Crown of Horns

by pocketpom

Summary

"But you know, I rather like the idea of you as one of those beasts. Wouldn't that look nice for the clan, Hanzo? A living, breathing dragon, chained to a post in the gardens."

(Art included!)

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Chapter 1

Drip. Drip. Drip.

Hanzo's eyelids flutter, ears flicking as sound filters through his consciousness.

Drip. Drip. Drip.
His palm flatten and push up; his eyes open blearily as he lifts his upper body off the ground. Hanzo tilts his head upwards, blinking to clear his fogged view as he stares up at the ceiling.

*Drip. Drip. Drip.*

He can see it now, as the haze slowly clears. Rainwater is dribbling down from the small circular grate high above him. The droplets descend and splatter merely three feet away from him; a small puddle is forming on the concrete floor.

A pity. Today there will be no sunlight to warm himself in.

Hanzo adjusts himself into a sitting position, his knees bending awkwardly to relieve the pressure upon them. He leans over, tracing a hand over his thigh as it gives a painful throb; he massages himself just below the knee, where his legs abruptly end and scarred flesh begins.

*Brother! They're coming!*

Hanzo rubs one eye with his palm, glancing up at the trickle of rainwater again. That's the problem with rainy days. Without the sun, he has no way of knowing just how long he has slept. Had he missed his meal? Had they even tried to wake him?

Musing on possibilities brings him nothing. So Hanzo sits, and he waits; he even briefly entertains the idea of drinking the water falling from above, or letting it run through his untamed hair to wash away the dirt.

Hanzo has no idea how his locks have accumulated such grime. His visitors could only bring in so much dirt on their soles. Each wall that contains him in his small prison is pure, uncut stone – only the small, iron grate allows any trace of the outside world to drip into his own. However the dirt has infiltrated his domain, Hanzo eventually dismisses the idea of bathing. The rainwater carries no warmth, and he has nothing but the soiled clothes on his back with which to dry himself. Drinkable water will come in a glass, if he is patient.

Hanzo does not have to wait long - the rain had been right to wake him. His ears prick up at the sound of approaching footsteps and two hushed voices. There is no handle on his side, but he can hear the mechanisms turning on the other. The lock on the heavy metal door slides back and Hanzo can feel himself tense.

A young woman holding a tray enters the room, and Hanzo's shoulders lower. Namiko. Only Namiko.

The woman gives him a small bow he doesn't return. She crosses the room to set the tray down before him, keeping her eyes lowered to the ground. A small blessing – he needn't crawl for his meal this time.

She lays out each dish from the tray. A small bowl of rice. Radishes. A cup of water, and a handful of seaweed roasted to crisps. No meat.

Hanzo feels the stirring in his skin, anger that is not his own at the neglect. The hunger they felt, the rage at their continued denial. He closes his eyes, pushing their rumblings down.

Namiko is not the one at fault.

He reopens his eyes to look at her once more and nods. He then picks up the chopsticks, and begins to eat.
She waits patiently as he chews and drinks. He dislikes it. He knows they always come in pairs – one to open the door from the other side, one to remain with him to remove the trays when he's finished. But they must know by now he has no intention of killing her.

*Precautions, Hanzo. We are not fools.*

Namiko's eyes are averted from him as he glances up at her, no open sign of disgust at his state – a model servant, considering. Hanzo would have had her promoted in days past. The choice is no longer his to make.

Hanzo pushes aside the tray to indicate he's finished and she stoops to retrieve it wordlessly. He longs for her to say something to him as she places each bowl inside the other. Anything. A snippet of conversation, the barest trace of kindness. He'd even settle for servant gossip, like Genji had once favored.

*Did you hear, Brother? Asa might be pregnant again. Hasn't she learned her lesson?*

Namiko says nothing, and he cannot blame her. He has no doubt the few words she gave him were on orders, with an additional threat to say nothing else.

They will want him to be focused on the tasks to come. Not distracted by chatter.

Namiko raps on the door as Hanzo watches. It slides open just barely, so the slim woman can slip by. When the door closes and the lock clicks into place again, Hanzo can feel the sound echo in his heart.

*Let me out! Let me out! I will not serve you! Do you hear me??*

He crosses his legs again, folding his hands together in his lap. After a few moments of slowed breathing, he delves deep, seeking out the spirits he'd pushed back only minutes before.

He finds them easily. It had never been difficult, even as a child. There's always the descent into blackness, with his only guide being his sense of self and the delicate blue light that wraps around the corners of his mind. They're always there, his spirits.

His dragons.

He can see them now - almost translucent, gleaming like stars against a night sky. They are creatures of power and grace, beautiful and ethereal as they hang in the black together, observing him.

They're nettled. Their angry rumblings hurt as they suddenly brush past him, curling and winding around each other. He steels himself, reaching out towards the brother. The spirit jerks its snout away angrily, twisting away to wrap around its sister. Hanzo can feel his body sigh in response.

*You dishonor us.* Her mouth does not move, but Hanzo can hear the sister speak and feels a twinge of worry. Genji had named her, a long time ago. Ami, and her brother Eri. Foolishness, but a foolishness that had remained in his mind.

*You are glad she does not look upon you.*

*You reject our gifts.*

*Your rights.*
Hanzo falters, and they sense it. Eri releases Ami from his hold upon her, floating through the inky black to Hanzo. He steels himself – but the dragon's caress is gentle, long body curling around him as claws perch upon his shoulder.

**We gave you our scales, to shield your wounds.**

Hanzo can feel his body bristle at the touch.

**Our claws, to cut down your enemies.**

Hanzo's fists curl, sharp nails pressing against his palms.

Eri's snout finds purchase in Hanzo's hair.

**Our crown. So all will know-**

Hanzo's eyes snap open, pulling himself back from the abyss as his vision swims. He can feel the dragons recoil angrily – then curiosity, worry creeping up from them into his chest. He swallows thickly, fighting back nausea as he leans forward to press his forehead against the cold, stone floor.

Minutes pass like this. Hours, perhaps. There is no sun. There is no time. Just himself, the cold and the sound of...

*Drip. Drip. Drip.*

He ignores it for a while. The steady beat is almost soothing.

*Drip. Drip. Drip.*

His mind begins to wander. The puddle must be larger, now. There is still enough light, that perhaps, if he tried...

*Drip. Drip. Drip.*

He lifts his forehead from the floor. The puddle had indeed grown – even a sliver of light is breaking through from what must have been thick, darkened clouds. The water glints, beckoning him.

Hanzo drags himself forward. He sits on the edge of the water, keeping his head held high. Debating. Wavering.

**Our gifts. Your right.**

Hanzo lowers his gaze to the pool.

An alien form stares back at him. The first thing he always sees is his cerulean scales, smattered in small patches across his face and shoulders. Hanzo lifts his hand, observing his claws with their curved, wicked nails and more scales that have grown up to his wrist. He considers them for a moment before he reaches up and touches his hair. It's as dark as it's ever been, but it's too long now. It's grown well past his shoulders and become greasy, matted and dull.

He's a wretch, through and through.

Hanzo's hands don't reach any higher on his face, but he can see them. His ears, curved and long like the dragons he'd studied on the tapestries of his home – only his are pinned back in distaste. Just above them, he can glimpse the final insult jutting out from skull. The last nail in the coffin of
his humanity.

A gift. A blessing.

Twin, antlered horns are peeking out from between his locks, curving just slightly in the back. They'd grown slowly. Painfully. For months, he'd pleaded for it to stop. Begged, and broken his pride worse then he'd ever known.

Your crown. They will bow to you.

“Enjoying the view?”

Hanzo's heart jolts, his head snapping backwards. He'd been so involved, he hadn't heard-

The lock clicks into place behind a gaunt, towering man. His robes were vermilion silk, his hair pulled into a tight bun. Beady eyes rest squarely on Hanzo's hunched form, and a smile pulls at the man's thin lips.

Saburo.

“I cannot claim to understand those dragons of yours, Hanzo,” the man muses, a fake sigh escaping as he lowers himself down to eye level. “Are they going to turn you into one of them someday?” His hand reaches out, delicately brushing loose strands of hair back behind Hanzo's ears. A chuckle follows when Hanzo averts his gaze.

“Perhaps we are working them too hard. Maybe a few weeks off, and you might revert, hm?”

A flicker of hope rises before Hanzo can halt it.

“But you know, I rather like the idea of you as one of those beasts. Wouldn't that look nice for the clan, Hanzo? A living, breathing dragon, chained to a post in the gardens. Hanamura would be awed!”

Hanzo closes his eyes as Saburo laughs again and feels the hand caress his cheek. “Ah, well. I suppose we will have to make do with what you are. For now.”

Hanzo hears the rustling of paper and opens his eyes again. Saburo is placing a picture in his lap.

It's an older man, and Hanzo feels a small prick of relief. Wrinkled skin, patchy white hair and thick bottle glasses. A small nose, strangely curved to the left. Recognizable. Easy.

“Rodney Templeworth. Kyoto. Last seen near Kiyomizudera Temple.” Saburo offers out an emptied, travel-sized bottle of shampoo. Hanzo takes it into his palm, sniffing it for a few moments. He can feel Saburo studying him. “Questions before you begin?”

Hanzo presses a clawed finger against the picture's left breast and Saburo lets out a snort.

“Ah, how forgetful of me. No, we do not want him alive. Send them to kill.” Saburo sits back on his heels. “But try to locate their prey more quickly this time, Hanzo. I have much to do.”

Hanzo swallows, keeping his gaze lowered as he attempts a steady breath. He nods.

“Devour him, Hanzo. Do not fail.”

Hanzo lets his eyes slip shut at the command. He reaches for the dragons, and they stir beneath his skin.
Seek. Locate. Devour.

Do not fail.

--

Hanzo does not know how much time has passed since he'd first been taken here. The sun, when it shines, marks the passing of the hours with each slant of sunlight through the iron grate. Still, Hanzo has long lost track of the days and months he'd been spending laid out on the cold, stone floor of his prison.

*Genji is doing so well, Hanzo. Continue your work, and he won't be touched.*

Recently, Hanzo had been doing more hunting than killing. It seems the clan is attempting to handle things on a more personal note.

*Find them, Hanzo. They cannot hide from you. We will do the rest.*

He seldom knows the faces that were lain out in photographs before him. He minds less when they're elder, omnis, or members of rival clans he had once sought to crush. Old hatreds die hard, even here.

The young men and women hurt more. They had had their whole life before them and they often look calm, even happy in the stills.

Once, and only once, it had been a child's image they put before him, accompanied by a tiny pink shoe. The daughter of a wealthy businessman who had turned on the clan, they had said. It had been during the early times of his imprisonment. He had refused, instantly. They'd attempted to force his hand, with everything they had; he had fought back.

They had won, in the end.

Recently, unfamiliar faces bring him his meals. Servants he has never known, and who recoil upon first glance at his body. He did not know why Saburo sends them, instead of Namiko. Perhaps he is being punished for past failures.

Perhaps Saburo simply wants to remind him of what a wretch he's become.

The food rarely changes. Rice, vegetables, water. Once, boiled eggs. Namiko had brought the meal that day, and Hanzo quietly hoped that she'd slipped them in as an act of kindness. They'd never appeared again, but the dragons had purred their delight for days and he still dares to hope whenever her face appears in the doorway.

The sounds – those did change. Most days Hanzo sits directly below the grate and tilts his head upwards, listening closely to the world above. Conversations filter down – never clear enough that he could hear what was being said. But tones and inflections carry. Hanzo drinks them all in, drowning out the silence he's suffocating in.

Thrice - and these, Hanzo can remember very well – there had been music. Once, it had been a woman singing. A servant, he assumes, sweeping the courtyard or halls as she sang an old lullaby that had just barely met Hanzo's ears. The second had been loud and obnoxious. Rock music,
played through something electronic that rattled the dragon's tempers. The third had been a festival, far away from the castle grounds, but still loud and merry enough to reach his small prison. He'd treasured the noises and used his arms to drag himself up a wall as best he could, straining to get closer, to hear more.

Like all good things, it had ended. But he hadn't forgotten, and tried to remember the songs from time to time with the barest trace of a hum.

Today's sounds are different.

The castle is on high alert. Hanzo is familiar with the routine – he'd been trained in it all his life – and he knew how to recognize the footsteps of the guards who rush by, shouting, giving orders he can't quite make out. Frightened chattering from servants come and go as disappear deeper into the castle. Eventually the noises die down to an eerie silence; it stretches on for what feels like hours. Hanzo flicks his ears, straining to hear something. Anything.

Nothing.

A false alarm, perhaps?

A thunderous explosion shatters that notion and the silence in one fell swoop. Shouting and gunfire erupt almost instantly, filling the air and echoing off the walls of his prison. Hanzo's ears pin back as a scream pierces through the din – the shouting intensifies and heavy footfalls pass close to the grate.

A fall-back? So soon?

Hanzo gets onto his knees, trying to lift himself up to hear better; his legs sharply protest with a vicious throb of pain, but he steadies himself. He won't collapse, not yet.

The sound of gunfire is drowning out the shouting, now. His men – no. The clan's men have retreated farther back. They must have, for all he can hear are strange voices now. Deep timbres, heavy accents, and words he cannot pick out in foreign tongues. His skin crawls, and the dragons rumble their discontent.

**Invaders.**

The door to his prison slams open. Hanzo swivels his head sharply, baring his teeth for a fight.

It's Saburo, holding the door open with one hand. His fine robes are disheveled and his brow is pinched with rage. Hanzo has never seen him as anything less than perfectly poised.

A small glimmer of satisfaction blooms.

“Hanzo!” Saburo hisses. “What have you been doing?!”

Hanzo stares at him wordlessly.

“Can you not hear, boy?! There are invaders in our home! Your home!” Saburo barks angrily. “Strike them down! Must you always need a command?!!”

Hanzo's ears flick he processes this. Devour them? Why were they here? Who had driven back the clan so easily?

The footsteps and shouting are getting louder, but not from above. The narrow hallway lain out
behind Saburo echoes ominously. Someone is getting closer, and Hanzo very much doubts it is the clan.

“Do you not hear me, beast?!” Saburo shouts. There’s panic in his voice and his eyes are darting around nervously. He can hear them too. “I gave you an order!” Saburo's hand leaves the door as he advances menacingly on Hanzo. “You damned-”

Click.

Saburo's eyes widen. He whirls back around, one hand grasping blindly. There was nothing to find purchase on – a knob has never existed on this side of the door.

Precautions, Hanzo. We are not fools.

Saburo's hands scrape wildly on the door, looking for purchase, anything. He pounds on the door, shouting as his nails dig and scratch uselessly.

If you kill even one of my men, this door will never open again.

Saburo snaps his head back and gives Hanzo a hateful look. “Do not think foolish thoughts,” he warns. He's trembling, for all his bravado in voice and posture. “The clan will come. They will kill you if you've harmed me.”

Hanzo can hear the foreign voices approaching in the distance. He knows the echoes, knows they've found the halls. They must have followed Saburo here, and if that's the case, they'll keep looking until they find him. Saburo must be able to see Hanzo putting it together, because his face pales quickly.


Hanzo lets his eyes slip shut and he can hear the dragons crackle with approval, lashing beneath his skin.

Devour, Hanzo.

“You beast! You vile-”

Saburo's snarls become screams, screams that were nearly drowned out with the dragons' roar rattling around in Hanzo's ears. He need not guide them this time. They know who they seek, this kill he'd longed for for so many moons.

A right.

Hanzo feels the dragons retreat, curling back into his body with pleasured purrs. Just above their content noises, a loud thud as Saburo's body slumps and hits the floor at Hanzo's knees. He does not open his eyes. He sits there, savoring, his lips curved in a smile. Saburo was such an ugly little man in life. Hanzo is certain he's made an equally pitiful corpse.

There's a loud thumping on the door. He can hear the lock turning, and the door opening. But he does not open his eyes. It does not matter. Whoever they are, they will surely kill him.

He doesn't care. The clan will blame the invaders for Saburo's death and his own – he is sure of it.
Will Genji ever even see his brother's body? Or would Hanzo be quickly buried away, an ugly secret best forgotten?

There's a loud clatter of something rolling across the floor, breaking Hanzo's thoughts. It bumps against his knee, and he finally opens his eyes.

A small, metal canister sits before him. He observes it and then the door, which has only been opened a tiny crack. The top of the canister clicks, drawing back Hanzo's attention as mechanical locks slide out of place. It pops open.

Gas instantly pours from the device, flooding the small room and assaulting Hanzo's senses all at once. He covers his mouth, but a sharp inhale of surprise had already betrayed him. His throat burns, then his lungs – his eyes have been squeezed shut, but the searing pain had already begun. He doubles over as someone yells something unintelligible – and then there's shouting and the footsteps are here, the men are here.

Hanzo can hear the men surround him, foreign voices obscured by something as they mumble in awed tones. Masks, to block the gas, he thinks vaguely. He can't understand them. He can't see them. All he knows is the burning pain keeping him bent to the ground, blinded and muted. The dragons roar their displeasure, crackling in his skin – trapped by his disorientation and suffocation.

The men lay their hands on him. Two on each side, grabbing him by the arms and pulling him down the hallway. Hanzo has one, delirious thought of happiness – he will not die in there, not in the room. He will die, of course - but not in there.

Someone slips something across his mouth. Hanzo has a chance to breathe in only once before darkness rushes up to meet him.

Chapter End Notes

Come visit me on my tumblr, sneakyfeets!

Beta'd and art provided by phsfg on tumblr! Check out their McHanzo tag!

There's a link to the Crown of Horns fanart blog on the very last chapter; the blog is not spoiler-free!

*Please DO NOT republish this work anywhere, and asking others to remove it if they have done so is appreciated! I am only posting it on Ao3! I will allow translations into other languages, but you must link back to the original and give due credit!
“Do you think Father is going to get better?”

Hanzo's eyes do not meet his brother's. His gaze is trained on the horizon, the soft pink and golden hues of the setting sun. The cup in his hands warms his palms as a cold gust of wind blows through the terrace.

“I do not know,” he replies.

He can feel Genji looking at him harder, instead of simply accepting his answer.

“You have always said he will,” Genji points out after a moment. “But now, you think not. Don't you?”

Hanzo does not respond. Genji finally looks away.

“What is going to happen?”

Hanzo takes a sip of his tea, then lowers it. “You know what will happen. I am going to become the head of the clan.” The words feel hollow, a tired recitation.

Genji makes a noise of displeasure, and Hanzo finally glances at him. “Why are you asking now?” he asks sternly. “Have you money trouble, again?”

“No!” Genji looks hurt, then annoyed. “No. It is not about that.”

“Then what? Speak.”

“You do not have to take his place, Hanzo. I know deep down, you do not really want to.

“Hold your tongue,” Hanzo commands instantly.

“You told me to speak,” Genji counters. “And you know it is the truth, Brother.”

“It is foolishness.” Hanzo looks away, adding an angry mutter. “I do not have your wings, Sparrow. I cannot simply fly away from my duties, my home. My right.”

“No, you cannot fly.” Hanzo feels Genji's hand rest on his knee.

“But you could run.”

- “Readings show that GUEST420's breathing pattern has changed. Eyelid movement detected, as well as light muscle movement. Good morning, GUEST420. Are you awake?”

Hanzo’s eyelids flutter as a robotic voice fills his ears. His eyes open just a crack before he’s
squeezing them shut again.

White. Bright. Wherever he is, it hurts to look.

“You have indicated discomfort. My apologies, GUEST420. Dimming lights now. Please try again.”

Hanzo peeks an eye open. The voice hadn't lied – blinding white has been replaced with a soft, orange glow.

*It is called ‘mood lighting’, Brother. Is courting the fairer sex not in your lessons?*

Hanzo braves opening the other eye, but his vision remains cloudy. So far, he could make out... some sort of cloth, covering him. A blanket, his brain helpfully supplies. He's on a bed – a thin cot, by the feel of it. Is he in a hospital?

His eyes travel to the left and he jolts - there are tubes sticking out of his arm.

“Do not be alarmed, GUEST420. All additions to your body are for: Feeding and Hydration. Reports collected indicate you have been unconscious for: Thirty. Five. Hours. Cues indicate your eyes have begun adjustment. Returning the lights to normal settings now.”

Hanzo looks up as the lights gradually brighten, taking in the small bags of fluid hanging off a metal pole. He recognizes the image – they'd done the same for Father. His shoulders remain tensed, however, as he takes in more of the illuminated room.

There's a wheelchair by his bedside. Far in the corner, a small showerhead sticks out of the wall with a single knob and a drain beneath; a toilet sits a few feet from it. The room is painted white, floor to ceiling, with a curiosity in the middle. There's a sort of wall, directly across from him, formed by what looks like thick glass. It cuts the large room neatly in two, with Hanzo trapped on one side and a door in the middle. This one, thankfully, has a handle on his end. On the other side, Hanzo can make out what looked to be the back of an electronic keypad. A hallway stretches out of the room, curving around past where he can see.

A prison, then. Just as before, and now, without privacy.

*I wonder what would people pay to see a creature like you, Hanzo.*

“How are you feeling, GUEST420?”

Hanzo looks up and around, but he can't pinpoint anyone else in the room.

“Sensors detect head movement. I am not a physical presence, GUEST420. My name is Metis. I am an AI program. I have been tasked with your care until Doctor LILAC arrives.”

Hanzo finally notices a small speaker, carved into the wall on the other side of the glass. There's an odd inflection in the program's voice whenever names and specifics are included. It had almost sounded like a real woman for a moment.

He then realizes it's been speaking in Japanese to him.

“How are you feeling, GUEST420?”

Hanzo says nothing.

“Understood. Your file will be updated. Switching to YN mode. Are you in pain, GUEST420?”
Hanzo, after a moment, shakes his head.

“Movement understood. Are you feeling hunger, GUEST420?”

Hanzo shakes his head, but he has a feeling the program is going to go on for a while. He shifts himself in bed, leaning over to tug the wheelchair closer.

“Understood. Do you need to empty your bowels, GUEST420?

Hanzo rolls his eyes. When he's sure the wheelchair is steady, he scoots backwards in the bed, gently lowering himself into the seat.

“GUEST420, I am not able to read an answer. Sensors indicate you are leaving your bed. Possibility: desire to empty your bowels. Doctor LILAC would like me to remind you of your tubes.”

Hanzo's eyes narrow slightly as he unlocks the chair's brake. Is he being watched? Or was that a warning given in advance?

It doesn't matter. He knows what he wants, observed like an animal or not. After a few bumps and curses at failed attempts, he manages to wheel the chair and his IV stand in the direction of the showerhead.

It's only after he's reached it, however, that Hanzo actually gives pause to think. How is he supposed to do this? He looks down. His original clothes are gone – he hopes they'd burned them - and he's been dressed in plain, white robes tied tight around his waist. Should he divest himself and toss them to the floor? It pains his pride, but he isn't certain he could bend down and reach them if he did. Will his captors laugh as they watch him fall and then struggle his naked body back into the chair? Will he pull out his tubes in the process?

His hair, Hanzo decides. He can start with washing his hair. He wheels the chair near the knob, keeping himself out of where he thinks the water will fall. He twists it and to his relief, clear water spurts out with a hiss into a small arch. It hits the drain spot on, water steadily trickling down the through the hole. Good. He will not have to worry about making a mess.

Hanzo reaches out with his hand, testing the water. Cold. No good. He retracts his fingers, and waits with a pleased sort of smile. Clean. Soon he could be clean.

After two minutes, Hanzo sticks his hand back under the water and frowns. Still cold. He reaches out to fiddle with the shower knob, but as far as he can tell, it's unmarked. No indication of which direction is hot, just simply... on.

He plays with it another ten minutes or so, frustration mounting each time he sticks his hand under and receives only cold water. What is going on?

“GUEST420, I have informed Doctor LILAC, on request, of your activities. She has asked me to relay that the shower within your room is not currently attached to a water heater due to technical difficulties.”

Hanzo's lips twist in a snarl. Of course. The one good thing he thought he might have is broken. Should he have expected any less?

Hanzo turns the knob to off and wheels his way back to the bed. Fine. There is no real reason to clean himself, anyway. If his captors want to gaze at him, they can look at filth. They can smell filth. Hanzo drags himself into bed in a huff, pulling the blanket up and over his horns to surround
himself in before laying back down.

“GUEST420, are you going to sleep again? I have been informed you will have visitors in: Three. Minutes.”

Hanzo ignores her. It. What do you call a sentient program?

“I have informed them of your desire to communicate nonverbally. Please co-operate.”

Now that's curious. Hanzo can almost swear he heard exasperation in Metis' voice. That couldn't possibly be pre-programmed. Are his refusals actually annoying an AI?

Good.

After a few minutes, Hanzo hears a door open from down the hall. There are footsteps coming – one set light, two heavy. Out of rhythm with each other. Informal. There's brief conversation he can't quite hear, and the heavy steps stop, out of sight.

Hanzo sits up in bed, still keeping the blanket closely tucked around his form.

A woman rounds the corner and walks into view. Black hair and rimmed glasses – a small nose and sharp eyes. She's small, even compared to Hanzo. Korean lineage, he surmises from her appearance. She's pretty. Genji would have liked her.

The woman stops in front of the glass. “Greetings,” she says, and Hanzo's brow lifts. She speaks Japanese as well? “I am your doctor. You may call me...” She pauses. “Metis, what is my code name again?”

“I have informed GUEST420 that you are Doctor LILAC.”

“Lilac, then,” she agrees. “And – hold.” Her brow furrows slightly, and then she pinches it. “420? Metis, why is he simply not Guest?”

“Agent MCCREE informed me: Nine. Days Ago. That all patients under GUEST were to be replaced with GUEST420.”

“McCree!” Lilac turns, barking in the direction of the hall. She's switched to English, and Hanzo is momentarily grateful his language tutors never gave up on him. “Stop playing with Metis' functions! She's not a toy!”

Hanzo watches as a man's head pokes out around the corner. He's tanned, with thick brown hair that reaches down to his cheeks, and a smile on his lips. Most notably, he seems to have donned some sort of American cowboy hat to squash down his locks.

He looks ridiculous, and Hanzo immediately decides he doesn't like him.

“Aw, Lily'loo,” the man laughs. “Y'know I don't mean any harm. Metis and me are friends. Just teachin' her new stuff.”

“Do not,” Lilac informs him shortly. “And go stand back in the hall until I say I am done.”

The man's head disappears and Lilac turns to readdress Hanzo with a sigh. “Moving past that. As I said, I am in charge of your care.” She's speaking in Japanese again. They must think he knows nothing else.

That could prove useful.
“I am in charge of care as well,” Metis chimes in.

“Yes, as is Metis,” Lilac agrees, head turned down as she flips through her clipboard. “Now. Metis informs me that you have declined to speak to her, so I will be using yes or no questions as well. Are you capable of speech?”

The question stings. Hanzo’s eyes narrow in anger as his claws dig into the blanket. He gives her a curt nod, if only to show how insulting she was being.

“I see. My apologies. Still, good to know.” She jots something down on the notepad. “Do you know why you are here?”

Hanzo shakes his head. Perhaps she would tell him.

“He was out the whole flight.” That man's voice is back, calling down the corridor.

“I have his files, McCree!” Lilac snaps in English over her shoulders. “Please refrain from interrupting!”

Perhaps this woman dislikes the loud cowboy. That makes Hanzo like her a little more.

Lilac sighs. “Alright, where were we? Can speak, doesn't know...” She scribbles, then looks up at him. “You are not in any pain, you are not hungry. If you can eat, we can remove your tubes, and then begin feeding you normally. Do you have any allergies?”

Hanzo shakes his head.

“Do you...” Her eyes briefly flick to the small pattern of scales across his nose. “Have food preferences? Meat, perhaps?”

There's that sting against his pride again. She's not wrong, though, and the dragons murmur their agreement, so Hanzo nods while still managing to look as hateful as he can.

Lilac flips a few pages before finally looking up at him. “Based on previous records and photographs, we have an assumption on who you are. May I ask, are you the result of a genetic experiment?”

Hanzo continues glaring as he gives her a sharp shake of his head.

“Is your name Hanzo Shimada?”

Hanzo abruptly turns away, shifting in bed to show her his blanket-covered back. He can hear Lilac sigh.

“Very well,” she says. “I have asked enough for now. An omnic will come by later to remove your tubes and bring you your meal. Is that alright?”

*Your meal, Hanzo. Try not to waste it this time. You’ll need your strength.*

Hanzo says nothing.

He can hear Lilac's footsteps retreating. “I leave him in your care for now, Metis. Please report back with any signs of discomfort or irregularity.”

“Of course, Doctor LILAC.”
The footsteps fade – one heavy, one light. The second seems to linger, hanging back for longer than Hanzo would have liked before finally retreating down the hall with the others. Peeping at him, no doubt. Cretin.

Hanzo rolls over in bed, curling his legs up into his chest.

Even worse than dying in prison. Now they would have him survive in another one.

Here, Hanzo can count the days. Or, he would, if Metis hadn't been doing it for him.

“Good morning, GUEST.” It seemed Lilac had fixed the 'Guest' problem the cowboy had caused.

“Today is: May. Twenty-Eighth. You have woken at: Nine. Fifty. A.M. Would you like your breakfast?”

Life is better in this cell. Hanzo had tried to deny it out of spite the first few days, but slowly, he'd found himself unwinding. Accepting. Feeling less murderous and more docile to his captors – ironically, what Saburo had wanted all along.

*You catch more flies with sugar than salt, my son.*

Hanzo's meals are brought promptly when he asks for them, three times a day. They're laden heavy with meats and attempts at Japanese cuisine. Attempts is a *kind* word for it; there are only ever scant traces of fish and once, Hanzo had found hot dog pieces wrapped in his rice balls. Wherever he is, it's clearly nowhere near the ocean.

An omnic comes in on the days when Lilac does not – it does not offer its name, and Hanzo never asks. It merely checks him over, asks a few yes or no questions regarding his health, and leaves.

The hot water still is not fixed, and Hanzo refuses to bathe properly until it is.

They'd supplied him with towels and liquid soap, though. He would run one under the water, pour the soap onto it, then scrub himself down to clean as best he could before throwing the towel to the ground. He takes satisfaction watching the omnic or Lilac bend down to retrieve them from the piles he'd leave. He might not have servants now, but he'd at least make them lower themselves to keep him here.

He has a bed, hot food, and a shower. No one gives him orders to hunt – though, each day he checks his reflection in the glass to see if his *gifts* might be fading with disuse. For now, they aren't.

There is only one sight he dislikes even more than his reflection - the cowboy, McCree. For whatever reason, the drawling buffoon had been assigned as his... what had Metis called it? *His liaison.*

Every day, Hanzo would hear his heavy boots coming down the hall. Sometimes the boots clinked. Sometimes, McCree wore *spurs.* His shirt is almost always some version of plaid, and his jeans, distressed -and always that same, stupid hat. Even if Hanzo is being kept in the middle of a Western movie set, he cannot abide such idiocy.
He hopes he is not on a Western movie set. Perhaps McCree had simply been raised on one.

The cowboy would saunter in, pull up a chair – and oh, they had a chair for him now – to try and talk to Hanzo.

McCree's Japanese is atrocious. He rolls sounds that he shouldn't, and speaks informally. Hanzo doesn't think it's intentional rudeness, but he resents it just the same. He sometimes can barely understand a word the cowboy says in that awkward, fumbling drawl – not that Hanzo's ever responded to it.

“Are you Hanzo Shimada? Why were you being kept down there? What happened to you?”

Inane questions. Hanzo understands these, but has no interest in answering and keeps his back turned to the cowboy the entire time.

Saburo had not wrested a word past Hanzo's lips after the few first days of his capture. Does this brazen fool really think he's going to be the one to break Hanzo's perpetual silence?

It's dangerous to speak. Words betray emotions, thoughts – weaknesses. He can't afford to give these mysterious captors anything.

“Your ears pin back when you're mad, you know? Like a horse.”

Hanzo would kick the glass, had he any feet to do it with. He hates this man. He hates how McCree so calmly observes his deformities, and wonders aloud at them. McCree is interrogating him, gawking at him under the guise of casual idiocy. It's insulting. The man would arrive with no warning, too – sometimes in the morning, sometimes as Hanzo is just drifting off to sleep. How can the man's schedule be so erratic? He's probably just being rude.

Today, Hanzo treats McCree no differently. The man's been asking a few things, trying to prod Hanzo to speak or even just nod. Hanzo ignores him, pretending to be absorbed in his clawed fingers.

“Alright,” McCree sighs. He's swapped to English suddenly. Hanzo's ears twitch in interest, though he makes no other outward show he's listening. “Stubborn fella'. Dunno what I ever did to make you so mad. But lessee...” Hanzo glances at McCree out of the corner of his eye. The man's rubbing his chin thoughtfully, leaning back in his chair.

“Maybe,” McCree beings, switching back to his garbage Japanese, “I have been doing this incorrectly. I should start with telling you what I know, first.”

Hanzo's ears flick again, and he gives McCree a suspicious look.

“I was one of the ones who found you. We brought you back from Hanamura, and took you on the plane here.” Hanzo knew the latter. But since it was first revealed in English, he perks his brow to pretend this is surprising news. “We were chasing down Saburo Tashiro when we found your room,” McCree continues. "We knew he had taken two of our men. You had known Saburo, correct?”

Of course he'd known Saburo. What he still didn't know is who McCree's men were. Still, Hanzo gives McCree a slight nod. Perhaps the idiot would let it slip as he spoke.

“Kenny tossed the gas. Young. Idiot mistake, but he is learning. Always check for... ah, innocents.”

Innocents. Surely that was not the word McCree had wanted based on his pause. It still amuses
Hanzo. Him, an innocent.

“But, uh, it was strange. Saburo was already dead, and the coroner said it was not the gas. He said he had a...” McCree clicks his fingers, looking for the right words. Hanzo's amusement grows.

“Shock,” McCree decides. “His heart...” McCree makes a crude motion of squeezing, then releasing at his chest. “You would not happen to know what happened to him?”

Hanzo looks at McCree, really looks at him. He watches as the cowboy grows surprised, then interested as he leans forward in his seat. Hanzo lets his mouth open just slightly as McCree's eyes widen.

Hanzo then shrugs, then turns away to inspect his fingernails again. A long, aggravated sigh from McCree can be heard from behind, and Hanzo allows himself the barest hint of a smile.

“Alright, alright.” McCree's rubbing his head. “You will not talk. I understand. I am not an idiot.”

Hanzo very much doubts that.

“So what do you want? What can I give you?”

The question is enough to make Hanzo turn back around in surprise. McCree's got his thumbs in his belt loops, giving Hanzo a steady look.

What does Hanzo... want?

“I am serious,” McCree insists. “I understand. They have you locked. For safety. But what can I give you? What will make you happy?”

Hanzo, after considering this a moment, turns to point over at the showerhead.

McCree's confusion is visible, and Hanzo has to resist the urge to roll his eyes. He keeps pointing.

“A shower? But you have...” McCree rubs his chin before something dawns in his expression. He snaps his fingers together. “That is right. The last person, he said too. Complaining. There is no warm water.” He looks at Hanzo in earnest. “Is that correct?”

Hanzo gives a slight nod.

“I understand.” McCree's visible happiness fades a little as he scratches the back of his head. “Ain't no fuckin' plumber though,” he mutters in English. “So how do I...” He clicks his tongue, thinking.

Hanzo's brief interest is beginning to fade. This cowboy is of no use to him. But then, McCree tilts his head up and nods.

“I know,” he says in Japanese. “You can use mine.”

Hanzo looks at him funny. He can't mean... but McCree is checking his watch, then looking at the door. “It is too late, today. I have to get to training.” Training? What is he training for?

“Tomorrow, then. I promise, I will take you tomorrow.”

Hanzo stares at him in disbelief as the cowboy tilts his hat politely and gives him a two-fingered salute. “Tomorrow. I take you, and you will start talking to me. A deal?”

Hanzo keeps staring, but McCree seems to take it as an agreement. The man gives Hanzo a wink and a wave before jogging back into the hallway. Hanzo is still staring at where he'd stood by the
time he hears the hallway door shut.

An idiot, that man. Through and through.

Chapter End Notes

McCree will be speaking awkwardly, as he's going to be stuck using (bad) Japanese for a bit. Bear with him!
“Good morning, GUEST. Today is: May. Twenty-Ninth. You have woken at: Seven. Thirty-Three. A.M. Data analysis shows that this is: Three. Hours. Earlier than your average times. Are you feeling alright, GUEST?”

Hanzo isn't. He's been tossing and turning all night, feelings of restlessness and unease plaguing his dreams.

Had the cowboy been serious? Is he really going to remove Hanzo from his cell? He couldn't possibly. Could he? How much power did that Western movie wannabee actually hold? Where would Hanzo be taken? A communal shower? Would there be others to gawk at him, whisper and point? If he killed all of them, would he be able to escape?

There are too many unknowns. He can't plan like this, can't prepare for whatever is going to happen. He hates it. At least in Hanamura, they had never given him hope.

He finally pushes himself up from the bed, running a hand through his tangled hair with an irritable yawn. He lazily flicks his hand at the ceiling, motioning for Metis to continue her morning monologue.

“You have not openly indicated discomfort in regards to the previous question. Would you care for your breakfast now, GUEST?”

Hanzo nods as he crawls out of bed to lower himself into his wheelchair.

“Understood. It will be arriving in: Five. Minutes.”

Good. With any luck, Hanzo will be fed and finished with the toilet before McCree stops by. He hopes the cowboy will come early today. A morning shower would feel heavenly right about now.

McCree doesn't come early. Hanzo actually wants to see him today, so naturally, the man is late. Hanzo waits patiently through the morning, less patiently through the afternoon, and is practically seething by the time his dinner arrived with Metis making absolutely no mention of any visitors on their way. It was almost enough to make him want to ask her about it. He wouldn't, though. Maybe the offer had been a trick to get him to try.

Damnable fool.

Hanzo has all but given up on the man and become solely focused on doing spins in his wheelchair when his ears pick up the sound of the hallway door opening. Heavy, fast footfalls are coming his way.

“Sorry! Sorry, sorry!” It's McCree, panting as he jogs into view. His hat is askew and his hair mussed – Hanzo's nose wrinkles. He can smell the man's sweat from here. “Ah, shit. I am sorry, friend. A test ran a long time today.”

Hanzo is no friend, and he has no interest in whatever test McCree has been taking. Beginner's Japanese for the fifth time, probably. He narrows his eyes, folds his arms and lets his ears pin.

“Shit. I am sorry. I know you are mad. It is late,” McCree admits, rubbing the back of his neck. He's bent over slightly, trying to catch his breath. “I am here. I did not lie. Do you still want to come out?”
Of course he did, insufferable little... Hanzo inhales deeply, attempting to calm the irritation sizzling in his veins. Aggression might make the cowboy think twice about removing the wall between them. He slowly breathes in a second time, and gives McCree a short, stiff nod.

The cowboy's face brightens. "Well, alright. Let us get you out, then." He moves to the door, fiddling with the keypad before pulling a card from his pocket and holding it in front of – there must be a scanner on the other side. The door gives two series of beeps before there's sounds of locks sliding out of place. The handle turns, and the door opens.

Hanzo stares in disbelief. It opened. They actually opened the door for him. Just like that. And now McCree's stepping inside and tipping his hat politely. Like he's entering a home.

This is why Hanzo likes not speaking. It gives him time to marvel at how incredibly foolish people are without seeming rude.

McCree's made it behind Hanzo during his spell of disbelief, putting his hands on the handles of the wheelchair. "The hallways all look the same, so I thought I would push you there. Is that alright?"

Hanzo says nothing. He could kill McCree. He could kill him, right now, and wheel himself out and into possible freedom. They wouldn't know. How could they? They'd just think he had a heart attack, like all the rest.

"Well, if it bothers you, just pull the brake." McCree starts pushing, and Hanzo doesn't stop him. Hanzo's wheeled out of the room, glass door automatically closing and the locks clicking back into place behind them. They round the corner into the hallway – it's painted white too. No pictures, not even charts or windows. Hanzo takes it all in, claws gripping the armrests tightly. He can feel McCree looking down at him every now and again, but he ignores it.

The door they exit through leads to an even larger hallway, but this one's walls are a dirty grey color. There's a distinct lack of windows that disappoints Hanzo; he'd hoped to glean where in the world he actually was. There's only doors, marked with numbers and the occasional warning sign every so often. But the hallway is wide and spacious, enough for multiple travelers and Hanzo is suddenly and violently reminded of his original fear – gawkers.

"Do not worry," McCree says, as if reading Hanzo's mind. "Metis is looking ahead for me. No one is out right now." He gives Hanzo a little extra push, going over a small dip in the floor. "I snuck away a little early from the gathering so you could avoid them."

Hanzo's almost grateful, but he won't show it.

After a few more hallway turns – the same, they really do all look the same, how will Hanzo ever make it out of here on his own? - McCree finally stops in front of a door. Unlike its companions, the metal numbers that adorned the top of its door seem to have been warped and welded into English letters.

BAMF. What on earth is BAMF?

"Here's mine," McCree announces. He pulls off his left glove, briefly placing the garment atop Hanzo's arm before he leans to press his thumb against a scanner. It beeps, flashes green, and Hanzo can hear more locks clicking out of place. McCree turns the handle, retrieving his glove before nudging the door open with his boot and wheeling Hanzo inside.

The room is surprising in its normalcy. There's a large queen-sized bed in the middle occupying the
most space, with a mounted TV directly across from it. Nightstands on either side, with a small closet tucked in the corner and what Hanzo can only assume is the bathroom door adjacent to it. It looks like an American hotel room he had spent a day in with his father as a boy, and had complained about the whole time.

Now, it seems almost decadent. Hanzo especially has his eye on the numerous pillows and thick down comforter adorning McCree's bed. He wants those for his own. He's fairly certain he could trick the cowboy out of them.

Hanzo could do without the small pile of dirty clothes, or the cowboy boots strewn on the floor near the closet. But he didn't expect less from McCree.

“Bathroom is this way,” McCree says, breaking Hanzo's concentrated surveying. McCree takes his hands off the wheelchair's handles to step around Hanzo, going to open the bathroom door first. It's when it's opened that McCree actually seems to give pause, and appears to think. Hanzo raises a brow.

“It might be a little hard, getting in and out of your chair into the tub,” McCree admits, looking hesitant. “Do you want me to carry you in and out instead?”

The look Hanzo gives is so absolutely poisonous that McCree simply wheels him inside without another word.

The bathroom's spacious enough for his chair, but only just. There's six lightbulbs blazing in a row above an elongated mirror. There's a small, white sink sunken into what appeared to be granite counters. The toilet tucked into the corner is as unremarkable as the towel rack – but the tub to his right seems roomy enough.

There had damned well better be hot water in the pipes.


Hanzo gives him a sharp look in reply.

“I am going to go watch TV, then,” McCree says. “Just...” He raps on the wall five times. “Do that, then, when you are done. Okay?”

Hanzo nods curtly and with that, McCree steps back out of the room and closes the door.

The tension leaves Hanzo's shoulders at McCree's departure. He slumps back in his chair, and long sigh threatening to break loose as he rubs at the bridge of his nose. He can hear the sounds of the TV being turned on in the background, and mattress springs creaking as McCree settled himself.

Hanzo glances at himself in the mirror. It had slowly gotten less painful – the constant reminder of his reflection, forced on him in a prison of glass. His hair is still disgusting – clumps in strange places where grime had solidified, and thick with grease. His hair, at least, he could fix. The rest... He finds himself touching the pattern of scales crossing his nose, watching them gleam in the light in sharp contrast to the dull color of his horns. His ears flick and give a swivel to the side as something on the TV gives a yell.

*Like a horse.*

Hanzo's eyes are drawn downward when he spots a small, crystal bottle sitting on the edge of the sink. It's filled to the brim with a deep, orange liquid. He sits up in his chair, straining over the counter until his fingertips catch the rim. He pulls it into his lap and uncorks the top, giving it a
Bourbon.

What on earth is bourbon doing in a bottle like this? And in the bathroom, no less? Hanzo sips at it experimentally. Strong. Pungent. It isn't good, but it's still booze.

He tucks it under his arm. This is his, now.

He wheels himself over to the tub and turns the knob with the letter H. True to McCree's word, hot water begins flowing from the tub's spout and Hanzo can feel a silly little grin cross his face. Finally.

He fiddles with the knobs until the showerhead above starts sprays down water instead. Hanzo had no intention of bathing until the filth from his hair had been scrubbed away. He sets the bottle of bourbon on the tub's rim for later.

Disrobing himself is easy. He simply shrugs his robe off his shoulders, carefully laying it across an armrest for easy access later. Once he's satisfied the water is hot enough, he grips the edge of the tub and begins lowering himself into it as slowly as he possibly can. He certainly wasn't going to be careless and brain himself before he was cleaned.

McCree's shampoo smells strange, but it's labeled as De-Greasifying which Hanzo thinks means it'll help with his hair. He thinks the word grease is in there, somewhere. Why did Americans insist on making up new words?

He doesn't know how long he takes in the shower – only that he's in heaven the whole time. Scrubbing the dirt and grime from his scalp feels amazing, and his long claws work wonders at working out the tangles in his hair. He doesn't look down at how muddied the water becomes before it's washed away. That part is a little gross, even to him.

Once he's sure he's clean, he pops in the drain plug and switches the water flow to fall from the tub's faucet. Steam has enveloped the entire bathroom to the point where Hanzo can't even see the mirror, so he takes the time to drink more of his bogarted bourbon while the tub fills. It still tastes shitty, but he can feel a pleasant sort of buzz developing the more he swallows.

All that time in forced sobriety has lowered his tolerance, it seemed.

The tub fills before long and Hanzo simply floats there, the very picture of contentment. He could lay here forever. He might lay here forever. He'd like to see them try to get him out.

On cue, there's a knock on the door.

“Hey. I do not want to interrupt, but I need to take you back soon.”

Hanzo doesn't reply. He's too busy watching his hair spread out in the water with a happy little smile on his face.

He can hear the door turn and open, followed shortly by a loud, English swear. Hanzo turns his head slightly, watching McCree rapidly wave a hand in front of his face as all the steam Hanzo had accumulated floods out into the bedroom.

“God damn,” McCree mutters in English, squinting as he steps into the bathroom. “Hot enough for you?”
Hanzo feels a tinge of amusement, which he quickly blames on the booze running through his system.

McCree lowers himself down to a crouch at the edge of the tub, eyebrows shooting up. “You are redder than a lobster,” he remarks in awe. Hanzo lazily watches the man dip a finger into the bath water, only to hastily withdraw it and swear again.

“How do you stand that?” McCree demands. “Does that not hurt?”

Hanzo shrugs one shoulder, folding his arms on the tub's rim before resting his chin atop them. It felt fine to him. “Must be a dragon thing,” McCree mutters in brief English. Hanzo takes offense at that, but he feels too sleepy to do much about it.

“And... aw!” McCree snatches up the emptied bottle Hanzo had tossed to the floor. “You drank my bourbon?! Come on! I was using that!” He looks almost hurt when he looks back at Hanzo, who gives him a smug little smirk in reply.

“God damn,” McCree mutters again, dragging a hand over his mouth. He gives Hanzo a frustrated look before pointing a finger at him. “Alright. I got you hot water. You have to answer some questions now.”

Hanzo considers this. Does he? He thinks on the bourbon buzzing in his system and the feeling of the hot water lapping at his waist.

He had taken much from the cowboy. Perhaps a few nods will not hurt, if it keeps McCree exploitable like this.

McCree plants his hands on the side of the tub. “Are you actually Hanzo Shimada?”

Mmm. Should he be honest? Hanzo considers his options, mulling it over as he clicks his tongue in his mouth. McCree is starting to look utterly exasperated before Hanzo finally gives a slight nod of his head.

McCree blinks. “Really?”

Hanzo nods again.

McCree let out a low whistle. He drops out of his crouch, sitting down cross-legged on the bathroom floor and crossing his arms. “God damn. You sure?”

Hanzo rolls his eyes and McCree grins. “Sorry. You just took a while to answer. Okay, uh...” McCree scratches the back of his head. “Do you remember how long you were down there, back at Hanamura?”

Hanzo shakes his head.

McCree lets out a sympathetic *tsk*. “Did they ever let you out of there, before we found you?”

Hanzo shakes his head again. The questions are starting to drum up his irritability again. He removes his arms from the tub's rim and closes his eyes as he sinks back down into the water.

“Did you ever know-”

Hanzo holds up a hand to halt McCree's chatter. He moves it back, tapping the tub's faucet.

“Huh? You want more water?”
Hanzo shakes his head. He taps it again.

“You want another bath?”

Hanzo opens his eyes to give McCree a steady look. He lifts his hand from the water and wiggles it in a so-so gesture.

“You kind of want another bath.”

Hanzo resists the urge to roll his eyes – they're going to stick like that, at this rate - and moves the hand to point at the clock hung next to the mirror. McCree gives it a curious look.

“You want another bath... in time..” He says slowly. Then it seems to dawn. “You want another bath later. Tomorrow?”

Hanzo nods, stretching his arms above his head.

“But I still have some more questions for you.”

Hanzo looks at him, then shakes his head.

“No? What do you mean, no? You are not going to answer me anymore or something?”

Hanzo taps the tub faucet again, perking a brow.

“You are extorting me,” McCree accuses, and it's enough to draw a genuine smirk to Hanzo's face. “You-” McCree sighs through his nose. “Fine. Alright. Spoiled bastard. Now come on, get out of the tub. I have to get you back.”

Hanzo arches his back for a final stretch. He supposed he'd spent enough time here, for one day. Especially now that he had his luxuries secured for another day.

“I am not letting you drink my bourbon next time.”

Hardly mattered. In a few days, Hanzo is pretty sure he could have the cowboy importing him sake instead.

Perhaps having an idiot for a liaison is going to work out well.
Chapter 4

A routine is struck up. Every day at varying times, McCree would come by and wheel Hanzo out of cell. He'd be taken to the man's bath and left alone for an hour or two, and only when the steam had begin to creep out from under the door would McCree would come in and begin questioning him.

He'd let the man ask five questions each day, give or take. Sometimes he allows more, simply because McCree is so amusingly awful at figuring out what to ask.

This has been going on for a week or so, and Hanzo is quietly delighted at how little McCree has managed to pull from him, even with Hanzo's total honesty. Half of the man's questions are wasted on inane curiosity.

“So you're not the result of the Shimadas messing around with genetic experiments? Can you only eat meat? Do you not talk because you resent us?”

No, no, and yes. McCree had grown thoughtful when he'd nodded his agreement to the last question.

“Is it really that bad? I don't think Lilac and I have ever been anything but nice to you. And I'm working on your release with my boss, honest. Just have to wait for him to check in here.”

Hanzo had mostly ignored him, but tucked that last piece of information away. Is McCree really asking for a release? The cowboy seemed too sincere to lie, but Hanzo can't be sure.

McCree's Japanese has improved a fair bit with the constant use, to Hanzo's chagrin. He'd liked it better when the man fumbled over his words. Now that he's speaking more naturally, it's harder to pick out amusement from slip-ups.

McCree calls him 'Hanzo' from time to time. Informal and annoying as it was, it's admittedly the only name Hanzo has left. Beyond his brotherly ties, he's hardly a Shimada anymore.

Yesterday, however, McCree's words had thrown him off-guard.

“What if...” McCree had looked thoughtful, which was rarely a good sign. “What if I gave you something to write with?”

Hanzo's head had been partially submerged in the bathwater, and he'd lifted it up to give McCree a fully quizzical look.

“I get that you don't want to talk. But what about writing? There's only so much you can do, shaking and nodding your head.”

That was the point. Hanzo had grunted, and begun lowering his head to dip below the bathwater again.

“And you could ask me for things.”

This had caught Hanzo's attention, and given him pause. That had been the one draw-back to his silence. His inability to demand things properly. He still desperately wants his sake, and McCree had never brought him close enough to the bed to steal a pillow.
He'd sat up straight and given McCree a suspicious look, which the man had only returned with an inquisitive one.

Hanzo had finally relented with a nod, even if McCree's disgustingly bright smile had given him second thoughts.

Then third, fourth, and fifty-seventh thoughts in the present as Hanzo nervously picks at his wheelchair's cushioning and waits for McCree to arrive. He shouldn't have agreed to it. McCree is terrible at questioning him – he should have just left it up to the man to figure it out for himself. He shouldn't be opening vulnerabilities up in his armor just so he could secure luxuries like booze and goose-down.

He wants them, though. After going without for so long, he can't believe how much he wants them now.

McCree arrives in the afternoon, and Hanzo's surprised to find that he doesn't really mind the sound of spurs jingling down the hall anymore. When McCree jogs around the corner, Hanzo can see he has a large notebook in his arms and an assortment of pens tucked behind his ears.

“Howdy,” he greets in English, tipping his hat. Hanzo snorts derisively at the gesture but McCree just grins.

“I have your paper and pens,” he says, switching to Japanese as he types at the keypad. “Are you still feeling up to it?”

Hanzo doesn't really know how to respond to that. Luckily, he doesn't have to – McCree opens the door and walks on in anyway. He crouches down, offering the notepad to Hanzo.

Hanzo stares at it, uncertain.

“Come on.” McCree's voice is gentle. “You can even start with something easy. Just ask me for something.” He plucks a pen from behind his ear and offers it out. “Anything at all, Hanzo.”

Reluctantly, Hanzo takes the pen. After another glance up at McCree, he accepts the notebook into his lap and begins to write.

When he turns the pad around to show McCree, the man's pleased expression morphs to confusion. “Uhhhh...” He bends down to get a closer look. “Hang on. Give me a second.”

Hanzo has to resist the urge to roll his eyes. Of course. McCree's verbal skills had improved, but that didn't mean he was any better at reading Japanese. Hanzo turns the notebook back around and begins scribbling.

McCree cranes his neck in close to get a look at what Hanzo is drawing. He can feel the man's hairs tickle his ears, and they flick at the sensation. McCree smells like bourbon, though Hanzo detects none on his breath. Curious. “Ah... a bottle. Cups. Little cups. Shot glasses? No...”

McCree snaps his fingers and leans back with a look of triumph. “Sake.”

Hanzo nods in relief. Finally. Artistry had always been Genji's talent, not his.

“Sake,” McCree repeats, putting his hands on his hips. “Well. I don't think we have any here but...” He clicks his tongue. “There's a store, not too far. I think they have booze. I could probably get it and be back within the day. Do you want that instead of our usual date?”
Hanzo gives him a suspicious look. He doesn't agree with that last word, but after a moment, he nods.

“Alright.” McCree tilts his hat up with his thumb. “I can do that. In fact, I better get going if I want to get there in time.” He glances back at the hallway. “I will try not to be long.”

Hanzo just watches him. He's not sure what to write. Should he wave?

If McCree's expecting anything of him, he doesn't show his disappointment. “Right. I'm off, then.” The man gives him another tip of his hat, then jogs back down the hallway and out of view.

Hanzo looks down at the notepad, then back up at the space McCree had stood.

Kindness always has a double-edge, Hanzo. Never let yourself be dulled.

A sigh escapes his nose, and Hanzo wheels himself back to bed.

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Hanzo waits until midnight for McCree to reappear. Only Metis' constant gentle-voiced badgering finally gets him to settle down and close his eyes, accepting that perhaps the store was much farther than McCree had thought.

When he awakes, McCree is still not back. He waits through the day, certain the man would come at some point. But then the night rolls by once more, and the man's absence has drawn a worried pinch to Hanzo's brow.

Had something happened?

Metis is no help. The AI simply informs him of the time, the date, and asks questions about his health. She makes no mention of the man who was supposed to be seeing him every day.

At least, Hanzo thinks McCree is supposed to. Perhaps his time as a liaison had ended? Or perhaps someone higher-up had disapproved of the bath trips. Why now? McCree had never said he was hiding it. And Hanzo hadn't tried to escape, or hurt anyone.

What is going on?

Another day stretches by with no visitors and no news, and Hanzo's irritability reaches its peak as he digs his nails into his chair's armrests. This is nonsense. Hanzo is getting an answer, one way or another.

He is going to find McCree, and then he is going to claw the man a new ear for making him wait like this.

Hanzo's gaze falls on the door, and he wheels himself up to the edge of the glass. Electronic. He'd thought from the start of his imprisonment that he could probably break it. There was a reason that the clan had relied on stone walls and heavy locks instead of modern gadgets; something his captors seemed blissfully ignorant of.

If he left, however, Hanzo'd just had no idea where to go.
Now he knew. If McCree or the sake wasn't in the man's room, then Hanzo was sure as hell going to trash it out of spite before he came back here. No one would come by, anyway. The only one who would notice his absence is...

Hanzo inhales, folding his hands in his lap as his eyes slip shut. It had been some time since he'd truly spoken with his dragons. They had grown quiet, and he had let them. He hoped it was out of contentment.

He can feel himself submerge down into the darkness. He reaches out, probing the depths as he calls to them.

**Little prince.** It's Ami who answers first, sliding out of the darkness in a gleam of brilliant blue. **It has been some time.**

**What need could you have?** Eri's chiming voice can be heard from above. He glides downward, wrapping himself around his sister.

Hanzo shows them the image of the door, the memory of McCree's promise and the days wasted waiting for it. He pulls up the sound of Metis' voice – always watching him. Keeping track of him.

**Of course we can stop her.** Ami seems amused at his query. **You know we have devoured many an omnic. Their lifeforce is no different from hers.**

**And it is a simple task to snuff out.** Eri yawns, stretching like a cat. **We will find where she hides.**

Hanzo withdraws, pulling himself back into his body with a feeling of relief and satisfaction. Good. He is fairly certain Metis will not suffer any lasting damage – she is, after all, a computer. His captors would likely just reboot her when they found something amiss.

He'd have to be quick, then.

Hanzo reaches out, keeping his eyes shut as he places his palm against the door. His fingers tingle sharply as he feels the dragons' energy surge, leaving his body as they begin their hunt.

A minute passes, then two. Hanzo almost feels a flicker of doubt surface, before the door lets out an erratic beep and swings out from beneath his fingers.

Metis says nothing.

Hanzo smiles, a small shudder as a flash of blue creeps into the corner of his vision and he feels the dragons return to him.

He opens his eyes and wheels himself across the threshold. He'd be in and out before anyone noticed.

He's sure of it.

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Although the hallways are dull and still nigh indistinguishable, Hanzo still finds himself
envisioning his path through them with perfect clarity. There's only one route he has ever taken, the one McCree had pushed him through every day. At times they had stopped, ducked around corners when footsteps approached. But those had been irregularities, and don't seem to be hindering his memory now.

It's odd, though. Even though Metis is not guiding the route like she'd done before, he still hasn't run into anyone in the halls. Strange. Why are they so absent?

He stops in front of a door and looks up. BAMF in ugly, metal lettering. At least the cowboy's stylistic choice is easy enough to remember. Hanzo leans forward in his chair to rap on the door.

A few moments of waiting, his ears tilted forward to listen. There is no answer, no sound of feet moving or a bed creaking. McCree is not here, or he is ignoring him. Hanzo scowls briefly, shutting his eyes and placing his hand against the door. He feels the dragons crackle in acknowledgment, energy pulsing in his fingers as they slip out of him to obey – and then retreat, only moments later. Hanzo's brow furrows.

There is nothing to eat. Ami's voice is in his head. She sounds disappointed. No life flows here.

Hanzo opens his eyes in confusion. He reaches out, testing the door handle.

It gives immediately – the locks make no sound. They had not been in place. Hanzo's frown deepens.

He can't see anything immediately wrong as he wheels inside and shoves the door shut. The dirty clothes pile on the floor has grown, and the bed's unmade. But there's no blood-stained linens, no signs of a struggle. Hanzo huffs irritably. How long had that bed been like that? Had McCree simply vanished?

His eyes spot a dinky white bottle on the bedside stand, and he wheels closer for a look. He's not familiar with the brand, but the lettering on it is clear.

Sake. The cowboy had kept his promise.

Hanzo picks it up from the table and a receipt follows, stuck to the bottom. Hanzo pulls the paper off and turns it over, reading down the printed text. Nothing was bought except the sake and a cigar, but an address at the bottom catches his eye.

Agate Mart

8032 Broke Off Meadows Road.

Shingletown, CA, 96088.

CA... California? They'd brought him all the way to the States? He supposed the cowboy outfits made a little more sense, in context.

He puts the receipt into his robe pocket for later. He could puzzle it back in his cell. For now, Hanzo twists the sake’s cap off, tossing it onto the bedspread before taking an experimental sip.

It's... not bad. McCree either has good taste, or got lucky.
He reaches for the cap to replace it, then pauses. His gaze wanders up the bed – over the thick pillows and the colorful pattern of the bedspread. His hand gently presses down on the covers and he inhales. Stuffed with goose-down, as he'd thought.

He glances at the closed door, then back to the bed. Debating.

Well. If McCree isn't here, it hardly matters. The bed's already mussed anyway.

He puts the bottle back on the nightstand and positions his chair better. After careful alignment, he plants his hands on the sheets and hoists himself up. He scoots his way across the bed until he can rest his back against the plentiful pillows. They're soft and enveloping and Hanzo melts backwards into them until his head is resting on them fully. His horns clunk gently against the headboard, and he shifts to accommodate them.

A strange sort of scent tickles his nose. He leans his head to the left, sniffing the pillowcases. Smoke? It's faint, like the cases had gone through several rigorous washings, and the scent has never been present in the rest of the room or on his person. Is McCree trying to quit?

He inhales a little deeper, seeing if anything else stands out. A hint of bourbon, a strong, lingering waft of the man's shampoo. Beneath it all, just a sort of... scent. McCree's simple, basic smell. He doesn't know how to describe it without the trappings of booze or sweat.

Hanzo reaches down, tugging up the thick comforter over his form until it's tucked up to his chin. He snuggles down into the sheets, letting the soft warmth envelop him.

He's never had this sort of comfort. Similar, of course. A kotatsu he and Genji had burrowed beneath on the cold, winter days. A thin bed with silk sheets and satin curtains that had enveloped the room, when they'd visited a Vishkar complex. But nothing that is simply so – plush.

He can feel himself getting drowsy as he lies there, enjoying the feeling. He realizes he might fall asleep entirely, and at the moment he can't bring himself to care. McCree might walk in. So what? The man could just sleep on the floor until Hanzo is done.

His eyes flutter, threatening to close. The smell of bourbon and smoke and McCree are lulling him to sleep. The idea should disgust him, but he can't muster a sneer. He's tired, he's warm, and the bed is luxurious beyond belief.

He would rest. No one would be looking for him anyway.

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In his dreams, he is flying.

Eri and Ami are with him, gliding side by side with him as they coast through the night sky. He looks down – trees are zipping by below him at incredible speeds. Everything's sort of blurred around the edges, hazy and vague. Only his dragons stand out, crystal clear in their defined beauty. The spirits turn slightly to the left in their flight, and he can feel himself following their course, unbidden.
Hanzo can feel Eri's eyes upon him, the dragon's maw curled in a strange grin. We thought you'd like to join us, for this one.

We cannot be far. Ami's front legs are tucked close to her chest as she scans the treeline. The scent is strong.

Hanzo doesn't understand. Who are they hunting? When they sought on Saburo's orders, they have him see through their eyes, confirming their prey – but never something like this. Never separate, but joined as a spirit.

There. Ami snaps her neck to the right and dives, and Hanzo feels himself tugged after her as Eri follows. Their bodies ripple as they sail through trees – redwoods, Hanzo realizes, why was he dreaming of redwoods? - and curve left and right around bends as they streak towards their target, zeroing in on their prey.

Who? Who were they hunting? If they could hear his questions, they chose not to answer.

They abruptly stop in a clearing, hovering above the ground and Hanzo is briefly glad that his spirit self could not experience whiplash. They tilt their heads downward and Hanzo follows their gaze – there. Nearly hidden in the grass, something gleams in the moonlight. A metal hatch, held just open by – a rock? Really?

The dragons don't share his disbelief. They are diving again, melting through ground and taking Hanzo along with him. For a few moments there is nothing to see – just the cold, dizzying sensation that he is trapped beneath the earth. The dragons turn again, phasing through a wall and – there. Inside. Metal walls and metal floors are the first thing Hanzo sees. And then – men. Strange men filling the metal bunker, choking a series of hallways. Brown suits and metal masks were all he could really make out, but every one of them carrying a gun and were clearly looking for something by the way they move their heads.

They must be shouting, but he can't hear him. That was normal. In all his hunts, he had never heard a sound. Perhaps the dragons could. They never said. It had always made it easier for him – there was never a dying scream to haunt him.

Well, Saburo's. But he'd liked that one.

The dragons don't seem interested. They glide onward, over the heads of the men as they turn their snout every which way, sniffing out their prey. Eri utters a low noise and takes a sharp left, phasing through a nearby doorway. Ami motions to Hanzo with her snout and follows her brother.

The room contained crates upon crates, piled high and tight. No visible path between them, except over them. The dragons, of course, glide right through.

There, tucked into the corner of the room. Three people, all wearing black and huddled together out of sight. Hanzo can't make them out very well. He can see a young man with a blood-stained side, clutching at it and panting with scrunched up eyes. A woman, he thinks, with long, red hair who was holding up a gun pointed at the crates and shifting her stance every so often. An omnic with a golden dome, tending to the wounded man. And-

McCree? Hanzo doesn't recognize him at first, even as the man stood out with the same, sharp clarity his dragons shared. McCree is donned in black like the rest, crouched on one knee. Thick, metal armor cover his chest and legs, and a cloth drape obscure his back and shoulders. Two fingers are pressed into his ear, talking into a communicator with a pistol grasped firmly in his other hand.
It was bizarre. Hanzo had never seen him in anything but plaid. A strange sense of relief washes over him as he looks at the man, and he can't quite pin down why.

The wounded soldier convulses violently on the floor, and Hanzo can see McCree grit his teeth. The dragons crane their head back towards the door, and Hanzo floats upward to look with them. They say nothing, but he knows what's being unsaid.

Four men – one wounded – would be no match for the swarm of soldiers looking for them. They'd been cornered for a reason.

Ami's teeth slowly bare as the door begins to tremble. The masked men pounding on it, no doubt. They'll break through. The crates won't hide McCree and his men for long. They'll be overtaken, and they'll be killed.

Hanzo feels the electricity in the air before he knows what's happening. Eri and Ami are sparking, crackling with energy as their mouths pull back in twin snarls. Their eyes glaze bright white and their claws unfurl.

Hanzo doesn't give them a command, hadn't even formed one in his mind yet. He only watches, feeling frozen in place as they move of their own accord and surge through the doors. He can see their spiritual energy flare light a thousand lights, even from here – he can't hear anything but the roars his dragons leave behind as they tear through the men, one by one. Ripping the energy from their bodies, devouring it whole. Leaving only wide eyes and empty husks behind.

He floats there, the midpoint between his dragons and McCree. He turns his eyes from the door – the three huddled soldiers look dumbstruck, and the redhead's lowered her gun in shock. They must hear them, Hanzo realizes. Not the dragons, but the screams of the men. The panic that must be ensuing in the remaining who would have only moments before the dragons were upon them.

Only McCree looks – guarded. Still ready for a fight.

**We have finished.** Eri glides back through the doors, a long tongue rolling over his teeth.

**A good hunt. A good meal.** Ami follows him and shakes herself like a dog as sparks flicker off her body.

They surround Hanzo, hovering in the air as they peer down at him as if in search of praise. He stares up at them, unable to form words. It seems to amuse them, based on the look they briefly share.

**It is time to go.** Ami places her claw on Hanzo's shoulder. **Time for home.**

Hanzo can feel himself gasp as the dragons dive into him, and his vision goes black.
Chapter 5


Someone's calling him. Hanzo can feel his eyes flutter and throat swallow. Something gently touches his ear, and it twitches at the sensation.

“Come on. Wake up. Boss is asking for you.”

That's enough to grab his attention. Hanzo blinks his eyes a few times as he wakes, trying to clear his fogged vision and dragging his unwilling consciousness back to the surface. He can see a blurred outline at the side of his bed, and a familiar scent hits his nostrils.

McCree?

Hanzo mindlessly reaches out towards him, testing if he's still dreaming.

His hand catches in place. Something is around his wrist, something is holding him back and that is enough to sharply wake him. His vision clears as he focuses – handcuffs. One clipped around his wrist, the other side attached to the – metal poles, the metal of his cot. His cot, he's back in his cell? How had he gotten here? He tests his other wrist and his breath catches. Restrained on both sides. He immediately begins writhing angrily, pushing up off the bed and attempting to break them apart.

“Hey! Hey, Hanzo! Stop!” McCree's hands are on his chest as if attempting to hold him down and Hanzo whips his head towards him and snarls, his teeth fully bared. McCree immediately releases him, jumping back with one hand reaching for his hip.

Something hot and awful curls in Hanzo's stomach. He closes his mouth as something else clicks – McCree isn't in plaid. The man is wearing the same armor, the same outfit he'd seen in his dream.

Not a dream.

And strapped to McCrees's hip is-

With a start, McCree seems to realize what he's done and both of his hands shoot up to his shoulders, palms out. “I did not mean that. Jesus. I didn't mean that, Hanzo.”

The pistol's handle gleams in the room's bright lighting. Polished and well-kept. Hanzo can't take his eyes off it until McCree purposefully shifts its strap around to his back.

“I did not mean that,” McCree repeats slowly, pain etched into his expression. “I am sorry.”

Hanzo looks away from him. His stomach is still roiling, foul and burning – he attempts to test his restraints again. How had he gotten here? The last thing he remembered was drinking his sake, falling asleep, his dream -

Not a dream.

How long had he been asleep? He felt like he'd flown far enough with his dragons. How long had it taken McCree to get back, replace him in his cell, and tie him down like an animal?

“I did not do that to you,” McCree says hoarsely, as if reading Hanzo's thoughts. “Honest, Hanzo.
The boss is back, and he is really unhappy about you wandering off.” McCree fishes a tiny key out of his pocket, holding it up so Hanzo can see it in the light. “He wants to see you. I am going to take you to him, okay?”

Hanzo refuses to look at him as McCree approaches. He feels the man's hands on his wrists and hears the sound of the handcuffs unlocking. As soon as they're freed, he grabs his right wrist in one hand and begins inspecting it, rubbing his thumb over the lines left behind. They're deep. He'd been out for a while, it seems.

McCree pushes the wheelchair up to the bed and sets the brake. Hanzo doesn't acknowledge it, keeping his attention down on his wrists and away from McCree.

“We have to go,” McCree says quietly. “It will be worse if we are late.”

When Hanzo still refuses to budge, it elicits a soft sigh from the other man. “Okay,” McCree mumbles. “Sorry about this.” Hanzo has enough time to be briefly confused at the comment before there's hands under his knees and armpit and he's being lifted upwards. He thrashes instantly, but McCree's hold is firm and it only takes a second or two before Hanzo is unceremoniously dropped into his wheelchair. He stares in abject disbelief and fury as McCree bends down and quickly snaps a pair of handcuffs back on his right wrist and the wheelchair's armrest.

“No time for this, Hanzo,” McCree mutters. He almost seemed genuinely apologetic in the way he glances at Hanzo before straightening. “I actually do want you to live through this.”

A prickle of fear crawls down Hanzo's spine as McCree grabs his chair's handles and begins wheeling him from the room.

Live through what?

Of all the places Hanzo had been imagining he was being taken to, it certainly hadn't been the small conference room he was being deposited in. There are a smattering of metal, foldable chairs scattered around a large, circular table, and a whiteboard set against the wall. A projector's internal lights flicker above from where it's bolted to the ceiling, and a water cooler bubbles quietly in the corner next to a small, wooden door. McCree kicks a few of the chairs out of the way to park Hanzo at the edge of the table.

The door by the cooler opens, and a man walks in. His skin is dark – darker than Hanzo has seen in ages. He's got on the same black, armored outfit as McCree, with an ugly beanie pulled across his scalp.

Are bad hats part of the uniform here?

The man looks up from a pile of papers in his arms, gaze traveling over Hanzo in an openly studying manner before he looks up at McCree and cracks an ugly grin.

“So, Jesse.” He's using English. “Prince's kiss finally wake his little Sleeping Beauty?”

Hanzo flushes instantly, hot and angry. He takes in a breath and attempts to school his expression.
“Lay off, Boss,” McCree complains, still in English.

“What, I can't poke fun at your bedwarmer?” Hanzo can feel smug eyes upon him, but he won't meet them.

The man drops into the chair opposite Hanzo, on the far side of the table. He places the stack of papers to his right before folding his hands atop each other and resting his chin on them.

“So. Hanzo Shimada. Lost heir to the Shimada Clan and currently, a drain on my resources.”


“No, I don't.” Hanzo bristles at the confidence in the man's tone. “He can understand English just fine, and he's been lying to you if he says he can't. You miss him blushing like a schoolgirl when I pulled that Beauty quip? He knows what I'm saying.”

Hanzo finally matches the man's gaze with a glare. This man is smart. That makes him dangerous.

The man doesn't seem phased. “Real fuckin' tough guy act you got goin' on. Hey, Jesse, you say he doesn't talk either?”

“He claims he can. Doesn't want to. I ain't pressed him on it.” McCree has his arms folded, leaning against the wall. He looks a little hurt.

To be fair, Hanzo thought, they'd never actually asked if they had to use Japanese.

“Oh, ain't pressed him? That's awful gentlemanly of you, and completely useless to me.”

“Lay off, Commander Reyes,” McCree snaps. “This ain't my interrogation.”

“You're right, it ain't,” the man – Reyes? - says. “Let's get on with this, then.”

Reyes leans back in the chair, lifting his arm up and clicking a small remote in his hand. The projector overhead flickers to life.

“When I showed up here yesterday, I was coming for a routine inspection of what should be a well-developed and stable base of operations. Instead, I get this.” Reyes clicks the remote again, and the whiteboard is covered with images of a computer room. Hanzo could see a few stray sparks and tufts of ugly black smoke, even in the still.

“Our main security system is fried to hell,” Reyes continues. “Instead of the lock down protocol in case of error, every god damn door in the building is set to green so any John or Jane can waltz in and out as they please. All the cameras offline, because no one in this sh*tshow, Jesse-” Reyes is turning a glare on McCree. “Was left on base that knew how to properly reboot your AI!”

“I taught them! I taught them, and they never fuckin' listen-!” Reyes holds up a hand, and McCree falls silent with a huff.

“During this time, no one seems to know where you are, Shimada.” Reyes' attention is back on Hanzo, and he bristles in response. “In fact, until Jesse here found you all cozied up like a fairy-tale princess in his bed, you'd been missing for over seventeen hours. Oh, and, just let me say-” Reyes places a hand over his chest. “Thank you for that, really. Whatever reason, it just, it looks really good for Jesse when I find out a prisoner's gone all snugglebug up in his room instead of escaping. The base is just eating that shit up in the mess hall.”
McCree wordlessly pulls his hat down over his eyes, and Hanzo can't bear to look at him twice.

“So, seventeen hours.” Reyes is leaning back in his chair again. “No trace of you during that time. In fact, the last actual image we have of you is right before the cam's go offline. And look here.” The remote clicks again. An image of Hanzo fills the screen, taken from above. His palm is against the glass door and his eyes are closed.

Hanzo can feel his breath catch.

“That's weird. Especially since, as far as I looked back in the video logs, you've never done that before. And right before my entire base's system goes down without a fight. Huh. Might be a coincidence.” Reyes pushes himself from his seat, and goes to stand by the board. He raps his knuckles against the spot where Hanzo's hand was pressed against the glass – and Hanzo finally sees the small, blue spark that was laying across index finger.

“Might be a coincidence,” Reyes repeats. “But you mind telling me what the hell was going on with your fingers, there?”

Hanzo stays silent, but he can feel his ears pin back as he continues to glare.

“Not the only strange shit that's happened around you. Not that cow-brains here seemed to notice.”

“Hey,” McCree snaps.

“SHUT THE FUCK UP!” Reyes barks back. McCree's mouth snaps shut, instantly cowed. “You got sloppy,” Reyes continues in a calmer voice, pointing an accusatory finger at the man. “You got fucking sloppy and you got soft, and now you're gonna sit here and you're gonna listen while I point out all the obvious shit you missed, all the while pushing me on the phone for his god damn release.”

McCree says nothing. Reyes lets out a gruff snort, then turns away. He picks up the remote and clicks it again, and the image changes to Saburo's body, lain out on a stretcher.

“Saburo Tashiro. Fifty-four, and the acting head of the Shimada clan. Responsible for countless crimes and atrocities in and out of Japan. His clan's killed at least twelve of my men this year alone. Target of a raid that took months of planning, preparation, and espionage. When we catch him? Already dead, at one Hanzo Shimada's feet, or lack thereof.”

Reyes drops back down in his chair. “Well, maybe he had a heart attack. Lot of stress, armed men coming to kill him. Coroners assumed as much. There was one thing, though.” Reyes clicks the remote again, and a new image fills the screen.

It's a heart, blackened and cut open. Hanzo wrinkles his nose in distaste.

“His heart stopped, sure. Coroners were real sure of that. But his heart was crispy. Like he'd gotten a bad zap to it, some sort of electric hit. Real strange. Well, not real strange.”

Reyes reaches out, taking hold of his stack of papers and laying them out, one by one. “Cause I did a little digging. Turns out, this isn't the first time our autopsies have pulled up something like this.” Reyes slides a piece of paper across to Hanzo. Hanzo catches it and looks down.

His breath hitches again.

“Thought so,” Reyes says, but there's no triumph in his voice. He slides another paper, than another. Hanzo can only look briefly at each before looking away.
Photographs of men, women and omnis.

“You know them. I can see it on your face.” Reyes slides the final paper – a young woman, curly hair and freckles. McCree has been watching – he walks over, picks up her photograph. He gives it a good look, mouth drawn into a thin line.

“Ah, that's right,” Reyes says, looking over at McCree. “She was part of your squad on the Shikoku mission. Wasn't long after that, was it?”

McCree says nothing, and Reyes rises from his seat to begin walking down the table. “Saburo was your mistake. Guessing it felt pretty good, if he was the one keeping you down there. But I know from him, that these?” Reyes stops next to Hanzo's chair, tapping a photograph. “These were you.”

Hanzo feels a sudden sense of dizziness. He doesn't know if McCree is looking at him or not, but the man hasn't lowered the photograph of the woman.

“You killed my men, Shimada.”

Hanzo wants to wheel away, backwards and out of the room, but his wrist is still locked to the armrest and Reyes has gripped the other.

“Well?” Reyes barks. “Speak, boy! I know you can!”

Hanzo swallows as his vision tilts and the room begins to blur.

“Tell him!” Reyes stabs a finger at Jesse. “Did you kill my men?!”

Hanzo closes his eyes, trying to center himself.

“Did you?! SPEAK!”

“Yes,” Hanzo rasps.

It feels awful. His chords ache from the disuse, like shards of glass have ben embedded in them. Reyes has stopped shouting, and McCree was saying nothing. Silence fills the room but Hanzo can't bear to open his eyes to see how they were looking at him.

“I want to know why,” Reyes finally growls. A fist slams into the table. “Tell me why, Shimada. Before I paint this room red or whatever color your freak blood is now.”

“My brother,” Hanzo replies hoarsely. He touches his throat, swallows.

“I know about your brother,” Reyes spits. “Genji Shimada. Disappeared off the radar four years ago, same as you, following Sojiro Shimada's death. We assumed you two had been killed off in an internal power play.”

Four years? Has he really lost so much time?

“Clan... wanted me... to kill him,” Hanzo says slowly, each word pained. English is hard enough without feeling like he was inhaling pins. “Wouldn't. We tried to.. run. Caught.” His other hand subconsciously touches his legs. “Prison.”

Reyes doesn't seem to to miss the movement. “So you two tried to defect, failed, and they cut you up to make a point and threw you down there. Sad story. Not what I want to know.”

Hanzo might have rolled his eyes any other day. But this man's presence is too powerful, too
overbearing for anything but continuing with: “Let Genji go if... I served clan... from below. While caged.”

“You killed my men while inside that prison?”

Hanzo nods, and Reyes makes a nose of disbelief. “How?”

“Dragons,” Hanzo mumbles. “Family... has always had. Mine were... are strong. They can... travel far.” He wheezes again, resting his head on the table. He wishes McCree had just brought him the notebook.

“Dragons? The fuck does any of that mean?”

Hanzo lifts his hand to wiggle his fingers, hoping Reyes would figure it out.

“Wiggle shit isn't going to cut it, Shimada. I don't care if you're spitting blood, you speak. You killed good men and women.”

“Spirits,” Hanzo rasps. “Energy. They can... take energy. Life. Electricity. I said... they can travel... very far. Not at... first. But... I grew stronger... with practice. I did not... want to.”

“You did it anyway,” Reyes counters. Hanzo cracks open an eye and despite the man's harsh tone, he almost looks thoughtful. “So, let me lay this claim out. You have spirit, energy dragons you got from what I can only assume is some form of family inbreeding, based on your lizardly looks.” This gets a glare out of Hanzo, even if it's completely ignored. “And you can use these 'dragons' to cross cities and countries, kill my men from the safety of your prison, and then turn around and have them send a fortified base offline just from smacking your palm on some glass.”

“Yes.”

“Bullshit.” Reyes is looking at him in disgust. “You would have killed this whole base on arrival if any of this was true. What's stopping you?”

“Nothing,” Hanzo rasps.

“Excuse me?”

“Nothing,” he repeats, lifting his head to stare the man down. “I could... have killed. I still... can. Both of you. All of you.” He won't look at McCree, but he can feel the gaze. “But... I have not.”

Reyes's mouth closes at that. His brow furrows as he gives Hanzo a long, scrutinizing look. His arms fold and his fingers drum an irregular beat. “So, then. Why haven't you?”

Hanzo's anger deflates as he sinks back down in his chair. “Where... would I go?” He reaches down, touching the top of his knee. “I do not know... where this is. Who... you are. At first... I was waiting... for you to kill me.”

“Can still be arranged,” Reyes mutters. His brow is scrunched; he looks like he's thinking. “Jesse!” he barks suddenly. McCree snaps to attention. “Wheel him out of here. Make sure he doesn't wander, and call Lilac while you're at it. I need a better report than the garbage you've given me so far.”

McCree mumbles a: “Sure thing, Boss.” He side-steps a few chairs, takes hold of Hanzo's wheelchair handles.
Hanzo glances up, but McCree isn't looking at him. Instead, he leans down to release the brake and silently pushes Hanzo from the room.

The last thing Hanzo sees before the door closes is Reyes' back, half-turned. He still looks thoughtful, like he's turning over some idea in his mind.

Hanzo's sure he won't like the result.
Chapter 6

McCree doesn't take Hanzo very far. He's wheeled to the side of the hall and parked next to a bathroom door. McCree bends down, unlocks one handcuff and reattaches it to the door's 'Pull' handle - all done in short, precise movements. When he's done he stands back up and presses two fingers to his ear. Hanzo recognizes the gesture.

“Lilac,” McCree says in a gruff voice. “Need you down here. Reyes' is looking for you, ASAP.” His fingers are fiddling with something in his shirt pocket.

“Jesse?” Hanzo's ears prick up – he can just barely hear the doctor's voice over the communicator. “What's up? No 'Lily'loo' today?”

“ASAP means ASAP, hun,” McCree replies. “Conference Room D. Quick as a bunny, now.” McCree taps his ear, and Hanzo hears nothing else. Must have ended the call.

McCree leans back against the wall with a sigh, running a hand through his hair and over his hat. The hand in his pocket fishes out a cigar and he shoves it between his teeth, grinding down on the fat stub. He glances downward at Hanzo.

“Yer starin',” McCree remarks dryly, and Hanzo looks away.

Another sigh. Hanzo can see McCree patting his pockets out of the corner of his eye, looking for something. He pulls whatever it is out and Hanzo can hear a small, mechanical click.

Hanzo's ears flatten. Is McCree going to shoot him? Here? Now? The sound is followed by a snap, and McCree's stowing the thing back in his pocket. Hanzo chances a glance upwards.

The end of the cigar is now lit, and McCree is taking a long, two-fingered drag off it.

A lighter. It had just been a lighter.

Calm yourself, Brother. Don't you trust me?

Hanzo lowers his gaze to his lap. McCree isn't saying anything, isn't looking at him anymore. The least Hanzo can do is the same.

Minutes tick by in relative silence, broken only by the sound of Jesse puffing on his cigar and eventually the sound of Lilac's approaching footsteps.

“Jesse McCree, what is so important?” she demands, her white labcoat trailing behind as she rounds the bend. “I was in the middle of tests!” Her gaze lands on the cigar. “Put that out. You know there's no smoking in here.”

McCree waves a hand lazily at the conference room door. “He's waiting for you, Miss Lilac.”

“Put it out, Jesse! You'll make the whole hallway reek.”

“Really best not to keep Reyes waiting,” McCree drawls back, tapping the end of his cigar. “He's in a mood.” Ash falls in a neat little pile onto the floor. Lilac simply huffs, turning to yank open the door and stepping inside. Hanzo can feel his ears turn back when she slams it in their faces.
Once she's gone, McCree slumps. He slides down the wall until he's sitting flat on the tile, legs spread and his hands resting on his thighs. He chews on the edge for a few moments.

“Reyes is right,” he says suddenly. “I got sloppy with you.”

Hanzo feels a spike of shame stab in his chest. He folds his hands together, sharp nails pressing against his skin. The minor physical pain is a brief, but welcome distraction.

McCree goes quiet again and Hanzo continues digging his nails in, focusing on the sensation. It takes him more minutes than he'd like to muster up the courage to speak.

“I am sorry.” Hanzo's voice is so soft, so tired. He hopes McCree can still hear him. “I did not ever wish to do... what I did.”

McCree takes an agonizingly long drag off the cigar. He fills his cheeks, then blows a thin line of smoke into the air.

“Genji was... all I had. We... were caught. Because of me.” Hanzo swallows thickly. “He is my brother.”

“Jenny was a mother,” McCree replies. He's looking at his cigar, twiddling it between his thumbs. “Used to tell me about them all the time. Kevin and Steven. Her two boys. Couldn't have been older than five and three, respectively, when it happened. Don't know what happened to them. Father had never been there for 'em, never even saw Steven get born, she'd say. Wasn't at her funeral either.”

Hanzo lowers his eyes again, shoulders hunching together. The shame has returned in triplicate, overpowering his senses as he clenches his eyes shut. Of course. There is no defense for this.

“But...” Hanzo can hear McCree clicking his tongue. “Juan's got three sisters, and five nieces and nephews. Clara's engaged – poor schmuck, she's gonna run his life like an army sergeant. And Yono, well, I don't know what kind of family omnis get, but he's a good soul all the same.”

Another long drag on the cigar. “And they were all with me last night, when some awful strange shit went down.”

Hanzo doesn't lift his head to acknowledge it – his fingers simply clench.

“I was feelin' pretty bad about you that night,” McCree remarks. “See, I was thinkin' I'd been forced into breakin' a promise. I didn't step two feet in the door, back from that sake run before I'm gettin' news barked that there's a Ta- an enemy base reactivated in the area that we needed to go scout out and flush out. No time to dawdle or dally, so I pick my best and we head out. Was told it would be simple. Didn't think I'd end up two days later with Juan bleedin' out on the floor and the rest of us cornered like rats with a survival chance of diddly-fuckin' squat. And then...”

Hanzo takes a small breath. “Strange shit happened.”

“Yeah,” McCree remarks tonelessly. “It sure did.”

Hanzo hesitates. “Do you-”

“Don't.” McCree holds up a hand to interrupt him. “Don't ask a man to sort out his complicated feelings so quick. I ain't done thinkin', and I won't be for a while. So don't ask.”

Hanzo goes quiet.
McCree taps more ash onto the floor. “Will tell you one thing, though.” He sticks the cigar back into his mouth. “I don't have any intention of takin' you out back and shooting you like a dog. And neither does Reyes, but he's gonna tell you different.”

Hanzo looks up in surprise and McCree snorts. “I know. He's good at playing the bulldog shtick when he wants to. It's why he's where he is. And it worked on me, when I was in your sitch. Course, he actually would have let me rot. But I've been around that man long enough to know when he wants something, and I can already tell he wants you on his side a hell of a lot more than he wants you dead.”

Hanzo sits back, trying to process this. “What does that... mean?”

“Means you have bargaining power that I didn't.” McCree reaches up to scratch his chin hairs. “He's gonna want you to sign on with him, no questions asked, and be grateful he's lettin' you live. But you can get more. He's gonna raise a fuss about it but he's gonna agree to most of what you want, I reckon. Like gettin' a room with hot water and a decent bed like mine, since you're so drawn and all.”

Hanzo flushes at the mention, but McCree keeps talking, unabashed. “And, I'm just guessin', but I'mbettin' whatcha want most is a room that isn't locked from one side. The freedom to stretch your legs.” McCree's eyes flick down. “Actually, might wanna throw some legs into your demands. Angela's prosthetics are better than money can buy.” A pause. “I know you don't really wanna die, Hanzo. But I know you also don't wanna spend the rest of your life in a cage, pr'verbial or not. Use this to get yourself a better life.”

“JESSE!” Hanzo jolts at the sound of Reyes' shout. “GET YOUR UNGRATEFUL ASS IN HERE! AND BRING YOUR BOYFRIEND!”

“Sorry,” McCree sighs as he stubs out the cigar on the floor and gets to his feet. Hanzo works to control his expression, trying to will the angry flush from his cheeks. “Nah. Took turns guessin' how long it'd been since you washed that shitty beanie of yours, Boss,” McCree quips cheerfully, stepping back and resuming his previous position against the wall. Hanzo's certain Reyes will pistol-whip McCree then and there, but the commander just gives him a measured look and then snorts.

“Right. You.” Reyes' hands plant on the table and his gaze lands on Hanzo, who tries not to shrink under the look. “Sorry, Shimada. But you're way too dangerous to keep alive.”

Hanzo's heart plummets into his stomach. He turns his head towards McCree – but the man isn't
meeting his wide-eyed look. He's the picture of calm.

*Just trust me.*

Hanzo forces himself to turn his head back to Reyes. The man is watching him closely. Hanzo knows Reyes hadn't missed his moment of panic. He swallows again, trying to steel himself.

“Hm,” Reyes grunts after a moment. “Nothing to say to that?”

“I...” What should he say? He doesn't understand Jesse's gamble. “I killed... your men. I understand.”

“Yeah,” Reyes agrees. “That's right. You did kill my men.” He removes his hands from the table, folding them behind his back. “And you seem halfway sorry about it, if you're gonna let me kill you for it. So I'll give you one chance.”

Hanzo's heart leaps.

“Sign on with me. Swear your complete and utter fuckin' loyalty, like your bedbuddy there. Do what I say, and you'll end up protecting more of my men than you killed. Sound like a fair trade?”

Hanzo looks at his hands, flexing his claws and watching his scales gleam under the florescent light.

*Use this to get yourself a better life.*

“No,” Hanzo says quietly. “I won't.”

Reyes' eyebrows shoot up in disbelief and Hanzo swears he can feel McCree smile, even if he can't see it.

“No? Sorry?” Reyes is leaning over the table, anger starting to furrow his brow. “Did I hear you right, Shimada? I don't have those big, floppy ears of yours.”

“No,” Hanzo repeats. His voice is firmer, and he's raising his gaze to Reyes'. “I do not... want to be used.”

“Used?! I don't want-”

*I KNOW WHAT YOU WANT!* Hanzo snarls. He can feel his throat sear in pain and quickly pulls back, covering his mouth and coughing, closing his eyes as he recovers. When he opens them again, Reyes is two feet farther from the table than he was before.

*Dios,* Reyes mutters. “Those eyes-”

“I know... what you want,” Hanzo repeats, attempting to keep his voice calm. “You want... me to be... what I was. A prisoner. Something you can just... point and aim. And think I should... be grateful for it. For existing, like that.” He takes in a reedy breath before continuing: “You want... my loyalty? I want... to be treated... like a human being. I want... a room, with hot water... and a real bed... that I am not chained to. I want... to be free. To come, and go. When *I* want. I want... to walk again!” Hanzo angrily slaps his right leg.

Reyes is glaring daggers at him. “Anything else?”

“Yes,” Hanzo breathes. “I want... to know. If you have me... kill again. I want to know why. And I want.... to be able to refuse.” McCree makes a small noise of surprise; Hanzo ignores it. “I killed...
good people. I want to be sure... I do not do it again.”

Reyes leans menacingly over the table. “And what makes you so sure I’m not going to take you and your fanciful list of demands and send you both packing with shotgun shells to the face?”

“You want me alive.” Reyes' face tightens and Hanzo allows himself a small smirk. “I know... you do. I am... more useful, on your side. If you wanted... to kill me. You would have done it... already.”

Reyes glances between McCree and Hanzo, scowl deepening after a moment. “You.” He rounds on McCree and jabs a finger at him. “You bastard. You did this! You got soft again, didn't you!”

McCree raises his hands in a mock gesture of surrender. “Boss, I've never been anythin' but honest with you.”

“Bullshit.”

“Nah. You remember? Lil' ol Deadlock me, spittin' fire and kickin' your shins in that holding cell?” McCree tips his hat as he smirks. “Told you I'd get you back for it. I told you straight-up I would.”

Reyes swears violently. He grabs a metal chair and hurls it against the wall, resulting in a large crash that pins Hanzo's ears and makes him lean backwards. McCree seems unphased, even chuckling as Reyes kicks another chair to the ground and storms from the room.

Lilac's mouth is drawn into a thin line. “I hope you're happy, Jesse.”

“I am. Been waitin' ages to make good on my promise.” McCree saunters over and gives Hanzo a light pat on the back. “You did good.”

Hanzo stares at him incredulously. “He is going to kill me.”

“Nah.” McCree ruffles Hanzo's hair, who has to reach up to swat the hand away from his horns. “Watch this.” McCree reaches up, pulling the small communications device from his ear and holding it out.

Hanzo looks at it in confusion, then back up at McCree.

“Just wait for a min-”

“JESSE!” Reyes' voice blares from the communicator, and Hanzo pins back his ears with a wince. No wonder McCree had removed it. The cowboy brings it back up to his mouth with a cheerful: “Go ahead, Boss.”

“CALL UP ANGELA. GET HER ON THE FIRST FLIGHT OUT HERE SO SHE CAN START ON THE PROSTHETIC FITTINGS. GET LILAC TO PULL UP THE PAPERWORK, AND CALL ME WHEN HIS SIGNATURE'S DRY. I DON'T WANT MORRISON SNATCHING THIS ONE FROM US, GOT IT?”

“Got it, Boss,” McCree chirps. “Over and out.” He clicks the comm off, and replaces it in his ear. “He likes to point a megaphone at the mic when he's done, finish off the illusion of intimidation,” McCree explains calmly. “I've learned.”

Hanzo can't help the small laugh of disbelief that bubbles out of his chest.

Lilac pushes herself out of the chair. “Aren't you and the commander forgetting something?”
McCree and Hanzo look at her, with the former offering a shrug.

“Our name,” she stresses. “Our organization.

“Oh,” McCree says. “Right.”

Before he can say anything else, Lilac brushes past McCree and bends down to offer her hand to Hanzo. “Welcome, Mr. Shimada.”

“Hanzo, please,” Hanzo corrects automatically.

“Hanzo,” Lilac repeats. “It is a pleasure. My real name is Lillian Kim. I am a doctor here at Blackwatch, a covert division of Overwatch.”

“Let me be the first to welcome you to your new home.”

Chapter End Notes

Reyes’ men got him a microphone-compatible megaphone as a joke gift for his birthday; he loves it and they regret it more than anything in the world.
Chapter 7

Blackwatch turns out to be even better at keeping secrets than Hanzo.

“Yes, we're called Blackwatch, and yes, we're a covert division of Overwatch,” Reyes had told him. “Two things. One, you don't work for Overwatch. You work for me, and you ignore anyone in a stupid baby blue outfit who tries to give you orders. And two? Everything I just said is the absolute extent of what you need to know right now. Now piss off and go see Angela.”

Angela, it turned out, is an extraordinarily pretty woman with a soft voice and a gentle smile that had relaxed Hanzo the moment he'd laid eyes on her.

She'd greeted him, asked him to lie down so she could examine him. Aside from plucking a single scale for analysis and drawing his blood, she hadn't done much of anything to hurt him. She'd measured the stubs of his legs, jotted notes, and asked the same sort of questions Metis had when he first arrived.

“I've sent the specs to a friend back in Sweden,” she'd explained, using her fingers to swipe across a screen as she types with her other hand. “He's an engineer, and once I've collected all the data he needs, he crafts the prosthetics for my patients and sends them over. I'm afraid Gabriel's base here is a little too out of the way for my normal equipment to be shipped in, or I'd do it myself. They should be ready in about two weeks, give or take. But tell me - are you ready?”

“Me?” he'd asked. “Ready for what?”

Agony, it turned out. Walking again had not been the simple as refitting his legs with something soft and fleshy. Two weeks later, Angela had presented him with were legs comprised a hard, layered metal, cushioned only on the top with translucent silicone.

“Blackwatch is dangerous work,” Angela had told him. “You'll need something sturdy, in case you take blows. And, well...” Her eyes had traveled down to the two clawed toes at the end of each foot. “I did mention your... looks. I fear he thought I wished for a stylistic addition.”

Hanzo hates them; but they're the only legs he has. He'd just saw off the ends later, when he was more accustomed.

Later had become much later. His muscles are weak, Angela had said. Atrophied. He hadn't used them in so long, attempting to stand was the worst sort of agony that placed pinpoint pressure that felt not unlike being stabbed through with a knife.

And then she wanted him to walk. Someday she'd ask him to run. He didn't like thinking about it.

Wheeling his way to her lab to work on physical therapy, as Angela called it, replaced the daily routine he and McCree had had. He no longer had to be taken to a room with hot water – he had one of his own now. Reyes had given him an empty room about three doors down from McCree. It's almost identical to the one he'd visited – it simply lacked the personal affects, and the sheets and pillowcases are the same shade of blue as his scales. He isn't sure if that was intentional, but he resents it if it was.

He'd tried watching the TV, but the only channels that come through are public shows for children and infomercials. He'd looked for books, but his room is bare.

“Secret military bases don't get cable, and we're sure as shit not a library,” Reyes had informed him
over a stack of paperwork he'd called Hanzo in to fill out. “Once you've finished, go see Angela.” He’d had – incidentals with the rest of the base. A few faces here and there that he couldn't recall well. Most of them had been humans who turned and whispered when he passed. Reyes had given him a pile – literally, dumped into his arms – of clothes to wear that had been milling around in the lost and found bin for years. Almost all of them are too big, which works in Hanzo's favor. Long, flapping sleeves hide his tattoo and claws, and hoodies can be pulled up to hide his ears and shadow his face from passerby. Only the horns betrayed him, and after a few fruitless struggles, he’d simply given up and poked holes in the top of the hoods to accommodate them.

No one had tried to speak to him. A shame, because with practice, his own voice is getting stronger and clearer by the day.

“I told the grunts to leave you alone.” Reyes had been chewing on dried jerky over the next round of paperwork, his boots kicked up on the table and coffee mug in hand. The phrase '#2 DAD' was plastered on the cup in bright red lettering. “Like I said,” Reyes had continued, sipping from the mug. “You don't need to know anything until you're up on your feet. Speaking of which—”

Go see Angela. Hanzo doesn't harbor any real resentment towards the woman. Well, perhaps during the really agonizing parts of therapy. But he's getting tired of his doctor being the only person to speak to, with the small exception of Reyes' paperwork calls.

Despite his room's proximity to McCree, there's more distance between them than ever. After his mirth at Reyes' tantrum had died down, the man had grown... not colder, exactly. But he'd pulled away, and noticeably.

“You're gonna have to give me time,” he'd told Hanzo a few days after the confrontation with Reyes. He'd been smoking another cigar, and Hanzo wondered if he'd been the cause. “I'm fogged up right now with feelings and shit. Ain't bein' rational. I will be, I'm sure of it. Just give me a bit to work myself out.”

Hanzo had given him time, and space. If they encountered each other, Hanzo would simply offer a small bow of his head before continuing onward. If the ice was going to be broken, he would let the other man move at his own pace and break it himself.

McCree's pace, it turned out, is positively glacial.

Hanzo is being selfish. He knows that. He has his room and his luxuries. He has his freedom – partially, anyway. He can venture around the base, but above-ground activities are still forbidden.

It's just bumpy dirt and twigs right outside anyway, Shimada. How far you think you're gonna make it in a chair?

Hanzo has everything he'd asked for. He just hadn't known having someone to talk to would be something he'd need this badly after so many years of silence.

He really doesn't count Angela. He's fairly certain she'd been taking bits of his skin and hair for her lab whenever she came over to support him when walking. There was always some sort of pinch that would occur when he was distracted, and then fade instantly.

At least she isn't dissecting him.

Today he finds himself wheeling himself out of her laboratory, stopping every so often to dab at the sweat on his forehead with a towel. His prosthetics are locked into place – he'd been surprised when she'd halted his attempts to unclip them after they were finished.
“Keep them on,” she’d advised. “Just until you sleep. You're doing much better, but you need to get accustomed to their feel; even if you're not actively using them. And you can work on your ankle rotations!”

Hanzo has no intention of doing anything of the sort.

When he rounds the hallway corner to go back to his room, he's surprised to see McCree leaving his own. The man's dressed in his armored uniform, pistol on his hip and duffel bag slung over his back. He glances to the side as Hanzo wheels up closer, and tips his hat politely. “Hey, Hanzo.”

“Greetings,” Hanzo replies, keeping his expression neutral. “Has Reyes scheduled a mission?”

“You should really call him Commander,” McCree says mildly, and Hanzo internally flinches at the rebuke. “But yeah. It's just a simple escort, but he's taking most of the base. He'll probably just tell them to beef up the security before we all leave.”

They never had gotten Metis' AI up and running again, and were back to relying on technicians maintaining the base's security protocol. Hanzo felt a little bad about it. He hadn't meant to fry her completely.

“Hey, uh...” McCree shifts the bag on his shoulders, his expression awkward.

“Yes?” Hanzo felt a flicker of hope. Were they going to have a real conversation?

“This really is just a routine mission. So you don't need to, uh...” McCree scratches the back of his head. “Check on us, or anything. With those dragons. Probably be better if you didn't.”

The flicker is swiftly snuffed, and a cold feeling in his chest replaces it. “I wasn't planning on helping anyway,” Hanzo snaps, struggling to keep his irritation in check. “So try not to get cornered like rats again.”

“Ah. Okay,” McCree replies, discomfort plain on his face. “Will do.” He turns to leave with a small wave, and Hanzo can only mutter a good-bye before turning to unlock his door.

Once inside, it takes all his willpower to drag himself up onto the bed and tuck himself in properly instead of simply allowing himself to slump out of his chair and onto the floor. He's so tired. Angela had taken it out of him physically; thirty seconds with McCree had had the same effect emotionally.

Probably be better if you didn't.

Hanzo rolls onto his side and rubs at his face. He's sweaty, skin sticking to the baggy grey sweatshirt and faded jeans he wore. He probably smells awful. So what? His robe and a possibility of a shower are all the way in the bathroom. He isn't getting back in that chair, and he certainly isn't getting back on his feet.

He cracks open an eye, staring blearily at the blank wall facing his bedside. He rolls onto his back, then his other side to look at the opposite wall. It's the same. Blank and impersonal. It might as well be the walls of his old cell.

Hanzo sighs, reaching up to scratch the bridge of his nose. It's the same after all, isn't it? He could leave this room, sure, but he couldn't leave the base. Nothing had really changed at all. He's still in a prison, just a larger one.

Hanzo shifts again, pushing himself up into a half-sitting position as his heart beat a little faster.
He feels suddenly ill, restless at the thoughts running through his head, unbidden.

He's alone, too. Angela – she gives him orders on what to do, but she isn't his friend. She would probably autopsy him at the first chance she got. He interests her, but in the wrong ways.

*Like Saburo.*

And Reyes – fleeting, no trace of affection towards him like the nameless servants.

Hanzo can feel his throat catch, and he throws the heavy covers off himself as he runs a hand through his hair. The room is getting warm. Too warm. Or is it him?

McCree is...

*Namiko*, a nasty little voice inside Hanzo whispers. *They show you the smallest kindness, but they don't really care. You're a fool to think otherwise. They know what you are.*

Hanzo's chest hurts. What is happening? Is he having a stroke? He pushes himself off the bed, all but tumbling into his chair. His hands are trembling as he tries to reposition himself better. There's feelings of pins and needles shooting down both arms and a sort of tilting sensation in the back of his head.

The door handle slips out of his hand twice before Hanzo can finally get a good enough grip to open it. Out in the hall, the air is cooler, but he still feels feverish and jittery. He can't pace, so he does the next best thing – he begins wheeling himself down the hall, back and forth as he works to control his nerves.

What is going on? What had triggered this? His nails dig, tearing into the armrest's cushions before he forces himself to keep moving. His mouth hangs open, taking in deep breaths.

Why is no one coming?

Surely anyone watching the cameras could see something is off. Maybe the base really is fully empty. Maybe Hanzo is alone down here, just like before.

Maybe they do see him, and they don't care.

The wheeling isn't working. His frantic feeling rising, Hanzo locks the wheelchair's brake and rests both hands on the armrests. His muscles tremble, arms screaming in protest – but he plants a foot, then another on either side of his footrest and forces himself up and out of the chair. Pacing. The pain would distract him until he calmed, he's sure of it.

He takes one step, then another until he's stumbling and smacking flat against the wall. His knees buckle and he sinks down to the floor with a frustrated snarl.

The pain hadn't helped. If anything, he's trembling *more* with the added muscle spasms from his already overworked body. Hanzo lets out a choked sound, forcing down the beginnings of a sob as he slumps against the wall, nails dragging uselessly over the plaster before he lets his upper body drop completely to the floor.

*Get yourself a better life.*

Some life. He'd ended up the same as he started. On the edge of death, lying on a concrete floor with a pair of useless legs.
And utterly alone.

Hanzo closes his eyes, and he can hear the dragons murmur worriedly in his ear. He tunes them out, covering his face with his arms to block the light of the florescents overhead. His emotions are bubbling up again, squeezing his chest and forcing another strangled sound from his throat. There's another, then another, and finally, he simply gives in.

For the first time in a long time, Hanzo allows himself to cry.
“Hanzo? Hey.”

Hanzo mumbles as he feels himself being jostled awake - literally. He pieces together the sensation's source as a firm hand on his shoulder. He grunts and swats at it irritably.

“C'mon. Up at at 'em. You're causin' a bit of a fire hazard.” There's a foreign murmur of assent somewhere behind the voice and that rouses Hanzo sharply.

He snaps his eyes open, giving them a quick rub before the back of his hand to try and clear his vision. McCree is crouched down directly in front of him, hands resting on his thighs as he gives Hanzo a peculiar look. There's another hushed titter - Hanzo's gaze flicks up and behind the cowboy. His ears pin.

There's a crowd of people at McCree's back, all dressed in the same black uniform. Most of them are muttering to each other with crossed arms or raised brows. A few are standing on tiptoe to get a better look at him. Hanzo can pick out a familiar mop of red hair. What was her name? Clara? She's giving him a severely unimpressed look and he can feel himself shrinking under it.

McCree turns his head to follow Hanzo's terrified stare. He clicks his tongue and gets to his feet.

"Alright, git, you lot. This ain't fuckin' HBO. Mission's over, get back to your rooms."

“We don't get HBO,” a man pipes up.

“Jackson, your block's about a mile down thataway. If you need help finding it, I can always send my boot up your ass to accompany you,” McCree replies cheerfully. “All of you, GIT!” The crowd grumbles unhappily at the barked order, but they begin dispersing. A few walk past Hanzo, still craning their necks to openly peer at him before disappearing around the hallway's corners.

Clara remains. McCree's shooting her a stern look that she's flat-out ignoring. Hanzo waits for him to bark another order, but the two seem to share some sort of silent conversation with their eyebrows raising and lowering before McCree just mutters something darkly and turns back to Hanzo. “Why're you out here?” he asks. “And off your chair. Something happen?”

Hanzo looks to the side. His wheelchair's lying flat on its side against the wall. Strange. He hadn't remembered it falling over.

McCree crouches back down and snaps his fingers in Hanzo's face. “Hey. You there?”

Hanzo immediately slaps the hand away full-force – McCree withdraws his fingers, shaking them out and cursing. “If you must know,” Hanzo hisses. “I was having a stroke.”

McCree blinks, pausing mid-shake. “What?”

“You heard me,” Hanzo snaps. Anxiety is being replaced under anger, self-conscious under Clara's judging gaze. “Or are you too busy star-”

“Smile for me.”

Hanzo stares. “What?”

McCree's expression is serious. “Smile for me, and raise both hands above your head.” When
Hanzo doesn't oblige immediately, he adds: “It's stroke shit. Go on.”

After a moment, Hanzo suspiciously raises his arms up and bares his teeth in a grimace. McCree makes a thoughtful hum.

“What made you think it was a stroke? Symptoms-wise.”

“Numbness in my arms,” Hanzo says immediately. “Trembling. Disorientation. My vision was slightly blurred, and chest hurt. I couldn't stand.”

McCree's gaze briefly flicks down to Hanzo's prosthetics. “Hm. Did you have a headache?”

Hanzo thinks back. “No,” he says after a moment. “I do not think so.”

“Were you breathing funny at any point, before or during the time you felt it?”

“Yes. Deep breaths.”

McCree nods. “Well. You can go to Angela for some tests, but I'm almost positive you ain't had a stroke.”

The tightness in Hanzo's chest uncoils a little. “No?”

“Nah. Just a panic attack, probably some hyperventilation by the looks of it. Common shit, down here. Jackson would know.” McCree shrugs his shoulders and Clara lets out a soft chuckle.

Hanzo can feel his face flushing. Laughing. They're laughing at him.

“There was no just about it,” he hisses venomously. “And it is not common for me.” He pushes himself off the wall and begins scooting sideways to retrieve his wheelchair.

McCree reaches outwards. “Lemme help you with tha-”

“DO NOT!” Hanzo snarls. McCree's arm instantly retracts, eyes widening as Clara lets out a hushed: “Jesus.”

Hanzo inhales sharply, briefly closing his eyes to steady himself. “Do not,” he repeats slowly. “Do not try to help me. I do not need any more of your help.”

He can't see McCree's expression, but he knows he's being stared at. He doesn't care. The sooner he'd hear the man's footsteps leaving, the better. He turns his head away before he opens his eyes, returning to his sideways scoot over to his chair.

“Hey.” At first, Hanzo thinks he's being spoken to again, and his lips curl. “Clara.” Oh. “Can you give us a bit?”

“I dunno, Jesse,” the woman replies. She's chewing on something, loudly smacking her lips. Gum? “You done bein' a chickenshit?”

“Yeah,” McCree replies after a moment. “I'm done.”

Clara lets out an unimpressed *hmpf* and a few seconds later, the thumps of her heavy boots fade down the hall.

McCree, unfortunately, does not budge from his crouch. Hanzo pointedly ignores him, focusing on righting his chair. It's difficult from this position and he hates that the man is just watching him
struggle instead of just leaving like the others.

*You're gonna have to give me time.*

“What were you thinking about?” McCree asks quietly. “When you started feelin' wrong, I mean.”

“What did you lie to you about?”

“What about how I could get a better life!” Hanzo finally lets go of the chair to pin McCree down with a glare. “This isn't *better!* This is the same!”

McCree actually looks surprised. “But-”

“But nothing! I am still in a chair with a pair of useless legs! I am completely alone, save for a miserable doctor who does nothing but run tests and give me orders! And I am still a prisoner! You think being trapped in a base is *freedom*? It has been. *Four. Years.* Since I have felt sunlight that did not come through *iron bars*, McCree! Nothing has changed!”

He's shouting, and he's sure however far Clara's walked, it hasn't been far enough to miss overhearing. He snaps his mouth shut and looks away, hating McCree and the stupid, stunned expression his tirade had wrought.

McCree goes quiet again, so Hanzo gives up and starts working on righting the chair again. Idiot cowboy.

Idiot Hanzo for trusting him.

“How do you,” McCree clears his throat, and Hanzo is surprised by its momentary hoarseness. “How d'you feel about moonlight?”

“*Excuse me?*”

“Well, let's. Let's fix some of that. I can't make your...” McCree gestures uselessly at the prosthetics. “I can't make that work. But I can get you above ground.”

“When?” Hanzo asks sarcastically. “In a year or three? When Rey- sorry, *Commander* allows it?”

“Fuck Reyes,” McCree replies with a shrug. “Let's go now.”

“Now.”

“Yeah. Now.” McCree is getting to his feet. “Order me to pick up your chair.”

“What did you say?” Hanzo stares at him in disbelief.

“Order me to pick up your chair,” McCree repeats, gesturing to the fallen transport.

“Because...”

“Because you don't want my help. But I'm still your liaison, and if you want something, I'll do it for you. It's not me helping, it's you tellin' me to do shit and me doin' it because you said so.”

Hanzo gives him a suspicious look as he weighs this. “Fine.” He's sick of wrestling with the stupid
thing anyway. “Pick it up and and right it.”

McCree walks over and grabs the chair's handles, pulling it upwards and turning it with a clatter until it's sitting upright.

“Now put me in it,” Hanzo continues, keeping his eyes narrowed hatefully. “But do not keep your paws on me a second longer than that.”

If McCree's surprised at the addition, he doesn't show it. He adjusts his hat and stoops down, placing his palms under Hanzo's left leg and armpit. A grunt, and he's hoisting Hanzo upwards before promptly depositing him into the chair and stepping back.

“Good,” Hanzo says curtly. McCree's looking at him funny but he's ignoring it, trying to shift into a more comfortable position in the chair. “I will not thank you.”

“Didn't expect you to,” McCree replies. “We goin'?”

“And where exactly are we 'goin'? ” Hanzo quotes as McCree takes hold of the chair's handles. “I have been all over this base. I have never seen a door leading out.”

“That's on purpose.” McCree's pushing him down the hallway, towards the curve leaning left. “You think the fact all the doors and shit all look the same is on accident?”

“I thought you simply had terrible designers.”

“Nah.” McCree's shaking his head. “It's so outsiders get confused, 'case we ever get raided. Every door almost identical so if you don't know your way, y'get lost an likely end up on the end of one of our barrels. I've never seen you in the mess hall either; did Reyes even tell you where it was?”

“... No. Reyes gave me permission to order food to my room. Usually a copper-colored omnic brings it.”

“Damn. You get room service from Rono? Ain't that a nice perk. I just figured you weren't too keen on socializing.”

“Perhaps you should not assume things about me,” Hanzo snaps tersely. “Though I am sure you were glad I was not there.”

McCree says nothing in reply. Silence falls, save for the sounds of McCree's heavy steps and the rolling of Hanzo's chair.

Hanzo hates it. All of it. The silence. His own sudden bursts of irritation. The unknown distance he'd have to travel in it on McCree's impromptu, and quite literal, guilt trip. Hanzo is being pitied, he just knows it, and it makes him want to reach up and drag his nails down the man's face until he told Hanzo where the exit is and just leaves him be.

McCree stops them in front of a door. It's as uninspired and plain as the others, if lacking in numbers or lettering. McCree punches in a code on the pad with his left hand, then reaches into his pocket and pulls out a card to swipe. The locks beep and slide back, and the door swings open.

It's... not quite a room. Just a circular platform on the floor, surrounded by lights fixtures that had been carved into the wall. McCree pushes the chair inside and steps in after while Hanzo tilts his head upwards. There was no ceiling, just a long, long tube reaching up into darkness.

“Emergency out,” McCree supplies. He's typing something into a small computer screen on the
wall. “Won't sound no alarms, but it's just a quick in and out when we need to get to the surface. Not supposed to use it willy-nilly, but.”

“Fuck Reyes,” Hanzo repeats with a mutter.

“Yeah. Pretty much.” McCree finishes at the computer and steps back to place both his hands on the wheelchair's handles. “Steady now. Always a bit of a bump when she's wakin' up.”

Hanzo doesn't have time to question who 'she' is before a sharp jolt by the platform nearly bounces him clean out of his chair. McCree grabs his arm, helping haul him back as gears whir loudly and the machine groans and rumbles at deafening volume. Hanzo's ears press back and his mouth turns upward in a grimace.

McCree seems unbothered. Hanzo wonders if his own hearing is too advanced, or if the cowboy had simply had too many guns go off near his ear over the years.

The platform's noise levels into something more tolerable as it begins stretching upwards, taking McCree and Hanzo along with it. It's sort of like an elevator, but with no safety rails, no music, and on Hanzo's personal note, felt at least ten hundred percent more likely to break and send them plummeting to their deaths.

It didn't, even though several creaks and whines had made Hanzo sure it would. They reach the top of the tunnel, and there's another computer panel stuck to the ceiling. McCree stands on tiptoe to punch a few more numbers in. He'd been silent the whole ride up, but a smile breaks on his lips when the panel gives a confirmation noise. He plants his palms on either side of it, and pushes upwards.

The ceiling – a lid, it seems - gives way easily. McCree shoves it up and to the right, sliding out of place like a manhole cover. After a few moments, the platform whirs to life again, and pushes them up and out the last few feet. Hanzo can feel cold wind begin to tickle at his ears and the sensation makes his heart flutter with nostalgia.

The platform grinds to a halt.

They've surfaced in a forest. Mahogany trees as tall as buildings surround on all sides, towering over the pair like silent behemoths. Their leaves rustle in the cold night wind – and it must be night, the darkness is so pervasive - but they stretch so high and block all but the barest glimpses of the clouds set against a starry sky.

“Damn,” McCree says quietly, tilting his hat up. “Ain't much of a view right here.”

Hanzo has seen this place. He's seen these trees, these looming sequoias in his dream, if only for a moment. They're so much more beautiful in person. The wind that whistles through them is so crisp, so much colder than he's tasted for so, so long. It's sweet on his tongue, and the stuttering breaths he's taking doesn't do it justice.

It's too much. It's strange and new and it shouldn't be, but it's been so long and Hanzo, heir to the Shimada clan and trained in elegance and dignity since birth, wants nothing more than to throw himself to the ground and roll in the fallen leaves like a child.

His hands find the wheels of his chair, pushing himself forward until McCree briefly catches him.

You have no part of me.

McCree's pushes hard, forcing the wheels forward over rocks and twigs. Hanzo grips the armrests tightly at each bump and jostle, gritting his teeth at the sensations.

“C'mon,” McCree murmurs, rolling Hanzo deeper into the forest. “Let's go find you that moonlight.”
Their journey through the forest is short-lived – it only takes a few minutes of walking before the trees break enough to give them a clear view of the night sky. McCree steers them around a fallen log before halting at the edge of a small, grassy clearing. He bends down, picking up a handful of rocks to jam behind the chair's wheels and pulling the brake into place. “Should hold, but-”

Hanzo immediately pushes himself up from the chair, planting his feet into the earth as McCree lets out a startled noise. He takes one wobbly step, then another as his eyes close. His knees buckle and he stumbles, letting himself drop down and sprawl against the ground. “Hanzo-!”

“Leave me be.” A hoarse whisper from a throat thick with emotion. Hanzo can hear McCree make a soft noise of worry, but it's not his concern. He runs his fingers through soft dirt that parts like waves, catching beneath his claws. Something wet and slimy wriggles against his finger before disappearing back into the ground. There's a small leaf he's managed to catch in his scales - he plucks it and crushes it in his palm. It crumbles effortlessly.

Dead. Perhaps it was winter, here.

“Hanzo...”

Hanzo doesn't open his eyes. He breathes deeply, inhaling the rich, earthy scent of the forest floor. The wind is picking up – the grass rustles loudly and his ears swivel at the noise. A few budding sprouts tickle at his nose and he wrinkles it, trying to suppress a sneeze.

McCree's stopped talking again. Hanzo can hear the grass crunching as the man walks a circle around the meadow. Surveying. Perhaps scouting for danger or extra sets of eyes. Hanzo certainly isn't bothering to check.

McCree finally stops besides Hanzo's sprawled-out form. He settles down in the grass with a grunt about a foot away and clucks his tongue softly.

The soft hoot of an owl can be heard overhead. Hanzo inhales, rolling onto his back before he opens his eyes.

The sky is beautiful. In Hanamura, the city's pollution had robbed him of anything beyond the moon's reflection and the occasional satellite passing by. But here, the stars are numerous pinpricks of light against a milky backdrop. They're spread out as far as his eyes can see, and even the thin layering of clouds do little to obscure his view.

Hanzo turns his head to the side. McCree had been looking up too, but he lowers his gaze when he notices he's being stared at. Hanzo swallows thickly, then opens his mouth to speak. “...Why?”

“Because,” McCree replies evenly. “When it comes down to it, sorry's just a word. And I ain't been treatin' you right.”
Hanzo swallows again. “Because I killed them.”

“Nah.” McCree tilts his head back, returning his gaze to the stars. “That ain't it. Be real fuckin' hypocritical of me if it was. Sure, took a bit to come to terms with but...” He rubs his chin. “I just let you think that was why I was skitterin' around you on eggshells.”

“Hypocritical?”

“Mm. Unfair of me. I told you, back at your interrogation. I was in your situation once.” McCree fishes a cigar out of his pocket, then pauses. “Hrn. Better not. Light'd be too easy to spot.” He puts it back with a sigh. “Where was I? Right. Your situation. I killed Reyes' men, too. I had a choice in it, probably more than you did.”

Hanzo blinks, surprised.

“I ran with Deadlock. Y'know those shitty biker gangs you'd see in movies? That was us, just with a whole lot of murder an' drug runnin'. I was young. Thought I was invincible 'cause I was damn good at what I did. I was a stupid punk, and the best thing that ever happened to me was Blackwatch coming down on us like a ton of bricks and throwing me face-first into the slammer.”

Hanzo pushes himself up onto his elbows. “You were jailed?”

“For a little bit. Holding cell, really. Reyes came in, saw my potential. Did the same bulldog gimmick he did on you, and had me cut a deal to work for him and skip out on spending the rest of my life behind bars. Was only after I knew him for a bit I realized he's a big fuckin' teddy bear beneath it all.”

Sincere doubt crosses Hanzo's face and McCree lets out a laugh. “Nah, he is! I'm serious. He'll be rough around you before he decides he can trust you. It'll happen in time.” McCree flicks the brim of his hat. “Well. Maybe I'm biased. Think he's got a soft spot for me. He encourages me to be insubordinate when no one's watchin'.”

“You are just making things up now,” Hanzo accuses. “Why would he ever encourage that?”

“Like I said. I was in your situation. Deadlock was serious shit. You fucked up, you were dead. You killed who they told you to kill, or you ended up on the other end of the gun. And most importantly of all, you never questioned the way the boss ran things. Saw some really nasty, drawn-out deaths from people who forgot that.”

McCree takes out the cigar again, if only to shove into his mouth to chew. “Reyes was my boss now. And one day, I called him out. Beat him on target practice, in front of his vet squad. I was so proud, I got swept up and openly challenged his method of aimin' compared to my own. He scowled and...” McCree scratches the back of his head. “I dunno. I freaked out. I can't really remember it. Ran, locked myself in my room. When he came to get me, I was sure as shit when he broke down that door it was gonna be with his guns out and blazing.”

“Course, he didn't. He kicked it down, sure, said I couldn't leave practice early. But then I guess he figured out what the hell I was blubberin' about. Calmed me down, got it through my head that contestin' his ideas wasn't gonna be the end of my world. Think Angela gave him the exposure idea.”

“Exposure?”

“Yeah. A kind of therapy, he called it. Just – mouth off to him. Not on missions, but just, whenever it didn't matter. Acclimate myself to the feeling of not suppressing and overthinking my words and
actions. He's my boss, and I respect the hell out of him - but he wants me loose enough to call him on it if there's a better course of action. I try to keep quiet about it around the others, 'cause they start sayin' he's playin favorites.” McCree snorts. “Probably is. He likes havin' someone to trash-talk in Spanish with.”

It was a lot to process. Hanzo slowly lowers himself back down, resting his head in the grass. He mulls this all over for a while as McCree chomps at the cigar and fiddles with his hat.

“But...” Hanzo licks his lips to wet them. “Why were you... skittering? If not for the deaths.”

“Ah.” McCree sighs, taking the cigar out of his mouth. “Like Clara said, I was chickenshit. I was scared of you.”

Something hot and painful clenches in Hanzo's gut. “I... see.”

“Just...” McCree makes a frustrated noise. “Look. I don't know how your dragon things work, but what did you do after you killed those men? That night, in the bunker.”

“... Nothing,” Hanzo replies honestly. “They... ate. And then the dragons returned to me. When they were done, everything went sort of black. I do not know. It has never happened when I was dreaming before.”

“Dreaming. Jesus.” McCree lets out a nervous laugh, running a hand over his face. “You did that in your sleep?”

Hanzo doesn't answer, looking away. His stomach is churning – he feels almost nauseous. He wants to be angry again instead of – whatever this was.

“Never mind. Doesn't matter. I didn't know that before, that's all. Don't tell Reyes you can do that.”

Hanzo doesn't intend to.

“If you – blacked out, in your sleep. Then you missed the aftermath. We didn't know what had happened, Hanzo. A whole bunch of screams, and then silence. When we finally worked up the courage to test the door? It's just – it's fuckin' something to find piles and piles of corpses blockin' your exit. We had to push them aside, wade through a sea of dead to get out and make our escape. And we didn't know what had done it. And then, I find out it's you, and just...”

“You start seeing me as a monster, like the rest,” Hanzo snarls.

“Look. You didn't make it easy! You told me, then and there in that room with Reyes that you could just – kill me. Whenever you wanted, if I ticked you off, I could end up in that pile of bodies. That's not an easy thing to hear!”

“Yes, and you seem to have missed when I pointed out I had not killed you! I never wanted to-!” That's a lie. Hanzo purses his mouth in a thin line and looks away again, anger simmering hot in his veins. “You were the only person there who showed me any kindness. Did you really think I was going to just-”

“It was your eyes.”

“Excuse me?”

“Your eyes.” McCree reaches up and taps just below his own. “When you're mad. You did it for a second, just now. When you – I dunno. Snarl, bare your teeth. When you get really mad. They do
this – thing. They slit all sudden-like, like a cat or – fuck, Hanzo, it's just *scary*. It's what got me and Reyes jumpin' like that."

“My apologies,” Hanzo grinds out, ears pinning back, “That I am so *monstrous* to behold.” He pushes himself back up. “Enough of this. Take me back, *now.*”

“No, Hanzo.” McCree's hand lands on his chest, and Hanzo shoot him a glare. “Lay back down. I ain't done.”

“I am done listening!”

“No, you ain't.”

Hanzo hisses under his breath and attempts to slap McCree's hand away. “Do no-”

McCree's arm snaps out – he grabs Hanzo by the wrist and swiftly yanks the offending hand up and over, pressing it against his neck. Hanzo momentarily freezes in place.

“Clara was right, that I was bein' chickenshit,” McCree says seriously. Hanzo then struggles, trying to pull his hand away but McCree holds it firmly against his neck. His pulse beats strong and fast beneath Hanzo's palm. “But I meant it when I told her I was *done* with that. And now I'm tellin' it to you. I was bein' stupid.”

“Let go of me!”

“No.” McCree gestures at Hanzo's claws with his free hand. “I'm provin' a point.”

Hanzo makes an embarrassed, frustrated noise in the back of his throat. “I do not understand!”

“You got claws, Hanzo. Sharp teeth and one hell of a temper. Right now, how I'm holdin' you, you could tear my jugular out real easy.”

“So!”

“And you're angry.”

“Of course I am *angry*, you-”

“You could kill me, right now,” McCree says seriously. “You could kill me and get away from here. You're outside, Hanzo.”

Hanzo stiffens.

“You could do it. You're out of the base. You got legs for the rough parts of the mountain. No one knows we're out here, won't know til it's too late. It'd be real easy, Hanzo.”

Hanzo says nothing. McCree's pulse isn't spiking beneath his fingers – if anything, it's slowly getting steadier.

“What is your point?” Hanzo asks. His voice sounds strange in his ears. Strained.

McCree lets go of his hand and Hanzo immediately retracts it. “My point is, you didn't think of any of that, did you? And I knew you wouldn't do it, even if I reminded you. I know why you've got a prickly-ass shell, and I've seen what's beneath it. I trust you, Hanzo. Wouldn't have brought you up here if I didn't.”
Hanzo drops back down to the ground, rolling to shove his hands beneath his armpits and show his back to McCree. “You are foolish,” he snaps irritably.

“Not always. Just sometimes.”

Silence falls again as the minutes tick by. Hanzo can feel his shoulders slowly slump, anger and embarrassment fading to simple exhaustion. McCree's settled down onto his back beside him and the cigar's back to being chewed to pieces.

“You should stop those,” Hanzo mutters finally. “I thought you were trying to quit.

McCree's chomping noises halt. “How'd you know that?”

“Your pillows,” Hanzo mumbles.

“Sorry?”

Hanzo clears his throat. “Your pillows. I could smell old smoke on them, but never on you.”

“Huh. Well, y'ain't wrong. I only started recent again, cause of... nerves, and all.”

Hanzo rolls onto his side to face McCree. “Are you nervous now?”

McCree tilts his head to look at him, a wry smile on his lips. “Nah. Not really.”

“Then you should quit again.”

McCree snorts. “Alright. Alright, that's fair.” He stows the chewed-up cigar back into his pocket. “Is that an order, since I'm your liaison and such?”

“No.” Hanzo lowers his eyes. “It is not.”

McCree hums. “I'll make you a trade, then.”

Hanzo glances back up. “What?”

“I'll stop smoking, and you never make me speak Japanese again.” McCree chuckles and rubs the bridge of his nose. “Gotta admit, I was a little sore about that. I was garbage at it, and I knew you were lookin' down on me for it.”

Hanzo allows himself a small smile. “I was,” he admits. “But you did improve.”

“Flatterer.”

“You did!”

A cold gust of wind cuts off their arguing, sending Hanzo into a fit of shivers. McCree gives him a once-over with mild concern.

“Gettin' chilly. We should get you back soon.”

Hanzo shudders, pulling his arms back into his sleeves of his sweatshirt. “I am fine. I do not want to go back yet.”

“I thought you liked things real warm?”

“I do. Give me your shirt.”
McCree pfts, covering his mouth for a laugh. “Hell no. I can get cold too, y'know.” He clicks his tongue, looking thoughtful for a moment. “I’ll compromise with ya.”

Hanzo glances up as McCree pushes himself up and begins moving around on the grass. The man is re-positioning himself until he’s lying perpendicular beside Hanzo; then, he gently lifts Hanzo's head up and lets it lower to rest halfway on McCree's stomach.


Hanzo can’t help the chuckle that bubbles out of his throat. “Softest, too. Are you sure you are a soldier, McCree? That is a squishy gut you have.”

“Hey!” McCree exclaims, audibly offended. “That ain't my fault! Kopi's the one doin' it to me, the cocky little squirt.”

“Who is Kopi?”

“Base cook. Real good at what he does.” McCree shifts slightly, and Hanzo's head bounces. “Works in the mess hall. I'll take you to meet him.”

“I do not know if I am ready for that, yet,” Hanzo replies softly. “I did not enjoy the hallway, tonight.”

“No rush. We'll get you there when you're ready.” McCree's hand reaches up, patting Hanzo's head. The act should feel condescending - but strangely, it doesn't.

“Okay,” Hanzo mumbles. McCree's hand stops, resting atop Hanzo's head between his horns. Thick fingers gently card through his hair and rub at his temple as McCree lets out a yawn.

It feels nice.

“Hey,” McCree mumbles. “Wake me up if I drift, okay? Don't wanna catch us a cold out here.”

“Okay.” McCree's eyes close, and Hanzo goes quiet after that. He focuses on the heat at his back – the steady rise and fall of McCree's stomach with each breath. The warm palm resting atop his head.

Hanzo can feel his own eyes beginning to flutter as he stares vacantly into the distance. The wind has all but died down - the trees are silent, encircling them like a protective wall. The grass rustles at Hanzo's feet as he tucks them closer to his chest and lets his eyes close.

He would wake McCree soon. He just needed a short rest, too.

Five minutes of resting, together.

They could afford five minutes.

Chapter End Notes

If the Reyes+McCree boss scene sounds familiar, it's because it's a direct homage to my absolute favorite comic from pmendicant. Please keep in mind that they're not a McHanzo blog, so I ask that you not bring up the fic to them!
Chapter 10

Something caws overhead.

The first time he hears it, Hanzo assumes he is dreaming. Genji had taken up bird calling as a hobby in their youth – surely this was just a memory bleeding over.

Another caw, loud and chortling, a flurry of wings and a series of whistling cheeps and chirps.

Hanzo blearily cracks open an eye, trying to rouse himself. Had a window been left open? No, that couldn't be right. There were no windows in the base. And why was it so cold? And wet and -

Hanzo's eyes snap open and he scrambles to push himself up.

Outside. They were still outside.

Sunlight is streaming down through the canopy of trees above, making the dew upon the grass glisten in the soft morning light. Grey, ominous clouds had begun gathering in the sky at the corners of the clearing – rain was coming, but it wasn't here yet. Hanzo shivers as a frigid gust of wind blows by, rustling the grass and setting off another chorus of bird calls in the trees.

There's a groan that follows the cascade of cawing and Hanzo quickly lowers his gaze. McCree's beneath him - sprawled out with an arm thrown over his face and dew stuck to his beard. Hanzo realizes he'd tucked himself against the man, his head having rested in the crook of his shoulder. No doubt seeking out a source of heat in the night.

He curses himself, and McCree's damnable warmth.

“McCree.” He gives the cowboy's shoulder a shove and pulls the arm off the man's face. “McCree! Wake up.”

“Mm'boot scootin' snady,” McCree mumbles unintelligibly.

Hanzo tries shaking him a few more times, then pinching his cheek and tugging on his hair. McCree responds with a snort and Hanzo has a brief flash of hope – then the man simply rolls over, swinging an arm over Hanzo and sleep-pinning him beneath him.

Irritation crawls up Hanzo's spine. Fine, then. He'd wake him the painful way.

Hanzo opens his mouth and after a brief moment of consideration, chomps down on the offending arm.

The effect is instantaneous – McCree lets out a yelp and bolts upright. Hanzo releases him, and McCree yanks his arm back. He starts rubbing it fiercely while letting out a stream of curses in rapid Spanish. His angry, tired eyes squint in the light as he shoots an accusatory look at Hanzo. “The hell was that for?!” he complains.

“It is morning!”

“There's better ways to wake a man, Jesus! Y'ever heard of cof-”

“McCree,” Hanzo hisses. “It is morning.” He grabs the man by the chin and forcibly points it up at the trees. “It is morning and we are still outside.”
McCree inhales sharply through his nose as the situation parses through his mind and Hanzo barely suppresses an eye roll. “Fffffffshhit,” McCree breathes. “Shitshitshitshit.” Crude, but a sentiment Hanzo can agree with as he watches McCree scramble to his feet. “Shit! Hanzo, you were supposed to wake me up!”

“This is not my-” Hanzo's protest is cut short as McCree bends down to grab him by the waist.

“What-?” He's unceremoniously lifted up and thrown over McCree's shoulder with an undignified yelp. “McCree-!”

“Get mad later!” McCree interrupts, panting as he jogs over to grab Hanzo's wheelchair. He lifts the thing with one hand and starts running back the way they came. “Hauling ass now!”

Hanzo resents both statements, long nails scrambling on McCree's back as he tries to keep himself semi-upright from his position. McCree's jumping over rocks and branches as he books it through the forest, and if he's trying to keep Hanzo from bouncing around too much, he is failing miserably.

It's a shorter trip, granted. They reach the platform – still raised and honestly, that can't be good stealth-wise – in what feels like less than a minute. McCree sets the wheelchair down and all but drops Hanzo into it before smashing his fingers against the console as he continually swears in Spanish.

The platform ride down is in silence - Hanzo, because he's more than a little resentful of being blamed and then hauled around like a sack of potatoes, and McCree because all his energy seems to be devoted to jittering his leg and running his hands through his hair anxiously.

“Okay,” McCree says finally, the machine clunking loudly as they reach the bottom. Gears twist, and the door swings open. “We'll go-”

“Ayyyyyy! Morrison! Look who decided to show up!”

Reyes is sitting smack outside the door, a wide smirk on his face. He's got one leg crossed, leaning back in an old lawn chair he's set up only a few feet from the entrance. There's a fully opened six-pack of beer lying at his feet, and a large, digital tablet in his hands that he's pointing directly at them. A blond man in a blue coat is on the screen, but he doesn't look half as amused as Reyes does.

“Gabriel-” the man begins.

“Look at this!” Reyes interrupts loudly. “A walk of shame, right here in my own base. Ain't this a fuckin' sight!” Hanzo can feel his ears pin back, shrinking into his chair as McCree lets out a weak noise.

“Lessee what we got here.” Reyes hops out of the chair, holding out the screen as he moves it up and over them. “Dirt all over their clothes – coupla twigs in the hair. Big ol' drool spot-” Reyes jabs a finger into McCree's chest at the damp patch. “Classy, real classy.” Hanzo can feel his face flushing, hands clenching at his armrests.

“Gabriel, is this really-”

“Whoa! What's this?” Reyes grabs McCree's arm and lifts it, showing off the fresh bite wound. “God damn, Jesse!” He pulls on McCree's shirt, forcing the man to twist and bend as he examines the claw marks Hanzo had left when he was being jostled around on the man's shoulder. “Didn't know you were into that kinda shit! You got something to tell me?”
Hanzo can feel his teeth grind as his face burns even hotter, shame and irritation twisting uncomfortably in his gut.

“C'mon, Boss,” McCree whines, still bent over. “Don't-”

“Hey!” Reyes barks, before his voice drops into false cheeriness again. “Jesse? The fuck you still doing here? I thought by now you'd be at the track doing suicide runs!” He releases his hold on McCree's shirt and gives him a shove back. “Go on, then! And I want you to take the name suicide real literal – I don't want to see your face or hear your name again unless it's Angela calling me about how she's got a baboon heart with your name on it because yours just crapped out for good.”

“Boss-”

“GO!” Reyes roars and McCree's stumbling, skedaddling down the hall at breakneck speed. Leaving Hanzo alone with Reyes.

_Traitor._

“Gabe, are you finished?” the man on the screen asks, sounding exhausted. “We're in a meeting.”

“You're a shit wing man, Morrison,” Reyes informs the screen, pulling it back up to his face. “We're done anyway.”

“No, we're n-”

Reyes clicks the tablet off and tosses it onto the chair. “Boring conversation anyway.” He immediately rounds on Hanzo. “So. You.”

Hanzo's ears pin even further, but he musters up a glare atop his beet-red face.

“Y'done chewin on my men? Normally I'd throw you back in your cell for skippin' out without permission, but as your luck would have it, I need somethin' done. Pronto.”

Hanzo isn't stupid. “You need a kill,” he accuses.

“I needed a kill last night, while you were out rollin' in the hay with McCree's stupid ass.”

There hadn't been any hay. Uncut grass was not hay - or was Reyes speaking in idioms?

“But now,” Reyes continues. “Situation's changed. And since you're so keen to be in the know, you're gonna come with me and get briefed. And you're gonna tell me what you can do about it.”

Reyes makes a swift, two-fingered beckoning gesture, and starts heading down the hall.

“You forgot your beer,” Hanzo calls before wheeling along after him.

“It's the kid's. Tastes like horse piss anyway. I was just letting it go flat for him.”

Hanzo bites down a query about the strange specifics of that comparison, and follows Reyes down the hall.
They end up seated in another conference room. The only difference is the door leading in and the water cooler are on opposite ends - boring, through and through.

Reyes clicks the projector on before leaning back into his chair. “Ever heard of the Horts?”

Hanzo wrinkles his nose. “What?”

“Horts,” Reyes repeats. He lifts up a remote and clicks – an image of Canada appears on the screen. “They're small time arms-runners from up north.” The screen changes again, zooming in on the country's border touching Washington.

“A Canadian gang?” Hanzo can't help but snort.

“Don't laugh,” Reyes warns, setting the remote down. “They're small, but they're ugly. They've killed more than their fair share of law enforcement trying to get between them and a payday. And most importantly, they're slippery.”

“So?”

“So, we've cornered three of them.” Reyes reaches over to tap the remote, and a satellite image of a wooden cabin appears on the screen. “A team of my men have them holed up in a house on the Oregon border.”

“So why not just swarm them? It is only three.”

“Because they were smuggling guns.” The projector flashes as the image changes again. “And them.”

A grainy photo of three young women appears on the whiteboard; they're bound and gagged. Hanzo can feel himself tense.

“Human trafficking.”

“Winner, winner,” Reyes replies mirthlessly. “Seems their success is making them expand. It's high time we cut them down, but...” Reyes tongue clicks.

“If your men move in, they will kill the women first.”

“Yes, you've managed to figure out the obvious. So now I need three kills, and done at the same time before the others in the room can realize what's happening. I got some snipers shipping up to give it a go. But I figured I'd ask, since you've been sitting on your ass, is it something you can handle from here instead?”

“Yes.”

Reyes perks a brow. “Really.”

“Yes,” Hanzo repeats. “I can do that. Only...”

“Always a fucking 'but', isn't there.”

Hanzo scowls. “Do you have anything of the men's?”

“Scuse me?” Reyes brow shoots even higher.

“I cannot just...” Hanzo waves a hand irritably. “See a face on a screen and track them down.
Especially since you've taken me to California, a place I have never been. I do not know this land."

“Who told you you were in California?!” Reyes demands - then snorts, and leans back. “Never mind. Dumbest question of the year. Yeah, you're here, it's not Japan. That mean you're useless?”

“No,” Hanzo replies curtly. “Like I asked – do you have anything of the men's?”

“My men?”

“... Yes,” Hanzo realizes. “That would work too. The dragons hunt on... it is like a scent, but it is energy. It lingers on everything a person has touched, if it's recent enough. And every energy trail is different. If you can give me something of your men's, the dragons could sniff them out, and then they could find the house your team is surrounding.”

Reyes clicks his tongue again. “You should have told me how this fairy-tale garbage works earlier.”

“I was not inclined to help you before,” Hanzo says shortly. “Do you have something for me or not?”

Reyes grunts and pulls out a communicator from his pocket. “Paulie, you copy?”

Silence from the other end.

“PAULIE!” Reyes roars into the mic, sending Hanzo's ears pinning back. “PICK UP!”

“Yeah, Boss!” comes a stammered reply a few moments later. “I'm here!”

“You and Robin are still fucking, right?”

“I- No.” He sounds forlorn. “She – why are you asking?”

“She dumped you, fine. Gonna assume you kept something from the breakup to remember her like the needy fuck you are. Bring it to Conference Room F.”

“Wait-”

“DO IT!” Reyes barks, then ends the call with a click. “Poor kid,” he says in a suddenly even tone. “Knew she was stringing him along. Tried to warn him.” He leans back in the chair and sighs wistfully. “Young love always breaks my heart.”

Hanzo just stares. Reyes' erratic shifts between screaming, snarky and sympathetic were – disconcerting, to put it mildly. Was this what McCree had referred to as the 'bulldog shtick'?

Either way, this man is terrifying.

Reyes' yelling apparently does do the trick – the man named Paulie skitters into the room after only a few minutes of agonizingly awkward silence. He drops a turquoise scarf onto the table before Reyes and gives the commander a quick salute. His eyes, of course, then land on Hanzo and his mouth opens slightly as he openly gawks. Hanzo meets his stare, glaring up at the man.

“PAULIE!” Reyes snaps. “This ain't a fuckin' peepin' hole! Get your stupid ass out of here!”

The man bolts out of the room instantly, all but slamming the door behind him. Hanzo's shoulders lower and Reyes lets out a huff of annoyance.
“Jittery kid. Barely scraped by the orientation. Hope he figures his shit out someday.” Reyes rolls the scarf into a ball and tosses it overhand into Hanzo’s lap. “Two points,” he remarks casually. “Now. Is that good enough for what you need to do, Shimada?”

Hanzo brings the scarf to his face and closes his eyes, giving it a little sniff. It smells like lavender and sweat – but his dragons stir, picking up something only they can scent. After a moment, he nods.

“Yes,” he says. “I can find her with this. Do you have a picture, to be sure?”

Reyes pulls a phone from his pocket, swiping right until he stops and slides it across the table to Hanzo. “Brunette in the middle. Glasses.”

Hanzo picks it up and gives it a look-over. It’s Reyes, McCree, and a few other strange faces. They’re laughing and drinking, but he can pick out the woman in the middle of it, holding up a middle finger to the screen. “Very professional.”

“Shut your trap, Shimada,” Reyes replies, though he sounds amused. “Go summon up your mystic dragon bullshit. Show me you can do this right, and maybe I won’t slap a shock collar on McCree so he can’t get within twenty feet of your scaly ass.”

Hanzo scowls at the threat – a bluff, he’s almost certain – but he closes his eyes and folds his hands just the same. His dragons purr, a pleased sort of curiosity bubbling up as he reaches for them.

Yes, he confirms.

*It is time to hunt.*
Chapter 11

The journey back to his room is long. The clatter of his wheels over tile and the buzzing of the florescents are the only things that break the silence of the halls.

*I thought you were dead, Shimada. Was getting ready to have Lilac here wheel you out in a body bag.*

It had taken longer than he'd thought. Oregon was enormous, far larger than it had any right to be as a simple state. It had taken ages for the dragons to finally pin down the location, and the energy expenditure on his body to reach that far had taken its toll.

*Hanzo, can you tell me the date? Good. Arms above your head? Alright. Drink this, and swallow.*

He wasn't entirely sure how much time had passed, only that he'd been 'disturbingly motionless' and 'pale as a fuckin' spirit'. Was it night again? Impossible to tell in a windowless facility.

Lilac – he'd already forgotten her real name, to his chagrin - had finally released him when he'd confirmed yes, he was feeling better and yes, sometimes things like this happened. He'd had a similar experience when Saburo had asked him to search out a submarine far off the coast – at least this time, he didn't feel seasick.

It was still exhausting. His head hurt, and the dragons' sated rumblings did little to improve the idle pain in his chest. Worst of all, he's forgotten about his prosthetics, which he'd already left on for far too long. They lay in his lap now, unclipped and freed, but his stumps still ache from where they'd been.

His arms feel like lead as he forces them to turn his wheels forward, bleary eyes trying to pick out which of the rooms was his. He stops in front of a door and looks up. 221. That sounded right.

With a sigh, he taps a few buttons on the keypad and presses his thumb against the scanner.

*Bzzt.*

Hanzo blinks as the door's LED goes red, then fades to black again. He tests the handle – still locked.

What?

He punches in the numbers again, wipes his thumb on his shirt before placing it on the scanner again.

*Bzzt.*

Hanzo feels a prickle of agitation. The door had always worked before. And now, when he really wanted to just lie down-

Another attempt, another *bzzt* of denial. He punches the wall and lets out a frustrated snarl.

A nearby door opens. Hanzo ignores it at first, but-

“Shit, you too?”

McCree's voice is enough to draw Hanzo's gaze up and over – the man's head was sticking out of the doorway. “Thought it was just me he was pickin’ on.”
“Picking on what?” Hanzo asks in exasperation, turning his wheelchair to face the man properly.

McCree rolls his eyes. “One of Reyes' skip-the-base punishments is lockin' people out of their room, so they gotta bunk on the shitty cots in the barracks.”

Hanzo makes a noise of indignation. “You are not locked out!”

“Sure am.” McCree steps out a bit to rap on the wall. He's bare-chested and absolutely glistening in sweat that trails down all the way to the hem of his jeans. His hair's damp and slicked back with it, sticking to his neck and dotting his brow and a glimpse of a dark tuft of hair can be seen sprouting in his armpit. Hanzo's nose wrinkles in distaste at a waft of particularly strong body odor.

McCree seems to notice, and lowers his arm with an embarrassed chuckle. “Ah. Sorry. Reyes had me suicide-drilling for hours. Thought he might actually kill me there for a bit.”

“You smell like he succeeded,” Hanzo complains, covering his mouth and nose with one hand. “But you are also clearly not locked out.”

“This ain't my room,” McCree explains, tapping on the wall again with his knuckles. “Jake's thumb scanner's been broke for a while. I got the pad code from him before he shipped out, wanted me to water his plants. So I'm bogartin' his bed.”

Hanzo grunts. “How fortunate for you. I, on the other hand-”

“Oh, come off it,” McCree interrupts. “I'm not gonna leave you in the hall. C'mon, we can share.” He leans back into the room, then bends down to prop the door open with a book before disappearing inside.

Hanzo debates internally for a few moments. He didn't have that many options. Staying in the hall would mean on-lookers, and he desperately wanted a bed to collapse in. But did that mean he would have to lie in it with McCree?

“Cool if I take the first shower?” McCree calls, and it's enough to get Hanzo to sigh and roll in after him.

The room is exactly the same as his own, save for the personal decorations. A few plants are sprouting in pots on the bedside table, and there's a smattering of rock and roll posters on the wall. Hanzo doesn't know who KISS is, but they look positively ghoulish.

“Hanzo?” McCree's calling again from behind the bathroom door.

“Yes!” Hanzo replies curtly. He can smell the lingering stench of the man, even from here. “Bathe, please. You are foul.”

“God damn.” He can hear McCree chuckling, even if it's muffled by the door. “Cuttin' me deep.”

Hanzo ignores him. He's tired. He can be blunt if he wants. He wheels his chair over to the bed, locking the brake in place before clambering his way up onto the comforter.

He can hear the shower turning on as he settles himself among the pillows. He gives them a sniff and wrinkles his nose in distaste. They smell like bubble gum and fruit, overpoweringly. Is this from the shampoo this 'Jake' used? Nauseating.

McCree's scents are better.
The man in question didn't take long to bathe – or if he did, Hanzo had dozed off for most of it. His eyes reopen when he hears the creak of the bathroom door. He quickly snaps them shut again when McCree emerges in nothing but a towel wrapped around his waist.

“Why-”

“Won't be long. Just gonna nab some of Jake's shit.” He can hear McCree rustling through the bedside drawers. “Mine are sweat-soaked.” McCree seems to find enough of what he needs – his footsteps retreat back into the bathroom and Hanzo waits until he can hear the door close before he opens his eyes again.

He isn't good with sudden intimacy like that. He'd been told so many a time by the very men he'd brought to bed when he was young. It feels like a lifetime ago.

It had been, in a way.

He knows McCree didn't mean anything by it. Whatever coy mannerisms Hanzo had used to lure men to his side had vanished with the deformation of his looks. He's as cold as the scales dotting his brow and prickly as the claws currently tightening into a fist. Passion and yearnings have been replaced by a constant sense of irritation and displeasure. No one would desire him ever again and that is – fine.

He just doesn't like being reminded of it.

Hanzo's brief spiral of self-hatred is broken upon McCree's return. The man exits the bathroom in jeans that stop several inches above his ankles, but were clearly not intended to be capris, and a tight polo shirt whose buttons looked like they were about to pop at any moment.

Hanzo can't help it. He laughs.

McCree’s confident smile wavers. “Aw, c’mon. It ain't that bad, is it? Jake's fuckin' tiny...”

Hanzo has to cover his mouth to try and smother his laughter, snorting and snorking whenever he glances back up at McCree. This man. He obliviously makes Hanzo hate himself for being so monstrous, and then just walks out looking like... looking like... “You look like,” Hanzo gasps between breaths. “You're from one of my brother's pornos!”

McCree beams. “Is that a compliment?”

“No!” Hanzo laughs. “They were terrible!” He flops back onto the pillows, shoulders shaking with mirth as he drags his hands over his face. Good gods. This could not be happening.

McCree's letting out a nervous chuckle of his own. “Aw, c’mon, Hanzo. What'd I ever do to you?”

The bed creaks as McCree settles on the edge. “Alright then, I'm turnin' the tables on ya. What were you doing with your brother's porno?”

Hanzo coughs, trying to clear his throat and finally settle down. “Ah,” he wheezes. “Genji used. To make me watch them.” He pats his chest a few times, clearing his throat again. “They were stupid. He was trying to embarrass me, break through my scowl.”

McCree snorts. “You were always scowly?”

“Not always. But I was when I was being forced to watch terrible porn.”

“You've mentioned your brother a coupla times,” McCree comments. “And how you followed
killin' orders for his sake. Hell of a beating to take, even for family.”

“We were close.” Hanzo glances down at his claws. “He was my best friend, growing up. The only one I was allowed during my strict training. Father spoiled him, and in ways, I lived vicariously through him.”

“Surprised you never asked Reyes to find him. Wouldn't surprise me if he's looking anyway.”

“I do not want Reyes to find Genji,” Hanzo snaps immediately. “And I do not want to find him either. My brother was given complete freedom in exchange for my servitude. I am not going to drag him back into my life, or risk complicating his with my burdens. It would only hurt him.”

“Is that because he doesn't know about... y'know.” McCree motions to Hanzo's horns.

Hanzo merely glares.

“Alright, alright.” McCree's settling down on the bed, propping himself up on one arm as Hanzo begrudgingly scoots to accommodate him. “I won't pry. Family stuff is complicated. So tell me, did Reyes make you do anything else as punishment for the topside trip?”

“Yes. He had me kill someone.”

McCree's easy-going expression quickly fades. “Serious?”

Hanzo's lips purse. Ah. He'd thoroughly soured the mood. “Yes,” he says after a moment. “I am sorry if that makes you uncomfortable again.”

“Ah.” McCree lays his head down on the pillows. He's turned on his side to face Hanzo, and his expression's thoughtful. “Would you tell me?”

“About what?”

“About what it's like,” McCree explains. “I dunno. I meant what I said, I do trust you. Just... might give me a touch less of the willies if I knew more on how it worked.”

“... I can try,” Hanzo says after a moment. He shifts on the bed, suddenly feeling restless. “It is difficult to explain.”

“You don't gotta.”

“Just give me time.”

McCree's mouth turns up in a lop-sided smile at the call-back. “Alright. No rush.”

Hanzo closes his eyes, leaning back into the bed. It's as soft and plush as the others, it's just – strange. It doesn't feel like his own. It doesn't feel like McCree's. And it certainly doesn't smell right. He finds his head drifting to the left, trying to avoid the pillow's fruity stench.

“Hanzo?”

Hanzo opens his eyes. He'd been unconsciously leaning towards McCree, seeking out his scent instead. He instantly snaps his head backwards, ears pinning as his face flushes a dull pink.

McCree just looks confused. “Uh-”

“It is strange,” Hanzo interrupts, speaking to mask his embarrassment. “The hunt. When I kill. It is
like I am myself inside another.”

McCree's gaze softens, and he nods.

“It changes, who I am. Sometimes it is Eri, sometimes Ami. It rarely seems to matter.”

“Eri and-”

“Ami. My dragons. They have no real names. My brother named them as a child, and it is easier to explain them this way. May I go on, or do you have more questions?”

McCree shakes his head, raising his palms in gesture of surrender.

“They need a scent to hunt. A trace of energy someone has left behind. It doesn't matter on what. Today it was a scarf. Once, a bottle. Every energy trail is different and glows in different hues to a dragon's eyes.”

“Yeah?” McCree's brow perks. “What color am I?”

“... I do not know,” Hanzo admits after a moment, turning his gaze to the ceiling. “They hunted you of their own will. I was with them, but not – I did not see through their eyes.”

If McCree has any thoughts on being hunted, he doesn't voice them. Hanzo's grateful for it.

“They can reach far. It used to be a small area, but they have grown stronger and so have I. Today was a new land, but...” Hanzo rolls his shoulders. “We found them eventually. It was merely exhausting to do so.”

“Why?”

“I do not know,” Hanzo snaps. “It just is!” A sharp inhale before he steadies himself. “Apologies. A long day, as I said. But I truly do not know. Perhaps keeping them or my spirit away from my body is a withdrawal of some sort.”

“Hm.” McCree clicks his tongue. “And who was it that Reyes sentcha after?”

“The Horts.”

“Those dirtbags? Yeesh. That op was a mess last I was briefed.”

“Well, they are dead now.” Hanzo keeps his eyes on the ceiling. “But the women they took are unharmed. So that is enough.”

He feels a hand touch his shoulder and lowers his gaze. McCree is looking at him with kind eyes and a small smile that makes Hanzo want to jump out of his own skin. “Ya did good, then,” McCree says gently.

“Stop that,” Hanzo says, letting irritation creep into his voice to hide his embarrassment at the gesture. He pulls his shoulder away. “Do not use doe eyes on me.”

McCree looks briefly scandalized. “I ain't doin' nothing of the sort! I was bein' nice!”

“Be silent,” Hanzo replies with no heat. “Go fetch me a book or something. I want to read before I sleep.”

“Eh.” McCree rolls over to pick something up off the nightstand before rolling back. “Don't have a
book. Got something better.” He holds out a phone to Hanzo. “No internet down here, but I have a couple movies loaded up onto it. Pick one out for us.”

Hanzo takes the phone suspiciously. “Us? Surely you have seen these before, if you were so keen to keep them.”

“Yeah, but I wanna watch them through your fresh eyes.” McCree tucks his arms under his head and settles back in the pillows. “It'll be fun.”

“Am I wrong in guessing that all you have are old Westerns?” Hanzo quips as he swipes right, navigating to Videos.

“I take offense at that!” McCree replies with a laugh. “Don't judge me by my cover. I bet you can't guess Reyes' favorite genre.”

“Horror?”
McCree shakes his head. “Romantic comedies. Bastard loves Serendipity. Made me watch it five times, at least.”

Hanzo flicks through the selections. There's a few Westerns, but there's also a handful of action movies and something in Spanish that looks suspiciously like a soap opera. “Mm. I believe that, surprisingly.” Hanzo finally taps a movie and lays back, holding the phone out sideways.

McCree scoots closer, peering at the screen. “What'd you pick?”

“Jurassic Park.”

“Really? You’ve never seen Jurassic Park?”

“I never said that.” Hanzo moves the phone to the left, letting McCree get a better view. “But it has been a while. And it has fresh appeal, now.”

McCree looks over at him. “It does?”

“Yes,” Hanzo replies evenly. “I am now rather drawn to the idea of something with scales and claws breaking out and murdering arrogant captors who thought they could contain it.”

McCree snorts, loud and ugly. He covers his nose as his chest shakes with mirth. “Jesus. Who knew you could make a joke?”

“Lay your arm out.” Hanzo nudges McCree's side with his elbow, and the man obliges. Hanzo shifts and scoots upward, positioning his head to lay on McCree's outstretched arm. He accidentally scrapes his horns against the man's bicep before quickly lifting them up.

McCree just smiles – it doesn't seem to bother him. “What, I'm just yer obligatory pillow now?”

“Yes.” Hanzo swipes at the volume, raising it as the theme music begins to play. “And these ones reek.”

McCree cranes his neck a little and sniffs. “Smells like a fruit orgy dipped in bubblegum. I smell better than that to you?”

“ Barely. Do not let it bloat your ego.” He can feel McCree's pulse on the back of his neck. It's beating fast and erratic - but Hanzo chalks it up to the laughter. “Now be silent. It is starting.”
“Alright, Alright. I'll be good. Don't chomp my head off in a bathroom stall.”

Hanzo gives him another jab with his elbow. “I will bite you again,” he warns.

McCree just chuckles. “I'm countin' on it.”

Hanzo doesn't know what that means, and he can't bring himself to ask. He merely settles back down, returning his attention to the movie with a sigh.

*Prattling cowboy.*
Two weeks have passed, and Hanzo's learned a few things.

The first is that Reyes seems to have absolutely no intention of returning their rooms to an accessible state.

“What? Oh, right. Meant to change that back.” Lately the commander's been preoccupied with his own paperwork, a cup of coffee almost constantly on hand. “I'll get to it.”

He hadn't. Hanzo had asked every day for three days straight until McCree stopped him.

“Ya know that every time you ask him, he pushes it back a couple more days, right? Says people who think they got the right to fume at him about it haven't learned their lesson.”

Hanzo is fuming about it, but now he had to keep his tongue in check and ride out his punishment at Reyes' whims.

The second thing is that McCree is a very touchy roommate. Not in an emotional sense, but he was... tactile. Hanzo would be lying on the bed beside him, flicking through the phone's various game apps and he'd feel a hand atop his head. Or fingers playing with the ends of his hair or teasing the tips of his ears. For the first few days he'd swatted and snapped his teeth but McCree never got angry about it. He'd back off, insist he didn't mean anything by it.

“You've got my phone,” he'd point out. “Can't blame a man for gettin' fidgety.”

Hanzo does have McCree's phone, almost constantly. Since discovering the device is packed with games, music and movies - entertainment that he'd been devoid of for years - he'd rarely allowed McCree to so much as hold it. The compromise was that he had to let McCree sit beside him, so the man could at least watch the screen too.

Sometimes they'd lay together, head touching head with the phone propped up on an arm. On the colder nights, Hanzo would often indulge and order McCree's arm outwards so he could settle in the crook of the man's arm and steal his body warmth. McCree ran hot, and as long as no one was around to see it, Hanzo didn't feel too embarrassed about taking some of that heat for himself.

McCree never seemed to comment on it – he'd just pat Hanzo's head and pull the covers up over the pair of them.

It was nice. It reminded him of home, under the kotatsu.

The third thing he'd learned is that, despite the contant touching, McCree is not actually a bad roommate to have. He did a better job of tending to his clothes in here than he did in his own room. While they fit Hanzo, Jake's clothes are still far too small for McCree, so he'd been making due with the same pair of sweatpants and a hoodie he'd wash in the sink when Hanzo began to complain about odor.

He helps Hanzo around the room when he's asked, but he doesn't offer outright. Hanzo appreciates that more than the reverse – the last thing he wants is McCree doting on him like a nurse. Like he's helpless.

He asks if Hanzo wants the first shower, brings him meals from the mess hall, and is more gracious than Hanzo would have ever expected from a roommate who wears spurs. It's bizarre, but
Currently, they were sitting cross-legged on Jake's bed, sharing a plate of cold spaghetti McCree had nicked from the mess hall at lunch. Jake had a mini fridge, a small luxury that both of their rooms lacked. They'd quickly cleared its remaining contents and taken it for themselves by the time the second day of their banishment rolled around.

“You should come by, y’know.” McCree's dabbing at his chin hairs with a napkin. “To the mess hall. You're getting' stronger in the legs. Could probably walk here and back, long as you sit between.”

He's not far off. Angela had doubled down on Hanzo's physical therapy, along with a new type of drug she'd had flown in. It hurt to take – the syringe is about as thick as a pencil, even if she promised him it isn't – but it works. Standing's less painful, and he'd improved motor function in his ankles considerably. Yesterday she'd had him walk back to his room, holding onto his chair for support. He'd made it, but had admittedly collapsed into bed the moment he could.

“I would still need to be wheeled at least one way,” Hanzo admits. “But that is not the part that concerns me. My chair is not what people stare and point at.”

“Most of 'em have seen you at least once, by now. Once they get it outta their system, they'll get to know you. Lot of 'em are good folk.”

“I have no interest in knowing them,” Hanzo replies curtly. “I have only just begun to tolerate you.”

McCree scratches his chin, looking briefly uncomfortable. “Alright. Well, it's up to you.”

“Thank you.”

“Just-”

Hanzo's nostrils flare irritably.

“Look.” McCree sets his fork down. “I'm a soldier and with no boastin' intended, I'm a good one. Reyes is gonna ship me off somewhere sooner rather than later. Doesn't sit right with me, thinkin' about how you're gonna be all alone again if I'm gone for who knows how long.”

Hanzo had reflected on that possibility too, though he refused to admit it. “I would be fine,” he says curtly. “I do not need you.”

McCree sighs, long and slow. He cranes his head down, running his hand through his hair. Hanzo almost feels bad for a moment, then quickly squashes the guilt down. He would be fine.

“I'm goin' about this the wrong way again,” McCree remarks, lifting his head back up. “So I'm gonna go with what works. I'll make you a trade, just like old times.”

“Trade?”

“Yeah. You do somethin' for me, I do somethin' for you.”

“If I am to assume your 'something' is dragging me to this hall to be gawked at like an animal to placate your misplaced concern - what are you going to offer me in return?”

“What do you want?”

“Sake,” Hanzo says promptly. “A lot of it. That bottle you brought back was barely an evening's
worth.”

“I can do that. But...” McCree flicks up the brim of his hat. “Reyes is probably gonna extend his power-trip if I skip the base again.”

Hanzo finds himself completely fine with that exchange.

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Hanzo's agreeableness had faded fast when he'd realized he'd actually have to make good on his end of the deal.

“This is not fair,” he hisses. McCree is currently pushing him through the halls, and unfortunately the death-grip Hanzo has on the armrests do nothing to slow the turning wheels of the chair. “You only bought three bottles! That is not enough for a proper trade!”

“Was enough of a blow on my pocket money,” McCree replies. The man was in a good mood, even if he was being mindful enough to stay out of Hanzo's swiping range. “Don't be a poor sport, now.”

“It was not even good sake!”

“Yeah? Well, you're gonna need to head south if you want the good stuff. Was lucky the shopkeep had any at all, and I know he was jackin' up the prices on me.” McCree's steps falter, and they stop in the middle of the hallway. Hanzo looks up suspiciously over the rim of the hoodie pulled low across his face.

“Look,” McCree sighs. “I ain't gonna force you. If you really want to go back, I'll take you back. Might have bribed ya, but it's still your decision.”

“Of course I do not want to do this!” Hanzo snaps. “What is the point of this?!”

“To get you someone besides just me to talk to.”

“I am fine with just you,” Hanzo snaps. “You do not gawk at me.”

“Hanzo...” McCree's crouching down beside him now, resting a hand on Hanzo's arm. Hanzo glares, but he doesn't pull away. Yet. “I got somethin' to confess.”

Hanzo gives him a suspicious look.

“The only reason I didn't spend half as much time starin' at you as the others is because I had the whole whole flight here where all I did was look at you. You just slept through it.”

Hanzo can feel an angry flush shoot up his face, and his ears pin back.

“You're a sight, alright?” McCree continues. “And personally? I never really thought in a bad way. Just give 'em a bit to get it out of their system, and I'm sure the good ones'll treat you right as rain.”

“That means there are bad ones,” Hanzo mutters darkly. He withdraws his arm from under McCree's hand and folds his own in his lap.
“Yeah, well, that's the human condition.” McCree straightens up and replaces his hands on the wheelchair's handles. “But I got a gun to stick up the nose of those folks if they nettle ya.”

Hanzo scoffs. “Very well,” he says after a moment. “I will do this for you, once. But when I say I am done—”

“I hightail you out of there. I know. It'll be okay, I promise.”

Hanzo very much doubts that.

—

“What the hell happened to you? Get dipped into something radioactive?”

“Your scales ever come off, like a snake? Shedding and shit?”

“Did you cut those holes for your horns or did you just shove them through the hood? Did it hurt?”

Hanzo hates this.

There'd been no grand scene when he'd finally allowed McCree to wheel him through the double doors of the mess hall. No sudden silences, punctuated only by people gasping or spoons clinking to the floor. No mouths gaped open in shock.

No one had even really noticed them.

The room had been packed – loud conversations filling the air and adding to the clatter of silverware and trays being tossed into bins. Groups of three to five sat together at tables, either eating or chatting or, disgustingly, both. Most had been dressed in the standard Blackwatch uniform, but a handful were in what McCree called 'civvies'. North of the entrance was a long line of men and women, heading into a small room Hanzo hadn't been able to see into and exiting with trays filled with food.

McCree'd wheeled Hanzo over to an empty table, tucked in a corner that was about as far from the door and the line as was possible. He'd pulled the brake into place and tipped his hat back on his head. “You feel like anything particular?”

Nerves had sapped any hint of hunger from Hanzo's gut. “No,” he'd mumbled. He didn't think anyone had been looking at him, but it was hard to tell when staring down at his lap. “Be quick.”

McCree had turned to leave and Hanzo was ashamed that his first instinct had been to grab hold of the man's arm and stop him in his tracks.

But he hadn't, and McCree had left him. He'd joined his comrades in the lunch line, hooting and laughing in greeting as they'd slapped their hands together and ruffled each other's hair.

Hanzo had sat alone, and waited. He's still sitting, nervous glances to the door McCree should be exiting through any minute now.

Only now, Hanzo is joined by others.

Three young men wearing goat-skull crests on their uniforms had plunked their trays down at the
table and seated themselves without so much as a greeting. One of them seemed to just be a tag-along – he's eating his meal in silence, and appeared to be ignoring his surroundings. The other two, however, had immediately begin bombarding Hanzo with questions and hadn't so much as glanced at their trays since sitting.

“Saw McCree bring you in – you the prisoner everyone's sayin' he's been fucking?”

Hanzo wants to kill them. He wants to cut them up, dig his claws into their eyes - at least be allowed the dignity of an angry snarl at their incessant questioning.

But he's being watched. He can feel it, a gathering crowd of eyes upon him. The annoyances aren't bothering to keep their voices down, attracting more and more attention as Hanzo reaches up and tugs on his hoodie's drawstrings.

*It'll be okay, I promise.*

“**JACKSON!**”

Both men jump in their seats, and the leftmost one whips his head around. A woman is stomping towards the table in black boots that reach up to her knees and sporting a ponytail full of fiery red hair.

Clara?

Hanzo barely has time to open his mouth before Clara's slamming her fist onto the table, promptly shutting him up. Her attention's on the right boy – he must be Jackson - but she's shooting the middle one an equally poisonous look.

“Clara-” Jackson starts to whine.

“Shut it, squidlips,” she snaps. “I *know* I'm not seeing you sitting here stuffing your ugly face when I just came had to use a training room that's still trashed to *shit.* Am I seeing you here, Jackson? Is it or is it not you and your little pep squad's day to clean up?”

“We were gonna after-”

Clara sweeps her arm outwards, sending all three trays clattering to the floor and earning her two terrified looks and an annoyed one from the silent man. The conversations in the room die down as attention turns towards the scene. Hanzo sinks further into his chair, trying to remove himself from view.

“You're gonna do it **NOW!**” Clara barks. "**UP!**" The two men jump to their feet as the third slowly picks himself up. “And don't let me catch your asses back in here until that room's *spotless!*”

They scatter like flies. An ugly ripple of laughter goes through the room as Jackson stumbles in his haste and face-plants on the floor before scrambling up and disappearing through the double doors.

Clara huffs something darkly under her breath, then drops down into the seat beside the silent man. Hanzo shoots her a look of utter bewilderment, but she's looking over and moving her hands at the man – signing? Hanzo's not entirely sure, because it's ended with her giving him the middle finger. He returns the gesture before rising to his feet and leaving to follow his friends.

Clara rolls her eyes before looking back at Hanzo and giving him a calculating once-over. “Don't mind those rookies,” she tells him. “I'm Clara. Been told you saved my life a couple weeks back.” She extends her hand over the table for a shake. “Charmed ’n shit.”
“I know who you are,” Hanzo hisses. Now that he's had a moment to gather himself, anger is returning. “What I do not know is what possessed you to cause a scene.”

“Really? Look around, hotshot.” Clara jerks a thumb over her shoulder at the room and Hanzo's eyes track the motion. He's surprised to see heads turned away from them – people were laughing and chattering over their tables as they had before.

“People love a scene. Once you get one rolling where someone else gets humiliated, they'd rather gab about that for a while than stick their eyeballs on ya.” Clara's fishing out a pack of gum from her breast pocket and popping a piece into her mouth. “And I've got a feeling you don't like the spotlight.”

Hanzo's shoulders droop a little and he lowers his gaze back to his lap. “I do not,” he admits tersely. “If redirecting attention was your... intention. Then I will thank you for it.”

“Neat.” She doesn't seem remotely impressed by his display of humility, blowing a small bubble and then popping it with here teeth. “Where's McCree? He fuck off and leave ya on your lonesome?”

“I was gettin' food.” The sound of McCree's voice causes Hanzo's ears to prick up and his head to raise. The cowboy was balancing two trays of food on each hand – he slides one before Hanzo before settling onto the seat next to him. “And what the hell were you yellin' about, Clara? Ramón wanna change the caterers for your wedding again?”

“He'd already be dead if he did,” Clara replies smoothly. “And I was defendin' your friend from Jackson's goons, thank you very much. What'd you go and leave him for?”

“I told you, I was gettin’ food!”

“Piss-poor gentleman skills, Jesse. I'd have already dumped Ramón if he ever did that to me, and I don't have scales.”

Hanzo picks at his food as they argue, barely listening. The meal he'd been brought was fairly simple, just a few cuts of grilled chicken and a bowl of rice. McCree had plopped something truly disgusting down on his own, some sort of bread absolutely smothered with chili, meat and onions. The smell wafts, suppressing Hanzo's appetite and making his nose wrinkle in distaste.

“Hey.” McCree's hand is suddenly on Hanzo's shoulder, making him start in surprise. “Y'okay? I'm real sorry if you got bothered.”

“I am fine,” Hanzo mumbles, shrugging the hand away.

“He's tough.” Clara's smacking on her gum as she folds her arm on the table. “His thick skin ain't just for show, if he's been stomaching you.”

“Aw, leave me alone,” McCree complains, picking up his soggy sandwich. “What'd I ever do to you?”

“Wales.”

“Oh, fuck off-”

“Really, you two?” Hanzo's gaze flicks to the left as someone else approaches the table with a tray in hand. They've got cropped auburn hair and dimpled cheeks pulled up in a smile. “First thing I hear when I come over is about Wales? Again?”
“Make her drop it!”

“Never,” Clara declares. The newcomer laughs and takes the seat next to her.

“This is Alex.” McCree motions at the table's new addition. Hanzo silently tips his head in greeting. “Only person at this table who can snipe better than me.”

“A blind dog could snipe better than you, McCree,” Alex replies with a smile. “Did you really think attaching a scope to your pistol would help?”

“Might’ve.” McCree looks briefly indignant. “Was worth testing.”

“Wasn't worth the scrap you wasted mutilating that poor gun.” Clara blows another bubble as she fiddles with a butter knife. “That dwarfism guy from Overwatch was ready to kick your ass when he saw it.”

“Listen-”

“Are you guys picking on McCree again?” Someone else has dropped into the seat beside Hanzo and it takes all his willpower not to recoil. The table was getting far too crowded and far too loud for his liking. “Because, if we are, I want in.”

“Blow it out your ass, Lance.”

Lance is a blond haired man with thick arms and a cocky grin. He's got a tray filled with bread and a bowl of soup that smells just tempting enough to draw Hanzo's eye. Then he realizes Lance is looking at him. “Yes?” he asks testily.

Lance's smile widens as his eyes roam boldly over Hanzo's form. “Who's this, then?”

“Jesse's new ward,” Alex pipes in around a mouth full of food. “You haven't heard? Where've you been?”

“Montpelier for some infiltration. Had to brush up on le langage d'amour.” Lance is still looking at him, and it's making Hanzo's brow pinch. “Poor guy. Bet you're real sick of McCree, huh? How many countryisms has he jammed down your throat?”

“Lance.” Hanzo glances over, and he's surprised to see McCree's expression has lost any trace of mirth. “Lay off the staring, yeah? He doesn't like that shit.”

Lance averts his gaze, raising his hands to shoulder-level with his palms out. “Alright! Alright, I'm looking away. Got a pretty cute face, that's all.”

You're a sight, alright?

Clara makes an ugly noise in the back of her throat. McCree's still glaring daggers over Hanzo's head at Lance, who hasn't lost his smile.

“He got a name, McCree?”

“I-” Hanzo clears his throat, and the entire table falls silent. “I would like to leave.”

McCree's on his feet immediately. Hanzo barely has time to glimpse the surprise on Alex's face before his brake is pulled up and he's being wheeled away from the table.

“Evenin', all,” McCree grunts. Clara hollers something in Spanish that McCree ignores before
rapidly whisking Hanzo through the double doors and back down the hall.

McCree *had* promised Hanzo that he would be 'hightailed' out of there - but Hanzo finds his claws digging into the armrests as the walls whizz past. McCree's pace is too rapid; Hanzo nearly bounces out of his chair when they hit a bump in the floor too fast. "McCree." The man offers no response as they round a bend, the chair swerving dangerously. "M-McCree!" When there's still no answer, Hanzo reaches back to haphazardly swipe at the hands on his chair's handles. McCree releases his grip in surprise – Hanzo's chair goes skidding until he bumps roughly against a wall.

Hanzo shakes his head to clear his vision, then twists around to glare daggers at the man. “Are you *mad?!* When I asked to leave, I did not mean to be thrown from the room!”

“Sorry! Sorry, shit.” McCree's holding up his hands apologetically and his face is pinched with worry. “I got caught up. You told me you wanted out quick-”

“I am not a race cart, McCree!”

“I know. I know, I'm real sorry, Hanzo.” McCree's taking a cautious step towards him, looking like a kicked dog. “I didn't mean to.”

Hanzo huffs. “Stop,” he orders McCree, stopping the man in his tracks. “I will take myself back.” He rolls forward, back, and forward again, gradually turning himself the correct way.

“Hanzo-”

“Go back to your friends.”

“But-”

“I am tired, McCree,” Hanzo snaps. “And I want some time alone. Go back to them, or go somewhere else. But leave me be.” He turns his head away, firmly putting his back to McCree before he begins wheeling himself away.

It's not until Hanzo's fully turned a corner and crossed halfway through another hall that he finally hears the faraway sound of McCree's footsteps retreating back the way they came.
McCree, mercifully, leaves him be.

Hanzo uses the alone time to take a shower, then a bath that he only pulls himself from when his fingers have pruned beyond belief. Once he's swaddled in the soft evening robe he'd found hung behind the door, he dries his hair and clips his nails. He even takes a pack of Q-tips from Jake's supply to clean his ears. It's a more difficult exercise than he remembers – his old ears wouldn't twitch away from contact.

He listens for McCree's footsteps the entire time he's locked in the bathroom, but he hears nothing. He decides that's a good thing, the cowboy taking extra time to respect his space. Hanzo had been right to snap at him; he isn't the one at fault here.

Is he?

He dismisses the doubts in favor of focusing on re-attaching his prosthetics. It's much easier to simply walk out of the bathroom than to do the quintillion-point turnaround he's forced to do in a wheelchair. Even if it hurt a little more.

He opens the door and hobbles back into the bedroom, taking care to stow his chair within reach before flopping face-first onto the bed. Steam wafts freely out of the opened bathroom door, but he can't bring himself to get up again to close it.

Exhausting. He'd sat in a chair for twenty minutes maybe, and that entire exchange had just... utterly sapped him. The chattering, the *staring*. How was he supposed to form a friendship with these people if he could not tolerate thirty minutes with them?

Hanzo rolls onto his back to stare up at the ceiling. Clara had been – alright. Intimidating was the best word for it. He'd trust her to watch his back in a fight, but had a hard time imagining sitting and watching a movie with her. Alex, an enigma. They might have been interesting, but the chance to know had been interrupted by-

Hanzo wrinkles his nose in distaste. Of all the things he'd expected, fake flirting had not been one of them. Lance seemed like a friend of the group's. Had McCree set him up to it, to boost Hanzo's self-esteem? McCree'd seemed overly annoyed, like Lance was ruining something. Perhaps botching his pre-written lines?

Hanzo hoped they were botched. Then again, if that was McCree's idea of flirting, it did explain why Hanzo had found no trace of a girlfriend's existence on the man's phone.

Not that Hanzo'd been looking for such a thing, of course. He'd simply noticed a lack.

A sigh escapes him and he throws an arm over his face. It didn't matter. He'd done what McCree asked, and could use this disaster as an excuse to never, *ever* do it again.

The phone's within reach, sitting beside one of his bottles of sake on the nightstand. Two luxuries that would be so easy to reach up and snatch – but Hanzo can't muster up a sliver of energy. It feels better to simply lie here and wait for McCree to return.

The clock ticks the minutes by, one by one; a harsh shiver wracks Hanzo's body. He opens his eyes with a groan – when had he begun drifting off? Jake's room gets so wretchedly cold at night; if any bed needed the thick down comforter and an extra body to warm it, it was this one.
Hanzo takes his arm off his face and rolls over to check the digital clock. 1:37 A.M. Where on earth is McCree?

As if on cue, there's a knock on the door.

Hanzo rolls off the bed and gets to his feet, briefly thankful he'd lacked the energy to unlock his prosthetics. He fumbles in the dark towards the doorway, roaming his hands along the wood until they find the knob. He turns it, and the bright lights of hallway instantly assault his vision and make him squint.

There's no one standing at the door - but there is something large and dark curled near his left foot that draws Hanzo's gaze downward.

It's McCree, slumped against the wall with his hat drawn over his eyes. His arms are folded, but Hanzo can tell by his limp posture that the man's fallen asleep. When had he even gotten there? Hanzo's hearing was normally so sharp – was the cowboy actually adept at stealth? Had he been trying not to be heard? And strangest of all, there's a sticky note attached to the brim of McCree's hat.

Hanzo crouches down, ignoring the protest from his knees as he plucks the paper free, turning it over to give it a read.

Hey,

McCree had a long night, so I brought him back - he mentioned you two'd been bumming around in Josh's room. Sorry about Lance. Got a bit of "history" going on between these two. Hope you weren't too uncomfortable; it was still nice meeting you!

- Alex

Hanzo purses his lips, discarding the note to the floor before he leans over and gives McCree's shoulder a shake. “McCree. Wake up.”

There's a mumble from the man, but no clear sign that he's rousing. Hanzo reaches over, pinching the man's nose with his thumb and index finger. A few moments later, McCree snorts loudly and his eyes snap open. Hanzo releases him, retracting his arm as the man pounds on his chest and wheezes with a few stray snuffles and snorts. Glassy eyes turn upwards as McCree gives him a blank stare, still obviously disoriented from sleep.

“Buh?”

Hanzo knows his own expression is strained. “Get up.” He takes a step back, holding the door open for the man. “Come on. Inside.”

“Y'told me to stay out,” McCree mumbles, rubbing a hand over his face.

“And now I am telling you to get in.” Hanzo keeps his voice quiet, in case any nearby occupants are listening in. “I only wanted a little peace, not to...” Hanzo waves a hand exasperatedly, searching for the words. “Banish you. Come inside and get into bed. It is cold out.

It's not the apology Hanzo wants to give, but it seems to have done the trick. McCree rises to his
feet and shuffles inside with Hanzo quickly shutting and locking the door after him. McCree falls backwards onto the bed eagle-spread, lifting his legs in the air to kick off his boots.

“Get under the covers,” Hanzo instructs, settling on the edge of the bed to unclip his prosthetics. “You are doing no good atop them.”

McCree mutters something unintelligible but he rolls to the side and starts tucking himself under the sheets.

“What?”

McCree mumbles it again.

“What?” Hanzo leans forward, trying to hear as McCree exhales loudly. His breath hits Hanzo's face-first, who wrinkles his nose at the scent.

Liquor, strong and potent. Was McCree drunk?

The man in question is busy cozying up beneath the blankets and nestling his face into the pillows. The very picture of contentment. Hanzo briefly debates sleeping on the floor himself to avoid the smell, before he simply gives in and joins McCree under the covers.

It's still chilly. Hanzo shivers, trying to draw the blankets tighter around himself – before there's hands on his waist and he finds himself being drawn flush against McCree's chest instead. He immediately begins squirming, trying to get loose. “McCree-!”

“Said y'were cold,” McCree mumbles. His grip is ludicrously strong for a drunk man. “'M nice 'n warm.”

He is. McCree practically radiated heat on most nights, and he currently hadn't even stripped himself of his cotton shirt. Hanzo gnashes his teeth together as he's held fast, embarrassment welling up hot in his cheeks. “I am not your-”

“I know what y'are.” McCree's voice is quiet, sad.

Hanzo stops struggling.

McCree sighs, tucking his chin atop Hanzo's head as his cheeks brush antlered horns. “Yer my friend. An' I'm sorry I made y'go.”

Hanzo lies still. His face is partially pressed against McCree's neck and he can feel the man's pulse, strong and steady. McCree's grip on him as loosened but Hanzo's still just being held there, in his arms. Like a child, or a lover.

“You did not force me,” Hanzo murmurs after a few moments. “I react... too strongly, sometimes. I have become more sensitive than is right.”

“'S your life; you choose how't'andle it. Y'got treated bad, I get it.”

“Yes. But I lash out too often. And far more than is fair to you.” Hanzo shifts uncomfortably in the man's grip. “I know this, deep down. Just... I do not like being reminded of my looks, or what I have been made into. But that is all anyone sees and thinks of me, so I am constantly...”

“Cranky,” McCree mumbles, and it's enough to get Hanzo to scoff.

“That is... a word for it.”
“Lance's dick.”

Hanzo thinks McCree meant to add an 'a' between those words, but he lets it slide. “I should not have allowed him to make me uncomfortable. But I have never enjoyed fake flirting. It is uncouth at best, cruel at worst.”

McCree grumbles unhappily. “Wasn't fakin'. Always does that shit.”

Hanzo scoffs. “McCree, please. I have horns and scales. Ears like a deer.”

“So what? Horns're cute.” McCree lifts a hand to brush against the tip of Hanzo's ear. “Ears're cute. Scales don't bother me n-”

“Enough,” Hanzo interrupts. He's keeping his voice tight and clipped as his claws curl in McCree's shirt. “Go to sleep. You are rambling drunken nonsense.”

McCree, mercifully, goes quiet. His grip on Hanzo slackens but – he's warm. He's warm and soft to lay against, and no one is here to see them. As long as he stays silent, Hanzo decides he's willing to bear the small indignity of being held in exchange for the pleasant heat wrapping around his body.

“... Good night, McCree.”

The man doesn't answer. Perhaps he's already slipping away, inebriation aiding his path. Hanzo closes his eyes and tilts his cheek to rest against the man's chest.

Yer my friend.

The words replay in his mind over and over, until sleep finally comes to claim him.

---

Hanzo is awoken by the sound of two consecutive thumps on the door. He barely has enough time to crack open an eye before something metallic snaps and the door is thrown open with a slam. Hanzo bolts upright in bed, lips pulled back in a startled snarl as he bares his teeth.

It's Reyes. The man's lowering a leg down from waist-height – had he actually kicked the door in? - and brushing off his pants. “So this is where you two've been holed up,” he says, voice absurdly calm. “Havin' fun turnin' Jake's room into your little lovenest, Shimada?”

Hanzo looks down. McCree, miraculously, is still asleep with his hair mussed against the pillows and an arm thrown over Hanzo's waist. He gives a soft snort at the noises, but otherwise appears to be peacefully dozing.

Hanzo promptly plants his hands on the man's chest and shoves him straight off the bed.

It's enough to draw a laugh from Reyes as McCree hits the floor hard, waking abruptly and letting out a startled squawk. Reyes stalks over as McCree sits up, rubbing at his head and wincing.

“Morning, pendejo. You have a nice dream?”

“God damn, fuck off, Boss,” McCree moans, rubbing his eyes with the back of his palm. “Why's your mug gotta be th'first thing I see?”
“Because you haven't been picking up your comm. So, you made me track your ass down here to watch Shimada kick you outta bed for failing to satisfy him. Get up.”

Both Hanzo and McCree try to start talking at once but Reyes silences them with a roared: “UP!”

McCree tries to scramble to his feet, but Reyes is already leaning down and hauling him up by the scruff of his shirt. “We're shipping out. Go get your shit and meet in the hangar in five. Everyone else is already waiting, because they keep their comms on. You're coming too, Shimada.”

Hanzo's brows shoot up in surprise, but McCree cuts in with: “The rooms are locked, Boss.”

“No, they aren't. Unlocked 'em two days ago. You two idiots were just too busy snuggling to notice.” Reyes is already sweeping from the room, two fingers pressed against his ear. “Yeah, I found them. Tell Nguyen she owes me a twenty.”

McCree glances over as Hanzo shifts uncomfortably on the bed. He looks like he wants to say something.

“FOUR MINUTES, JESSE!” Reyes bellows from down the hall.

McCree bolts out without another word, leaving Hanzo to groan aloud and begin searching for his prosthetics.

We're shipping out.

Why is Hanzo suddenly included - and where are they going in the first place?
“Mazatlán. That's Mexico, for all you hicks out there.”

Reyes is rapping his knuckles on a bolted-down whiteboard, filled with images of a coastal town. A projector whirs loudly overhead; its small noises, however, were all but lost beneath the roar of the plane now carrying a team of elite Blackwatch operatives through the air.

A team of elite operatives, and Hanzo.

He feels out of place among these uniformed men in his baggy jeans and ripped T-shirt, plucked from the pile of lost-and-found civvie garbage Reyes had foisted on him weeks back. He hadn't had much time to be picky.

Hanzo's currently smushed between McCree and Clara, strapped in like the others into seats that were far too small for his liking. Every jostle of the plane ended up with an elbow or shoulder being pressed into him, and muttered apologies did little to soothe the pain.

At least no one's looking at him. The team had stared at first when he'd come aboard, but Reyes had immediately begun issuing orders left and right and he'd become quickly forgotten. Now their stares were on their commander, undivided attention on the mission details being laid out.

“At o' five hundred hours yesterday, seven Overwatch operatives were ambushed and taken by Los Muertos. They're currently being held for ransom set at two million dollars.”

A ripple of discontent noises goes through the hold. Reyes holds up a hand to silence it. “I know. We-”

“This is bullshit.” A woman is cutting in – she's strapped in directly across from Hanzo. “Why should we risk our butts just because Overwatch can't manage a fucking street gang?”

“Because we've got orders.”

“Your orders! This-”

“Tonya! Shut it,” Reyes barks. The woman falls silent again, but the look on her face is mutinous.

“You lot aren't getting risked anyway.” Reyes clicks a remote, and the image on the whiteboard changes to a thoroughly dilapidated mansion set atop a hill. “Los Muertos holed the agents up in here. They took over the property a while back, and no one's ever scouted it. It's likely teeming with security, traps, and other weaponized bullshit. So we're not sending you in. Blackwatch has been asked to handle the ransom exchange. That's all.”

“Theen why the strike team, Boss?” Alex is speaking up from the right. “If Morrison is willing to pay.”

“Because situations can change.” Reyes' gaze briefly lands on Hanzo before returning forward. “And you'll need to be ready if shit goes south.”

Another mutter of displeasure goes around, but Reyes silences each and every mutterer with a glare. “I want to see eyes closed for the rest of the flight. Partly because you'll need to rested in case of a firefight, and partly because sleeping mouths are silent mouths. Which reminds me - someone plug Hernandez’s nose before he starts up his pig-snore.”
Reyes ignores the protest. “Shimada. Cockpit.” Reyes is already sweeping towards the door as Hanzo hastens to unbuckle himself and toddle to his feet. He'd been made to leave his chair behind and is now forced to hobble in the direction of the cockpit as the rest of the team watches.

*No point in dragging that thing on board, Shimada. We got plenty of chairs and no intention of letting your scaly ass off the plane in the first place.*

Reyes is waiting for him up front with folded arms and a frown on his face. “I'm hoping I don't need to explain why you're up here,” he says shortly.

Hanzo closes the door and glances around. Two omnics are flying the plane, but they don't seem to be paying the men any attention.

“Is that safe?” Hanzo murmurs, gesturing slightly to the pair.

“Don't be racist,” Gabe snaps. “They've been reinforced against external tampering anyway. You know why you're here or not?”

“You want me to kill the men keeping the Overwatch agents without risking your own.”

“No. I want you to scout. This shit is too delicate to go in guns blazing, even with magic spirit guns. My ass will be cooked if those men die because some high school dropout in face paint got spooked and started offing prisoners. Unless you can kill an entire house packed with men all at the exact same time?”

Hanzo shakes his head.

“Didn't think so. Check out the mansion, make sure the agents are still alive. See what the traps are or if Los Muertos looks like they're cooking up something else. They're going to try and take the money and the men's lives if they think they can get away with it. Don't let them.”

Reyes glances over at a clock on the wall. “Now settle in up here. We don't have a mystical séance room on board, so this is going to have to do. Unless you want to do your spooky shit back with the team?” Hanzo's expression sours and Reyes nods. “Alright. It's gonna be another five hours til we land, give or take. Our site's about four miles south of the house, so the hill shouldn't be too hard to spot. Do we need to go out and bring back a scalp so you have something to track with?”

“No,” Hanzo replies curtly. “I will be fine if we are landing that close. Just tell me what the Overwatch agents look like.”

“They'll be the ones tied up, probably in blue uniforms. Los Muertos are the idiots with dicks painted on their faces à la glow-in-the-dark goop. Clear?”

“... Clear.”

“Good. Go to sleep, or don't. Just don't go dragging Jesse in here to cuddle. *Pendejo*’s been distracted enough by you already, and I need him alert.”

Hanzo bristles angrily. “He is the one-”

Reyes isn't listening. He's already left.

Hanzo sinks to the ground, huffing in frustration. The omnics were occupying the only chairs in the
room – Hanzo could look forward to spending the rest of the flight slumped on the floor.

*Pendejo's been distracted enough by you already.*

McCree distracted himself. What did Reyes know, anyway?

Hanzo closes his eyes, settling in against the cabin door. Five more hours to kill, and he wasn't the least bit tired.

He should have taken the phone.

---

By the time Reyes re-enters the cabin, Hanzo's managed to nod off into a light slumber. Of course, he only realizes he'd been dozing because now there's a boot on his cheek, nudging him awake.

“We're landing soon.” Once he sees Hanzo has awoken, albeit with a scowl, Reyes crouches down to eye-level. “Be a good time to start on your magical journey. You can see the house from the air and the quicker you finish this up, the less excuses I gotta make about why we're waiting.”

Hanzo grunts irritably, rubbing at his eyes. “Fine. Then get out.”

“And how are you gonna tell me when you're done, then? Last time you did this shit you nearly keeled over. I'm not just gonna keep popping in and out of he--”

“*Fine,*” Hanzo hisses hatefully. Reyes' mouth shuts. “Then be *quiet.* I have to concentrate for this.”

Reyes is giving him a calculating look, but the man's lips stay mercifully sealed. After a short, silent glaring war between the two of them, Hanzo finally lets his eyes close again. He folds his hands into his lap and lets out a low, long sigh.

The moment he enters the inky black his dragons are there. They twist around him like affectionate cats, crackling with energy and nuzzling at him with their snouts. He can feel his brows lift in astonishment – they had never been like this before.

*Little one.* Ami's positively beaming at him. *You have come back to us.*

*We have been watching through your eyes.* Eri's settled his claws on Hanzo's shoulders. *You are growing well.*

Hanzo felt a flicker of confusion. Growing? How was he growing? They couldn't mean--

*Fear not. We are not bestowing new gifts upon you.* Ami curls by her brother's leg. *But someday, you must learn to accept the ones you have.*

*You could take them away,* Hanzo thinks curtly.

*Your gifts exist to protect you, Hanzo. You will need them, soon enough. And then you will understand.*

Ominous. Hanzo didn't like it one bit. *I need you, now.*
We know. We have been listening. Ami stretches her claws as Eri untangles himself from her. We will seek out what is needed. Send us on our course.

Hanzo holds out a hand and the dragons press their snouts to it in one fluid motion. Their eyes shut and their bodies ripple with light.

Guide our path, little prince.

Where is everyone?

The mansion had been easy to spot from the skies. Worn, ugly and dirty in ways that Hanzo had a feeling existed long before Los Muertos had claimed it. Tacky statues missing heads and dead grass littered the lawn, and graffiti was tagged on nearly every square inch of the house. This gang may as well have put a neon sign over its head for all their subtlety.

What's odd is, despite their flashy displays of ownership, Hanzo is simply having no luck finding a single person in the house.

The mansion is well-defended – he'd gleaned that much through Eri's eyes. C4 is strapped to the door and litters the hallways in small pockets of the ceiling. He'd passed through at least three different armories; and if they were not armories, then he'd hate to find a real one. Guns are littered through this place, and he could have sworn he saw a crude bear trap sticking out from underneath a patch of carpet.

They'd gone through the first two floors of the house with nothing gained but a sense of dread kindling in Hanzo's stomach.

They're going to try and take the money and the men's lives if they think they can get away with it. Don't let them.

Had Los Muertos simply fled? Hanzo doubts that very much – two million dollars was too big a price, and assaulting Overwatch agents had already landed them in too deep. But where were they?

We have spent much time looking up. Ami is peering at Eri, but Hanzo can feel her eyes on his own soul within. Perhaps it is time to turn our gaze down?

Of course. In a house this large, there must be a basement of some sort.

They dive down through the floorboards, and after a few moments of seeing nothing but earth and darkness, Hanzo's suspicions are confirmed. The view opens up on large room, packed with casks of what had at least once held wine. A group of men are sitting in a circle around a small table. They're – playing cards? He can't hear them but he can see cocky smirks on their faces, and one tilts their head back in laughter. All but one of them has his face decorated in neon paint in a skull-shaped mask, but it's that man that draws Hanzo's eye.

Because the bare-faced man is also dressed in a baby blue uniform with Overwatch's crest boldly emblazoned on his right sleeve.

He doesn't seem like a prisoner. There's nothing shackling his wrists or feet – no sign of
mistreatment or discomfort. He's smiling at the others, playing his cards and taking sips from a dark-colored bottle.

One of the men says something. He points upwards and Hanzo tracks the gesture – a clock. Nearly five, if it was accurate. The men push themselves back from the table and get to their feet, discarding their cards in favor of retrieving guns they'd left at their feet.

Hanzo can feel his body tense when they hand the bare-faced man a gun and slap him on the back with a grin. The men exit through a staircase leading up, tucked against the corner.

**Little prince.** It's Ami, floating back from somewhere deeper in the room. When had she left? I have found the rest.

*Are they well?* he asks.

**No.** The solemnness of her voice makes Hanzo's gut clench.

*Are they alive?*

**No.**

**Oh.**

*Where are they?* He urges Eri in the direction his sister had gone – only to be stopped as she moves to block his path.

**Ami?**

**It would not be... wise.** Hanzo has never heard her hesitate before. **For you to gaze upon them.**

Hanzo can feel his body swallow. *I have to see them. I must tell Reyes what has happened.*

*Are you certain? This will pain you, here and in the mortal realm.***

*Let me pass. I must do this.*

She bows her head to him before gliding upwards and out of his path. She beckons with her snout towards a corner of the room. Hanzo can feel Eri's own hesitation for a split second before he begins drifting after his sister.

There's a metal door, tucked away almost out of sight. There's a small, horizontal slat cut out at eye level – a peephole, like Hanzo had seen in old movies. Ami is hovering just outside the door, her claws tucked delicately against her chest.

*They will see you, as they did me. But they cannot harm you.*

Hanzo peers at her for elaboration, but she stays silent.

After a brief moment to gather his waning courage, Hanzo coaxes Eri forward through the door.

Sharp teeth are instantly thrown at his face and for one dizzying moment, Hanzo can hear his body and self cry out as one in alarm. But no pain comes. Snarling mouths snap and gnash at Eri's body fruitlessly; it takes Hanzo a few moments to gather his wits and realize the bared teeth belonged to **dogs.** Big dogs – Dobermans - that were snarling soundlessly with hateful eyes locked directly onto the dragon spirit floating above them.
It seems dogs really *could* sense spirits, like his grandfather used to say. Hanzo is immensely thankful they can do nothing else to them.

The dogs keep jumping, continuing their pointless assault on Eri’s incorporeal body. After the initial shock’s worn off, the scene is almost - humorous. Hanzo can feel a trace of a smile tugging at the corner of his lips. They were just... so angry.

Hanzo’s gaze slowly drifts away from them and as quick as it had come, any trace of mirth vanishes. His gut clenches in horror as his eyes begin tracking across the floor. A lightbulb flickers weakly overhead, revealing erratic glimpses of what lay beneath the dogs’ paws.

Blood, sticky between their toes. Clumps of hair, matted with gore and still clinging to pieces of scalps and tattered blue clothing that lay torn and stained upon the floor. Bodies, ripped open with their rib cages protruding and a woman's face, gaping and rotted -

Eri’s eyes close. Ami is on him in an instant – he can feel her wrapping around him, and her embrace is almost suffocating. The nausea is hitting him full force – the images refuse to fade, even beneath his lids.

He'd seen things like this before, in his youth. They'd made him watch, made sure he could stay stoic in the face of it.

After all these years, it still isn't any easier.

*Tell me.* His body is trembling, and he can swear he feels hands upon him – real, physical hands. *Were there six?*

Six faces, all mutilated beyond recognition like the woman's.

**Yes, little one. There were six. Only the traitor lives, now.**

Traitor. The word throbs painfully in his chest as the bare-faced man's image flashes before him. *Let me go. I have to go back. I have to tell them.*

The dragons uncoil from each other, brushing their snouts against his horns. **We are sorry, little one.**

**We are sorry it was too late.**
Chapter 15

First five paragraphs mention vomiting!

“Oi! Hanzo! Motherfucker, don't you dare die on me!”

Hanzo is being shaken awake, literally. Clara has both his shoulders in a vice grip and he can feel
his neck being snapped back and forth like a wet noodle. It's only when his eyes flutter open and he
makes a loud croak of protest that she finally stops and stares at him.

“God damn! You-”

Hanzo lifts a trembling hand up to interrupt her. She closes her mouth, he opens his – and promptly
keels over to empty his stomach contents onto her boots.

“What the f-! HANZO!!” Clara jumps back with a howl of disgust as Hanzo plants both hands on
the floor and gags. Clara starts shaking her shoes at a nearby wall in an attempt to fling the vomit
off, face contorted with rage. “THE FUCK IS WRONG WITH YOU?!”

“They are dead,” Hanzo gasps out.

Clara halts almost comically, one shoe still in the air. “What? What did you just say?”

Hanzo lifts his head, casting bleary eyes over the cabin. Why is Clara here? Where is Reyes? And
the omnic pilots are gone – had they landed already? How long had he-

“Hey!” Clara's crouching down next to him, one hand on Hanzo's chin as she forcefully tilts it up.
“Wake up. Say what you just said again.”

Hanzo swallows; the taste of bile is foul on his tongue. “They are dead,” he repeats hoarsely.
“Overwatch. Six of them. They are dead.”

Clara sucks in a sharp breath behind her teeth. “Shitttt.” She's reaching up to her ear – then pauses.
“Only six? We were told seven-”

hard to talk – each word sends another spike of nausea into his belly. “Bodies were not far. He
knows. He has to.”

Clara's expression morphs from concern to absolute fury in the span of a few seconds. “Fucking
hell,” she spits. Her fingers are pressed against her ear as she rises to her feet again. The vomit lies
on her boots, forgotten. “Boss, you copy?”

“I copy. We're starting our ascent towards the swap site. Sleeping Beauty still out?” Hanzo can
hear Reyes' voice clear as day, even from the floor. Clara must have him on speakerphone.

“No. He's up, and he's telling me the Overwatch operatives are dead.”
“What?”

“He's claiming one of them sold the other six out. Says he saw him with Los Muertos with guns and laughter or something – he's having a hard time talking. Ralphed on my shoes. But the 'traitor' part was pretty fucking crystal.”

“Of course,” Reyes snarls, adding something foul in Spanish. “Fucking Morrison. Of course he had a rat and didn't know it, and of course I'm the one who's got to clean up the mess.” There's more angry muttering that Hanzo can't quite make out, and he thinks he hears some of the team in the background.

“Where are the bodies? I'm going to need proof.”


“You catch all that, Boss?” Clara looks mildly sickened with her lips drawn into a thin line, but she keeps her tone professional.

“Yeah.” Even Reyes sounds a little quiet. “Fuck. Alright, Clara, I'm keeping the line open. You and Shimada hook your end up to the computer and start recording. We're gonna need a confession out of the rat before he gets his brains blown out, or we're gonna get blamed for this whole debacle. You got it?”

“Got it, Boss.” Clara's started walking out of the cockpit and it takes all of Hanzo's energy to push himself to his feet to follow her.

Reyes voice echoes in the main hangar as he starts feeding Clara instructions – what to do, which wire to connect where. She's pulled the comm from her ear and placed it a nearby tray table as she taps something on a flatscreen console. Hanzo drops himself into a nearby seat, running his hands through his hair. The nausea isn't abating, and it's making it hard to think.

“Jesse's doing the dropoff.” That cuts through Hanzo's daze like a knife, twisting his head and pricking up his ears towards the sound of Reyes voice. “We're swapping comms now, so you'll be able to pick up everything the little prick says. And you'll probably be able to hear Morrison's rat talk, too.”

“I'm feelin' the love.” McCree's voice comes through the line – there's a fumbling sound, then a loud huff of breath. “Gross, Boss. Don't you ever clean your ears?”

Whatever Reyes barks in Spanish just gets a laugh from McCree. “Hey, Hanzo. You doing okay?”

“Focus, McCree,” Clara and Reyes say as one. Hanzo bristles at the insinuation. He isn't that distracting.

“I am fine,” he says curtly. It's a lie, but the pair had been right. McCree would need to focus.

“Why are you doing the exchange?”

“Because I'm just so damned charming. And because Robin fucked up Brazil- ow!”

“Do not be childish. They are well armed, McCree.”

“Aw. You worried about me?”
“FOCUS,” Reyes yells, right into the comm and presumably McCree's ear.

“Alright! Alright. Yeesh.” McCree sounds annoyed. “You know I'm good to go, Boss. I can drop six men without even-”

Clara plugs a thin cord into her comm, and the console screen lights up. “We should be recording now,” Clara cutting in over McCree. “Everything looks like it's all set.”

“Good.” Reyes sounds briefly smug. “Let's go paint Los Muertos red.”

“Boss, that was cheesy as shit.”

“MOVE!”

---

Once the banter between McCree and Reyes has died down the comm line is – remarkably quiet. Hanzo asks Clara a few times if she's sure the connection is still ongoing, and each confirmation is given with a little less patience.

Sometimes he can hear a twig snap, or the sound of leafy branches being pushed out of the way. Surely there's a paved road leading up to the mansion; but it seems Blackwatch is taking the road less traveled. Hiding the rest of the team from sight, perhaps.

Readying an ambush.

“I see them.” McCree's hushed voice cuts through the silence. “Less than a klick north, by the double-door garage. Seven- no. Eight men. One's in Overwatch's getup. White with a blonde buzzcut is all I can get from here. Looks like he's got a gun to his head.”

The bare-faced man. Hanzo swallows thickly, anger sparking up below his incessant nausea. “That is the one. He is going to lie to you.”

“I know.” McCree doesn't say anything else for a few moments, but there's quiet murmuring in the background. “Yeah, I gotcha. Huong and Tonya getting in position? Alright. Gimme the case and make sure it's latched this time, Robi- ow!”

Hanzo and Clara roll their eyes, back in the hangar.

McCree goes quiet again, and Hanzo has to strain his ears to hear the sound of the man's footsteps through underbrush. Then the sound of boots on something hard – concrete, or blacktop. McCree's approaching the swap site.

“Afternoon, fellas.” Something's barked back in Spanish and Hanzo can instantly picture guns being raised at McCree's head.

“No need for that.” McCree's voice is even, his tone easy-going. “Looking for this?” There's a small, metallic click – the case? More Spanish follows, then-

“Blackwatch?” English with no trace of an accent, and a voice quavering in fear. The bare-faced man. “You're-”
“Here to help,” McCree cuts in. “Don't worry. Your boss sent us here to play by the book. We all want a painless swap; we get the men, they get the money. Nice and easy.”

“You have to help us,” the man pleads. “Kimmy – she won't last much longer. She's diabetic, and-”

“Hey, hey.” McCree clicks his tongue, and Hanzo can imagine the look of false sympathy on his face. “Calm down. It's okay. We're gonna get you all out of here.” His voice doesn't sound anything but sincere and Hanzo is... quietly impressed. “So why don't they send you on over here?”

“What?” The man sounds surprised, then quickly recovers. “They won't let me- not without the money.” More Spanish, and the man lets out a whimper. “Please. They're going to kill me! All of us!”

“I just want to look you over,” McCree says easily. “Make sure there's no bomb strapped to you or nothing, you know? Blackwatch is an awful paranoid lot.”

“They-!”

“Have six other prisoners, right?” The bare-faced man goes silent. “I just want one. I'll look you over, then give them the money. And then they'll give me the other prisoners, right? Bet they're in that garage over there.”

Hanzo glances over at Clara. The woman's eyes are narrowed, her mouth set in a hard line. Her right hand drums impatiently on the table as she stares at the console.

“Just you,” McCree says coaxingly. “A show of good faith. Then they get two million dollars for the rest. Sounds pretty fair to me, wouldn't you say?”

There's an awkward silence that follows, broken by some muttered Spanish that lasts for a solid minute. McCree says nothing – he seems to be waiting patiently.

Finally, the sound of footsteps shuffling forward. “Please,” the man begs. “Don't do anything that would make them shoot. Kimmy-”

“Yeah, I bet she's a right sort. Come on over.”

Hanzo can hear the sound of the man approaching – careful steps that hesitate every so often before continuing.

“There you go. See? Nice and easy. No need to get jittery.” The footsteps stop in front of McCree. “How are your mates?”

“I told you, they-”

“You told me. But y'now, you didn't look me in the eyes when you said it.”

The man says nothing, but Hanzo's ears can pick up a harsh intake of breath.

“Two million dollars is a whole lot of money, y'know? Lot of folks get greedy for it. Especially if they're not all that confident 'bout what their mates have been planning. Some will take a much smaller cut, if they're certain they'll get it in exchange for some information. Did you really think all of them were keen on you? Really didn't notice the one ready to sell you out?”

Everything is silent, save for the sound of McCree's voice.
“I'd wager Kimmy was the one you hated most of all, wasn't she? Bettin' you listened to her scream when those dogs tore her op-”

“**KILL HIM!**” the man screams. "**ÉL SABE, KILL-!**"

There's a single gunshot, absolutely deafening over the comm as Hanzo slaps his hands over his ears. Rapid gunfire follows, drowning out the sounds of men shouting all around – chaos, all-consuming and followed by a rush of garbled static.

“**Jesse! Oi!**” Clara starts yelling obscenities into the comm, but McCree's not answering. The connection's fizzling and crackling loudly on the console; with a snarl of frustration, Clara yanks the cord out and the screen goes blank. She puts the comm back into her ear and taps it vigorously, switching between channels and barking out names and demands to respond.

No one does.

Hanzo's nausea is mounting again.

Clara pulls the device from her ear and slams it down onto the table with a snarl. “I'm going to wake the pilots out of recharge in the back,” she informs Hanzo through gritted teeth. “Stay in your seat. We're taking off in thirty-five, max.”

“What?” Hanzo stares at her in disbelief. “We cannot **leave.** Your men-”

“Have an agreement. When the lines go dead, you add fifteen minutes to the time it took them to reach the target from the drop point. If the team isn't back by then, whoever stayed behind leaves before they get found and overrun.”

“You cannot **do** that!”

“Ain't your call. Ain't mine either.” Clara's already walking away towards the back of the plane.

“Clara!”

She ignores him, disappearing into the cargo hold and leaving Hanzo staring angrily, helplessly at where the woman had once stood.

She would not really leave them – would she?

---

Thirty agonizing minutes pass.

Hanzo's nausea refuses to abate – the situation isn't helping it – and he's left slumped over in his seat instead of pacing around like he desperately wants to.

Clara is ignoring him. She'd brought the omnis back through the hold, giving them new orders that Hanzo loudly decries to no response. Her mouth's set in a hard line, shoulders squared.

“Give them more time,” Hanzo protests. It's been thirty-one minutes now, and Clara has begun strapping down parts of the hangar. “You do not know what has happened.”
“Neither do you.” It's the first thing she's said in half an hour, even with her back turned towards him. “You're an asset, Hanzo. But you're not Blackwatch. We have our own ways of doing things.”

“I am a person,” Hanzo snaps, bristling. “Not an asset for you to use as you please. If you leave-”

“Jesse?” Clara whirls on him with an accusing glare. “If I leave Jesse behind? Is that what you were going to say?”

“Any of them,” Hanzo corrects icily, ears pinning back. “Then I will do nothing for Blackwatch ever again.”

“Big fuckin' whoop. I'm not Reyes. If he bit it out there, someone else is gonna take over. And I'll bet your life that they're not going to be nearly as gracious about your insubordination and personal hang-ups as he is.”

She thinks Reyes is gracious to him?

Hanzo doesn't say anything else, because he's glanced at the clock.

It's been thirty-five minutes. But Clara's still in the middle of packing up the hangar – perhaps she hadn't noticed. He isn't going to be the one to point it out.

Five minutes tick by. Hanzo sits there, hands folded in his lap. If Clara's noticed he's watching her, she hasn't given any indication. She's picked the comm back up, tapping it in her palm and tossing it up and down like a small toy.

Five more minutes pass. Clara's pulled out a pack of gum – chomping and smacking a piece loudly between her teeth. Her eyes are closed, arms crossed as she leans against the wall.

Another five, and Clara's pushing herself up off the wall. When her eyes open, she looks – tired.


Hanzo opens his mouth to protest – and is interrupted by a loud beep. There's a turning of gears, and the hangar door opens.

Blackwatch operatives pour into the plane like panicked rats, their shouts filling the room. Men and women are stripping off their gear and aiding others onto the plane – one man's limping badly, and being held up by two others. Reyes steps onboard with a grim expression, the calm amid the storm. He's got someone Hanzo can't quite see slung over his shoulders.

“Shouldn't still be here,” he directs gruffly at Clara. “It's far past time.”

“Wasn't my fault, Boss.” Her tone is easy, relieved. “Hanzo tried comin' at me like a jungle puma. Feared for my life, I did.”

Hanzo looks briefly scandalized until Reyes grunts, clearly not buying it. “I'll write you up later. Get us airborne. EVERYONE, SEATS. NOW.” He bends over, dumping the body he'd been carrying into the seat beside Hanzo.

Hanzo's breath catches painfully.

It's McCree. The man's shirt is splattered with dark blood stains leading down from his right shoulder. His body slumps as soon as Reyes drops him, eyes closed and his mouth slightly agape. There's a steady trickle of blood dripping out of both ears.
Something tears open within Hanzo – he can feel it being ripped apart, ugly and raw. The dragons snarl beneath his skin, crackling with energy and a surge of hatred so sudden and powerful that the room tilts before his eyes and he’s forced to briefly close them.

“What happened?” Clara demands, asking the words Hanzo has stuck in his throat.

“Knocked out our communicators. Morrison’s rat probably told them how, so that’s gonna be something to look forward to for future encounters.” Hanzo can hear Reyes taking the seat on Hanzo’s opposite side. ‘Big fuckin’ electro-sound-pulse from God knows what, probably something they threw together like a coupla chimps. McCree got the worst of it, being closest. Got his ears fried and **YANG YOU GOT ABOUT FIVE FUCKING SECONDS TO SIT YOUR ASS DOWN!”**

“That blood his?”

“Nah. Rat's. McCree dropped him soon as he started shouting. Vihaan took a bullet to the thigh, but everyone else scraped out fine. We-” The sound of the plane starting up overrides whatever else Reyes had been about to say. Engines roar to life, drowning out the chatter of the men currently strapping themselves in.

Hanzo isn't listening to them anyway. His eyes have opened again and are back on McCree, on this unconscious, bloodied man. Is he dead? Reyes would have said something if he was dead. Wouldn't he?

Clara drops into the seat next to McCree, leaning over to begin buckling him down. “He'll be fine,” she says, not unkindly. “Jesse's taken worse hits than this.”

Hanzo reaches for McCree’s arm and brings it upward, placing it in his own lap. He presses two clawed fingers to the man’s wrist, feeling for a pulse.

There. Weaker than he liked, but there. Steady beneath his fingertips. Hanzo's hand slides downward, fingers gently curling around McCree's limp ones. He keeps McCree's arm in his lap. He knew he'd just keep checking the pulse, one way or another.

*Jesse's taken worse hits than this.*

He should have killed those men in the basement, whether Reyes liked it or not.

“What now, Boss?” Clara’s finished tidying McCree up – even set that stupid hat properly straight on his head. She keeps shooting Hanzo glances, obviously off-put by his silence and stony expression.

Reyes leans back in his seat, pulling off his gloves to run a hand over his face. “You get everything recorded?”

“Yeah. Double-checked it. We have what we need.”

Reyes lifts his gaze to the ceiling, sighing through his nose.

“Now, we deal with Morrison.”
Chapter 16

Commander Jack Morrison turns out to be a lot bigger than he'd seemed on the screen of Reyes' tablet. Hanzo had watched through the windows of their underground hangar when his unmarked plane had docked; Reyes had been waiting to the side with folded arms and a scowl that had been permanently etched into his face all week.

The plane's hangar door had opened and troops in blue uniforms had begun marching out in perfect alignment. They'd stopped, turned, and snapped their hands up in a salute to the man that strode past them – their Commander.

Morrison is taller than Hanzo, but Reyes doesn't give him an inch. Literally. The two men are toe to toe at equal heights, and had been standing far too close than was personable as each had sized the other up. Morrison, at least, had seemed to be trying to keep his expression neutral with mild displeasure. Reyes had been outright sneering.

Hanzo had watched as they exchanged quick words he couldn't hear before Reyes had given a sarcastic little bow and both commanders had swept from the room.

Morrison is also a lot louder in real life than he'd been on the screen, and Hanzo had been surprised to find that Reyes had an equal not only in height, but also in volume.

Their shouting matches rock the base almost hourly. The two men had locked themselves in a conference room for privacy – not that they'd had much. A small crowd continually mills in the hall outside their door, Overwatch agents and Blackwatch alike – Hanzo can only pick them out by their crests. Overwatch with the simple 'O-V' as he liked to call it; Blackwatch, with the bizarre skeleton goat head. Each sends the other equally poisonous looks, and every single person has a different excuse as to why they were there. Making sure one's commander didn't kill the other seemed to be the most common one.

Not that Hanzo is joining them. He'd been sitting in his wheelchair around the corner, peeking out every so often. His hoodie is pulled up and over his horns, helping him do his best not to be seen. He'd fidgeted with the form in his lap for the first hour or so, but now it's so wrinkled that he doesn't dare touch it further.

Eventually, the conference door slams open and the commanders storm out, the sea of agents parting like waves. Morrison's composure is fully lost and when he whirls back around to face Reyes, it's to stab a finger at his face.

“You don't know that, Gabriel! You don't have the intel to back any of this up!”

“Are you losing your hearing along with your hair, Morrison?! Or did you fuck up remedial Spanish so bad that you don't understand èl sabe?!”

The agents surrounding them are spilling to either side – each physically backing up their respective commander as the two men stand mere inches away from each other. Hanzo is reminded briefly of two mountain rams he'd once seen butting heads, horns locked and tangled.

“This was supposed to be simple, Gabriel! We had the money! My men-”

“Were DEAD! They'd been dead before we ever touched down!”

“You don't know that! You couldn't have known that before you went in guns blazing, like
always!

“Go get their fucking bodies yourself, Jack! The coroners can tell you time of death on what's left of them in that stinking dog pit!” An disgusted murmur rises through the Overwatch operatives and some shift uncomfortably. “I'm not sending my team in to die to clean up an Overwatch shitshow! Stop trying to pin this on me because you didn't vet your men properly! You let a traitor in, Jack!”

Morrison physically recoils and the mutters grow louder, angrier on the Overwatch side. A few Blackwatch members jeer – Reyes silences them with a look so furious that even Hanzo wheels back a little.

“Tempers are too high,” Morrison says after a moment, voice strained and tight. “We will discuss this later, Commander Reyes.”

“Fuck off, Jack.”

Morrison turns away without another word. He sweeps down the hallway with his long coat billowing after him and after taking a moment to mutter and glare, his operatives do the same. The Blackwatch agents disperse the moment Reyes turns his seething gaze on them – leaving the hallway almost empty in mere seconds.

It's just Hanzo and Reyes now, the latter who is currently dragging his hands down his face and muttering murderously.

It seemed like as good a time to approach as any.

Reyes scowls at Hanzo as he wheels up, giving the chair a disapproving eye. “Hasn't Angela got you walking yet?”

“I have been able to walk for a small amount of time for several weeks now,” Hanzo drones dully. “But I did not feel like guessing how many hours you were going to take in there.” He takes the paper from his lap and holds it outward. “Angela needs you to sign this.”

Reyes takes the form with one hand, giving it a quick glance-over. “This ain't for you. What, is she having you play messenger pigeon for her?”

“Yes,” Hanzo answers, voice equally dull.

“And you said yes because...?”

“Because she wanted me out of her lab. And said I could come back in if I did this for her.”

The look Reyes gives him is long and calculating. Hanzo doesn't like it, but he's too tired to snap at him about it.

“She's right, though. You can't spend your whole day cooped up in there. Ain't healthy.”

“I am not concerned with my health, so do not concern yourself. Sign the form.”

Reyes is still looking at him, eyes slightly narrowed. “What if instead of signing it, I let Clara take you topside today? Keep you away from Morrison's crowd. I can bring this to Angela myself.”

“No, thank you,” Hanzo says shortly.

“We got movies in the break room. I could set you up with some. Seen you with Alex, they make damned good popcorn.”
“I would prefer you to simply sign.”

“Course you would,” Reyes mutters. He fishes a pen out of his pocket, slapping the paper against the wall as he leans in to scribble his signature. “There.” He tosses the paper down – Hanzo has to reach out to snatch it from the air. “You're fucking impatient, you know that? Just give him a little time.”

Hanzo doesn't bother to acknowledge that, wheeling around to head back the way he came. “Thank you for the signature.”

Reyes snorts angrily from behind him.

“No one ever listens to me.”

---

Angela is reading when Hanzo re-enters the lab. She's got her legs tucked sideways on the small fold-out couch and her back propped up with two-pillows. Figures a doctor would be a stickler for spinal support.

“Welcome back.” Angela greets him with a smile, as if she was not the one who had forced him to leave in the first place. “You were gone for quite some time. How are you feeling?”

“Your form,” Hanzo says coldly. He holds out the wrinkled piece of paper. “Reyes signed it.”

“Please walk it towards me. You mustn't rely on your chair so much, Hanzo. Strength will only come with practice.”

Hanzo gnashes his teeth, hating her. But he plants his hands on the armrests and gets to his feet with only the slightest wobble. He takes slow, careful steps across the lab and when he's reached her, he snaps out his arm and throws the paper in her face.

It's not an effective gesture. He hasn't crumpled it, so it just sort of... glides haphazardly through the air before landing at her feet. Instead of offended, she looks amused as she puts her book down and bends to retrieve the form.

“It would be good for you to seek emotional therapy as well, you know. I have a friend with excellent credentials. Perhaps we can even get you on some SSRI's, if you're agreeable to it.”

“How is McCree?” Hanzo asks, ignoring her.

“The same. How are our commanders getting on?”

“Like angry rams.” It's enough to draw a laugh out of her. Angela's getting to her feet now, shrugging on her white coat and picking up the clipboard she'd left abandoned on the couch. “Could you not hear them?”

“Our labs are soundproof. A necessary precaution, for both privacy and to smother cries of pain.”

Hanzo doesn't care for Angela's sense of humor sometimes. Her profession has made it... odd.

He waits for her as she mills about the room. There's beakers to be filled, centrifuges to be spun.
She’s got a pyramid of urine samples stacked in a transparent fridge that she's been continually monitoring for something all week.

It's always like this. The waiting period. He begrudges her for it, but only a little. She has other things to do. He can be patient, despite what Reyes claimed.

This entire week has been an exercise in patience.

He's not sure how much time passes. He's slumped against a white wall, repeatedly thumping his horns against it before Angela straightens up from the counter she'd been bent over and motions to him.

“Alright. I'm going to check on them now.”

Hanzo pushes himself off the wall, following her as she crosses the room and stops before a thick, metal door. She holds out her ID from around her neck to the scanner – after a quick read, it beeps and flashes green.

Hanzo would have destroyed it already, if he wasn't quietly worried about overstepping and knocking out the lab's life support systems too.

Angela's twisted the handle and is now holding the door open for him – Hanzo brushes past her and heads straight for the farthest corner.

The small room is packed with hospital-style beds, all lined parallel in rows. There are enough cots for twelve patients – but currently, there's only two occupying beds.

The man named Vihaan who had taken a bullet to the thigh is laid out in the farthest lefthand corner, reading a magazine with his head cushioned against a pillow. Lilac is at his bedside, jotting down something on her clipboard. The pair look up as Angela and Hanzo enter the room, giving each a polite nod.

Hanzo walks past them without so much as a second glance. Instead he pulls up a stool to the bed opposite Vihaan and casts a tired gaze down on the occupant.

Angela had been right. McCree does look the same. The man hasn't moved at all since his last visit – still lying in the same position on his back, his mouth covered by the plastic oxygen mask Angela had outfitted on him. The bandages on his ears look new, at least.

He'd been unconscious for days now, but Angela swore it was normal.

“Do not fret. It is my doing. We heal faster in sleep than we could ever hope in the waking world. The more he rests, the quicker he can return to us.”

Hanzo hadn't been allowed inside the lab when McCree was first brought back from the mission. He'd been told the man had woken briefly, only to shout a lot of 'WHAT? 's and done some uncoordinated, panicked flailing before Angela had sent him under again.

Ruptured ear drums, she'd said. Hearing loss and dizziness – but it was all temporary, provided they stayed any sign of infection.

_He is the same. He will be fine. Be patient, Hanzo._

Hanzo leans forward, folding his arms on the bed and resting his forehead atop them.
Clara and Alex have been stopping by Hanzo's room to chat almost daily. He'd abandoned Jake's – there was no need for it, now that his own room is once again accessible.

The plants McCree is supposed to be tending to are probably dead by now. Hanzo doesn't care.

Alex is his favorite visitor, because whatever they ask him is never about McCree. They're curious about his past – his home life, his favorite types of food, even his brother. It's easier to talk about nowadays, so Hanzo's more than happy to indulge.

Clara is... uncomfortable. It feels like she's coming by because she's somehow obligated to. Their conversations are short and brusque, and usually ended with her giving him a piece of advice that he doesn't want and had never asked for in the first place. She seems almost frustrated by him, and he doesn't know why.

Once, it had been Lance. He'd been all smiles, sympathy and silver-tongued and in a moment of weakness, Hanzo had allowed him in.

He'd been nice, surprisingly. No flirting, no shameless gazes that set Hanzo's teeth on edge. Just pats on the back, a squeeze on the shoulder. Hanzo had tolerated the light touches and Lance had left without a fuss and a simple promise to be there if Hanzo needed him.

Hanzo doesn't need him. He doesn't need Lance or Alex or Reyes' strange bouts of kindness, and he especially doesn't need Clara's special brand of passive-aggression. What he needs is for his dragons to settle.

He hadn't told Angela or Reyes about it; the last thing he wants is them thinking he doesn't have perfect control over what Blackwatch sees as weapons. He isn't even sure if Angela knows about the spirits. He isn't going to be the one to tell the doctor if Reyes is keeping her in the dark.

Eri and Ami are furious. Their anger hasn't abated since McCree was first brought in – a constant, churning unpleasantness that simmers hot in his veins. At first, he'd been deeply affected – snapping at every little thing, snarling at the most minor of inconveniences. But as the days passed and their fury remained, he'd found himself simply exhausted by the emotional toll they were causing.

He'd reached out, tried to speak to them – but they aren't receptive. They shy away from him, preferring to curl around each other and grumble in tandem. They would only ever say one thing, over and over.

Go to him.

It's frustrating. Hanzo wants to lay in his own bed, watch movies on the phone – to exist peacefully, alone. But every time he attempts to do so, the dragons' anger would curl up in his gut like searing lead. They don't want to let him relax. They want him to be back in the lab so they could watch over McCree, like they're suddenly his guardians now.

Reasoning with them doesn't work. Ignoring them didn't work. Hanzo has a very strong will – but theirs is stronger. He'd eventually give in, again and again, and wheel himself back to the lab as everyone around him tutted in sympathy and clicked their tongues. Like he's the one with a fretting problem.

The dragons are sated, for now. Pleased little purrs vibrate beneath Hanzo's skin at his proximity to the sleeping man.

McCree always looks so peaceful whenever Hanzo comes to visit, and he almost resents the man
for it. He wants to swap places, to be the one in the bed who's happily oblivious to the world.

He can hear Angela approaching but he doesn't bother to lift his head up. She's going to do what she always does – run some tests Hanzo doesn't fully understand, change out the IV's, and give Hanzo little looks of sympathy that made him want to poke his claws into her neck.

He closes his eyes, listening to her work above him. The heart monitor is a steady stream of soft, repetitive beeps that fills the relative silence between them.

“You know,” Angela remarks suddenly. “You remind me of Gabriel.”

Hanzo opens his eyes for that and lifts his head to stare at her, disgust plain on his face.

She laughs. “I did not mean it as an insult. He comes here as well, in the late hours of the night. I've seen him on our cameras.”

How nice. Unrestrained access is a luxury Hanzo does not share.

“And,” Angela continues, “with the commander visiting - it makes me recall a time where Gabriel was in the same position as you, and Jack was the one lying in my beds.”

“What? Reyes hates that man.”

“Ah. I don't know about that,” Angela muses. Her smile fades slightly. “At the very least, it did not used to be so. They were the closest of friends, once.”

“What happened?”

“Politics. Words that should have been said, but were not. When Jack was lying here, far before the tensions started, Gabriel would come to see him every day. Even if Jack was unconscious the whole time, he would come and he would sit beside him as you do. A few times, he'd even refuse to leave.” Angela reaches up to unhook a bag off the IV stand. “Jack stabilized eventually, and awoke when Gabriel was out on a mission. I never told him about the time Gabriel had spent at his side, and I do not think Gabriel ever mentioned it either. Nowadays, I feel I should have said something. It feels far too late for it now.”

“Why are you telling me this?” Hanzo asks suspiciously.

“Words are difficult, sometimes. And you are a very prideful person.” Hanzo makes an affronted noise, but Angela keeps talking. “But I think there are things you want to say to Jesse, and that is why you are here so often. I simply do not want you to back out once he is awake and can hear what those words are. That is what Gabriel did, and I do not wish to see it happen again.”

“You do not know me,” Hanzo replies coldly. “And you assume incorrectly. I do not have to explain myself to you.”

“No, you do not.” Angela finishes swapping out the bags and takes out her clipboard from under her arm. “But I wonder how you explain your actions to yourself?”

Hanzo's lips curl in a snarl, but Angela's already turned away. She walks to Vihaan's bed, carrying out a brief discussion with Lilac before the two women seem to decide on something and exit the room altogether.

Hanzo shoots Vihaan an accusatory look, but the man hasn't said a word. He seems fully absorbed in his magazine, or is doing a very good job of pretending to be.

Ah.

There was an idea.

Hanzo gives Vihaan another glance and the man is still ignoring him beautifully. Hanzo settles his chin back down atop his folded arms with a huff.

“Who does Angela think she is?” he mutters softly, keeping to his mother tongue. “What could I have to say to you that you do not already know?”

McCree, of course, gives no sign that he can hear Hanzo's quiet Japanese mumbling.

“You have already called yourself my friend. If I can have a friend, you are the closest thing to it. You think I would allow you to touch me so casually if not?”

The heart monitor beeps on, steady as always.

“I do not why you stuck yourself to me,” Hanzo continues. “I was so cold to you. I hated you the moment I saw you, and it only deepened when you spoke. But then I got to know you, I suppose. You are many things – some annoying – but you are also absurdly kind.”

Hanzo reaches out to gently touch the side of McCree's wrist. Feeling the soft pulse beneath his fingertips. “It is boring here, without you,” Hanzo admits after a moment. “And the nights are getting colder. Your heat is wasted in this bed. You should be in mine, instead.”

He instantly flushes as the last two lines replay in his mind. “That is not what I meant,” he hisses, even if McCree has not done so much as twitch. “I-” A long pause follows as he searches for the words.

“Of course you know that is not what I meant,” Hanzo says finally, fatigue settling into his voice. “I would not presume you to have any sort of romantic intentions towards me.” Hanzo is acutely aware of the sharp ends of his nails now, placed just above McCree's delicate, tanned skin. “I wonder why I have never seen you with another, though. You are charming and handsome, when you want to be. Surely you've courted at least some of your fellow agents, or bedded starstruck civilians on missions. I would not put the latter past you.”

If McCree hasn't, he's not conscious enough to defend himself. Hanzo feels it's time to change the subject either way.

“You need to wake up soon. Eri and Ami – the dragons, you remember – they're upset. Clara and Alex and Lance are all pitying me. Even Reyes is being nice. It feels wrong.” Hanzo gives McCree's wrist a gentle flick. “Wake up.”

McCree doesn't move, and Hanzo sighs.

“Hurry up and heal,” he mutters, closing his eyes and burying his face in his arms.

“I miss you.”
Chapter 17

The sound of the clinic door opening and shutting rouses Hanzo from his doze at McCree's bedside. He briefly assumes it's Angela or Lilac coming back for more tests – but his ears swivel up at the sound of footfalls far too heavy to belong to either doctor. He opens his eyes immediately and turns his head towards the sound.

It's Jack Morrison. The man looks utterly exhausted, but he's still clad in his blue uniform and long coat – he offers a quick salute to Vihaan before walking down towards Hanzo and McCree.

The dragons bristle as Morrison stops a few feet away, casting a glance at the bed before lowering his gaze down to Hanzo. The commander looks him over thoroughly before folding his arms behind his back and offering a small smile.

“Greetings. Angela told me you'd be in here. You are Hanzo Shimada?”

“Why are you looking for me?” Hanzo asks crisply. Even his scales feel on edge.

“I'm not. I came to see Jesse.” Morrison turns his head towards the sleeping man. “I read what happened to him in the mission details.”

“Mission details that you are contesting,” Hanzo replies coolly. Morrison looks back at him, and there's a sudden hard set to his jaw.

“Commander Reyes informed me weeks ago of your situation. I understand that he's having you feed him information on the Shimada clan, revenge for your genetically altered state.”

So that was the story being told. “Yes,” Hanzo lies. “That is correct.”

“And even without being one of his men, he's already turned you against me?”

“I am not turned against you because of Reyes. I am displeased because you are here to visit a man who was injured getting a confession – a confession you seem to be rejecting. Or did you wish to see if he is faking his wounds?”

Morrison sighs through his nose. He casts his gaze back at McCree. “I know Reyes isn't lying to me. And I know he wouldn't have risked Jesse for nothing.”

“Commander Reyes and I are in disagreement because it is not about me or what I think. There are seven families demanding answers for why their loved one is dead. I don't know how Reyes knew there was a rat, or found out what happened. However he got the intel, he's not giving it to me. I have no proof for my superiors. I don't even have bodies to bury.”

“You have superiors?” Hanzo asks in surprise.

“Of course. A Strike-Commander commands, well, the strikes. The operations. The funding for Overwatch and Blackwatch come from above me, and I have to answer to them to keep all of us running. Taxes to fund us are also collected from civilians under participating governments, so every one of them is someone that I am obligated to serve.”

Hanzo goes quiet for a few moments after that. Morrison doesn't break it, still standing there
impassively and watching Jesse sleep.

“Maybe you should trust him.”

Morrison glances down in surprise at Hanzo. “What?”

“Reyes. Maybe it's better you don't know how he finds things out. Let him take care of problems like traitors for you, outside of Overwatch.”

Morrison purses his lips. “My superiors wouldn't find that very reassuring.”

“Well,” Hanzo says, turning away to settle his arms back on McCree's bed. “Maybe you should tell them to trust him too.”

Morrison doesn't say anything in return. Hanzo doesn't care. He's laying his head down atop his arms again, letting his eyes close.

Eventually, Morrison's footsteps retreat and Hanzo is once again left alone at McCree's side.

How he prefers it.

–

Hanzo isn't sure what passes between Morrison and Reyes after his bedside chat with the commander, but there's a distinct lack of shouting in the halls outside his bedroom the next day. Alex stops around noon by to coax and wheedle Hanzo into visiting the mess hall.

“C'mon. Taco Tuesday. Even you should like that.”

He doesn't. Tacos are messy, and this Kopi that McCree had spoken fondly of adds too much spice to the meat for Hanzo's taste.

His lack of appetite at the table doesn't seem to bother its other inhabitants. Alex and someone – Juan, isn't it? - are striking up a conversation about preferred ballistic practice techniques. Lance is attempting to do the same with Hanzo on the subject of Reyes’ mood swings, but Hanzo can't muster the energy to pretend to be interested. Clara is sitting silently, crunching on a taco shell that is positively oozing hot sauce.

“I heard Angela and Morrison are packing it in soon.”

That's enough to get Hanzo's attention. He lifts his gaze up from his lap and focuses it on Juan.

“What?”

“Yeah.” The man slurps loudly from his soda cup. “Morrison's heading back to the Swiss HQ. Taking all his personnel with him, Angela included. Not sure what she was here for anyway.”

“She was here for me.” Everyone's brows go up, save Clara. “And she is taking care of McCree. What is going to happen to him if she leaves?”

“Nothing.” Clara is finally speaking, but she sounds bored. “He's gonna be fine. Lillian can handle some busted ears with her eyes closed.”
“Who?”

Clara rolls her eyes. “Doctor Lilac, lizard-lips.”

Hanzo bristles visibly and the rest of the table goes quiet. “Do you have a problem, Clara?”

“Yeah. It's called you.” Clara drops her half-eaten taco onto her tray and stands up. “Stop pining. It's annoying.”

Hanzo snarls and the rest of the table flinches - but the woman's already put her back to him.

“Don't mind her,” Alex says after Clara's stormed through the hall's double doors.

“Why is she-”

“Clara is our communications expert, and she's Jesse's best friend. Both of those things got knocked out at once, and she wasn't there to help.”

“What does that have to do with-?”

“You tell me,” Alex cuts in with a shrug. “Only you and Reyes seem to know why you were on-board in the first place, and why he said she needed to stay with you. Unless you want to elaborate?”

“No,” Hanzo snaps. He pulls up his chair's brake and rolls back from the table. “I am going to my room.”

Alex gives him a wave, unphased by his glowering demeanor. “See ya, Hanzo.” A chorus of bye's sound off from Lance and Juan as Hanzo merely grumbles back and rolls himself out of the hall.

–

When Hanzo finally reaches the hallway to his room, he's absolutely seething. Clara's outburst is testing his own patience, and the dragons are drawing on his fury and adding it to their own. Which in turn, rebounds back to him. A wonderful little cycle of an ever-increasing foul mood.

Hanzo rounds the corner, ready to collapse into his bed – only to see Angela exiting out of his door.

“What were you doing in there?” he demands instantly, wheeling up to her. “How did you even-”

Angela holds up her ID card and smiles. “Master key. But there is no need for temper. I was dropping off a gift, that's all.”

“Because you are leaving.”


“Oh. Yes, I am. I've spent too much time here already, but...” Her eyes travel down him. “You were a very interesting patient. Doctor Lilac will be taking over your physical therapy from here on out.”

“And what about McCree? And Vihaan,” Hanzo adds begrudgingly.
“Oh, I am not worried about McCree.” Angela’s still smiling, her eyes kind.

“And Vihaan?”

“I am not worried about Vihaan, either.”

“I want to see him. McCree.” Hanzo taps an irritated claw on his armrest. “Are you going to the lab?”

“I am,” Angela admits. “But I won't take you with me. I'm in the middle of packing.”

“So? Let me into the patient room, I will stay out of your way.”

“Ah, no. Far too many delicate instruments are out and about.”

“Angela.”

“Hanzo, go to your room.” Angela looks briefly surprised, then covers her mouth to muffle a giggle. “Ah! I sound just like my mother.”

Hanzo grits his teeth, holding back a frustrated snarl. “Fine. I will come by later.” He angrily punches numbers on his keypad as Angela lets out a little click of her tongue.

“Well,” she murmurs. “I don't know about that.”

“What?”

“Goodbye, Hanzo.” She's turning to leave, a little backwards wave over her shoulder. “I hope to see you again before my flight departs.”

Hanzo yanks down on the door handle, throwing it open and shooting her an aggravated look. “Of course you will s-”

“Hey.”

Hanzo’s head automatically turns.

McCree is sitting on the edge of his bed.

The man's sporting a hospital gown and a sheepish look, both hands folded in his lap. His hair looks like a case of extreme bedhead and the bandages covering his ears are still in place, but he looks otherwise... lucid.

Awake.

Hanzo stares at him in disbelief.

“Heard I was out for a bit,” McCree says, his voice impossibly gentle. Like Hanzo is some sort of a spooked cat. It was quite possible he looked like one. “Angela says I took a bit of a knock to the noggin.”

“You-”

“Woke up this morning,” McCree supplies. “After she was done poking and prodding at me, took me here. Said it looked like I'd healed nicely, but-” His speech halts briefly as Hanzo shuts the door without looking back. “Ah, but she wanted an extra pair of eyes on me.”
Hanzo says nothing. He plants his hands on his armrests and rises up from his chair, McCree flashing him a briefly nervous look.

“Y’aint sayin much,” McCree mumbles as Hanzo takes one step after another towards him. “Kinda worryin’ me here.”

“Shut up.” Hanzo stops before him, right between the man's spread legs over the side of the bed. He places one hand on the man's shoulder.

McCree looks downright wary. “Y'gonna hit me?”

“Shut up,” Hanzo repeats, and shoves McCree hard.

The cowboy falls backwards onto the bed with a yelp, and barely has time to stutter out a half-formed question before Hanzo is kneeling down over him. He curls his claws in the thin fabric covering McCree's chest and lays himself atop the man, burying his face against McCree's neck.

“Hanzo-!”

“How many times must I tell you to be silent?” Hanzo asks hoarsely, voice muffled against McCree. “I do not want you to speak. I want you to hold me.”

McCree lets out a soft oh, and Hanzo can feel the man's chest lower with a long exhale. McCree's arms come up, covering Hanzo's back in a gentle embrace as he pulls him closer and rolls, sending them both onto their sides.

A hand touches the back of Hanzo's head, and for a moment he thinks McCree is going to re-position him – but it merely trails downward, stroking through Hanzo's hair before stopping to gently cup the base of his skull. McCree's other arm is positioned in a curl beneath his own head, propping the man's neck slightly up so he's not squashing the bandages on his ears. Their legs tangle together haphazardly, and Hanzo is briefly self-conscious of his metal, uncomfortable prosthetics – but McCree's letting out a pleased little rumble. He doesn't seem to mind.

“Oh, Hanzo,” McCree sighs. “I'm real sorry 'bout leavin' you.”

“No talking,” Hanzo mutters against his neck.

“Right, right.” Hanzo's ears flick as he feels a gentle kiss pressed against his temple. He immediately tenses in McCree's arms.

McCree's chin tilts a little, like he's trying to get a look at Hanzo. “Too much?”

Hanzo feels like he's swallowed a pinecone. “That is... intimate,” he finally mumbles.

McCree shifts slightly, lifting his arm to gently tuck a strand of hair behind Hanzo's twitching ear. “Well, I was plannin' on holding you real close the rest of the night. Didn't think it was much more intimate than that. But you tell me to stop an' I'll st-”

“Enough,” Hanzo interrupts, feeling his face begin to flush. “Do what you want. But do not let go of me.” He can feel his legs twitch and skin itch – the dragons are stirring beneath his skin, purring their approval. “I am cold.”

“Alright.” McCree sounds a little amused. “Alright. I gotcha.” Another kiss is pressed just above Hanzo's right eye, and he can feel his face scrunch slightly at the contact. “You just let out a holler if you want me to stop, though.”
Hanzo says nothing, pressing his burning face further against McCree's neck. He can feel the cowboy's throat vibrate from a soft chuckle and a large, strong hand comes to rest on his hip.

They lay there like that for a long while. It's not until Hanzo's fifth shiver that McCree finally untangles them to pull the covers up over themselves – only to immediately tug Hanzo back into his arms, tucking his chin over the smaller man's head. There's another soft kissing sound, and Hanzo's nose wrinkles.

“Did you just kiss my horns?”

“Mm. Wait, can you feel that?”

“No. They are horns.”

Another chuckle from McCree. “Alright. Just curious. Old tale about... well, never mind.”

Hanzo grumbles, burying his face into the crook of McCree's shoulder. “Shut up, idiot cowboy. Go to sleep.”

“I've had plenty o' rest. But you go right ahead. I ain't goin' anywhere.”

Hanzo huffs, closing his eyes. McCree lets out another rumbling chuckle, warm breath tickling the top of Hanzo's head. His flimsy hospital gown is soft beneath Hanzo's clutching claws.

Angela's voice surfaces in Hanzo's mind as he lays there, listening to McCree breathe.

_You remind me of Gabriel._

_Words that should have been said, but were not._

_I think there are things you want to say to Jesse._

“I missed you,” Hanzo mumbles quietly.

McCree's hand squeezes gently on his hip.

“I know.”
Chapter 18

Hanzo's awoken the following mornings with a kiss.

The placement varies. Sometimes it's his forehead, sometimes his neck. The latter is the most effective at rousing him; McCree's scruff tickled and makes him squirm. Once it had been on the cusp of his ear and he'd been roused by McCree's soft swears – apparently, his ear had violently twitched and swatted the man's face like a fly.

After the first night, Hanzo had moved into McCree's room. As far as possessions went, Hanzo only has clothes to bring over; but he'd also taken the pillows and comforter from his own bed and added it to McCree's. A plush paradise of his own creation.

McCree always takes the first shower. The kiss is an alarm clock that allows Hanzo to slowly rouse himself, stretching and yawning – and usually ends with him flopping down and burrowing back under the covers. Only once he hears the shower being shut off would Hanzo would reluctantly roll himself out of bed and shuffle over to the bathroom door.

McCree would exit, Hanzo would enter. The steam from the man's shower was a small source of warmth as Hanzo would shimmy out of his pajama clothes and quickly step into the pre-heated shower. Once he's finished depleting Blackwatch's hot water supply and wrapped a towel around his waist, McCree would knock on the door.

Hanzo would let him in and they'd stand side by side at the fogged up mirror. They'd wipe it down and then begin brushing their teeth, combing their hair and in McCree's case, trimming their facial scruff. The sight always makes Hanzo wonder when his own would come in, but he never voices it. Instead, he would use McCree's hand lotion to rub down his patches of scales. The first time he'd done it had been out of curiosity – now, he couldn't get enough of how much better he feels after he applies it.

They always ordered their food to be brought to their room. The first day of their renewed cohabitation, McCree had begun to leave for the mess hall with the promise to bring something back for Hanzo. The man had gotten as far as the door before the dragons snarled within Hanzo, and before he fully realized what he was doing, Hanzo had grabbed McCree by the arm and forcibly thrown him back on the bed.

The dragons were opposed to the idea of McCree leaving their sight, to put it mildly. Hanzo had profusely apologized and reluctantly explained the sudden surge of possessiveness that had sprung up from them following McCree's injuries. The cowboy seemed to have taken it in stride. He'd pet Hanzo's hair with a small smile, commented on how special they were making him feel and agreed to let Hanzo abuse the room service privilege Reyes had granted him on first arrival. At least until the dragons had settled a little better.

McCree hasn't asked if they're calming their possessive urges over the following days, which Hanzo is grateful for.

Because they aren't.

Once the food is ordered, they'd settle back on the bed with the phone and pick out something to watch or a playlist to listen to. McCree would lay on his back most of the time and hold the phone in the air while Hanzo curls up on his side to rest his head on the man's chest. His pecs are soft and squishy like warm pillows, even if McCree doesn't like being told that.
“I’m in good shape! World's strongest man is fat as hell, it don't mean nothin'. Stop bullyin' me.”

The food would arrive, and after the spilled cereal disaster, they’d begun moving to eat on the floor instead of the bed. Once finished they’d straighten up, brush their teeth again and leave the dirtied dishes outside their door before making their way to Angela's lab – Hanzo in his chair, and McCree pushing him along.

It isn't really Angela's lab anymore, though. She'd left with Morrison three days ago, and Hanzo and McCree had slept right through it. They’d only found out from a call from Alex, informing them that Morrison had been asking for them hours ago.

Hanzo feels a little bad about it. Angela had said she wanted to see him again, and he hadn't made the time for her. They’d had their differences, and he still believed she’d been plucking his scales - but she’d also been kind to him on several occasions. She had deserved a farewell, at the very least.

Lilac's in charge of the lab now – probably had been from the start, before Angela arrived - and is tasked with both McCree's checkups and Hanzo's continued physical therapy. Under the guise of helping her save time, they'd offered to do both at the same time.

Hanzo would do his stair exercises, his side-steps and his braids while Lilac would examine McCree's ears. Angela had left behind her pain serum that Lilac is much more generous with. Hanzo wasn't sure if it was safe, but he feels damned good when it's in his system.

“You're both doing nicely,” she'd inform them. “You especially, Hanzo. Angela's notes indicated that you would often fight her on certain exercises – has something changed?”

His mood had, but he isn't going to discuss it with her.

“I just like you better,” he'd said instead, drawing a smile from her and a knowing chuckle from McCree.

Once they’d finished with Lilac, the pair would usually spend the rest of the day in their room. Sometimes people would stop by to see McCree, usually interrupting a movie or a nap Hanzo was taking on the man's chest. Alex is a frequent visitor – they'd brought McCree a small bottle of bourbon, delivered with a light punch to the man's shoulder.

“You were worrying people, asshole. You know what it's like to deal with a cranky Clara all day?”

Clara herself had stopped by only once, to exchange some sort of silent conversation with McCree that was done purely through varied looks and eyebrow ticks. She'd left shortly after throwing a pack of gum at his head and announcing that McCree was, in fact, the most annoying bastard she'd ever met.

Juan and Lance often visited as a pair. While Juan was sitting on the bed with McCree, talking about how people had been missing him on the shooting range, Lance had taken Hanzo aside to pose a question.

“So,” he'd murmured, gesturing slightly to the room. “Are you two...? Y’know.”

Hanzo didn't know. There wasn't a word for - whatever this was. The cohabitation, tangling their bodies together, even the chaste kisses Hanzo never returned... they'd never spoken about what it was supposed to mean, or why it was done. It simply happened. It's intimate to be sure, crossing a line that simple friendships didn't. But McCree hadn't given it a name and Hanzo isn't going to ask for one.
He'd heard of something called touch-starvation, back when he'd been undergoing grooming to become head of the clan. It was something that occurred in their prisoners when they kept them locked up for too long; captors would find that the very men and women they tortured would begin leaning into a cruel touch, if it was only for a moment. If prisoners were kept in the same cell they'd eventually be found curled together, even if they were members of rival gangs. He'd been taught that the touch starvation could be exploited – and should be.

Hanzo had been left alone for a long time. McCree seems content to indulge his need for warmth and contact – perhaps the cowboy has also gone too long without another to hold and be held by. Clara and Reyes seem to be the closest to him, and they're some of the most non-tactile people Hanzo has ever met.

So Hanzo had just shrugged, and informed Lance that rooming together just made sense for the time being. Lance had seemed to accept the evasive answer with a nod before returning to the group – but Hanzo had seen McCree's eyes tracking the man the whole way back.

“What were you two talking about?” McCree had asked the moment the pair had left.

“Nothing,” Hanzo had lied. “Scoot over.” McCree had obliged, letting Hanzo crawl onto the bed and settle down in the man's arms.

“Y'sure he wasn't bothering you or nothing?”

“You are bothering me. Put on some music.”

McCree had mercifully dropped the subject, but he'd held Hanzo a little tighter than usual that night.

The following day finds Hanzo lying in bed, staring vacantly at the ceiling. They'd already been to Lilac's – McCree had finally gotten his bandages removed, but Hanzo? Hanzo had been pushed hard, and hadn't been given nearly as much serum as he'd have liked. He's sore all over, even in muscles he hadn't known he had.

“Reyes wants us in the Breaking Pit.”

Hanzo lifts his head off the bed to see McCree exiting the bathroom, his communicator clutched tight in his palm.

“The Breaking Pit?”

“It's just a stupid nickname one of the vets came up with. Means the lounge area, where people go to relax and shoot the shit.”

Hanzo pushes himself up into a sitting position. “I did not know Blackwatch had such a thing.”

“Yeah, well...” McCree shrugs one shoulder, dropping down on the bed's edge to start putting on his boots. “Y'were awful shy when you first got here. Didn't really make sense to take you. And it's... not really your scene, y'know?”

“I am not shy. I am prudent.”

McCree chuckles, leaning over to give Hanzo a quick peck on the side of his cheek. Hanzo's nose wrinkles.

“C'mon, up and at 'em. Best not keep the Boss-man waiting.”
The Breaking Pit turns out to be fairly literal in regards to the second half of its name. When McCree wheels Hanzo through the door, he's greeted by squalor that instantly makes his nose wrinkle with distaste.

Soda cans and beer bottles are littered on the floor, accompanied by balled-up plastic bags from various eateries. The shag carpeting is a dirty grey, and Hanzo has a very uncomfortable feeling that long ago, it had once been white.

Worn out couches and easy chairs are scattered around the room, most of them occupied by Blackwatch members. A few are asleep, some are reading magazines that seem to have been plucked from a disorganized pile on a table. Most of them are gathered around a giant plasma-screen TV, currently displaying a soccer match as the noise of the game played loudly over the speakers. A round of cheers go up as men jump out of their seat – Hanzo can then spot Reyes slouched over on a couch end. The man is sipping calmly from his #2 DAD mug, a newspaper spread out on his lap.

“I thought you said secret military bases did not have cable,” Hanzo quips as McCree wheels him over to Reyes' side.

There's a long, rude slurp from Reyes that makes Hanzo's ears pin with disgust before the commander lowers the mug from his lips. “We don't. We get DVD recordings of matches flown in with the other supplies.”

“What an excellent use of taxpayer money.”

“I agree.” Reyes folds up his newspaper and tosses it onto the couch's armrest. “Got a question for you, Shimada.”

“Yes, I can walk,” Hanzo says curtly. “I am simply very tired.”

“Not that. You been killing men without letting me know about it?” Reyes voice is suddenly deadly serious.

“What?” Hanzo recoils slightly in surprise. “I- no? Do you mean before I was taken here?”

“Nope. I'm talking about anything recent. Last few weeksish.” Reyes is giving him a hard look over the rim of his mug. “You sure your dragons haven't been out having a midnight snack or something?”

“Yes,” Hanzo insists. “I am sure.” He glances over the filled room. “Should you be talking about this here?” he hisses under his breath.

“None of these layabouts are listening to us.” Reyes takes another loud sip before glancing at the TV screen – another goal has been scored, and another victorious roar rises up from the room. “Alright,” Reyes continues. “I believe you.”

Hanzo ignores the commotion. “Are you going to elaborate on -?”

“Nope,” Reyes replies, popping the P. He turns his attention to McCree. “Jesse.”
“Yeah, Boss?”

“Pack up your shit. We're flying out in the morning.”

“What?” McCree and Hanzo ask in unison.

“Good God, fucking lovebirds.” Reyes reaches over to pick up his newspaper again, snapping it open. “You heard me. We're going back to HQ. Spent enough time in this rinky-dink place as it is.”

Hanzo ignores the 'lovebird' quip. “You're going to Switzerland? Why did you not just fly with Overwatch?”

Reyes rolls his eyes. “He means our HQ,” McCree cuts in. “Blackwatch's main base.”

“Oh. Where's that?”

“Why do you think you need to know?” Reyes replies smoothly, not lifting his eyes from the paper.

“Well,” Hanzo scoffs. Reyes still isn't looking at him, but there's something strange in his gaze. A sort of calculating look. Hanzo's gut tightens a bit. “Well, because you're not leaving me behind.”

“Oh?” Reyes' brow perks. “I'm not?”

“No,” Hanzo stresses through gritted teeth. “You're not.”

“Wasn't aware you were the one giving the orders, Shimada. He boss you around in bed too, Jesse?”

“Yeah,” McCree replies as Hanzo makes a scandalized noise of outrage. “But you should lay off him, Boss. We both know he's coming with.”

“You don't know,” Reyes replies with just a touch of indignity, lifting his eyes from the paper to glare. “You don't know me.”

“I do, especially cause I saw you pull this exact set-up on Julia and Tessa back in Yemen 8 months ago. If you weren't bringing Hanzo you would have already said so instead of this sly, evasive thing you're doing.”

“You're garbage, Jesse,” Reyes snaps sullenly, slapping his newspaper down in his lap. “Stop ruining my fun. You think soccer keeps me entertained?”

“We'll see you in the air tomorrow, Boss.” Jesse gives him a cheerful little wave before quickly stepping back out of Reyes' swatting reach and wheeling Hanzo away from the couch. “Tell them to put on Love Actually!”

Hanzo hears an angry cry of: “They won't LET me!” before he's pushed right out of the room and back down the hallway they'd come from.
Chapte r 19

“Sorry about that,” McCree chuckles. He and Hanzo are quickly wheeling away from the lounge area, Reyes’ annoyed cry fading mercifully in the distance. There’s a bump in the floor, and Hanzo has to clutch his armrests to stay seated. “He gets bored,” McCree continues, “and likes to stir up a little drama whenever things get too slow around here. Think he misses his soaps.”

“Well, tell him not to toy with me,” Hanzo snaps. He has enough problems with McCree’s teasings as it is. Then Hanzo pauses. “Wait. Would he be missing the same soap opera as the one I saw on your phone?”

“I only have the first season,” McCree replies defensively. “He made me download it, I swear.”

“Mhm.” Hanzo cautiously leans back in his chair, drumming his clawed fingers on the armrests. “Well. I am glad he is only teasing, at least. I did not relish the thought of being left here-”

“Without me?” McCree quips, and Hanzo can hear the smile in his voice.

Hanzo huffs. “Without your phone, maybe.”

“Aw, come off it.” McCree makes a sharp left as they head back towards their room. “You’re still gonna play coy with me? I thought we were past this. What, do I gotta take you out on a date first?”

Hanzo’s hand instantly grabs his chair’s brake and slams it down, forcibly halting himself in the middle of the hall as McCree stumbles with an oomph.

“What?” Hanzo flinches at the crack in his voice.

McCree’s rubbing his hip where it had collided with the wheelchair handles. “What do you mean, wh...” His voice falters under the intense stare of disbelief Hanzo’s giving him. “I...”

“Past what? Are you taking up Reyes’ poor sense of humor?!?” Something unpleasant and sour rises in the back of Hanzo’s throat.

“Well, I- No!” Confusion is plain on McCree’s face. “I just thought-”

“You thought that- that you had earned the right to mock me now?!”

“I ain’t makin’ fun of you!” McCree looks downright alarmed now.

“You utter-” Hanzo inhales sharply, feeling his dragons crackle unhappily beneath his skin. He closes his eyes, pushing them back and attempting to re-center himself. A breath in, a breath out and hands that clasped together tightly in his lap. McCree wasn’t touching the chair, wasn’t saying a word as Hanzo struggles to recoup his composure.

“I have become more sensitive than is right.

I lash out more than is fair to you.

Hanzo exhales slowly, hands gradually unclenching and shoulders lowering. “My... apologies. I allowed my temper to get the better of me.” He reaches a hand up to delicately pinch his brow. “I may have to tolerate such jests coming from the rest of the base, but I do not enjoy them coming
“An’ what jests are those?” McCree's voice is awfully quiet, making Hanzo even more uncomfortable about his little outburst.

“That... joke.” Hanzo waves a hand dismissively. “You know. Us, together. Reyes and Clara and the rest, pretending we are some sort of couple.”

“Yeah?” McCree's coming around, crouching at Hanzo's side with an oddly serious look on his face.

“Yes,” Hanzo hisses back, before taking in another steadying breath. “Yes. I do not enjoy laughs at my expense.”

“Well...” McCree clicks his tongue. “Alright. That's fair. Maybe that lot are messing around, trying to make you angry. But you think that's something I would do? Have I done it before?”

“Not... recently,” Hanzo grumbles.

“Then what makes you so sure I was kidding?”

Hanzo scoffs. “McCree. Look at me.”

“I've been lookin',” McCree replies softly, earning an angry flush upon Hanzo's cheeks.

“Do not be absurd. I have scales. Horns and claws. My ears-!” Hanzo gestures at them, pinned back with embarrassment. “Do that!”

“So?”

“So what kind of person would possibly want to be with someone who looks half-beast?!” Hanzo exclaims, throwing his hands up in exasperation.

“Ah.” McCree has the grace to look embarrassed, lifting a hand to rub at the base of his neck. “Well, now, that's a little hurtful.”

“It is the truth!”

“I meant hurtful to me,” McCree mumbles woefully.

Hanzo stares at him in utter disbelief. “You cannot be serious.” Ah. That crack in his voice again.

“Look, Hanzo,” McCree sighs. He gets briefly to his feet, side-stepping until he can crouch back down directly in front of Hanzo. He places his hands on Hanzo's knees, who stiffens at the touch. “I don't really understand what goes on in that head of yours all the time. But did you really think me holdin' on to you like that, petting your hair, kissin' your neck – ya never thought it was 'cause I might be a bit keen on ya?”

“Do not be absurd,” Hanzo repeats as the heat in his face creeps down his neck. “I am-”

“Awful pretty.”

“Shut up.” Hanzo hisses. He swears he can feel the tips of his ears reddening. “What is the matter with you?!”

“What's the matter with you?” McCree counters. “You're actin' like a schoolgirl. Surely I ain't your
first.”

The immediate deadpan that Hanzo gives is enough to draw a genuine laugh out of McCree. “See, I didn't think so. Not with the title you had and the face you got goin' on. So what's the problem? Ain't your type? 'Cause I gotta say, you been sending me a *whoole* lot of mixed signals.”

Hanzo shoves McCree's hands off his knees and clenches his claws mid-air at the man. “How could you possibly find *these* attractive?!”

“Okay, now you're puttin' me a bit on the spot,” McCree mumbles, an awkward cough following. “Just - look. It don't matter to me if you got scales or even a tail hiding back there.” McCree reaches for Hanzo's hands, gently taking them into his own. “Stop fixatin' on it and lookin' for a reason to prove I ain't bein' truthful. Cause I am.”

Hanzo pulls back from the touch, and McCree lets him. “I-” He looks upwards, focusing his troubled gaze on the ceiling. He can't look at this man right now. He cannot *process* the words McCree is saying. “I am going back to my room.”

“Your room, or-”

“My room,” Hanzo repeats firmly, glancing down to pull up his brake. “I need...” What does he need?

“Space,” McCree supplies. The man grunts as he gets to his feet, moving out of Hanzo's path. “I gotcha. Hurts a little, but uh...” McCree scratches at his scruff, his eyes tired. “I gotcha. Won't bother you.”

“See that you do not,” Hanzo mutters, wheeling past the man and down the hall towards their rooms.

–

The problem with owning next to nothing is that the act of packing his belongings had only managed to distract Hanzo for a good three minutes.

He sits on his bed, quietly cursing the fact he'd left all his pillows and comforter back in McCree's room. He's stuck resting his head on a standard-issued duffel bag packed with his gifted clothes and two bottles of sake.

Well. One and a half bottles of sake. But Hanzo had so *desperately* needed a drink.

He flops his right arm over his face, an aggravated exhaled slipping past his lips. There's some small solace - his dragons had finally ceased their needy little grumbles that have plagued Hanzo for weeks. Now, he doesn't feel so much as a single tug from them in the direction of McCree. They are silent, and they are still. Good. Perhaps they were just as shocked by the man's confession as he was.

Perhaps he has no right to be. Hanzo rolls onto his side, grunting as his horns scrape against the bag's zipper. He'd been more intimate with McCree than any of his actual 'conquests'. Leading a clan left no room for sentimental attachments – Hanzo would bed them and leave them, all within under 24 hours. He hadn't held hands with or cuddled any of them, and he certainly hadn't let them
gently run their fingers through his hair.

Pulling on his hair didn't count. That was different.

Hanzo removes his arm from over his face and lifts it up towards the ceiling. He examines his claws in the dim lighting, turning them back and forth as he watched the scales on his knuckles gleam.

Monstrous.

McCree couldn't possibly be able to see past Hanzo's claws, scales... his eyes, as the cowboy had so kindly pointed out.

*I was scared of you.*

Hanzo's arm drops listlessly onto the bed.

You're a sight, alright? And personally? *I never really thought in a bad way.*

Lance's flirtations, the way his eyes boldly roamed over Hanzo's form – it had set Hanzo on edge, annoyed him, but he hadn't seen it as anything more than a careless attempt made in poor taste. Clara and Reyes' snarky quips on the subject of his love life nettle him, but rarely did more than draw a snarl from Hanzo's lips. Yet McCree's casual inference to a possible date had nearly given Hanzo a heart attack then and there.

Hanzo lets his eyes close. Whatever the reason, McCree seems convinced that he truly does care for Hanzo. His teasing touches, his kisses, the way he held Hanzo close at night – they'd all been born of the man's apparently genuine affection. Romantic affection.

Hanzo lies there in the bed, staring at the back of his eyelids and listening to the quiet hum of the digital clock ticking the time by.

McCree is handsome, rugged. He sports strong arms and a thick chest that Hanzo is already well-acquainted with. His facial scruff tickles Hanzo's nose and the man carries himself so confidently. Hanzo huffs when he imagines being held down by those broad, worn palms. McCree has a nice smile, and a good laugh. He is... charming.

And Hanzo hadn't wanted the man to leave. Reyes' casual inference that Hanzo might be left behind while McCree jetted off to parts unknown... it had unnerved him. The thought of losing his only companion.

It's possible it had simply been too long since McCree had had another in his bed. A false sense of adoration, sprung up from proximity and emotional loneliness. Hanzo can't be sure that isn't what he's feeling, too.

Perhaps he just needs to test it.

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*Knock knock.*

Hanzo can hear the sounds of shuffling feet shortly after, a sleepy sort of snort behind the door.
The handle turns and Hanzo is greeted by the sight of McCree's ridiculous bedhead and sleep-sackened face.

“Mm.” McCree rubs at his eyes and yawns loudly. “Han? 'S two in the mornin’.”

“I know,” Hanzo says evenly.

“Y’cold? Want your blankets back?”

“No.” Hanzo puts a hand on McCree's shoulder and pushes him back into the room, firmly kicking the door shut behind him.

“Oh?” McCree's eyes blink thrice, like he's trying to clear them. “Then-”

“Shut up,” Hanzo breathes, fisting his claws in McCree's bedshirt and roughly yanking the man down for a kiss.

McCree's mouth is soft and warm against his own – full, chapped lips that muffle McCree's noise of surprise. The man is agonizingly still for two heartbeats, and Hanzo thinks he might have misstepped - before McCree's arms are swiftly wrapping around Hanzo and pulling the man flush against him. One hand grabs at the back of Hanzo's skull, deepening the kiss with a deep, pleased rumble that vibrates in his throat.

Or maybe that's Hanzo. He can't tell. All he knows is his dragons are going absolutely wild beneath his skin.

Hanzo's the first one to pull away, breaking the kiss to pant openly as McCree lets out another content growl, leaning forward to press their foreheads together and nuzzling his nose against Hanzo's.

“Helluva way to wake me, darlin',” he purrs.

“You did not brush your teeth,” Hanzo retorts breathlessly.

“I was sad. And y'didn't give me much warning.”

“Disgusting. Get on the bed.”

“Yessir,” McCree replies sweetly. He's not letting go of Hanzo, walking backwards until their feet hit the edge of the bed. With a grin Hanzo can barely glimpse in the dark, McCree free-falls backward, taking Hanzo down with him.

They both hit the bed with a bounce – Hanzo barely has time to growl in annoyance before McCree is hoisting himself up and covering Hanzo's body with his own. Strong hands tangle in Hanzo's hair, angling his head upwards as McCree pulls him into another kiss.

“You smell,” Hanzo breathes against his lips.

“Y'like how I smell,” McCree mumbles back, nipping at the bottom of Hanzo's lips. “Y'told me.”

“Oh!” McCree kisses him gently again, an soft apology. “That is - true,” Hanzo admits. He can scent McCree so well like this, can practically taste the man's sweat and musk against the real, actual taste of his lips. “I would, hah, like you to take your shirt off.”

“Ain't that the nicest I've ever been asked,” McCree chuckles. He pushes himself up, using his leg muscles to hold himself off the bed as his hands leave Hanzo to begin tugging his shirt up and over
his head. “Real polite when you want something.”

“Maybe,” Hanzo murmurs. His arm reaches out, tracing fingertips over stomach muscles he'd only glimpsed before. There's a little pudge at the hips, even if McCree denies it. But Hanzo is realizing he likes it. Really, really likes it.

McCree finishes shimmying off his shirt and throws it to the ground, puffing out his chest in display. “Enjoyin' the show?”

“Get down here,” Hanzo says instead, and McCree is only too happy to oblige.

McCree's hands find Hanzo's hips, and Hanzo's hands roam freely over McCree's bared, hairy chest. He gropes soft pectorals, reveling in the way they clenched in his grasp. McCree holds Hanzo down, burying his face in Hanzo's neck and trailing soft little bites that force sounds from Hanzo's throat he didn't know he could make.

“You're beautiful, darlin','” McCree whispers, breath hot and ticklish in Hanzo's ear. Hanzo squirms, his ears flicking violently at the sensation.

“Do not – tell me such things,” Hanzo groans behind gritted teeth. There's another chuckle from McCree and suddenly the man is leaning back, pulling himself into a sitting position and using his grip on Hanzo's hips to hoist him up and into McCree's lap.

“Alright, sweet pea. Alright.” McCree presses a gentle kiss just below Hanzo's chin. “I won't tell ya.” There's a dark promise in his voice that makes Hanzo shiver.

“I'll show ya.”
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Someone is speaking.

It's faint, almost inaudible – but a voice is tickling at the forefront of Hanzo's consciousness and making his ears flick irritably. He's cozy, pressed up against a warm body and dozing somewhere between fully asleep and a light nap. The sound continues, and Hanzo's brow scrunches with displeasure. Really? Is someone really going to make him open his eyes?

After a few moments, all goes quiet again. Hanzo's shoulders untense and he settles back down, ready to fall back unto deep slumber.

A deafening screech of static suddenly blasts through the room, sending Hanzo hurling upwards in the bed and forcing him to slap his hands over his ears with gritted teeth. McCree lets out a gruff snort as his arm tumbles off where it had lain on Hanzo's stomach and he cracks his eyes open with a grimace.

"GET! UP!" The static is replaced by the roar of Reyes' voice – McCree's communicator is practically vibrating off the nightstand from the sheer volume. McCree blindly grasps for it, knocking over a glass of water to the floor before he finally pulls the comm to his lips. "Fuckin' hell, Boss," he groans.

"YOU WERE DUE THIRTY FUCKING MINUTES AGO, MCCREE!"

McCree exhales sharply, rubbing the bridge of his nose. "Oh."

"OH?! GET YOU AND YOUR SHITTY ASS BOYTOY OUT OF BED OR YOU'RE BOTH RIDING IN CRATES! MOVE!"

McCree clicks the comm off, dragging his hand up and down his face. "Hnnrgh. We're late."

"I noticed," Hanzo mutters dryly, finally taking his hands off his ears.

McCree finally pushes himself up to a sitting position and gives Hanzo an appreciative, lidded gaze before leaning over to kiss his neck. "God damn. An' the one day we really needed showers, huh?"

Hanzo can feel McCree smiling against his neck and he rolls his eyes, pushing the cowboy away with one hand. His body aches, and McCree's kisses are aggravating the bitemarks littering his neck. "Make yourself useful and pick up my prosthetics from the floor. I left my belongings back in my room."

"What if I wanna admire my handiwork a lil' more?" McCree purrs, catching Hanzo's hand to hold it in his own. "Y'look stunnin' in the morning light."

"I do not wish to test Reyes' temper any further," Hanzo replies, even as his heart gives a fond squeeze. "Besides, your flattery will not work. I know I must look absolutely disheveled and-"

"Wrecked?" McCree supplies slyly.

"Stop," Hanzo says with no heat. "You know we do not have time for this. We have to hurry."
"Mm." McCree's gaze roam boldly. "I ain't afraid of Reyes. He's all bark, little bite."

"Perhaps. But I do not desire any form of 'ass-whooping' as he so delicately phrases it."

"And here I thought you liked having your ass-"

Hanzo shoves McCree and his shiteating grin right off the bed.

---

The look Reyes is giving the pair of them is downright murderous as McCree hurriedly wheels Hanzo through the hangar door. The commander is drumming his right hand on one of the massive shotguns strapped to his hips, and Hanzo has the distinct impression the man is debating whether or not to level it at their heads. "Sit," Reyes snarls. "Now."

McCree tosses their duffel bags into the overhead compartment while Hanzo wheels himself over to the nearest seat. "I'm goin', I'm goin','" McCree says, adjusting his hat while he slams the compartment door shut and moves to drop into the vacant seat beside Hanzo. "Y'don't have to yell.

"Apparently, he does." Hanzo glances to the right as he's lowering himself into his seat; Clara is sitting a few feet down, her legs crossed and a disinterested look on her face. She blows a small gum bubble and promptly pops it with her teeth.

"Aw, what, you're coming too?" McCree complains as he buckles himself in. "Ain't I bossed around enough?"

"No," Reyes barks as he storms towards the cockpit, earning a smirk from Clara. The woman's eyes flick to the left as she gives Hanzo's shitty t-shirt and cargo shorts an unimpressed look. "Nice neck," she comments flatly.

Hanzo touches his fingertips to his neck in confusion – then his ears pin back, teeth grinding together as he fights back a flush.

The bitemarks.

McCree lets out a nervous chuckle as Hanzo whirs around to shoot him a seething glare. The cowboy's hands raise in a helpless gesture. "Now, Han..."

"Here." Clara leans over, picking up a small paper bag that had been lying at her feet. She pulls out a bundle of black cloth and tosses it underhand towards Hanzo. "Put it on before Reyes sees you."

Hanzo leans over to catch it, shooting Clara a irritated glance before unfolding the... shirt? No - a hoodie. He lays it out on his lap, smoothing out the wrinkles as he gives the thing a dubious glance. It was made of cotton, as far as he could tell – pure black all around, save for two white dots and a whiskered nose sewn on the front of the hood, and two huge, floppy rabbit ears hang off the top.

"They're hollow," Clara says with a shrug. "So you can stick your horns in 'em."

Now that grabs Hanzo's attention. He shrugs the hoodie over his head and tugs on the hem to help slide it downward. It's not a perfect fit; the sleeves are too long, and it's a bit of a struggle to angle
his horns into the hollow ears but – it works. His horns are completely hidden from view and as he
tugs on the drawstrings, he finds he can make the hole close until only his nose and eyes can be
seen poking out of the garment.

He finally has a way to shield himself from errant stares, and all it costs him is some dignity.

“Thank you,” he mumbles quietly.


“Jackass, you've known me for two years. Have I ever sewed so much as a suture? Alex made it.
They just had to jet because someone was late.”

“I'll-” McCree pauses as the plane's engines begin roaring to life, the hangar trembling from the
noise. “I'll call them when we land. Right decent of them.”

“I will make the call.” Hanzo pries open the hood a little, freeing his mouth to speak clearer. “It is
my gift. I will want to express gratitude personally.” He shifts his gaze to Clara. “Thank you for
bringing me this. I know you have been cross with me lately.”

“We're fine,” she says evenly. “Now that I can see you two are done being chickenshit with each
other. You have no idea how annoying that was to watch.”

Hanzo averts his eyes, tugging on his hoodie's strings again.

“Leave us alone!” McCree protests indignantly. “We got our own pace!”

“Fuck off, furry.”

“Oh, two things,” McCree retorts. The plane lets out another rumble, and Hanzo can feel it
beginning to move forward. “One, I don't agree with that on any level. Hanzo's a person, and a
good one.”

Hanzo lets out a small, if not fond scoff.

“And two. If you're gonna try that line of insult, shouldn't it be 'scalie'?”

“You would fuckin' know, wouldn't you?”

McCree makes another scandalized noise but the subject is mercifully silenced by the reappearance
of Reyes coming back from the cockpit. The man shoots all three of them a scornful gaze before
focusing in on Hanzo's bunniesque attire. “Good God,” he drones. “You turning into some kind of
jackalope there, Shimada?”

“It's for the horns,” Clara replies. “Alex made it by hand.”

“Oh.” Reyes drops down into a nearby seat and pulls a pack of cigarettes from his pocket. “Look
good, then.” Hanzo blinks in disbelief at the sudden shift to kindness, but Reyes is ignoring his
surroundings in favor of flicking a small lighter to life.

“C'mon, Boss. Clara could be pregnant,” McCree quips. “Something's gone to her hips, and it can't
be the gum.”

“If I wasn't strapped into a chair, I'd already be kicking your ass, Jesse.”

“Well that's hardly fair, be two against one.”
Reyes turns his dull gaze on Hanzo as Clara and McCree begin bickering back and forth. The man takes a long drag off his cigarette and says nothing, but the look is – familiar. It's the look his caregivers often wore the days he and Genji would fight incessantly, just because they could.

It's the look of an overly-exhausted parental figure, and Hanzo almost feels sorry for him.

“How-” Hanzo clears his throat loudly, interrupting the stream of nonsense. “How long will we be in the air?”

“Not sure,” McCree answers. “Europe's a hell of a ways from-”

“Shut it,” Reyes snaps, withdrawing his cigarette from his mouth.

“Boss, he's going with us. What's the point in keeping him in the dark?”

“Because he ain't fully Blackwatch.” Reyes levels a steady gaze at Hanzo. “Not yet.”

“Kid's already killed for you,” and surprisingly, it's Clara who's speaking. “What more do you want?”

Reyes jams the cigarette back into his mouth, taking a deep inhale and blowing out a steady stream of smoke before answering

“Well. That's what he's gonna find out at HQ.”

Hanzo had expected Blackwatch HQ to look like something out of a Bond film. A villain's castle with high Gothic towers and perhaps a moat with alligators snapping at passerby. Or maybe closer to a prison – impenetrable walls lined with barbed wire and search beams with menacing guards posted at every outcropping. Some sort of intimidating structure, whatever it might be, clearly built to convey the mercilessness and brutality of the forces comprising Blackwatch.

The last thing he'd expected was to touch down outside a bright and cheery office building emblazoned with the Overwatch logo.

McCree had made the zippered-lips motion at Hanzo once the plane pulled up to dock. Men in suits and sunglasses had swiftly come aboard and begun unloading various pieces of cargo. McCree grabs the duffel bags and waits for Hanzo to slip into his wheelchair before immediately rolling him right off the plane, hot on Reyes and Clara's heels.

Wherever they are, it's beautiful. Green grass sways in a gentle breeze on the building's lawn, and small spruce trees line the walkway. The sun is bright in a clear blue sky, littered with puffy white clouds – which Hanzo glimpses for only a moment before he's whisked through the building's doors.

The inside of the building is – still absurdly normal. A security guard desk is staffed with two women that salute as they pass. Cheap florescent lights, sparkling white tile and ivory walls that don't sport the occasional probably-blood stains the California base had suffered from. The halls are lined with glass windows and filled with passerby – Overwatch personnel in lab coats and jumpsuits that hurry past the group without so much as a glance while scribbling on clipboards.
“I thought—” Hanzo begins. McCree silences him immediately, clapping a hand over his mouth. Hanzo makes a muffled noise of indignation and attempts to bite, but McCree's already pulling the hand away. Hanzo lifts his head to glare; he's met with another zippered-mouth motion and sinks back into his chair with a huff.

Reyes and Clara are moving with purpose, passing door after door with McCree following closely after. No one is saying a word, and it's starting to get on Hanzo’s nerves.

They finally stop in front of an old elevator and Hanzo has to raise a brow in disbelief. The thing looks positively ancient. The Up button has been pried off entirely, and Hanzo's pretty sure a frowny face sticker in its place is not an acceptable substitute.

Reyes stabs the Down arrow with his thumb, stepping back and folding his arms. A few rumbles and loud creaks later, the elevator lets out a weak ding and the doors slide open.

Reyes and Clara step on and to the side, making room for McCree to gently back Hanzo's chair in. Once they're all settled, Reyes hits the Door Close button while Clara seemingly studies the floor numbers. There's more than Hanzo expected. Thirteen floors? The building hadn't seemed that high.

Clara finally nods and presses a floor number. Then another, then another. Hanzo watches in utter confusion as the woman hits 3-10-4-11-3-4 in rapid succession, then Ground Floor. The elevator shudders and starts moving... down?

The rest of the group doesn't seem bothered. Reyes is lazily itching the bridge of his nose and Clara's leaning back against the wall with her hands in her pockets. Only McCree is bothering to give Hanzo a comforting look and a pat on the shoulder.

The elevator keeps going down, and down, and down – and Hanzo grits his teeth as the grim realization settles over him.

Another fucking underground base. He'd been so excited to see windows, too.

The elevator shudders to a halt and Hanzo expectantly stares at the doors, waiting for them to open. But then there's another sharp jolt and the elevator continues going – sideways? Hanzo's chair begins to slide with the shift in movement and McCree has tighten his grip on the handles to hold him in place. Hanzo tilts his head up to send the man a bewildered look – McCree just smiles and winks.

Several minutes pass with the elevator trawling to the right, utter silence from every one of its occupants. Hanzo was starting to get annoyed with the whole process. How far exactly did they have to go? And couldn't Blackwatch have sprung for some elevator music at least?

Finally, the elevator comes to a complete if not sudden stop. There's another faint ding, and the doors slide open.

The first thing Hanzo sees is water – rushing, white water that's cascading downward and crashing loudly onto something far below. A cool mist is spraying up everywhere, soaking the walls of the well-lit cavern the group was stepping out into. In place of lanterns, cool moss lines the walls; Hanzo tilts his head upwards and sees an immense stretch of sky, bordered by lush greenery dangling off the tips of towering cliffs. The cavern spanned up and up, multiple levels carved into the stone with winding paths that were connected by rope bridges swaying dangerously above the waterfall's arch.
“Neat, huh?” McCree says, finally breaking the silence.

“This is ridiculous,” Hanzo replies in disbelief. “This is a millionaire’s supervillain lair.”

Clara snorts loudly as the elevator door shuts behind them. “That's because it was.”

“Hey,” Reyes says warily.

“Fine, a shall-remain-unnamed supervillain’s lair that Reyes claimed for himself the moment we were done busting the guy.”

“He was barely even a supervillain,” McCree chimes in. The group is heading down a sloping path, towards what appeared to be a small door carved into the wall. “Guy didn't even finish that anthrax strain. Had to charge him with attempted genocide.”

“It wasn't completed because I'm good at what I do. And that's why I get nice things.” Reyes stops before the door to punch a series of numbers into a panel on the wall. The door slides open, revealing a dim hallway lined with flickering torches.


“I'm going to go check in, make sure Ricardo hasn't shat up the place too bad while I was gone.” Reyes fishes a cigarette out of his pocket and jams it between his teeth. “Go to your rooms or something. 30 hours on a plane with you was enough already.”

“Sure, Dad,” McCree replies sarcastically. “Where's Hanzo's room?”

“He's not getting one. Got enough space issues here. And I saw his neck, you fuckin' degenerates.” Reyes jams a button on the other side, abruptly slamming the door in their faces.

Clara clicks her tongue as Hanzo lets out a horrified noise.

“Well,” she says. “Guess nothing slips by him.”

Chapter End Notes

If you're disappointed by the skipped sex scene, please read here!
Chapter 21

Despite the primitive look of the Blackwatch Headquarters caverns and passageways, the security lining them is anything but. Surveillance cameras are posted every few feet, and heavily armed omnis blocked off several ominous-looking hallways. The same keypad and thumbprint scanners existed on every door – a slight annoyance, since Hanzo has to cart McCree with him everywhere to get anywhere. Apparently, hiding Hanzo's asset status but also getting his prints into the new system is... complicated.

McCree's room here is a lot nicer than the California base. Hanzo had immediately appreciated the addition of a arched, four-paned window over the bed that allowed natural light in and gave him a beautiful view of the waterfall. Much better than the shitty florescents he'd had to tolerate before.

There's still an adjoining bathroom, to his relief – but the bed is barely a double. The room altogether is smaller, but Hanzo finds it... cozier. Less like a hotel, and more lived in and natural. Especially with the cowboy memorabilia on the shelves and the pile of dirty laundry in the closet.

“You like it?” McCree asks, dumping their duffel bags to the side

“You need a bigger comforter,” Hanzo replies as he lifts himself out of his chair. “That one will not be enough. And will not the size of the bed be a problem?”

“I got a sleeping bag in my gear.” McCree's unzipping his bag to start unpacking. “I can always use that if you want the bed.”

“I am not going to kick you to the floor in your own room.”

“I've slept in worse ways.” There's a shrug as McCree straightens with an armful of clothing. “Bit wobbly on our relationship status at the moment. Don't wanna overstep.”

“I- don't call it that,” Hanzo says in exasperation.

“What, relationship status?”

“Just...” Hanzo rubs a palm over his face. “It is fine. As long as I am spared discussion of it, I have no trouble continuing as we were.”

“Y’mean like me flirting with you and bein’ all close?” McCree asks, dropping his clothes into a drawer. “Still fine with all that?”

Hanzo fights down a groan. Intimacy is ten times worse when asked to explain it. “Stop. I will tell you when you need to remove yourself from me.”

“Aw, sugar.” McCree's all smiles now as he heads back to the bags. “Alright. I won't press you.”

“Am I a 'sugar' to you now?” Hanzo quips, eager to divert the conversation. "Since you seem to be so eager to sink your teeth into me."

“Hey, now,” McCree protests. “Can't blame a man for getting caught up in the heat of the moment. You marked me up too, with those claws of yers.”

“Hm,” Hanzo scoffs. “I did not hear you complaining.”
“Never said I didn't like it.”

“Deviant,” Hanzo replies mildly. “Once you have finished, help me find some food. The flight's so-called snacks were positively inedible.”

“Oh, yeah, don't eat those.” McCree opens the closet door to toss the remains of the duffel bag inside. “Pretty sure those mixed-nut bags have been a part of Blackwatch longer than me.”

“Wonderful.”

McCree chuckles. “Don't worry. I know just where to go to get you a proper meal.”

Blackwatch's HQ is surprisingly less populated than the California base – that, or the operatives are much better at hiding themselves.

“Everyone works here. Most everyone's in their rooms, a lab, or out on a mission,” McCree had explained over dinner. The dining hall had turned out to be a series of smaller rooms connected in a circle, to allow privacy for most of the occupants. McCree had spoken to the cook, bringing back two heaping platefuls of spaghetti and garlic bread. Not Hanzo's preferred meal, but he'd take it.

“How do you manage to get people in and out efficiently? That elevator was atrocious.” Hanzo had toyed with a meatball on the end of his fork, watching McCree watch him before abruptly sinking his teeth into the meat.

“Ah.” McCree had cleared his throat, a light tint to his cheeks. “That entrance was just one of the landing docks. Don't tell Reyes I'm tellin' you stuff, but we've got fake buildings littered all over the place around here to get in and out without bein' too suspicious. It's why no one talks during transport, in case something's listening.”

“I will not be telling Reyes anything,” Hanzo had replied dryly. “Since he so kindly returns the favor.”

McCree had given him a sympathetic grimace. “He don't trust easy. You got off on a hell of a wrong foot with him, and he got so heated and wrapped up in Morrison after Los Muertos, don't think he ever leveled out to thank you.”

“He did not.”

“I'm sure his 'test' for you or whatever will come sooner or later. I've seen him be like this before with others. You gotta earn his trust through continued loyalty before he fully mellows on ya. Maybe third mission's the charm?”

“Hm.” Hanzo hadn't been impressed. “Why was your entrance building under Overwatch's banner?”

“Publicly, Blackwatch tries not to exist. So we just pretend we're Overwatch on the surface.”

“That traitor knew about you,” Hanzo had pointed out. “The Los Muertos one. I remember him saying you were Blackwatch.”
“Yeah, well, he probably knew a whole bunch of shit he wasn't supposed to. But most of the seasoned operatives know about us. Just ain't supposed to talk about us.”

“Hmm. Where do some of the exits lead?”

“Why?” McCree had jabbed an accusing fork at him, face faux-serious. “Y'thinkin' bout escapin' and leavin' me behind?”

“No. It is because I'd like you to take me somewhere nice before we end up working like the rest. Call it a date or whatever you wish, but I want to see the surface again before the chance is lost.”

“Oh.” McCree had brightened, then looked thoughtful. “Well, shoot. Lemme think, then.”

“While you are thinking, please get me some form of dessert. This garlic is overpowering.”

McCree had left and returned in the span of a few minutes, setting down a piece of chocolate cake and dropping back into the seat. “I've got it,” he'd said with a look of triumph. “Sandvika Storsenter.”

“Sandwhat?”

*Sandvika Storsenter.* The name of a mall that, after an tediously long elevator trip, Hanzo is currently standing inside of.

He tugs nervously on his hoodie's drawstrings, tightening the hole and keeping his gaze low. He and McCree had been deposited in the back of a security booth – the guards hadn't so much as given them a glance, but Hanzo's eyes had been drawn to the heavy weaponry laid across their backs. They're clearly Blackwatch, but interestingly enough, they seemed to be actually watching the TV monitors as well. Perhaps they double as mall cops?

“C'mon.” McCree's tugging on his sleeve, trying to coax Hanzo out of the room. “I want to hit up *Fattigmann.*”

“I don not know what that is,” Hanzo hisses back. “I thought you would take me somewhere secluded! Not-” He gestures at the wall of monitors. “This place is huge!”

“Oh, yeah, no. It's a big mall,” McCree drawls. “Been around for ages, and just keeps getting bigger.”

**Wait! Wait.** Hanzo pulls his arm out of McCree's reach. “I cannot- I cannot simply go out there! There are far too many people!”

“No one's gonna notice you, Han,” McCree says soothingly. “Just keep your hood up and closed and no one's gonna glance. Blackwatch guys who look way stranger than you shop here all the time, no one bats an eye. Sides, the guards here keep an eye out for us.” McCree taps the comm in his ear. "They let us know if something's up."

“Take me outside,” Hanzo demands. “Through the mall if we must, but I want to be outside.”

“Aw.” McCree rubs the back of his head. “I thought we could go clothes shoppin' for you or somethin'."

**Outside.**

“Alright, alright. Here.” McCree offers up his hand. “Just hold onto me and keep your hood and
eyes on the ground. I can show ya right out.”

Hanzo hesitates briefly, casting a quick glance at the impassive guards.

“Look, sugar, it's gonna get complicated if you start followin' a pair of boots that ain't mine.”

“No one wears cowboy boots,” Hanzo mutters, but takes the hand anyway.

McCree leads him through the security doors and down a small hallway. It's muffled, but Hanzo's ears prick up in the hood as he listens to the multitude of sounds coming from down the hall. How many people were out there? Would they really not notice him, his scales and fangs?

There's another door at the end – McCree punches in a few numbers and scans his thumb while Hanzo's busy fretting, and it swings open with a happy beep.

The noise triples instantly. Hanzo's hands slap over his ears and he recoils like he's been struck. It's too loud, it's too much – hundreds of passerby conversations all at once, pouring through the open door like a tidal wave. Heels on tile, squeaky stroller wheels, rustling bags – Hanzo can hear them all, even as he scrunches his face up and stumbles, falling to his knees. McCree's saying something, but it's all blending together.

After a few agonizing moments, door closes. It's an instant relief, deafening thunder reduced to manageable murmurs as McCree's hands finds his shoulders.

“Hanzo! Hey!” A gentle shake. “What happened?!”

“Too loud.” Hanzo slips his hands under his hood to massage his temples, fighting down a wave of nausea.

“What?”


“Why-” Hanzo irritably yanks his hood up and over, ears flicking in McCree's direction as he gives the man a pointed look. “Oh,” McCree breathes. “Yer ears.”

“Yes,” Hanzo says sarcastically. “M'ears.” He tugs the hoodie back into place, adding: “I cannot go out there. It is like being assaulted. We have to go back.”

“Well, hang on.” McCree looks thoughtful. “Maybe the guards have earplugs or some-”

“No,” Hanzo interrupts curtly. McCree's expression falls, and Hanzo has to take a steadying breath to keep from snapping further. “I am sorry. But, no. I understand why – what you were trying to do. The mall is not... a bad place, for...”

“A date,” McCree supplies quietly.

“Yes,” Hanzo groans. “But this is not... compatible. I do not want to be in another building, surrounded by strange people. I want to be outside.”

“Oh, hotcha. No problem.” He takes Hanzo's hands in his, slowly helping the man to his feet. “But I think I know where to go instead. Your legs up to another ride?”

“May I rest when we reach it?”
“Yeah.” McCree is smiling. “Where we're goin, you'll be able to do plenty'a restin’.”

Grass is tickling Hanzo's nose. His face scrunches up, fighting back the urge to sneeze.

“Y’doin okay there?” McCree's voice asks.

Hanzo opens his eyes to the sight of the man leaning over him, cowboy hat casting a wide shadow over his face.

“Move, please,” Hanzo mumbles. “You are blocking the sun.”

They're laying in a wide, verdant field, only a few miles outside of the Blackwatch’s faux farmhouse. Lush grass sways gently in a warm, summer breeze, dotted with pockets of dandelions and purple flowers Hanzo cannot name. The sky is crystal clear, not a cloud in sight, and the vibrant sunlight is wonderfully warm and soaking deep into his pitch-black hoodie.

McCree leans backwards, returning to his fiddling with some sort of mechanical cube he'd plucked on the way back through Blackwatch – a cloaking device, he'd called it

“Abdalla always makes the most annoying junk to open,” he remarks, scratching at one of its corners. “He's one of Overwatch's technicians. Smart as shit and also, hates my guts. Ah! There we go.” McCree tosses down the device into the grass. It gives a few whirs and beeps before letting out a pulse of energy. Something almost fully translucent springs up over them, forming a small, shimmering dome with the cube at the center.

“What is that?” Hanzo reaches out, tentatively placing his fingertips against the dome. It trembles at his touch.

“A one-way barrier. Lets the light in, but obscures it on the other side. We're like a big ol' heat wave effect to anyone flying over or coming over the hills – but we can see em' coming just fine. Same tech's covering the top of HQ, with an extra physical shield on the bottom."

“I wondered about that,” Hanzo remarks lightly. “It did not seem wise to leave a giant opening for intruders to scale down.”

“I mean, they could break through with enough effort. But we got a whole lot of turrets in the walls up there in case someone wants to try it.”

“Hm.” Hanzo flicks the barrier again, watching it ripple before settling back down in the grass. “How long will it last?”

“Hour, maybe. But like I said, keeps the eyes off you. So you can...” McCree gestures at Hanzo's hoodie.

“Are you asking me to disrobe?” Hanzo drawls.

“Stop teasin' a man. I just meant you could, y'know. Warm your scales or somethin’.”

Now there's an appealing thought. Hanzo's hands reach for the hem of his hoodie, then pause. “Are you sure it is working?”
“Good point.” McCree gets to his feet with a grunt. “One sec.” The man takes a few steps to the right, then begins skirting outside the barrier's edge in a circle. Hanzo can see him clearly, but -

“Yep,” McCree remarks. “Can't see you for shit. You're just sort of a murky blob of black on the ground.”


“Sorry. A cute murky blob-”

“Shut up.” Hanzo pulls his hoodie up and off – or tries to, before the cloth gets briefly tanged in his horns. He makes a muffled noise of irritation, struggling to free himself.

“Lemme help you there.” McCree's hands grab near his shoulders, tugging gently as he guides the garment up and over Hanzo's head.

“Mmph-!” Hanzo takes in a deep breath the moment he's freed, shaking out his long, staticky hair that now clung stubbornly to his tank top. “Cursed horns.”

“Why don't you just cut em?” McCree asks, folding up the hoodie in his arms. “If they don't hurt to touch, a big saw could probably file em down to nubs.”

“I cannot.” Hanzo stretches his bared arms up, basking in the warmth of the sun before flopping backwards into the grass. “They would grow back. And they hurt greatly when they grow.”

“Oh.” McCree looks thoughtful as he sets the hoodie aside. “When did they start comin' in? You didn't have any dragon features in your old file photos.”

“Why have you been looking at my old photos?” Hanzo asks crisply.

“Hey, now, I'm the one askin' questions. Don't you call me out for bein' curious.”

Hanzo rolls his eyes as he plucks at a few strands of grass. “My features came in during my imprisonment. The dragons call them 'gifts' and claim they are there for my protection. Perhaps it is just their method of keeping me away from the rest of the world. I suppose that is a form of protection, in a way.”

McCree hums. He still looks like he's thinking. “Did you ever ask them to-”

“Yes,” Hanzo says curtly. “And no, they cannot restore my legs.”

“Ah.” McCree scratches at his chin. “Well, good to know, but it wasn't what I was goin' to ask.”

“Then what?”

“Mm. Y'promise not to take it the wrong way?”

“No. And now I am more inclined to take it the wrong way than ever.”

McCree lets out a gruff chuckle. “Alright, but I was just wonderin' if you ever asked them to. Y'know. Take away the scaly bits, if they brought it on ya. Now don't you go thinking it's because I mind them-”

“Stop,” Hanzo interrupts tiredly. “Yes, McCree. I have asked that of them as well.”

“And they won't do it? Ain't you their master?”
“No.” Hanzo pulls up another handful of grass and watches the wind take it from his palm. “I am their vessel. Often, we agree. But sometimes, we do not. And inevitably, they change the host’s body as they see fit. I have not found a way to stop them.”

“I’m s-”

“Hush.” Hanzo arches his back slightly, stretching out in the grass. “You have nothing to apologize for, but I do not wish to talk about it. I want to enjoy the sun while I can and have some peace while I do so.”

“Can I have your head in my lap, to run my fingers through your hair?”

Hanzo considers the request. “Yes,” he decides after a moment. “But keep your hands away from my ears.”

“Ain’t my fault you look real cute when they tickle,” McCree replies casually as he scoots closer.

“It is precisely your fault that they tickle in the first place.” Hanzo props his head up against McCree's leg; the man's broad palm come to rest atop his head.

“Alright, alright.” McCree sifts his fingers through Hanzo's long hair, trailing them gently to the ends and then starting again. “I'll be on my best behavior. Seein' how it's our first date an' all.”

Hanzo groans loudly.

“What?” McCree teases, fingertips circling near Hanzo's horns. “Can't say date?”

Hanzo closes his eyes. “Stop.”

“Aw. You're shy.”

“I am not,” Hanzo replies crossly. “I just never envisioned my first date to be lying in the dirt, even if I asked for it.”

“Whoa, hold up there.” Hanzo can feel McCree leaning over him, casting a shadow over his face. “First date? I thought you said I wasn't your first!”

“You are not my first companion,” Hanzo clarifies with a pinch of irritation. “But I have never bothered with trivial courtship rituals. I have never needed them.”

“God damn.” McCree's hands still in Hanzo's hair. “Well. Shit.” He lets out a low whistle. “Ain't gonna lie, startin' to feel some pressure here as your first. Should I have worn a suit?”

“It would have helped,” Hanzo replies mildly, not bothering to open his eyes. “But what is done is done.”

“Well, hang on. We can just call this hanging out. I can get dressed proper tomorrow, get some fancy eats-”

“McCree,” Hanzo sighs. “Stop. I do not need or desire extravagant showmanship. I was only responding to your teasing.” Hanzo shifts slightly, nudging McCree's leg with his horns. “My life has changed greatly since my youth. Dating, being courted like this... it is not something I would ever have even tolerated due to my burdens. But...” He lifts a hand to gently cover McCree's. “I might enjoy it, with you.”

“Han...” McCree says in a terribly fond voice.
“Hush. Let me rest.” Hanzo tilts his head. “And keep your fingers moving. It feels nice.”

“You're spoiled, always givin' little orders.” Hanzo's nose wrinkles as he feels McCree brush a kiss against its tip. “It's awful cute.”

“I would be more spoiled if you refrained from labeling me 'cute','” Hanzo mutters.

“Nah. Gotta keep you in line somehow.”


“Sure thing, sugar.” McCree's fingers are sifting gently through Hanzo's hair, and a rough palm caresses his cheek. “You rest your eyes. I'll wake your cute face when it's time to go.”

Hanzo lets out an irritated grunt, but all he gets in return is a fond chuckle. He can't help but recall a comment he'd earned long ago in his youth.

_I don't understand you sometimes, Brother. You really do have such strange tastes in men._
Chapter 22

Life at Blackwatch HQ is more peaceful than Hanzo had initially assumed.

McCree is true to his word – most of the operatives are always out and about on missions, rather than cramming the halls. Those that he did come into contact with rarely gave Hanzo so much as a glance.

“No offense,” Clara had remarked. “But most vets have seen way weirder shit than you. You know Overwatch has a talking space gorilla?”

Hanzo didn't care for that comparison, but the lack of attention he receives is nice. It allows him to take walks in the halls with McCree without worrying about stares. Sometimes, he even lets McCree offer him an arm to hold – as long as they were in the darker parts of the caverns. There's even a small, hollowed-out cave near the base of the waterfall that they frequent; the moss that lines the floor and walls makes for a comfortable seat to picnic on while listening to the soothing sounds of the rushing water.

McCree's an expert at 'nicking' food from the kitchen, as he liked to call it. They lacked the cliché picnic basket to carry it all, but a plastic container in Hanzo's lap did the trick. Hanzo isn't sure how or why, but the supervillain's lair is surprisingly wheelchair accessible. Very few passages slant at uncomfortable angles that force McCree to take hold of his handlebars; he's learned paths to avoid them, but there's always a different way to take to get where he wants to go. Most of where he wants to go is with McCree at his side anyway.

It's... getting easier. Being with McCree. Letting his guard down to be affectionate, even in public; letting the man murmur praise and intentions into his ear. Caution and suspicions are giving way to genuine fondness and desire – and when he wants to, McCree knows how to be extremely desireable.

There was just something about that ridiculous country drawl, purred right into Hanzo's neck... Well. At least Genji is not around to tease.

It's also getting easier to make the trips around the base, even without his chair. Lilac would videoconference with Hanzo every other day; she'd give him exercises and check on his progress under the promise that he would see another Blackwatch doctor if he felt any unnatural pain.

The shipments of Angela's special painkiller also helped, but he'd downplayed it in front of her.

Lilac is not the only source of calls he receives – Alex rings every so often to speak with McCree and greet Hanzo. They'd downplayed the hoodie gift, waving off Hanzo's sincere expressions of gratitude with a smile and platitudes. It's still nice to hear from them, even if sometimes their call comes at... inopportune moments. Hanzo doesn't enjoy asking, but McCree's becoming particularly observant to his signals - knowing when Hanzo wants those strong, calloused hands off of a work tablet and onto him instead.

Hanzo's alone time with McCree is often shorter than he likes; Reyes would regularly appear around a corner or call over the comm for McCree to report to various parts of the base. Sometimes, Hanzo is allowed to follow. The training range is a frequent visitation site; a spacious room lined with targets, training droids and obstacle courses for operatives to practice on. Hanzo never partakes, but he sits on the sidelines and watch McCree, Reyes and others hone their skills.
McCree is an excellent shot. He hadn't been lying when he'd called himself a good soldier; even Clara shows him some respect on the training field. He's a quick draw with a quicker trigger finger – several times, Hanzo hasn't even realized what the man was firing at until he sees the target fall. Part of Hanzo wants to see the man on the battlefield, blazing in action - and his more rational side admits he'd be too stressed over the man's well-being to enjoy it.

“You sure you don't want to join in?” McCree asks one day, pulling off his hat and wiping the sweat off his brow. “I'm sure we could find you something to practice with.”

“I was never fond of firearms,” Hanzo admits. “And now, they would be murder on my ears. In my youth, I was trained in the sword and bow. Something you lack here.”

“Why bother with a bow? A rifle can beat it any day.”

“Find me a proper bow, and I will prove you wrong.”

“Nah,” McCree chuckles, taking Hanzo's hand into his. “Already know you can kick my ass six ways to Sunday.” He bends down to kiss the top of Hanzo's knuckles. “Don't need proof that kitty's got claws.”

“And here I thought you enjoyed my claws,” Hanzo murmurs coyly. He gently pulls his hand from McCree's grasp to gently trail a finger down the man's cheek. “You make such sweet sounds when they are digging into your back.”

McCree's next chuckle is several octaves deeper. “Well, now. I seem to recall you making some pretty noises yourself.” He catches Hanzo's wrist and loops one arm around his waist, pulling him closer. “But maybe I need a reminder?”

“You reek,” Hanzo replies fondly, leaning into the touch. “Go take a shower.”

“I'll go if you join me.”

“Jesus fucking Christ, I'm standing right here.” Clara's voice comes from somewhere behind Hanzo – he cranes his neck back to see her drenched in sweat, a towel around her neck and a water bottle in hand.

“Hey, Clara,” McCree says cheerfully. “Didn't see you there.”

“You literally waved me over behind his back, asshole.” Clara takes a swig of her water and swallows. “I thought you wanted a rematch.”

“Why would I want that? I won.”

“To try and show off to your boyfriend. I say try, because I'll win this round. And then Hanzo will be my boyfriend.”

McCree's already releasing his hold on Hanzo and stepping over to face her. “Will not. You already have a fiance!”

“No, I am pretty sure this is how the competition works,” Hanzo remarks casually, straightening his hoodie. “Clara, how do you feel about dinner tomorrow?”

“Sure. You want sushi?”

“I do want sushi, thank you.” Hanzo glances over at McCree, whose shooting both of them a look
of utter indignation. “I am sorry, McCree,” he says, schooling his face into an expression of mock sympathy. “But I suppose if you want to keep me, you will have to win.”

“I can win,” McCree mutters, jamming his hat back onto his head. “Could beat her with one hand behind my back.”

“Wanna bet a kiss on it?” Clara offers smugly.

“No.”

“I know you can't stand the mall,” McCree says, toweling off his neck. “But d'ya want me to pick you up some better clothes from it?”

Hanzo considers this, plucking at his oversized hoodie and cargo shorts as they walk. The training room is fading fast behind them, the sound of Clara's victory whoops still ringing down the hall. “Perhaps,” he admits. “I could use more variety. But I do not know my size in European.”

“Could get you measured,” McCree offers. “Centimeters on your waist and shoulders and such. But you also like it a little baggy, yeah? For the claws.”

“I would not mind something that fit, for once. So I might look more presentable.”

“Really, now.” McCree's arm loops around Hanzo's shoulders, and his tone is smug. “You dollin' up for me?”

“No,” Hanzo replies sweetly. “I want to look nice for my date with Clara.”

McCree retracts his arm with an indignant noise. “Oh, c'mon! You two weren't serious, were you?!)

“Did you win?”

“She barely scraped ahead!”

“That does not sound like you won.”

McCree huffs, visibly annoyed as they round the hallway's corner. Their room comes into view, barely visible in the dim torchlight. “I'll treat you myself. Anything you want.”

“Clara has already said she will get me sushi,” Hanzo points out as he types numbers into the keypad. “What will you offer to eat?”

McCree's expression turns sly. “Me.”

“I prefer the sushi.”

The door swings open, and whatever hurt reply McCree had been about to utter dies in the man's throat.

Reyes is inside their darkened room, laying on the bed fully dressed with his arms crossed and
heavy boots kicked up on the sheets. He pointedly turns his gaze off the phone in his hand to give McCree and Hanzo an unimpressed look.

“Always turning your comm off the moment I got work for you, Jesse?”

“Were you seriously waiting in the dark for dramatic effe- ah! Ah!” Reyes is off the bed and crossing the room in an instant, fingers clasping tightly around McCree's earlobes as he yanks downward and forces the man into a half-bend.

“How many times I gotta tell you to keep it on, pendejo? How many times?”

“It's not my fault," McCree whines. "Clara was-"

“I told you to be combat ready by four today.” Reyes brings the watch on his wrist to McCree's eye level. “Can you tell me, young ward of mine, what time it is now?”

“I ain't so good with Roman numerals, Boss.”

“It's six,” Reyes barks into McCree's ear, earning a wince. He shoves McCree back and points back down the hallway. “Get your ass to the armory and get your gear ready. We're shipping out in an hour, and you better not smell like a pig in the sun by then.”

“God damn, fine,” McCree mutters, straightening up and fixing his hat. “I'm goin'.” He stomps off down the hall; Reyes turns his gaze to Hanzo. He looks up and down, like he's assessing something.

“He was better about this stuff before you came along,” Reyes remarks dryly.

“I am not telling him to ignore you.”

“You're standing.” Hanzo blinks at the sudden shift in subject, but Reyes' tone betrays no indication of it. “You finally ditching your chair?”

“No,” Hanzo replies, just as neutrally. “But I am getting better at doing without. I am tired though, so if I may-”

“Go sit? Sure thing. Jolene here came along for that exact purpose.” Reyes steps to the side; a small woman in half-moon glasses had been hidden behind him, remarkably silent and clutching a clipboard to her chest. Where had she been hiding? The bathroom? She gives Hanzo a quick look-over before pushing her glasses up her nose.

“Him?” she asks.

“Don't let his bunny hood fool you. Just do what we discussed.” Reyes jerks his thumb over his shoulder. “Follow her – we've got a plane loaded up and ready for you.”

“I thought we were shipping out in an hour,” Hanzo asks curiously. “Why would I need to be on the plane now?”

“We are shipping out in an hour – that's me, McCree, and some others,” Reyes says slowly. "That's for our mission. You are leaving on your mission now.”

“What?” The dragons stir within Hanzo, grumbling with discontent. “Where am I going? For how long?”

“I'm gonna pretend I don't know, so that you'll have to get the answers from Jolene on the plane.
Technically you're both late, so you gotta move.”

“You can't just-

“What?” Reyes' voice instantly turns dangerous. “What can't I do, Shimada?”

Hanzo swallows down his spike of anger. “It would be wiser to bring me with you, would it not?” he says carefully. “To watch your back.”

“My back doesn't need watching. What it needs is for you to go and do your job. You're a specialty case, and you'll do more good by yourself than with us.”

“McCree is still recovering from the last mission,” Hanzo argues. “Why are you bringing him?”

“He's really, really not. Kid's been shipshape for weeks," Reyes retorts. "You know he's fine. This your way of trying to say you won't do missions without your boyfriend along?"

Hanzo glares wordlessly at the man from under his hood.

“Tough,” Reyes snaps. “Blackwatch isn't a dating service. You think this place didn't fuck up my love life? I've got operatives under me who've gone years deep cover without seeing their loved ones."

“But-

“But nothing. I'm taking McCree, and you're going to do what you're told. You both work for Blackwatch, and you need to shape up and act like it.”

Jolene clears her throat. “Sir, we are on a schedule...”

“Right you are.” Reyes gives her a quick nod before rounding on Hanzo again. “We gonna have a problem, Shimada? Or are you ready to fall in line?”

Hanzo mutters a bitter acknowledgment under his breath.

"Are you?"

“Yes! Fine.” Hanzo redirects his glare over to the tiny woman. “Lead me to the plane, handler.”

“No need for that,” she replies, pushing her glasses up again. “Please, follow me. The pilots are waiting.”

“I don't care,” Hanzo mumbles inaudibly, but the woman has already turned away. He's forced to follow her tiny footsteps at a halting pace down the hall, his knees already beginning to throb in protest.

Reyes could have at least let him say goodbye.
“My name is Jolene, as you know. I'm here to brief you, guide you, and remind you that neither of us are here by choice. I did not make you come on this mission, and I was forced to go myself. Please direct all glares and aggression towards this picture of Commander Reyes on the dartboard I have provided, free of charge.”

Hanzo has grown to like Jolene. The woman is funny and crisp, despite looking like a stuffy librarian. He'd been initially annoyed, of course – hustled onto a small plane with scant information, strapped down and flown out of HQ like he's a piece of express mail. He'd been all grumbles and snapping teeth towards Jolene, but the woman hadn't tolerated any of it. She'd bared her own teeth, made scowls in mimicry and reminded him repeatedly that she's not the one to be mad at and isn't Reyes just an ass sometimes?

“Honestly, I haven't been briefed myself on what you do, exactly.” Jolene always seemed to sport around a clipboard with paperwork that was about five pounds too heavy for her. “Going over the dossier, though, we only have three stops. Reyes informed me that you do 'something' and when you're 'done', I ship you off to the next place. That about right?”

Hanzo had nodded while Jolene jotted down notes.

“Right. Then I'm going to try and speedrun this to get you and me through this as quickly as possible. You do your stuff rápido, I keep the pilots charged and running while stuffing your mind full of mission facts. We finish, we get home, and I get to watch the Top Model finale before the base spoils it for me. Sound fair?”

More than fair. Hanzo spends most of the plane rides blissfully unconscious in sleep – if he or Jolene are awake at the same time, they play cards, darts, or even just chat together. She's easy to talk to and doesn't ask personal questions - at all. It's like she has no real interest in his appearance or past, and it's surprisingly refreshing. Light conversations make the time go quickly inside the dull, empty hangar.

He has no way of contacting McCree. No comm of his own, no device to send text messages or even photos back and forth. He's sure it's intentional, Reyes testing his loyalty, but it doesn't stop Hanzo from fretting. Is McCree's mission going well? Has he gotten injured again – or worse?

“Do you really hate Reyes?” Hanzo had asked fifteen hours into their first flight. “Or was that for my benefit?”

“What? Nah, that was for show, back when you were all pissy.” Jolene had been lining up a dart at the picture of Reyes, followed by a throw that landed it neatly between the eyes. “Reyes is Reyes. He's a great guy to chill with when he can afford it and a hardass when he has to be, which is often. He's the boss, and he's got a hell of a lot on his shoulders. You don't lead an assassin's guild with niceties.”

“Is that what Blackwatch is?”

“Might as well be. Overwatch does the nice, public work. We pick up what they're too squeamish for. We get the guts, they get the glory.” Jolene had turned to pluck her clipboard from the table. “Speaking of which, we should get on with your briefing.”

Their first stop had been in Numbani. Hanzo had never visited the metropolis, but his father had –
Genji always enjoyed the intricate wooden carvings their father would bring back, while Hanzo was often gifted with formal garments. The sight of the sprawling, gleaming city was wondrous to behold out of the plane's small windows.

Jolene had placed a small, metallic gear in Hanzo's palm after they landed. She'd told him he had an omnic target, a rebellious remnant of the war that had slipped through their grasp one too many times. No picture – this omnic had had time to change, and there was no telling what his new face could be.

“So...” She'd leaned back on her heels. “Do I escort you through the city, or...? Still not clear on what you do, and I've been asked not to, er, ask.”

“It is complicated,” Hanzo had admitted. “I do not need to leave. Please be patient.” The last thing he'd seen before settling himself and closing his eyes was her look of disbelief.

It hadn't been a difficult hunt. Omnic energy burns a little brighter than human, sharp and crisp – there were more omnics in the city than he'd expected, but the dragons had followed the faint trail off the gear with ease. Buildings melted away until they'd flown to the direct outskirts of the city. The target had been in hiding, as Reyes had expected – tending a salon in a small, run-down neighborhood.

The human remains lining the walls had been all the convincing Hanzo needed to strike the omnic down.

He wasn't sure how long he'd taken – only that when he'd returned to himself, Jolene had been in the middle of a vaguely impressive house of cards stacked high to the ceiling. She'd looked down at him, cocking a brow.

“Done?”

“Yes,” Hanzo had rasped. She'd provided a glass of water he'd gulped down before hobbling to the fold-out bed and collapsing into proper sleep.

When he'd awoken, Jolene had helped him swallow some pills and a light meal without a single catty remark. “Not sure what you did, but you did good according to Reyes. He comm'd while you were out, said we're still on for the second stop.”

“Wonderful,” Hanzo'd muttered.

They'd passed the time with some Crazy 8 and War until the plane landed at their newest stopover – New Zealand.

“I thought New Zealand was peaceful?” Hanzo had asked.

“You ever met a Cassowary?”

“I thought those were from Australia.”

“They migrated after the fallout. Some say they rode over on the backs of whales. Others say that's fucking stupid, and environmentalists relocated them. Either way, now they're twice as big and twice as mean from the radiation. Exactly like your targets.”

Junkers. The clan rarely ever dealt with them, even remotely. They were unpredictable, savage people who stole everything they could, even from their own. At least, that's what his father had said.
Jolene had laid out their pictures – five of them, but only two mementos between them. A small, brass ring and a torn scrap of leather.

“I can find two of them at least,” Hanzo’d admitted. “But without something for the others? I cannot scour the entire continent blind.”

“Reyes said that this was all they had. 'Do your best' was what he said.”

“Did he say it reassuringly or ominously?”

“The latter.”

“Of course.”

He'd ended up killing three. The trail off the ring led to a single bearded man, tucked away in a small cottage filled with firearms and surrounded by bear traps. He'd been sitting in a rocking chair, fast asleep – his death had been almost merciful. With the leather scrap, Hanzo got lucky – two of the men in the photos had been eating together in a seedy bar, slapping each other on the back and laughing. Hanzo had retreated back into his body the moment he'd felt their life force disappear; he hadn't wanted to stick around to watch the other bar patron's reactions.

Hanzo had found no trace of the remaining two Junkers. Truthfully, their pictures were the ones that discomforted him the most – the skinny one looked like a crazed hyena, and the fatter was just... disturbing. How much of that mask is real pig?

Reyes had commended Hanzo for his partial success – or so he'd been told. All communications with the man were done through Jolene, since Hanzo spent most of the trip in and out of consciousness.

They were currently on the third and final stop – or would have been, until Jolene informs him that they're turning around.

“Problem took care of itself.” She's leaning back in a chair, reading off a hand-held tablet and pushing her glasses up on her nose. “Apparently the guy we're after drank himself to death.”

Hanzo rubs the base of his horns tiredly, sitting cross-legged in his fold-out bed. “He died of alcohol poisoning?”

“Nah. He drank, but then he drove - straight into a local distillery, and sent the whole thing up in flames. Enough of his teeth left to ID him, I guess. Want to see the pictures?”

“No, thank you,” Hanzo says curtly. “Are we done, then? Can we go home?”

“Almost. Reyes is re-routing us.”

Hanzo growls in frustration. “But we finished-”

“Calm down. The reroute's close to Blackwatch HQ, so we'll not be far off.” Jolene's voice is oddly serious, and it's enough to draw Hanzo's curious gaze over to her.

“According to the intel... hang on.” Jolene's fiddling near the console, attempting to hook up the small tablet in her hands to an HDMI cord. “Damned... Ah. There.” The console's screen flashes blue before rapidly filling with images. “Anyway according to the intel, we shipped off four operatives...” She taps the tablet and the images zoom until a small land mass appears. “To here. Skærmet, a small village in Denmark hidden out in Thy National Park. It's surrounded by forest,
obviously, and houses about 25 people total. Tiny, rinky-dink.” Jolene taps again, and a picture of verdant treetops opens up to the side. "Honestly, I don't even know if the census is accurate. Place is so remote and small, no one really cares about it."

"It looks pretty,” Hanzo drones. “Why is it keeping me on this plane?”

“Because not a single operative has checked in for over 72 hours since arrival.” Jolene pulls up an image of three women and one man onto the screen. “Tessa, Kali, Pitar and Liles. All good, seasoned soldiers according to their records. When none of them bother to call in, there's likely a major problem.”

Hanzo studies their faces carefully. “Perhaps they just do not have service in the woods? And what were they doing there in the first place?”

“Negatory. We use special sat-comms – service range hasn't been an issue in over two decades. As for what they were doing? Reyes isn't elaborating beyond 'checking in on a potential situation'.”

“Mm.” Hanzo stretches his arms above his head. “So I am to find them when we land?”

“Yes, and no.” Jolene drops the tablet onto the table and stands, leaving the console screen filled with the images of the missing operatives. “Reyes wants you to find them, but we aren't landing right away. There's no marked place to do so. We're going to circle in the air briefly while you do your...” She waves a hand vaguely. “Thing. Hopefully we'll have enough time to spot a suitable clearing.”

“I do not mind telling you what I do,” Hanzo says mildly. “At this point, you might as well know.”

“Pass.” Jolene jots something down on her clipboard, then tucks it under her arm. “Reyes doesn't want me to know, and I don't really care either way. Whatever you do, it's probably safer for me if I don't know about it.”

“A fair point.” Hanzo turns his head towards the windows. “How long until we're overhead?”

“About six hours. You could take another nap, if you wanted.”

It's not a bad idea. Hanzo thinks he'll take her up on it.

No matter how many times Hanzo does it, descending from a plane is as dizzying and disorienting as always.

Eri and Ami don't share his discontent – they seem to enjoy coasting over the forest's darkening treetops with gleaming eyes on the setting sun ahead.

We are almost home. Hanzo watches through Ami as Eri gives a happy little ripple in the air. We are almost free.

Be prudent. We have been warned about this hunt. Ami's chiding voice is strange in Hanzo's ears – usually, her admonishments are directed at him.
I do not care, Eri replies easily. **Nothing can touch us. We will find them, living or not. And then we will go home.**

*What does he seek at the Blackwatch Headquarters?* Hanzo reaches out privately to Ami, as to not disturb her brother. *It is hardly my home.*

An amused titter follows. **Home is not a place. Home is a person. Someone whose absence is paining us, who we long to embrace again.**

... Oh.

Eri is more in tune with your longings, but we both feel as you do, little one. Your thoughts and emotions pour into us, even if you do not let them show.

*Stop.* Hanzo hadn't even known it was possible for his spirit self to become embarrassed. **We must focus.**

**True. Then look down.**

Hanzo obliges, following Eri in a downward spiral as the two dragons meld through the verdant trees. Leaves and bark are brushed away like air as they glide through the forest, the barest hint of civilization glimpsed in the distance between the shadows of the forest. As they near, Hanzo can barely make out the outlines of single-story houses and what he's pretty sure is a church steeple.

The forest finally breaks, and the two dragons pull themselves to an immediate halt to hover above the outskirts of Skærmet. It's – quaint. Like a clearing that had been cut out of untamed wilderness and filled with simple brick-lain houses. Hanzo can even spot the occasional shop, a diner, and a small church. It's picturesque, the kind of village tourists would pay top dollar to flood into and ruin. His aunt always had enjoyed bragging about the profit to be won from such untainted splendor.

The dragons, however, do not find the village as appealing. Hanzo can feel an ugly tremor course through Ami's body, and he's surprised to find both are bristling angrily.

Eri's claws are extended, flexing and curling - Ami looks equally tense. Her eyes travel over the town; her lips curl in a vicious snarl.

*What is wrong?* Hanzo follows her gaze, finding nothing out of place. *What do you see?*

**Nothing.** The dragons speak in unison.

Nothing?

**There is no life here.** Eri extends his snout forward, sniffing the air with narrowed eyes. *The hum of machinery, but...*

Impossible, Hanzo argues. *We are deep in a forest – where would everyone have gone? They would not just abandon their homes.*

**No,** Ami agrees curtly. **They would not.**

It's unsettling. The dragons' words, and their strange *stillness.* This refusal to move from the edge of the village. To Hanzo, everything looks perfectly in place even as shadows elongate. The sun is setting, darkening the small village bit by bit. It's a bit strange that no one is on the streets and not
a single chimney plumes smoke into the air. But there are no damaged windows, no signs of struggle or violence. Nothing to indicate something is decidedly wrong.

Silence fills the air as the dragons keep their gazes on the village, and finally, Hanzo forces himself to speak.

*We have to find the men.*

**They are not here,** Ami replies immediately.

*I cannot return with nothing. Come. We must search the village for some clue, at least.*

No.

Ami's immediate refusal shocks Hanzo - he can see similar surprise mirrored in Eri's expression. *No?* Hanzo sputters. *You-

**Refuse.** Ami's tail lashes erratically, whipping about like an angered cat. **Something foul has passed through here. I can feel its presence lingering nearby.**

**It is... strange. Unnatural.** Eri's still scenting the wind. **I have never felt anything like this before.**

*You are dragons,* Hanzo protests. *What have you to fear?*

**I do not know,** Ami replies.

*Then go!*

**We will not.**

Hanzo's frustration is mounting physically – he can feel his body's shoulders tighten, like he's being gripped by something unnameable. *We cannot return until we do this.*

**Nothing is left here. Simply tell them that.**

*That is not enough for them! If they think I cannot control you -*

**You do not control us.** Ami's voice turns harsh thunderous, rattles painfully in Hanzo's ears. **We protect you. As we are doing now.**

**Return to your body,** Eri adds in a gentler voice. **Tell them the truth. Nothing is here.**

*Fine. Hanzo's irritation has caused a pinching sensation to form on his brow. I will go. If you are both so afraid. You, who can fell men in a breath.*

Eri says nothing. Ami merely turns her head towards the forest, eyes narrowed into suspicious slits. A deep, terrible growl reverberates in her throat.

With an irritated huff Hanzo pulls away from them, letting the darkness sink him back into his own body.

Cowards. What could possibly harm them?
Chapter 24

At the first flutter of consciousness, Hanzo knows something is wrong.

He notices the silence, first. The plane's engines should be roaring in his ears, but there is only a low, electrical hum in the background. Jolene's footsteps or voice should be nearby, but he can hear nothing of the woman. And it's warm. Warmer than it should be on an air-conditioned plane. Is he under a blanket? He'd been sitting on the floor, before the hunt.

Hanzo opens his eyes blearily, vision fuzzy and swimming. He narrows his gaze to focus – a yellowed, popcorn ceiling slowly comes into view. After a moment of processing, he bolts upright in bed with a sharp gasp.

He isn't in the plane; he's in a room that's foreign, hot and humid. The bed he's been placed on has only a thin, flower-print sheet – on the wooden walls, there's a framed picture of a cat dangling from a tree and a small, mounted fan cycling air through the room. It's tiny and cramped, barely enough space for the single bed and nightstand crammed next to it. A thick door marks the room's only exit.

Hanzo's heart races as he takes in his new surroundings. Where was this? What had happened to the plane? The hunt had failed – he couldn't have been out for more than a few hours. Could he have? Had they stopped somewhere?

"Jolene?" Hanzo calls.

There's no answer. Only the soft hum of the fan breaks the room's silence.

Hanzo pulls the covers off himself, followed by a short exhale of relief. His prosthetics are still attached and seem unharmed. He swings his legs over the edge of the bed, getting to his feet with a shaky wobble – the anxiety prickling through his system is doing little to help with his balance.

He tries the door handle, expecting it to be locked. To his immense surprise, it gives easily and with a light push, the door swings open. Apparently, he is not a prisoner. This time.

Outside the door is a small, spiral staircase leading downward. He can see light coming from the floor beneath him and hears something metal clatter. It almost sounds like... pots and pans? Hanzo sniffs the air curiously as a gentle aroma wafts up from below.

"Bacon?"

The stairs creak loudly under each of Hanzo's steps, but whoever is moving around below doesn't seem bothered. The clatter of pans stops to be replaced by the repetitive clicking of a gas burner and the soft hiss of flame.

When Hanzo finally reaches the bottom of the stairs, he finds himself standing in a small diner. The windows lining the cream-colored room are dark – night has fallen outside. Florescent lights flicker erratically over the long, wooden counter. Plates that are scraped clean of food have been left scattered atop it; Hanzo turns his head and can see more left behind in the booths.

"We are in a forest – where would everyone have gone?"

A wet, slapping sound draws Hanzo's gaze over to the kitchen window that peeks out from behind the counter. The lights are on inside, bright and cheery. Hanzo can hear the sound of oil sizzling
and the scent of bacon grows stronger.

“Jolene?” Hanzo leans closer to the window, bending over the counter. “... Jolene?”

A robotic chuckle answers him. “Are you asking if I am going to take your man?”

Hanzo's hackles instantly rise; he stumbles backwards with his teeth pulled up in a loud snarl. This voice is new, different – a stranger. His hands grasp blindly for the nearest weapon, and latch onto a stray butter knife.

Perhaps he should just use his claws.

“Do not be alarmed. It was only a small joke.” The voice grows distant, moving away from the window. The kitchen door to the right swings open without warning, and Hanzo whips towards it to brandish his knife threateningly.

What emerges is nothing more than a thin, humanoid omnic, balancing a plate of toast and bacon on its left palm. A thick, red sash is wrapped around its waist, and tattered yellow pants cover its folded legs. Nine identical dots adorn its brow, and Hanzo isn't sure if those or the two dark slits below are supposed to be its eyes. “Greetings,” it says in a soothing voice.

“Who are you?” Hanzo demands.

The omnic floats over to the counter, setting down the plate of food. “I am a member of the Shambali order. A wandering monk, if you prefer. And it seems...” It turns over a piece of bacon on the plate to inspect a thoroughly burnt corner. “I am not much of a cook. My apologies.”

Shambali... the name is familiar, but Hanzo can't place it. “Where am I?” Hanzo snaps. “Where have you taken me? What have you done to me?!”

“I mean no ill will, and I have not taken you anywhere,” the omnic replies calmly, folding its fingers together. “Or at least, not far.”

“Liar,” Hanzo hisses. “I was on a plane. I was in the air! Not -” He waves the knife wildly at the diner. “This hovel!”

“Ah.” The omnic's lights blink. “Yes. I found you on the outskirts of the village, and brought you here.”

The village... he is in Skærmet? “You found me? Where?”

“On the forest floor,” comes the casual reply. “You were lying unconscious, nearly a kilometer away from your aircraft. It seems its presence was perceived as a threat.”

“A thr- where is my plane, and the other person on-board?! What happened?!”

The omnic holds up its palm in a gesture of peace. “It is alright. Your companion is unharmed; your plane, admittedly less so. But the threat of danger has already departed from this place.”

Hanzo snorts angrily. “Take me there.”

“Where?”

“Tо- to the plane! To where I am supposed to be!”

“Ah. That, I can do.” The omnic tilts its palm downward and beckons with two fingers. “Come. I
will lead you to your aircraft. Unless you would prefer to eat first?"

“No,” Hanzo hisses back. “I would not.”

The omnic shrugs its slender shoulders and drifts towards the diner doors. A gentle push outward and the omnic is gliding past them – after a brief pause to gather his flustered self, Hanzo follows.

The night air is chilling on Hanzo’s scales, and the darkness is all-encompassing on the unlit streets. The only source of light comes from the small, glowing dots upon the omnic’s brow. Hanzo stumbles more than once on the broken asphalt road and decides to stow his knife into his pocket for safety.

In person, the village is as quiet and still as it had been on the hunt. Only the sounds of rustling of leaves and Hanzo’s clattering footsteps break the silence. The darkness makes it difficult to make out more than the outline of the houses – but they still seemed unbroken, with no signs of violence inflicted. Untouched.

“Why is this village empty?” Hanzo asks, turning his head towards the omnic. “Where has everyone gone?”

The omnic’s facial plating betrays no expression, but his voice is soft. “Some fled. Most perished.”

Hanzo gives the omnic a suspicious look. “By your hand?”

“No. By another’s. I journeyed here in search of some old friends. But I arrived to this, instead.”

The image of the missing operatives flashes in Hanzo’s mind. “Did your friends make it out?”

“Yes. I do not know where they have gone, however. It is good fortune that I came, just the same.”

Hanzo glances at the empty, silent houses. “It does not seem so.”

The omnic makes a thoughtful noise. “I rescued you, did I not?”

They’ve reached the edge of the village. Against the starry sky, there’s a thin plume of smoke spiraling up between the trees to the north; the omnic tips its hand in that direction. “Your ship lies there, although it has suffered extensive damage. I would not advise restarting it until it has undergone repairs.”

Hanzo ignores the warning, brushing past the omnic as he heads towards the forest’s edge. The darkness grows thicker between the trees, but the scent of smoke is strong and heady. It’s an easy trail to follow.

Hanzo glances back only once; the omnic is still floating in place with folded fingers, watching Hanzo in silence.

Creepy.

Hanzo isn’t sure how long he walks. The forest is a sea of inky black, thick and unforgiving – his face earns scratches from low-hanging branches, and he stumbles to the ground more often than
he'd like to admit. However frightening his eyes may seem to Reyes and the rest, they certainly aren't helping him in the dark.

Lights from the plane can be seen long before the actual vehicle – by the time Hanzo reaches the clearing it's nestled in, he can already pick out three windows that have been well-illuminated. The hangar door is open, which was rarely a good sign. As Hanzo approaches, he realizes why – the thick cables attached on each side have been... cut? He stops before them, bending down to pick half of one off the ground. He turns it over, inspecting each side. The fibers show no sign of wear or disrepair; instead of being cut, they looked like they'd simply been torn apart.

What could possibly possess the strength to do so?

The smoke trail is rising from the plane's engines, the metal turbines crumpled and battered. Deep, ugly gashes run down the side of a wing - like something had been trying to claw its way in. The cockpit window is smashed inward with fragments of glass scattered across the plane's nose.

There's noise from inside. Sparks and zapping from something electrical, followed by muttered curses. Hanzo knows that voice.

“Jolene?” he calls.

There's a loud clanging from inside. Hurried footsteps close in on the hangar's entrance before the woman's small frame fills the doorway.

“Hanzo?” Jolene is staring at him, a wrench in hand and an expression of utter disbelief. Her glasses are missing. “Is that you?”

“Yes.” True to the omnic's word, Jolene seems unharmed. A wave of relief washes over Hanzo. “What happened to you?”

“What happened to me? What happened to you?!” Jolene hops over the hangar's gap and sprints down the ramp, stopping a mere foot in front of him. “You disappeared! I thought-”

“I disappeared?” Hanzo interrupts in shock. “When?”

“When this!” Jolene jabs her wrench in the direction of the ship. “Did you seriously sleep through everything?! How did you even get here?!”

“Stop.” Hanzo's spike of anxiety is being tainted by irritation. “Jolene, I do not know what happened. I hunted as you asked and when I awoke, I was inside the village. Who came aboard the ship? Who did...” He waves a hand at the damaged aircraft. “All of this?!”

Jolene's wrench slowly lowers. “You don't know?” she says in wonder. “You really don't-”

“Jolene.”

“Sorry,” the woman replies immediately. She turns back towards the hangar door and beckons him. “Come on. We should talk inside. That thing could still be nearby.”

Hanzo follows her up the ramp and back through the hangar doors. The inside of the ship is utterly trashed – the same deep grooves etched into the walls and papers and chairs thrown every which way. The console screen is cracked, emitting sparks and flickering erratically with its panel thrown open – Jolene stoops down in front of it to resume tinkering.

“The cockpit's worse,” she remarks tonelessly. “I don't think we're ever going to get those pilots up
A chill runs down Hanzo's spine as he surveys the damage. “What did this?”

“I was hoping you could tell me.” Jolene pulls out two sparking wires, leaving them to dangle by her feet. “Something busted into the plane not long after we landed. You were still out, doing your zen meditation pose or whatever. At first I thought it was just a bear; heard scratches and growling something fierce. So I ignored it.” She points in the direction of the cockpit without looking. “Then the front window shattered.”

“I saw.”

“Yeah, well, I didn't. Whatever came through cut the power. I had enough time to scramble for a gun before something slapped me upside the head. Next thing I know, I'm waking up to this mess with a pair of broken glasses and you nowhere to be found. Which brings me back to my first question – what happened to you?” She stops fiddling to turn and give him a measured look.

“I do not know,” Hanzo confesses. “As I said, I awoke in the village.”

“So, what, do we have a village of hulked-out werewolves snatching you up?”

“There is no such thing.”

“Said the dragon-boy?”

“Regardless,” Hanzo interrupts. “It was not the villagers. There is no human life in that town. They have fled, or they have died.”

“Really?” Jolene purses her lips after a moment. “So, no operatives?”

Hanzo shakes his head. “No. The only thing I saw in the village was an omnic. It said it found me lying a ways off from the ship and brought me to the village to care for me – it also said that our aircraft was mistaken for a threat.”

Jolene folds her arms. “An omnic said...? The only thing that I heard on this ship sounded like a rabid beast. Certainly isn't any omnic type I know of. What'd your caretaker call itself?”

“I do not know,” Hanzo repeats. “The omnic did not give me a name. It only said that it was a monk, a member of the Shambali.” Jolene's brows shoot way up, surprising Hanzo. “Do you know them?” he asks.

“Yeah, I know them. Everybody does. A non-violent, enlightened bunch of bots. They're basically celebrities – but they live in Nepal, and only travel for peace ceremonies and such. The hell was one of them doing out here?”

“It said it came to find friends who lived in the village, I think,” Hanzo recalls. “But arrived too late. It did say that the 'danger' here had passed; whatever that means.”

Jolene clucks her tongue thoughtfully. She's playing with the wrench in her right hand, idly flicking it back and forth. “Never heard of the Shambali making friends out in this backwater. And no personal guard as an escort?”

“I saw no trace,” Hanzo replies honestly. “But I was told that you were unharmed; yet you never met with the omnic yourself?”
“Nope. Maybe it peeked in a window while I was busy working.” Jolene turns back to fiddling with the console. “Suppose I should be grateful it's a Shambali and not a radical warbot reliving old times.” Jolene taps her wrench against the console's cracked screen. “Anyway, most of the ship's busted. I can't get a line going, so I don't know if Reyes has picked up that we're as AWOL as the others. I'll work on fixing it, but we might need to call Overwatch manually.”

“Manually?”

“As in from an actual, normal phone.” Jolene points over at a small hatch on the wall. “There's some emergency money stowed away in there. Code's 1134. Take some of the golden coins and see if there's still payphone in the village or something. Is the monk still there?”

“It was when I left,” Hanzo says as he moves to open the panel in the wall. A small safe is hidden beneath – his claws make turning the knob difficult work.

“Well, if it was just milling around the village – and you swear you didn't see anyone else?”

“No.” Hanzo huffs in relief as the safe pops open. Stacks of cash are piled up high, but he selects a wrapped roll of change instead before shutting the door.

“Then it's probably being honest about the danger having passed. Maybe it scared off that big-fuck beast, or maybe its guard is chasing it. See if you can get it to answer a few more questions, or if it's got a Shambali ship coming that we could hitch a ride with. Otherwise, you may just have to call Overwatch's line and schedule a pick-up.”

“Why not Blackwatch?” Hanzo asks.

Jolene snorts. “Because Blackwatch doesn't officially exist. You think we have a public hotline for just anybody to call? Only Overwatch gets that luxury.”

“Oh.”

“You're a real rookie, you know that?” Jolene's smiling, no trace of cruelty in her tone. “I'm actually pretty happy you're okay. Thought I was gonna have to tell Reyes I lost you.”

“Ah.” Hanzo shifts uncomfortably on his feet. “Thank you.”

“Don't get sappy. Go hit up the village and get us some information and more importantly, the hell out of here. I'm missing my Top Model finale.”

Hanzo braves a smile. “You are a strange woman. I am glad you are alright, as well.”


With a fond huff, Hanzo stows the quarter roll into his pocket and heads back down the hangar ramp.
The omnic is not present when Hanzo returns to the village.

Hanzo walks the streets, looking for a pay phone or some sign of robotic life; he finds neither. He re-enters the diner but it's empty – all trace of his neglected meal and the other forgotten plates have vanished. The kitchen's been cleaned and emptied, and the small room Hanzo had awoken in upstairs shows no sign of life. His bed's even been made. Why had the omnic bothered?

The phone in the diner is dead, so Hanzo returns to the streets. He sizes up the few houses he can make out in the darkness – which one should he try first? Surely someone has a working landline, or at the very least, a cell phone lying on their nightstand.

He decides on the closest; it's the only one he can really pick out a solid shape for. Why did this town have no streeatlamps – not even a lantern to hang from a post, if they were truly so primitive? And how had the villagers managed to traverse in such total darkness? Had they all carried flashlights?

By the time Hanzo reaches the house, he's already back in a bad mood; his prosthetics hurt from his stumbling and he's pretty sure he's scraped up the metal on his toes. It only adds to his irritation when he tries the door and finds it locked; he pointlessly knocks a few times, and unsurprisingly, no one answers.

Hanzo moves around to the back of the house to see if there was a backyard door, or perhaps an opened window somewhere. He finds the former, locked like its counterpart; but he does notice something curious right beside it.

Despite the lack of lighting and the classic look to the village, there's a square of something electronic nestled into the wall to the right of the door. Squinting in the darkness, it at least looks electronic – but there's no blinking lights or brightened console to tell Hanzo what it is. An alarm system, perhaps?

If it was, it had failed miserably. Hanzo traces a finger through a clean, horizontal cut splitting the device neatly in two; there's even a groove in the wall beneath it from the impact of the cut.

It looks like blade-work.

Something flickers at the corner of Hanzo's eye. He turns his head left to squint – there. Two houses down, a light can be seen glowing out of a side window. A shadow passes, and Hanzo can just barely make out the shape of the omnic.

What was it doing in there?

Loose gravel crunches beneath Hanzo's feet as he makes his way towards the lit home – unconsciously, he fingers the butter knife he'd left in his pocket. It won't do much; it might not even be sharp enough to sever the omnic's fluid lines. But it's a comfort, even if irrational.

Hanzo tries the door handle; it gives immediately. But as he pushes forward to step inside, the door catches in place. A thin chain is drawn across the crack at eye level – the omnic had locked it?

“My apologies.” The robotic voice sounds close; Hanzo's ears prickle up in alarm as he takes a step back. Was the thing behind the door? “I could not wait for you. I will be taking my leave of this place very soon.”
“Why have you locked the door?” Hanzo gives it another push, but the chain holds. “Why are you in this house?”

“I am here to finish my work. I locked the door so others could not enter.”

“By others, you mean me,” Hanzo accuses.

“Yes.”

“What is your work?” Hanzo asks suspiciously. “Why is a member of the Shambali visiting a tiny town in Denmark instead of staying in Nepal? You have offered no proof that you are not somehow responsible for whatever has happened here.”

“You have returned with questions, and an accusation.” The omnic still hasn't appeared, but Hanzo can hear his calm voice clearly from within. “But I have already answered several. I spoke the truth - I am a wandering monk. Nepal is not my home, but my brethren do reside there. And as I said, I came here to-

“Find your friends,” Hanzo interrupts. “But where is your guard? Why are they not with you?”

“My guard?” The voice sounds surprised.

“You could not possibly be in this wilderness alone. A beast attacked our ship and tore it apart; you said the danger has departed, but how could that be so? What is this danger? And why was I taken to the village, but not Jolene? Were you spying on us?”

The omnic murmurs something unintelligible, even to Hanzo's ears. “I am sorry,” it continues audibly. “But I am afraid my guard left to pursue – well, the beast, as you say. The same that attacked your ship and the one who caused the destruction of this town. I had hoped to stop it, but-

“You said you came here to find your friends!” Hanzo snaps. “But now it was to stop a massacre?! Which is it?!”

“Both paths led to the same goal. I came here to try and calm heated minds, to establish clarity and attempt to reason. But as I said, I arrived too late.”

“To find your friends, or -”

“To save the village from them,” the omnic replies quietly.

Hanzo's mouth snaps shut. Silence falls between them; the wind picks up, rustling leaves and sending loose stones skidding across the roads.

“I must return to my work,” the omnic says finally, voice as soft as before.

“People you call friends did this?” Hanzo asks, his own voice cracking. “You- but you are a monk of peace!”

“Yes.” Hanzo hears the light thump of something against the door. “When peace is an option.”

“How can you be friends with some beast that-”

“This beast, as you claim, was not always so,” the omnic interrupts. “Many years have passed. The brief encounter that led me here was by chance.”
“What is its name?” Hanzo demands. “This thing-friend of yours.”

“I was never offered one,” the omnic says simply. “But saw acceptance in the handle of Mitra.”

“A killer with no name. How apt.”

“I understand why your opinion would be tainted. But my friend was good and kind once, and has suffered greater ills than you know.”

Hanzo's mouth is set into a grim line. “Come out from behind the door.”

A pause. “It would not be wise of me to do so.” The voice has softened again – the lights from the windows go out with a soft click.

“Come. Out. I will come in and tear you apart,” Hanzo threatens.

Another thump against the door. “Very well,” the omnic finally says. “I will apologize now, if you intend to strike me down.” The chain lifts and drops down; Hanzo immediately pushes the door inwards.

The monk hovers in the air as he always has, the dots on his dome giving off a gentle glow against the dark backdrop of the house. He looks as he always has – with the exception of his hands. Hanzo stiffens at the sight of blood, sleek and wet upon the omnic's fingers and palms. “I know it is an unpleasant sight,” it offers quietly.

Hanzo bares his teeth, one hand reaching for the knife in his pocket. The smell of rotting flesh is hitting his nose through the opened door – whatever bodies the omnic had defiled, they were close by.

The omnic holds up a bloodied palm. “Please. Allow me to explain. This is the work I spoke of.”

“Corpse desecration?” Hanzo spits, struggling to keep the horror off his face.

“The contrary. I am attempting to gather the last of the villagers.” The omnic floats to the left, clearing Hanzo's path. “You may gaze within, if you desire. But I am merely attempting to move the bodies so they may rest in the earth.”

The stench of rot and gore is nauseating, even from here. Hanzo doesn't move from the doorway. “Why are your hands wet from blood, then?” Hanzo demands. “Blood dries quickly, unless you are opening new wounds.”


Each piece. Hanzo's nausea deepens as the claw marks from the plane surface in his mind. “Mitra – that's what took me? Off the plane, abandoning me in the forest? And you call it a person?”

“Yes,” the omnic repeats.

“Why? Why did it- they, why was I spared? Why was I taken?”

The omnic is silent for a moment, drifting back to the middle of the doorway. “I hoped you would leave this place in peace,” it says finally. “Unaware of what had transpired. But perhaps it is your right to know. You are an irregularity.”

“What?” Hanzo stares the omnic down in disbelief. “Tell me what is going on. Why the secrets?
“Why did I not become...” He waves a hand frantically at the empty town. “This! Tell me! Why me?!!”

“I do not know.”

“What?”

“I do not know,” the omnic repeats. “Mitra has only just become unfettered, and is disorientated and consumed by rage. The only person I have seen a stayed hand for is myself. But for some reason, you were not harmed; your unconscious form seemingly broke the haze of bloodlust. It’s a most curious occurrence that you were distracting enough to cause the neglect of your companion. Perhaps you will be able to help.”

“I do not- I am not going to-!” Hanzo stammers, furious. “Why would I ever-?”

“Have you repaired your ship?” the omnic interrupts. “Called your crew?”

“... No,” Hanzo admits tersely after a moment. “Why?”

“Then I have time.” The omnic floats from the doorway, past Hanzo and back onto the streets. “Come. If you seek answers, they are not here. We must go deeper into the village.”

Hanzo gapes openly at the omnic's back. This strange, eerie automaton – it's unsettling, to put it mildly. And now it made claims of its beast not even knowing why he taken Hanzo, yet still sparing him?

So, what, do we have a village of hulked-out werewolves snatching you up?

The omnic outpaces Hanzo's tired steps easily; by the time Hanzo catches up, the omnic's already been stopped for half a minute. It's floating patiently on the steps of – the church? The building casts an impressive shadow against the star-lit sky, towering over the smaller brick houses. A bell is enshrined in a small steeple – but it's cracked, ugly and broken.

Unnerving.

“We are here,” Hanzo snaps, diverting his gaze to the omnic. “Now explain.”

The machine in question steeples its stained fingers together. “Where would you like me to begin?”

Hanzo grits his teeth. “Why did this village die?”

The omnic tilts its head slightly. “There are many answers to that,” it begins. “But foremost, because it harbored a woman.”

“What woman?” Hanzo spits.

“A scientist, by the name of Helga Jepsen. A talented bio-engineer, specializing in the very mechanisms you wear upon your legs.”

Hanzo glances downwards at his prosthetics. “And?”

“And her prosthesis experiments are not consensual.” The omnic touches its own legs. “They are forced – some, upon those who only lost their limbs after she laid her hands upon them. She weaponizes them and molds her prisoners into killing machines of tremendous strength and rage.”

“Mitra is one of her patients,” Hanzo says slowly, putting the pieces together.
“Yes, once. She tore Mitra apart to be remade in the bestial image of her choosing. There is very little organic left.”

“But why did the whole village have to die?” Hanzo presses. “Why not just her?”

The omnic lets out a rush of static – a sigh, to the machine. “Because it is not a village. It merely looks like one.”

“It... what?” Hanzo stares incredulously. “You cannot be serious.”

“This is not a laughing matter.”

“What are you talking about? What else could this be?” Hanzo demands, gesturing at the houses. “Are you going to tell me it is a town, instead?”

“It is neither. It is a front. A falsehood to hide in plain sight.”

“You-”

“Come with me,” the omnic repeats. It brushes by him to head up the church steps and pushes open the door. It disappears inside while Hanzo is still making incredibly frustrated noises and clenching his claws. After a moment of muttered, irritable cursing, he follows.

The inside of the church is... is...

Plain. Unremarkable to its core. A wooden floor and wooden walls - twelve pews in neat little rows, a pulpit, and tapestries draped over the walls. Nothing seems remotely wrong or out of place. Just like the rest of the village.

“What am I supposed to be looking at?” Hanzo asks curtly.

“Currently, you are seeing what they wish you to see.” The omnic glides over to the pulpit and lifts it up, spinning it around to face Hanzo. The light from the omnic’s dome allows Hanzo to glimpse a similar slash on its side – the same cut as he’d seen before in the alarm system. The omnic bends down to fiddle with something at the bottom of the stand, and a few stray sparks go flying.

Something clicks. A rumbling sound is heard beneath the floorboards, and Hanzo has to stumble back as they lift up and separate. The paneling pulls back to reveal a metal hatch, set into the stone that lay beneath.

The omnic says nothing, so Hanzo takes it upon himself to stoop to try and lift the thing. He’s barely pried it up an inch before an overwhelming stench of rot hits his nostrils; he immediately drops it, slapping a palm over his nose.

“Apologies,” the omnic says, breaking the silence. “Mitra's frenzy painted the walls. I recovered all of the dead – but I can see the scent lingers.”

“I am not opening that,” Hanzo says, thoroughly disgusted. Nausea is eating at the corners of his stomach. “What is below?”

“One of the facilities where Helga Jepsen conducted her experiments, staffed and provided by a shadow organization. Its existence is why this village was fabricated into existence – to provide a place for scientists and workers to live above-ground under the guise of normalcy. Do you know the name of this village?”
A sudden shift – the information is hard enough to process as is. “...Yes,” Hanzo says finally. “Skærmet.”

“Skærmet,” the omnic corrects. ”And do you know what it means?”


“In Danish, it means ‘shrouded’. By the forest, yes – but it is also a literal translation. This village was built to hide something beneath it.”

Eerily similar to Blackwatch HQ. Hanzo sits there, momentarily stunned as he tries to run all of this through his head. This is why the phone had not worked? Why there were no lamps, no telephone lines?

“Which organization?” Hanzo finally asks. “Overwatch?”

“No, no. I believe they are known here as Klo. But I did see traces of something like Overwatch. A similar crest – but instead, what looked like a goat's skull.”

Hanzo's ears prick up in interest. “You did? Where?”

“Among the dead.”

Oh.

“There were four bodies, but they were not torn like the others,” the omnic continues, though its tone is a little kinder. “It seemed they had been killed not long after Helga Jepsen fled to this village with Mitra in tow. What I am uncertain of is why they came here, now. A strange coincidence, such arrivals intertwining.”

*Reyes isn't elaborating beyond 'checking in on a potential situation'*.  

“I think I know,” Hanzo murmurs uncomfortably. “Where are their bodies?”

“Buried with the others. They have been marked with pine bark, and the rest with stones.”

“Why bother burying the other dead? If this place is what you say-”

“Because they deserved it,” the omnic says simply. “Every soul should have the chance to return to the earth. Perhaps in a different life, the Iris will guide them to a better path.”

Hanzo rubs at his temples. This deluge of strange, calmly-delivered information coupled with mounting disgust is beginning to give him a headache. “I need to call someone.”

“You are free to try. But as this village is nothing more than a pretense, I cannot say if there are any phones that will work.”

“Fine, just-!” Hanzo's irritation is boiling over. He pushes himself to his feet, brushing off his shorts with an angry snort. “Enough. I am going back to my ship.”

“I will not stop you,” the omnic replies. “I was only answering the questions you asked.”

“Yes, well, forgive me for not loving the answers,” Hanzo snaps.

“If you ever come across Mitra-”
“I pray that I do not.”

“Please, try to help,” the omnic continues, unaffected. “Being imprisoned and controlled for so long, even I cannot say who Mitra truly is anymore. Perhaps you can succeed where I have not, and help calm a frenzied mind.”

“I will do no such thing.” Hanzo turns away, showing the omnic his back as he shoves open the church doors.

Although when it comes to murdering captors, this *beast* seems to be in the right.
When Hanzo returns to the plane, Jolene is on a call.

“Yeah. Mhm.” She's sitting cross-legged on the floor, leaning back against a wall with a flip phone in hand. “56.892483 North, 8.340721 East. Alright. We'll stay here. Thanks.” She snaps the phone shut as Hanzo approaches. “Good timing. Pickup's on its way.”

“Where did you find that?” Hanzo demands, settling down near her. His legs ache from all the walking. “I thought you said the lines were down!”

“They are.” Jolene jerks her thumb towards the cockpit. “I got hungry, started picking through the rations in the back. Found an old-ass phone and its charger buried under a pile of chips in one of the crates. Some operative must have been hiding it for the longer missions.”

“Why would they do that?”

“Bunch of nudes on it. Wanna see?” She holds it out towards him.

“No.”

“Anyway,” Jolene continues, stuffing the phone into her pocket. “I jerry-rigged up a port for the old-ass charger to give it a little juice so I could call in. They said they hadn't heard from you or anyone else – couldn't find a payphone?”

“There are no phones,” Hanzo says shortly.

“Really?” Jolene perks a brow. “None in the whole village?”

“It is not a village.” He gets a scrunched-up, confused look in reply, and Hanzo has to massage the side of his temples. Great. Now he has to play the omnic's role. “It is not a village,” he repeats tiredly. “Because it is a 'front'. A fake village made to hide an underground facility.”

Jolene clicks her tongue and lets out a low whistle. “Shit. What kind of-?”

“Prosthesis experiments. Someone named Helga Jetson had a lab there, run or funded by something called Klo. At least, according to the monk.”

“Helga Jetson...?” Jolene is getting to her feet, her brow furrowed in thought. “Helga... J- do you mean Helga **Jepsen**?”

“Probably,” Hanzo admits.

Jolene whistles again. “Shit. What kind of-?”

“Prosthesis experiments. Someone named Helga Jetson had a lab there, run or funded by something called **Klo**. At least, according to the monk.”

“Helga Jetson...?” Jolene is getting to her feet, her brow furrowed in thought. “Helga... J- do you mean Helga **Jepsen**?”

“Probably,” Hanzo admits.

Jolene whistles again. “Shit.”

“Am I to guess you know about her too?”

“She's no Shambali. This is all highly classified intel you're breaching into. Information I've barely been given the surface of.” Jolene heads back over towards the console, then back to where she stood – again and again. Pacing. He'd never seen her pace before. Is she nervous?

“Are you going to tell me more?” Hanzo presses.

“No,” Jolene says instantly, gaze flicking towards him. “And you shouldn't tell me anything else.
Save it for Reyes. We're both going to get debriefed to hell and back if Jepsen's involved.

“What about—”

“And don't tell Overwatch a damned thing,” Jolene interrupts. “I'm serious. Don't give them an inch on this. Don't tell them about the monk, the village— all I told them was that we needed a pickup because our lines are down. That's all they're going to get.”

“I thought we worked with Overwatch,” Hanzo points out. “They are going to have questions.”

“Ignore 'em. They've got to hand us back over to Blackwatch, not their superiors. Tough it out until we're safely back in Reyes' arms.”

“I do not appreciate that imagery.”

“Yeah, well...” Jolene shrugs. “Did you hear anything from the monk about getting a ride?”

“I did not ask,” Hanzo admits. “That thing unnerved me. Calm when it should not be, by all rights. It raised more questions than it gave, but I loathed being in its presence.”

Jolene chuckles. “The Shambali order isn't for everyone. I've heard it's a bit off-putting, to use gentler language, to have a bunch of bots running on zeroes and ones tell you the meaning of life and so on. We still have yet to figure out the human spirit without throwing bot brains into the mix.”

Human spirit? Hanzo barely understands his own, much less the other two denizens settled in his body. But Jolene has asked for blissful ignorance on the matter, so he remains silent.

“Anyway,” she continues with a shrug. “I'm sure whoever brought the monk there will also bring 'em back out. You said it had friends it was looking for?”

“I would not count on them,” Hanzo mutters.

“Either way, I'm sure it'll be fine. Unless it asked to come with us?”

“No.”

“And you're not just saying that because you got creeped out, right?”

“No!” Hanzo protests.

A chuckle. “Calm down, I'm teasing ya. I'd tell you to haul it over as a prisoner, but I don't think even Blackwatch is cleared for kidnapping a Shambali. We'll just wait for Overwatch to show up, report to Reyes and let him go from there.” She glances out at the window. “They should be here at dawn. Guess we can just settle in, play some games. Or if you're not in the mood, you can practice ignoring me till then.”

“But I like you,” Hanzo protests.

“Aww!” she replies, delighted. “Sweetie! Too bad for you, I'm married.”

“I did not mean like that!” Hanzo says indignantly; Jolene merely laughs again.

“I'm just teasing you. C'mon. Let's just play cards. Blue boys will show up sooner or later.”
The 'blue boys' of Overwatch announce their presence with the roar of a plane that lands mere yards away from Hanzo's own. He and Jolene put down their cards to peer out the window – men and women alike are swiftly disembarking and fanning out into the forest. One man in particular stands out as he steps out – he's short, with a ruddy face pulled back in a scowl. Several decorative medals are pinned to his chest, and he struts with purpose through his men who part like waves to avoid him.

“Ah, fuck,” Jolene says. “We got Palmer.”

Palmer turned out to be a five foot man with an even shorter temper. As his men stream aboard the downed Blackwatch ship, Palmer takes his time to survey the damage on the outside; at least five minutes have passed before the man makes his way into the shredded interior.

“Hell of a mess you lot left us to clean up,” he sneers, kicking aside an overturned chair. “The hell happened here? Decide to train up some tigers, Jolly?”

“Classified, sir,” Jolene replies in a neutral voice. “Thanks for the pickup.”

Palmer snorts, loud and ugly – his gaze drifts over to Hanzo, who’s seated against a wall with his hood pulled up and over his face. He’s trying to avoid notice from any of the men, but - “Oh. What's this?”

Hanzo can feel his ears pin as Palmer takes lazily steps towards him. When the man stops before him, Hanzo can feel a hand on his hood; he fights off a flinch and a snarl as Palmer forces it down to reveal him. “Jesus!” Palmer drops the hood, taking a step back with a snort of disgust. “Is this thing what tore up this place? Blackwatch can't handle its goddamn pets anymore?”

“Leave it, Palmer,” Jolene warns. “He's a Blackwatch asset.”

Palmer ignores her; he leans over Hanzo until their faces are mere inches apart. The man's expression is scrutinizing, and it's anything but friendly. “Ugly lookin' mutt. You some kind of hokey experiment, boy? Blackwatch up to some DNA tamperin’?”

Hanzo can feel his teeth beginning to bare, claws digging into his palms as he leans back as far as he can. The man's breath is hot and foul – the dragons are stirring angrily beneath his skin at the disrespect.

“Palmer!” Jolene's stalking over, arms full of tech. Her voice is downright dangerous. “Enough! Leave the kid alone!”

The man scoffs, straightening up and folding his arms behind his back. “Are you giving me orders, Jolly? I outrank you, and the mutt.”

“You don't outrank shit,” Jolene snaps. “We're leaving. We need to report back, ASAP. What's your plan?”

“Shut your trap.” Palmer lifts a hand to pick at his teeth. “The technicians are staying behind to get this scrap heap up and running. Already paged Blackwatch – we're meeting up at the Aalborg stop-over so I can drop you two out of my ship and get back to work.”

“By work, you mean sitting on your ass and going glassy-eyed at your desk?” Jolene asks
sarcastically.

“Watch it, Jolly. I can still leave you here.”

Hanzo's pushing himself to his feet, ignoring the aching protest of his legs. These two obviously have a history – whatever it is, Hanzo wants no part of it. He simply wants off the plane and away from this foul-tempered and smelling man as quickly as possible.

Palmer's gaze follows Hanzo as he begins to hobble towards the exit. “Well, at least the mutt's better behaved than the bitch,” he remarks with a laugh. “Aren't'cha boy?” He reaches out as Hanzo passes, brushing his fingers condescendingly against Hanzo's cheek.

Hanzo's vision darkens instantly. The image of his cell springs up unbidden behind his eyelids and he feels cold and weak all over. As the world tilts and fades, the hazy outline of Palmer's smirking face is replaced by Saburo's.

Something... happens. Hanzo's not fully aware of it, can scarcely register anything beyond his sudden disorientation and blurred sight. Then sharply, with no warning, his vision clears and Hanzo finds he's being pinned to the floor. Overwatch operatives are holding him at gunpoint, Jolene is yelling, and Palmer is positively howling in the background.

Hanzo briefly struggles, but the operatives force him back down, twisting his arm and applying pressure to his neck. Hanzo wheezes in pain, confused and dazed – he can hear Jolene at his side. Her voice is panicked and strained, and operatives are shouting at her to get back. Palmer is still screaming, and Hanzo becomes distantly aware of something wet and warm sticking to his right claw.

Something slams into back of the head; Hanzo's eyes roll up as he limply slumps into unconsciousness.

—

“You can't just keep us here! Palmer! Oi!”

Jolene's yells bounce around the empty metal room, echoing painfully in Hanzo's ears. He wishes she'd stop; the yelling and kicks on the door are already magnified to normal ears, but to his own, they're downright deafening.

Not that he can tell her to stop. The muzzle strapped to his face keeps him silent; the zip-ties on his arms and legs leave him bound and immobile on the floor.

Hanzo's getting tired of waking up in cells.

Jolene is decidedly less silent – she's pacing and swearing, anxiety written into every twitch and distraught expression. She hasn't built up Hanzo's tolerance to being caged, apparently.

“This is shit,” she says, speaking aloud. “Garbage. He can't keep us here. He already said Blackwatch's supposed to meet us here.”

Oh. Had they already landed in Aalborg? It's true that there were no engine noises – and small or not, this would be a fairly odd prisoner room to keep on a plane.
Strange. He feels rather calm about all this. Why isn't he angry? He feels like he should be angry,
tolerance or not.

“Hanzo.” Oh. Jolene's giving him a pained look. “Christ, you poor kid. What did they do to you?”

Hanzo doesn't know beyond the gags – which is fine, because he can't really answer her anyway.
Palmer's mocking touch had triggered... something in him. The gesture had been too familiar, too
reminiscent of Saburo's cruelty. But what had Hanzo done to him? If she's calling Palmer by name,
surely he hadn't killed the man.

Jolene's still looking at him, so Hanzo just averts his eyes. She groans and drags a hand over her
face.

“This is really bad.”

Hanzo feels a vague sense of irritation. She isn't the one bound and gagged on the floor.

There's footsteps by the door. Something clicks, and whatever locks were in place slide out – the
door opens, and three armed men fill the room.

“Come on.” The blonde one motions to Jolene with his gun. “Out. Commander wants to see you.”

“What about him?” Jolene asks immediately, pointing at Hanzo.

The man with copper skin makes an ugly noise. “Blackwatch can come in and get him themselves.
He stays where he is. Move.” He pokes the butt of his gun against Jolene's back, and after a
worried glance back, she's herded out of the room.

The door closes, and the lock clicks back into place. It's so achingly familiar; Hanzo closes his
eyes, trying to steady himself. Saburo. The windowless room, the loss of the use of his limbs. And
now, a cell emptied of anyone but himself.

Perhaps his fate is cyclical.

Hanzo lets his mind drift, trying to steer himself away from his present reality. He wonders if the
ship has been fixed yet, and where Overwatch would fly it to. Were there more Blackwatch secrets
hidden aboard?

Had Jolene left the 'nudes' phone in plain sight? Who took those photos, anyway? Were they taken
on the plane?

Hanzo shudders. Ugh. He needed a new train of thought, now.

Was the Commander the men had spoken of Reyes, or Morrison? The last thing Hanzo wanted was
the latter coming in an asking questions – why Hanzo, who he knew by face, had been alone on a
Blackwatch ship. As far as Morrison knows, Hanzo is an informant and nothing more. Hanzo
would like to keep it that way.

If it really is Reyes... did that mean McCree could be here too? They'd left on their mission
together. Is it already over? Or had Reyes left early to try and damage-control whatever Hanzo had
wrought?

Genji doesn't have these worries – Hanzo's sure of it. Perhaps his brother has already settled down;
begun a family, given up his previous life of more-than-mild debauchery. Wherever Genji is, he's
free – and Hanzo will never have the same luxury. Not in this life.
But he can't hold it against his brother. If one of them had to be chained for the other to survive, it
should be Hanzo. It had to be. Even before his imprisonment, he'd already lived his life in a cage.
What is one more?

_I do not have your wings, Sparrow._

Hanzo feels fatigue settle into his bones; his ears lower and his shoulders slump. Someday, he
would die. His body would rot away, erasing his claws and horns. He'd be born anew and cast
aside the pain of this wretched existence.

Perhaps, in the next life, he could have a true taste of freedom.
Chapter 27

Hanzo only realizes he'd fallen asleep because he's being roughly awoken; hands are shaking his shoulders, and a voice is calling his name.

“Kid. Hey, Hanzo. Wake up.”

Hanzo cracks open an eye; Jolene is crouching over him and pulling her hands back to her side. She looks unharmed in his blurry vision, but her face is pinched and tone worried. “You okay? C'mon. It's time to go.”

Hanzo blinks at her lazily from the floor before turning his gaze up and over to the door. The armed men are back – just two of them, now. One is pointing a gun at him; the other is setting up a beat-up wheelchair in the corner.

How welcoming.

Jolene helps him up. Not that Hanzo can really stand while tied, but she sort of hobbles him over until the copper-skinned man can push the chair under his legs. Hanzo awkwardly drops down, wincing from the impact. This chair is much less comfortable than his other; he can already feel the thin, plastic cushion straining under his weight.

“Hurry up,” the blonde man drones. Jolene shoots him an angry look, but Hanzo can't be bothered with ire. He's so tired. Of this. Of everything.

Jolene takes control of the wheelchair, pushing Hanzo out of the room and down a thin, winding hall. Unlike the previous bases, this location boasts paned windows on either side of the walls. Hanzo can glimpse the rays of a setting sun cresting faraway hills – or is it rising? Impossible to tell. How long has he been out?

Double doors open up to a larger room, and Hanzo is unpleasantly reminded of the interrogation chambers in police movies that Genji had always favored. Grey walls, minimal lighting, and armed guards stationed at an exit in the far corner. There's a conference table in the center of the room with six chairs positioned around it. One chair is occupied by a scowling Palmer, who's got a thick, bloodied cloth pressed over his face and a nurse fussing with surgical tools to his left. The other holds Commander Reyes in full battle-gear. His armored boots are kicked up on the table and he's shooting Palmer a severely unimpressed look.

“You're such a fucking baby.”

“That beast-” Palmer hisses – then falls silent as Jolene clears her throat, announcing their presence. Reyes glances over and his apathetic expression immediately sours.

“Get that shit off him, Laurent.”

Palmer bristles. “I will do no such thing. Restraint is entirely necessary here.”

Reyes heaves a sigh. He moves his boots of the table and grips the chairs armrests, getting to his feet. “Christ. Can't believe Jack won't let me shoot you.”

“Do not- Commander!” Reyes ignores Palmer's angry barks, walking over to Hanzo's chair. Jolene steps aside and Reyes takes her place behind Hanzo, beginning to fiddle with the straps on his muzzle.
“Leave that!” Palmer cries. “Do not untie him!”

Reyes is doing just that, taking off Hanzo's muzzle completely and tossing it to the side. He moves around to Hanzo's front and pulls out a switchblade from his pocket – massive, with a jagged blade – and holds up one finger. “Don't wiggle,” he warns Hanzo, before leaning down to saw at the binds on his wrists.

“Commander Reyes!” Palmer snaps, slamming his hands on the table to stand. The cloth falls from his face and Hanzo is startled to see four claw markings running across Palmer's scowling mug - a decent chunk of his nose has been carved out. The wounds are deep, ugly and bloodied; Hanzo can practically feel them throb with pain from here. “You are recklessly endangering my men! I'm going to report this!”

“You recklessly endangered yourself,” Reyes replies easily. “Jolene, you said he touched Hanzo's face before the attack? That true, kid?”

No words seem to form in Hanzo's throat; he merely nods.

“Well, there you go.” The zip-ties on Hanzo's wrist break, and Reyes discards them over his shoulder before moving down to Hanzo's feet. “Ain't you ever learned, Laurent? Don't fucking touch people without permission. That's kindergarten shit. And most importantly, don't touch my people.”

“That's not a person,” Laurent hisses. “That is a beast! An animal you've trussed up-”

“Okay, prove my point some more,” Reyes growls. “You don't fuckin' go up and pet a strange dog either.” He finishes cutting the ties on Hanzo's ankles and straightens. “You wanna stand?”

Hanzo considers this. Does he? Apparently he's taking too long to decide, because Reyes is giving him an incredibly suspicious look.

“What's wrong with him? Why're his pupils blown?”

“They drugged him.” It's Jolene, piping up from the side. “I saw it. Shot him full of something in the arm before they took him away.”

Oh. That might explain his absurd detachment and calm. Hanzo inclines his head towards an arm, seeking out a puncture wound.

“It was a mild sedation,” Palmer snaps. “And I was well within my right!”

Reyes makes a disgusted noise. “Laurent, we're keeping your shitty chair. C'mon, Jolene.” Reyes begins pushing Hanzo's chair in the direction of the far door as Jolene hurries to obey.

“Wait!” Palmer cries. “You- I demand an apology! Compensation for my assault and wasted resources!”

Reyes pauses mid-step. Hanzo can feel a frown forming; they'd been halfway to the door. The guards posted at it begin to look uneasy, grips on their weapons tightening as Reyes cricks his neck and turns back towards Palmer. The man in question looks twice as nervous now that Reyes scrutinizing him; but then the Commander's serious expression breaks into a calm smile. "Alright. I hear you."

Palmer gives Reyes a cautious look, gaze suspiciously flitting between all three of them. "You do?"
"Sure." Reyes releases his hold on Hanzo's chair and begins an easy amble towards Palmer. "I get it. You got hurt, and it stings. Literally."

"Yes," Palmer says after a moment. "It does." He has to crane his neck upwards to look at Reyes, who stops before him and all but towers over the smaller man. "What do you intend to do about it?" Palmer demands.

"This," Reyes says simply, before swiftly slugging the man straight across the face.

Palmer slumps instantly, body crumpling to the floor with a mighty clatter as he takes the chair with him. The guards at the door give a startled shout; they raise their guns and Reyes snaps his gaze towards them. He straightens up to his full height and gives the pair of them unimpressed looks. He doesn't respond beyond that; merely walks back over to Hanzo's chair and grips the armrests again.

The guards look conflicted, almost terrified as Reyes stares them down. Palmer is groaning from the floor but Reyes clears his throat to drown out the noise. "I have places to be," he drawls. "And since we both know I outrank Laurent and every scrap of life on this base, I recommend you boys take a big step back and let us pass."

After a moment of hesitation and a glance between each other, the guns lower and the guards step aside. With a snort, Reyes kicks open the door and wheels Hanzo out with Jolene hot on their heels.

"You shouldn't have done that," she says as soon as the doors have swung shut. "He's going to raise hell, Sir."

"I'm used to hell," Reyes replies tonelessly. "And I want you two debriefed ASAP. I'm not interested in wasting my time playing bloat-the-ego games."

"He saw him." Jolene glances down at Hanzo. "He's going to tell Morrison."

"Morrison already knows he exists. And that's all he's gonna get out of me." Reyes takes a sharp turn down the hallway. "You doing okay, kid?"

Hanzo still can't muster up the energy – or will – to speak. He just nods again, slumping back in his chair.

"Hanzo?" Jolene asks kindly. "Say something."

"Don't force him," Reyes interrupts. Jolene looks surprised – Hanzo mirrors the emotion internally. "Might be more than drugs buzzin' in his system. Just give him a little bit." Reyes gives an angry snort. "Fuckin' Laurent. Where'd he even get a muzzle?"

"His drawer of kinks, probably."

Hanzo's nose wrinkles with distaste.

"Who's here?" Jolene continues as they round another bend, nearly bowling over an Overwatch operative leaning on a wall. "Just you?"

"Nah. Got Yono and Roberto on-board, waiting for me to get back. And yes, kid," Reyes adds suddenly, "I have McCree too." Reyes reaches down, yanking Hanzo's hood back over his head. "We're almost out, get your horns hidden."

Hanzo's mood lifts, even if his expression doesn't change. He gives Reyes a grateful nod, who
merely scoffs. It doesn't seem mocking, just – accepting.

“Why didn't you bring Jesse?” Jolene asks. “He's usually your Good Cop for stuff like this.” They're exiting the building now – Overwatch insignias shine on every plane parked by the landing strip outside the office. Every plane, except one.

“Cause I'd probably be cleaning Laurent's blood off the walls if I had,” Reyes comments mirthlessly. “Specially with that muzzle bit.”

“Wow.” Jolene gives Hanzo a surprised look. “You two are that serious?”

“He fuckin' _ruined_ McCree,” Reyes replies – and maybe it's the drugs, but Hanzo thinks the man almost sounds... amused? “Now instead of an efficient soldier, I got a lovesick moron who keeps his comm off all the time so I don't interrupt his smooch sessions.”

Hanzo blinks slowly as Jolene shoots him a delighted look. “Aww.”

“Yeah, big fuckin' aw. C'mon.” Reyes reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small remote. The unmarked plane beeps twice, and the hangar doors begin to open.

The moment the plane's opened fully, McCree appears in the doorway. The man looks breathless, almost like he'd been sprinting. Hanzo's heart flutters, and he leans forward in his chair.

Reyes immediately points a finger at McCree. “Stay!” he barks.

McCree stumbles – he'd been half-out the door, one foot already raised.

“You fuckin' stay!” Reyes jabs his finger threateningly at the man. “Save this shit until we're in the air!”

McCree's expression is downright pained – but he puts his foot down and steps back, clearing a path up the ramp.

Hanzo watches, feeling a bit bemused at it all.

Reyes mutters something under his breath, stepping out from behind the wheelchair. “Jolene, you push him. I gotta talk to McCree first. Go let the kid settle in the back, give him some water and some of those candies the team's always going apeshit for.”

“The dinosaur gummies?”

“Yeah, those.” Reyes is already stalking up the plane's ramp – he grabs McCree by the scruff of his shirt and physically hauls the man in the direction of the cockpit. The last thing Hanzo hears before McCree disappears from view is a series of muffled protests.

When Jolene wheels Hanzo aboard, the hangar is fairly empty. Reyes and McCree have gone up front, leaving behind an omnic and an older man in the plane's strapped seats. The omnic's powered down, as far as Hanzo can tell. The man has a folded newspaper in his lap; he gives Hanzo the barest of glances before turning his gaze up to Jolene. “How'd it go?”


“Good.” The man seems to have nothing more to say – he picks up the newspaper off his lap, snapping it open to begin reading.

Jolene wheels Hanzo to the back of the plane. There's a small hammock set up, alongside a mini-
fridge and a dartboard. And... is that an arcade game console? Hanzo's pulled from his curious
stare by the sound of Jolene rapping her knuckles on the wall. “You want the fold-out bed, or the
hammock?”

Hanzo takes one look at the swinging, precarious netting and frowns. Jolene chuckles. “Bed it is.”
She bends slightly, tugging on a small handle and stepping back as a mattress slowly unfurls from
the wall.

Hanzo lifts himself from the chair with a groan – he's sore all over and is quick to blame the
excessive walking and his nap upon on a concrete floor. He collapses into the bed, burying his face
into the thin cotton sheet and doing his best not to think about how long it's probably been since
they've been washed.

“You get tired easily, huh,” Jolene comments. “Or is it just the drugs wearing off?”

Hanzo wouldn't have a response to that on a normal day. He's often fatigued, but it's never
seemed... misplaced.

Maybe it's just depression.

“You thirsty?” Jolene offers. “Hungry? We got things that aren't gummies, if you want.” She
stoops to open the mini-fridge and rifles through its contents. “We got nuts... sparkling water...
wait, who put onions in here? Who the hell is eating raw onions?”

“Peter.”

The reply is hoarse, but it doesn't come from Hanzo's throat – instead, he lifts his head to see
McCree in Blackwatch uniform, standing in the doorway. His hat is off his head, held close to his
chest; his expression is pained with his gaze directly on Hanzo.

“Oh.” Jolene stands up, kicking the fridge closed behind her. “I'll uh. I'll show myself out.”

“Yeah,” McCree rasps, still not taking his eyes off Hanzo. “Boss wants you up front.”

“No idea why,” Jolene replies sarcastically – but there's a fond smile on her face as she glances at
Hanzo. “Alright, ah. Have fun, kids.” She inches her way past McCree before shutting the door
behind her.

They're alone. McCree says nothing for a few moments; Hanzo returns the favor.

“Y'scared me.” McCree visibly hesitates, then takes a step towards Hanzo.

Hanzo's ears flick. He's not sure what his own face looks like; McCree's confusing him. He wants
the man to come over, scoop him up in his arms – not stall with cautious steps, like Hanzo's some
kind of spooked deer.

“Heard we lost contact with you,” McCree continues hoarsely. “Same as the others. Couldn't get
through. Thought something happened.”

It had. But Hanzo can't make his mouth work, can't focus to explain. It's like there's a block in the
back of his mind – something hard and unpleasant that had settled in after he'd been forcibly
captured and muted. He needs to say something – he doesn't know what.

“Reyes said you had a rough time.” McCree's settling on the edge of the bed. “Said you might be
like this. All quiet again, cause they drugged you.” McCree's voice has taken on a harsh edge; he
reaches out a hand towards Hanzo's face, then pauses. “May I?”

Seeking consent. No doubt Reyes had cautioned him.

Instead of replying, Hanzo leans into the touch. McCree inhales before bringing his other hand up to cup Hanzo's face. “Your pupils're huge,” he murmurs unhappily. “How out of it are you?”

Hanzo thinks he's relatively lucid, all things considered. He leans over to grab McCree by his shirt, gently tugging on it to coax the man further onto the bed.

McCree obliges, scooting over until he's sitting side by side. Hanzo awkwardly lifts himself up and over until he's settling himself in McCree's lap; the man's arms loop around his waist and back to hold him as Hanzo buries his face in McCree's neck. He thinks his horns might have bumped McCree's chin, but the cowboy's not voicing any complaints.

Instead, McCree is simply running his fingers through Hanzo's hair and pressing chaste kisses to the top of his head. He's as warm as Hanzo remembers, even if the thick armored plating across his chest is less than comfortable to rest against.

He'd missed this. Now that he has it again, he never wants to leave it.

McCree leans to the right, gently lowering the pair of them down onto the mattress on their sides. He briefly cups the back of Hanzo's skull before drifting his hand down and over, until he's stroking his thumb just below the base of Hanzo's ear.

"I wanna kiss you, an' hold you,” McCree rasps. “But it ain't right when you're like this. So I'm gonna wait. Just don't think for a minute I ain't missed you something fierce.”

Hanzo disagrees. Now that McCree's mentioned it, he would very much like to be held and kissed, along with all the other wonderful ways McCree makes his body shudder and clench. He lays an arm over McCree's hip, forcibly pulling the other man flush against him. Whatever McCree's just exclaimed, Hanzo ignores – he rolls until he's lying atop the man and pushes himself up to straddle him completely.

"Whoa, there.” McCree's got a deep flush and a nervous look on his face as Hanzo looms over him, long hair falling over his shoulders. “You, uh—”

Hanzo lazily traces a finger over McCree's lips to shush them – then trails it downward, playing with the man's chin hairs. They tickle as he flicks them back and forth, parting and smoothing under his touch. Hanzo's aware of a silly little smile on his face, but he can't bring himself to care – he just feels so pleasantly warm and fuzzy inside.

"You're really spaced,” McCree says with an awkward chuckle. “Jesus. I ain't complainin' about the view, but this ain't exactly a private area. People come in here for snacks, y'know.”

Now there's two things Hanzo doesn't care about. His brings his hands down to McCree's chest and gives an insistent tug on the armored plate.

McCree tracks the motion. “You... oh. Yeah, alright. I guess that's not all that nice to lay against.” McCree's fingers start working at the buckles and straps. “But that's all I'm takin' off, y'hear?”

Hanzo hums, sitting back on his heels as McCree begins tugging the armor up and over his head. Part of his shirt gets pulled up along with it; Hanzo delightedly runs a hand over the bared stomach and watches it flinch.
“Hanzo,” McCree whines pitifully. “C'mon. Don't tease-”

“JESSE FUCKING MCCREE!”

McCree bolts upright at the sound of Reyes' shout – Hanzo gets a hand on each shoulder before he's rapidly tossed out of McCree's lap to bounce backwards on the bed. “B-Boss!”

“He's DRUGGED! Fuckin' hell, you know better!” When Hanzo dazedly looks up, he can see Reyes standing in the doorway and fixing McCree with a look of utter fury and disgust.

“I wasn't- Boss, I swear, we weren't doing anything!” McCree stammers, holding up his palms in surrender. “He got on me- I was just takin' off the chest armor! I wasn't-”

Hanzo's staring idly at the ceiling as McCree babbles, picking out the cracks in the paint. He'd been enjoying himself. Why had Reyes barged in?

“How can I not trust you with anything, Jesse?! Is this what it's come down to-?”

Reyes is shouting too much, and it's making Hanzo's ears pin. McCree hadn't done anything wrong. Hanzo wants the Commander to quiet - at the very least, to leave them in peace. But how to be rid of him?


Hanzo watches Reyes' gaze slowly lower. He looks down to meet Hanzo's defiant gaze - while openly groping McCree's left tit.

McCree's mouth gapes slightly, before tightly shutting with a thick swallow. Reyes just looks – calculating. Unimpressed. Finally, he snarls: “Don't even think about doin' that shit, Jesse. Or I'll throw you from this plane myself. Capiche?”

“Yes,” McCree squeaks.

Reyes gives the pair of them severely critical looks before turning on his heels and whisking back through the door.

McCree slaps Hanzo's hand away the moment he's gone. “Hanzo!” he hisses.

Hanzo offers a lop-sided, smug grin in reply. His gambit had worked; Reyes had left. He trails a hand up to toy with McCree's shirt buttons, and gets his hand smacked again. He scowls.

“Stop,” McCree says firmly. “None of that. I'll cuddle you, but that's the limit. Y'aint yourself.”

Probably, Hanzo muses. He's openly enjoying himself; that's often a sign that something is wrong. With a huff, he settles back down onto the bed. He gives McCree's stomach a light-hearted push, trying to get the man to lie down with him.

“Behave yourself,” McCree warns as he lowers himself back onto the sheets. “Y'need your rest. Work it out of your system.”

Hanzo huffs again. He wriggles closer to McCree, nudging the man's collarbone with his nose as he nestles against him.

After a moment, and an exasperated sigh, McCree drapes an arm over Hanzo's waist. “Go to sleep,
Han,” he murmurs. “Wake up an’ talk to me, okay?”

That sounds fair. Hanzo lets his eyes begin to droop, soaking in the warmth of the man he’s pressed up against. McCree's heartbeat and scent are calming in their familiarity, lulling him with every inhale and exhale.

As long as McCree stays beside him, Hanzo will tell him anything he wants.
Chapter 28

Hanzo finds his voice not long after he awakens – McCree had been exhaling morning breath directly into his face, and it'd been enough enough to get a “roll over” grumble out of him before he could fully parse that the mental block had lifted.

Eventually, with many a stretch and yawn, he realizes is that he's no longer on the plane either. He's tangled up in the sheets of his own bed back at Blackwatch HQ, with McCree's arms wrapped tightly around him. Hanzo sits up in surprise, getting a grunt out of McCree with the motion. When had Hanzo gotten back – and furthermore, how had he gotten here? Had McCree carried him?

At least someone had had the common sense to remove his prosthetics.

McCree, roused by the movements, wakes enough to realize Hanzo is up and gently telling him to remove his arms. McCree is instantly delighted; upon inspection of Hanzo's shrunken pupils, he's more than happy to shower Hanzo with kisses, touches and tawdry little murmurs into his ears. They're halfway disrobed and completely re-entangled by the time a firm knock is heard on their door.

The male omnic by the name of Yono is the one to interrupt them. He gives no indication of discomfort and simply informs the half-naked pair, busy pulling their shirts back over their heads, that Reyes has sent him over to inspect Hanzo's well-being. As soon as McCree's fully dressed, the omnic ushers him from the room.

“How do you feel?” Yono asks, once the door is closed. He moves to the edge of the bed and holds out a hand, as if asking for Hanzo's own.

After a brief moment of bewilderment, Hanzo places his palm in the omnic's. “Fine. Grimy,” Hanzo mutters, watching the omnic turn his claws this way and that – inspecting the dried blood Palmer had left under his nails. “Awake and rational, if that is what you are looking for. How did I get here?”

Yono merely hums, releasing Hanzo's hand and folding his own behind his back. “I observed Agent McCree taking you off the plane. We were very close to our headquarters upon pickup. To matters, are you ready to be debriefed? Are you feeling lucid? Commander Reyes has asked me to see if you are fit before demanding your report.”

“I am, and that is fine,” Hanzo replies, rubbing an eye with the back of his palm. “Can you tell me where to meet him?”

“No need. He has informed me that he will come to you.” The omnic gives a short bow of his head before exiting the room.

Interesting. Reyes' treatment of Hanzo had been... strangely kind ever since the pick-up. Had he done something to make the commander more agreeable towards him?

Less than a minute after the omnic's left, McCree's head pokes out from the doorway. “Everything alright?” he asks.

“Yes. Come here.” Hanzo beckons him over with a crooked finger.

McCree's only too happy to oblige, dropping down onto the bed's edge with a bounce. “What'd Yono say about you?”
“That I am cold. Come here.” Hanzo reaches over, grasping McCree by his shirt collar to tug him closer.

McCree chuckles, scooting over and folding his legs criss-cross. “Affectionate little thing, aintcha. Sure you ain't still hopped up?”

Hanzo grunts noncommittally as he crawls into McCree's lap. Now that he was fully awake, he found himself even more reluctant to be parted from the man than usual. “I can return to prickly, if you would like.”

“Both are pretty damn cute.”

Hanzo pinches him, earning a wince before he settles down and leans his head against McCree's shoulder. “Reyes says I ruined you, you know,” he sighs. “I am inclined to agree.”

“Ruined me?” McCree's chin tucks over Hanzo's head. “How?”

“Because you keep your communicator off to spend time with me,” Hanzo admits. “Because I distract you.”

“Alright, well, that's some horseshit,” McCree replies with sudden heat. “I know for a fuckin' fact that Reyes pulled the exact same shit in S.E.P.”

“S.E.P.?”

McCree waves a hand irritably. “Supersoldier Enhancement Program. Reyes, Morrison and a couple other vets got ran through it by the government, back when the Omnic Crisis was peaking.”

“Reyes is a supersoldier?” Hanzo asks curiously.

“More importantly, he's a damn hypocrite.” McCree lets out an angry huff. “He always skipped out on stuff to go hang with Morrison, he told me he did!”

“Morrison?” Hanzo lifts a brow. “Angela once told me they were friends, but I never understood it.”

McCree grimaces. “Well... that part's a little complicated. Ain't ever gotten the clearest picture of what fully happened between 'em, but—”

“Maybe you should mind your own fuckin’ business,” Reyes voice cuts in. “How's that for a picture?”

Hanzo lifts his head as McCree tenses under him – Reyes is already here, nudging the door aside with his shoulder and giving the pair of them a hard look. The man's dressed in a black sweatshirt and baggy pants; yet still, his trademark beanie rests atop his head. It was strange, seeing him out of armor. He looked like a lazy-Saturday-morning father - albeit a scowling one.

“Boss, you gotta stop sneakin' up on us,” McCree complains. “Eavesdroppin' ain't polite.”

“We're an espionage unit, pendejo,” Reyes snaps. “Now get out. Me and the kid are overdue for a chat.”

There it is again - 'the kid'. Has Reyes finally abandoned the use of 'Shimada'? Is it meant to be kinder? Either way, the thought of McCree leaving...

“I would like-” Hanzo clears his throat, and the other two men turn to look at him. “I would like
McCree to stay.”

“No,” Reyes replies shortly. “Debriefing isn't a fuckin' snuggle session.”

“This is our room.” Hanzo reaches up to rap McCree's chest with his knuckles. “And when we are
apart, we are distracted. You have said this yourself.”

“You're also distracted together,” Reyes counters. “And this isn't up for negotiation. McCree, scat.”
McCree starts to shift Hanzo off his lap – Hanzo grabs his arm to halt the movement. His heart is
beating painfully fast. “Let him stay.”

“Hanzo...” McCree begins in a gentle voice.

“I want him here,” Hanzo presses. “Please.”

Reyes is giving him a funny look, like he can't decide if he's angry or just... thoughtful. “First time I
ever heard 'please' out of your mouth,” he comments. “This gonna be a habit?”

“No,” Hanzo tightens his grip on McCree's wrist. “Just for today. Please.”

Reyes' look is still suspicious. “Fine,” he says suddenly. He grabs Hanzo's wheelchair to yank it
over. “Can I use this?” Hanzo gives him a quizzical look before nodding; Reyes pulls it behind and
under his legs before dropping down. “Thighs are fuckin' killing me. But I'll allow Jesse to stay - if
you keep him from turning off his damn comm.”

“I will,” Hanzo promises. “He should not be doing so in the first place.”

“Hey!”

“Anyway.” Reyes pulls out a small notebook from his pocket and begins flipping through it. “I
some of the story from Jolene, but you've got some big-ass gaps to fill.”

“I have some questions for you, myself,” Hanzo answers evenly. He re-settles himself, leaning on
his side against McCree.

“Well, you're gonna answer mine.” Reyes taps a finger against the pages. “Tell me about the
omnic.”

“It said it was a traveling Shambali monk, and that it came to the village to visit and stop someone
called Mitra from massacring it. Have you heard of them?”

“I know a lot of names,” Reyes replies evasively, jotting something down on the notebook. “How
did he know this 'Mitra' would be there?”

“It did not say – only that it had just recently located them. Is that why your men were deployed
there? … And why did you call the omnic a he? Do you know the monk already?”

Alright, let's set something straight,” Reyes snaps, glancing up at Hanzo. “This ain't a fuckin'
back-and-forth. You tell me what you know, and if it's pertinent, I fill you in on what you need to
know. Understand?”

McCree gives Hanzo's arm a comforting squeeze, and Hanzo's reflexive scowl softens slightly.
“Fine,” he mutters. “Continue.”

Reyes flips through another page. “Where are my missing men?”
“The omnic, it – he?”

Reyes rolls his eyes and nods.

“He,” Hanzo corrects, “said that they are dead by the hands of an organization called Klo. He was burying them, to return them to the earth. He claimed your men's graves are marked by pine bark. I found no trace of life in the village besides him, physically or with my dragons.”

“Decent of him to try and give them a proper burial. Of course, we're just gonna unearth 'em.” Reyes marks something down. “Jolene said some big-fuck beast attacked the ship. Thoughts?”

“That was Mitra.” Reyes eyebrows lift. “The omnic said they were a person that had been experimented on by someone named Helga Jepsen. They have had their organic parts replaced by prosthetics and have been turned bestial. They killed most of the village for revenge - and apparently, mistook our aircraft for a 'threat'.”

“And took you off the ship while you were out cold doing your mystic shit,” Reyes supplies.

“Yes,” Hanzo confirms. “I awoke in a diner in the village. The omnic brought me in for care.”

“Why didn't you get chewed up and spit out like the ship?”

“Nobody knows.” Hanzo has to suppress a sigh as Reyes scowls at him. “I am being honest. The omnic claimed that I had simply 'broken Mitra's bloodlust', resulting in my abandonment in the woods. Mitra supposedly tore the rest of the village occupants to shreds, but the omnic did mention that some fled.”

Reyes continues jotting down notes. “We've got men on the ground now, picking through the scraps. What else?”

Hanzo thinks for a moment. “There's an underground facility beneath the church, where Helga ran her experiments.”

“What else?” Reyes repeats.

“A remarkable lack of surprise for such a statement,” Hanzo observes coolly. “I cannot help but think you already knew.”

“Think whatever you want.” Reyes flips the notebook shut.

“Why aren't you bein' straight with us, Boss?” McCree pipes in. “Y'barely told me anything about this op either.”

Reyes stuffs the notebook back into his pocket and gets out of the chair. “I have some working theories, but they need confirmation before anything else. And also, shut your trap. I'll be back if I need further intel.” Reyes gives the pair of them a sarcastic wave of his fingers before nudging the door open and then kicking it shut behind him.

“He did not seem too broken up over the less of his men,” Hanzo mutters.

“He already knew,” McCree sighs. “Tess and the rest were elites. No call-in means they're dead – they weren't a team to get captured alive. I was with him when the news broke; got real scary-quiet, like he always does.”

Hanzo tilts his head up; his horns scrape against McCree's shoulder. “Do Blackwatch operatives
“More often than we'd like. But that's the job.”

Hanzo lifts a hand to caress McCree's cheek. “Who is Helga Jepsen?” he asks suddenly. “Jolene acted like she knew her.”

“Everybody knew her.” McCree shifts Hanzo in his lap before resting his hands on his thighs. “She used to work for Overwatch.”

Hanzo looks at him in disbelief. “What?”

“I never met her,” McCree continues. “But she used to work under Angela. A classic brightest-pupil-gone-rogue situation. She started pushing patients beyond their comfort zones, offering advancements and experimentation that hadn't been cleared. Eventually, someone came forward with proof that she'd taken off a perfectly healthy arm and replaced it without consent. But she disappeared before they could arrest her, and she took a fuckton of tech and research materials along with her – including the last patient in her care. Took them ages to finally track her down, and then…” McCree shrugs. “The present, basically.”

“So Reyes did know about the village.”

“All I ever heard was that she'd been tracked to a village. Tessa and the rest were just supposed to do preliminary surveillance as far as I know. Reyes isn't dumb enough to send in four men to mess with Talon.”

“Talon?” Hanzo queries. “The omnic said she was being funded by something called Klo.”

“Same thing. Klo is just Claw in Danish. There's no literal translation for the word talon; it's just one and the same. Think they're called La Griffe en français, too.” McCree shrugs. “They're just a nasty piece of work all over the globe. Blackwatch's has been chasing them down for years, but they've just gotten bigger and bolder.”

Hanzo hums, leaning deeper into McCree's embrace. “And what of Mitra?”

“Never heard of 'em. Either deep-classified, or…” McCree shifts uncomfortably.

“What?”

“Well,” McCree says with hesitation. “I dunno. Maybe that omnic wasn't bein' straight with you. I know the Shambali are based outta Nepal, and in Nepali, the word Mitra just means friend. It could be that's just sort of a filler name, like he didn't want to give you the real one.”

“He said his friend had no name,” Hanzo admits. “And that they had simply accepted the handle of Mitra.” He gives McCree a curious look. “You know several languages, it seems. I had not expected that of you.”

“What, you're surprised?” McCree's smiling now. “Told you not to judge me by my cover.”

“Considering the manner in which you speak English,” Hanzo drawls. “I ain't expected it.”

McCree barks out a laugh. “Alright, now yer just bullyin me. But yeah, I know a couple languages off-hand – ain't fluent in Nepali by a long shot, but when we visited I picked up a handful of words. Blackwatch has ya listen to some tapes and pick up the dialect if you're going somewhere for a stay.”
“What else do you know?” Hanzo asks curiously.

“Spanish, bit of French and Portuguese. Real similar, got the Latin roots. Also learned Mandarin, Swahili... and of course, Japanese.

Hanzo lifts a brow. “That's rather impressive.”

“Aw.” McCree nuzzles the base of Hanzo's right horn. “Y'praisin' me?”

“Perhaps,” Hanzo replies with a touch of fondness. Then, he adds: “It depends on if your Mandarin is as poor as your Japanese was.”

“Hey!”

Hanzo huffs a laugh, reaching over to intertwine his fingers with McCree's. “I am only teasing.”

“Mm.” McCree's fingers gives Hanzo's a comforting squeeze. “I'll let Reyes know about 'Mitra' thing, though...” McCree shrugs. “If he's already got some workin' theories, he might already have an inkling on who they are.”

“Or what. Did he show you pictures of the plane? I have horns, and even I am not that savage.”

“Nah. To be honest,” McCree admits, “gives me the willies enough to hear you got snatched. Don't want to think about some mechabeast havin' the ability to tear you up while you're out like a light. Was worried enough about you without knowin' that.”

“I am touched,” Hanzo sighs, removing his hand from McCree's to reach up and trail a finger down the man's cheek. “Though admittedly, I was never meant to leave the plane. You are the one on the ground, at real risk. I was worried for you.”

“Hey, don't worry,” McCree says with a cocky grin. “I'm a good soldier.”

“So were the other four.”

McCree's smile droops. “Yeah. That's true.” He falls silent; after a few moments, Hanzo shifts in his lap to face the man, cupping McCree's cheek and pressing an apologetic kiss against the side of his mouth.

“It does not matter,” Hanzo murmurs. Another kiss, soft and sweet – McCree's arms lift to loop around Hanzo's chest. “You are here now, and you are safe. As am I.”

McCree hums into the kiss, palming just below Hanzo's shoulder blades. His hands drift downwards, pressing into the dip in Hanzo's back as McCree gently lowers him onto the bed. They lay side-by-side together – Hanzo with his hands against McCree's broad chest, and McCree with his legs entangling with what remained of Hanzo's.

“Glad you're feeling good enough to talk again,” McCree mumbles into Hanzo's hair. “Missed that.”

“I am feeling much better beside you. And you know,” Hanzo offers with sudden coyness. “I am no longer drugged.”

McCree snorts, loud and ugly. “Jesus. That's your way of propositionin' a man?”

“Do not mock me. I am out of practice.” Hanzo shoves a hand on McCree's chest, forcing the man to lie still as Hanzo moves to straddle him. “I am simply informing you I can consent.” Hanzo
leans over him, gazing down with lidded eyes as he brushes the tip of his nose against McCree's. “And am currently consenting.”

McCree licks his lips, a flush forming on his cheeks. “Are ya now? Well ain't that-”

Hanzo firmly rocks his hips backwards, stealing a groan from McCree's throat and silencing whatever inane quip the cowboy had been about to make. “No talking,” Hanzo breathes, nipping at the underside of McCree's chin.

“Oh,” McCree purrs. “Y’got another use for my lips in mind?”

Hanzo rolls his eyes before descending for another kiss.

_Darling, prattling cowboy._
Chapter 29

Re-situating to life in Blackwatch Headquarters comes naturally. Reyes is too preoccupied with his 'working theories' to pull either Hanzo or McCree away for the moment, so they're free to spend following day in blissful relaxation, together.

After washing off the grime of the forest – among other things – Hanzo is more than happy to lounge atop the bed, letting the tension from the previous days be worked out by McCree's kneading hands. The man's astonishingly excellent at massages for a trained soldier; he knows just how to work and roll the knots out of Hanzo's quivering muscles. Sometimes Hanzo even catches himself making pleased, trilling rumbles in the back of his throat. His little purrs, as McCree so fondly calls them.

Hanzo offers to return the favor, of course. But McCree just shakes his head and awkwardly declines; only when pressed does he reluctantly point out the claw marks Hanzo had left during the throes of pleasure.

“I can just use my palms,” Hanzo protests, feeling a little hurt. “I will be mindful.”

“I ain't worried about new marks, just aggravatin' the ones that are already there, sweet pea.” McCree gently takes said claws in hand. “Listen, I ain't complainin'. I don't mind bein' a little sore in the back, I really don't. I just don't want to push it.”

“I wish to do something nice for you,” Hanzo says sulkily. “Something to make you feel good.”

“Oh, well, y'already-” McCree begins with a grin.

“Besides that.” Hanzo pulls his hands out of McCree's grasp. “You have done a lot for me. I wish to return the favor.”

“Han...” McCree leans in with an expression bordered on pure adoration – Hanzo plants a palm on the man's face and pushes him backwards.

“Stop,” he mumbles, averting his eyes in embarrassment. “I must think of something.”

“Y'want any ideas?” McCree offers, muffled by the hand in his face.

“No.” Hanzo removes his palm and places it back in his lap. “I will come up with it. A surprise is fitting, considering how many times you have surprised me.”

“Han, I really want to kiss you right now,” McCree says in a deeply fond voice.

“No. I have already taken a shower. You will get me sweaty and sticky again.”

“Kissin' don't have to lead to that!” McCree protests indignantly. “I can be a gentleman!”

“Perhaps.” Hanzo reaches over to flick the brim of McCree's hat. “But I might not be, if you get me started.”

McCree's expression is briefly delighted – then sly. “Well. Now I really want that kiss.”

“Sticky. Sweaty.” Hanzo gives him a coy look, pretending to pick at his claws.

“I'll clean ya up real good myself,” McCree purrs. “Scrub ya down. Ya won't have to do a thing.”
Hanzo pretends to flick something off nail. “I will be hungry, after.”

“Bring ya anything you want. Won't fall asleep after, scout's honor.”

“Mm.” Hanzo gives McCree a long look-over as the man inches closer and closer on the bed. “Very well. But you must let me service you, at least until I have thought of your surprise.”

“Yessir,” McCree breathes.

Hanzo rolls his eyes, planting a hand on McCree's chest and shoving him down.

The problem with promising McCree a wonderful surprise gift to adequately express Hanzo's embarrassingly immense gratitude – is that now he actually has to come up with said gift.

The thought had been appealing, but he'd voiced it without thinking it through. What the gift should be? He's stumped. What could Hanzo possibly give to the man?

Heartfelt gifts usually came in craft form back when Hanzo had been younger – but Genji had been the one with the talent for it. And besides, Hanzo is much too old to start cutting out paper shapes or sprinkle glitter on cards. McCree would just laugh at him, and Hanzo wouldn't blame him for it.

Currently Hanzo's back in his wheelchair, rolling through the cavernous halls as he heads towards the base of the waterfall. McCree, untrue to his word, had fallen asleep shortly after their little romp; but it had given Hanzo time to shower again and to begin planning for the gift, so he doesn't hold it against the man.

Much.

Pleasuring McCree is all very well and good, but it's a dual exchange and Hanzo wants to do something special and personal. Something acceptable, that properly conveys his affection without being embarrassing or too revealing. Subtle to the cowboy, inscrutable to anyone else.

This is going to be difficult.

Hanzo arrives at the small cave at the waterfall's edge, but he doesn't bother getting out of his chair to lower himself onto the soft mossy seats. The pillow he'd propped under his rear suits him just fine – and quietly, he's afraid of the protest his back might give at the motion. So he leans back in his chair and lets out an aggravated sigh.

What could he gift? Hanzo has no skill in anything artistic; even his tattoo had been conceived and crafted by the clan's illustrators. He hadn't actually known what it would be until the day just before. Not that he'd had a choice in any part of the matter. It may have been called a tradition, a familial legacy, but even then he'd known what it was. A brand. A mark of ownership by the clan that he can never scrub away.

He briefly wonders if Genji has removed his own, or managed to permanently cover it in some way. His brother had been dragged screaming and thrashing to his fate; the look in his heavily sedated eyes still haunts Hanzo. He shakes his head, trying to dislodge the image.
Back to the matter at hand. Hanzo can cook ceremonial dishes, but his skills had undoubtedly waned during his imprisonment; he also doubts Blackwatch has the special ingredients he would need. Besides, McCree seems more like a ‘chili dogs and chilly beer’ connoisseur than someone who could appreciate otoro. Of course, he'd been wrong in assumptions about the man before.

Still, Hanzo's problems keep circling back to the same issue. If he cannot not handcraft something adequate from what he can procure on-base, then he needs to purchase something for McCree.

But Hanzo has no money.

It's a strange thing to realize – he hadn't given it much though, hadn't had any use for it. Blackwatch feeds him, clothes him – in discards - and McCree is always offering to take care of incidentals like booze or to buy Hanzo better clothes. Hanzo feels a twinge of guilt. McCree had been using his own money to treat Hanzo, but it had taken until now for Hanzo to notice he hadn't been doing the same.

If McCree has money, perhaps Blackwatch pays him? They had to, Hanzo reasons. No one would do this work for just food and board.

Well, besides Hanzo. But his enlistment hadn't really been voluntary.

Maybe Reyes could pay Hanzo? Maybe Reyes is supposed to be paying him, but Hanzo just hasn't asked? A few dollars, or whatever the current currency is... here. Where is he, again? Somewhere near Denmark?

It's time to find Reyes. Both to demand currency – politely – and to get an answer about where this base is actually situated. Of course, Hanzo has no idea where Reyes’ office or room actually is. One of these days he really needs to request a comm of his own.

When Hanzo leaves the cave, he ends up heading towards the base's mess hall; eventually Reyes should show up there, he reasons. The man can't lock himself in his room forever; at least, Hanzo hopes he can't. There's a very real chance Hanzo might be waiting in the hall all day.

When Hanzo pushes open the double doors to wheel inside, he's surprised to see-

“Alex?”

There's more than just them – an entire table is filled with Clara, Alex, Juan and even Lance, all sitting with their meals and now looking over at Hanzo in surprise. Then there's a quick chorus of hello's and a flurry of smiles and hands beckoning him over.

“Hey, Hanzo!” Alex is beaming at him from over a mug of coffee. “Come sit with us!”

“What are you all doing here?” Hanzo asks, wheeling over to the table. “I thought you were staying in California.”

“We were.” Juan shrugs his shoulders. He's gotten a haircut – it looks bad. “Reyes evacuated the base yesterday. Shipped us all back over here.”

“Not that we're complaining,” Lance chimes in. “This place is way nicer.”

“But evacuate?” Hanzo glances over at Alex with a look of confusion. “Why?”

“Didn't say.” Alex mimics Juan's shrug. “We thought maybe you'd know. Base got swept out and locked up pronto; don't even know if we're heading back or not. So now we're just stuck in good ol’
Norway.”

Ah. Well, one question answered. “That is... strange,” Hanzo says slowly. “I have heard nothing from McCree that he planned any such thing.”

“Speaking of which, where is McCree?” Lance asks.

“He fell asleep.”

"In the middle of the day? What wore him out?"

Clara pops her gum. “Guessin’ it was the same thing that's making our Hanzo here sit on a pillow.”

Hanzo flushes angrily as his ears pin – Alex and Lance snort, and Clara just looks unbelievably smug. “Don't shoot me no daggers,” she remarks easily. “You're part of Blackwatch now. Means we're gonna take the piss out of you to show our love.”

Hanzo clears his throat, trying to smother his embarrassment. “I would prefer praises to taunts.”

“Yeah, I'm sure you got Jesse groanin' praises out the ass.”

Lance guffaws as Hanzo purses his lips and shifts in his seat. “Clara.”

“Alright, alright.” She blows another bubble and pops it. “I'll go easy on ya. Just letting Lance know you're taken, since he went and stole up McCree's last-”

“Hey!” Lance cuts in. “I did not!”

“You really did.”

“Yeah, you kind of did,” Alex says. “And you dumped 'em, like, a week later. Didn't they ask to get transferred after? Never saw 'em again.”

“Look,” Lance protests. “Harper was crazy. And McCree wasn't even that serious about-”

“Lance, shut the hell up.” Clara's starting to look annoyed – Lance's mouth snaps shut.

Hanzo clears his throat again, trying to ignore the persistent redness of his cheeks. “Anyway,” he says. “I am looking for Reyes. Have any of you seen him?”

“Nah.” Alex takes another sip from their mug. “We just landed about an hour ago. He wasn't out to greet us – which is why we don't really know why we're here. Why are you looking for him?”

“I wanted to ask for money,” Hanzo admits.

Alex chokes on their coffee; Juan, Lance and Clara are all shooting him incredulous looks. “What?” Juan asks. “Like, to borrow? You want to borrow money from the commander?”

“No,” Hanzo corrects, ears flicking in annoyance. “As in, I want him to pay me. I may have been forced to join Blackwatch, but I need some pocket change, at least. It has been several months and I have not seen a single cent.”

“Oh.” Alex sets their mug down. “Well, that's a whole different thing.” The rest of the table looks relieved, with the exception of Clara.

“Seriously?” she says with a wrinkled brow. “Reyes hasn't paid you? Like, at all? No wonder
you’re still stuck in those shitty hand-me-downs. Alex’s hoodie is the only halfway-decent thing I’ve seen on you.”

“Aw, thank you!” Alex beams.

“Mhm.” Clara pushes herself out of her chair. “C’mon. I’ll help you locate Reyes. You three have any plans today?” she continues, addressing the rest of the table.

“Nah.” Lance folds his arms and rests his chin atop them. “Not until we get called up for something.”

“What a nice life. I’ll be in on the training range if you want to get your ass kicked.”

“Hey!”

“C’mon, Hanzo.” Clara beckons to him as she heads for the double doors. “Let’s go play find-the-cheapskate.”
Reyes isn't too terribly difficult to locate – at least, for Clara. She's got a far better grasp of the base's layout than Hanzo, who has to struggle to keep up with her in his chair. The woman's got a fast pace and seems even more determined than Hanzo to find out where her commander is.

She kicks open the doors to a small break room, complete with vending machines and worn-out couches – a location Hanzo mentally notes for later – before continuing on to the training range. There's no trace of Reyes at either, just a smattering of operatives Hanzo isn't familiar with. Clara waves at two of them, but Hanzo can tell she's getting frustrated. When Reyes fails to turn up at the weights room, Clara huffs irritably and informs Hanzo they're going to take the risky option.

“Time to knock on the old coot's door. Guess we better pray he's not busy yankin' one out.”

Hanzo wrinkles his nose, but still rolls after her as she changes course down the halls.

The door Clara leads him to is fairly unremarkable, to Hanzo's surprise. He'd expected Reyes' bedroom's exterior to sport skull insignias, KEEP OUT signs, possibly even a head on a spike as a clear message to those that disturb him. Instead, Hanzo finds himself staring down a plain metal door, adorned only by a tiny, circular peephole in the middle. Clara is even less impressed with it than he is; she knocks rapidly thrice before ending with two kicks to the lower part of the door.

There's a lengthy pause. Hanzo's sure at least twenty seconds have passed, but Clara doesn't seem bothered. She merely folds her arms and taps her boot impatiently on the floor.

Finally, Hanzo's ears prick up at the sound of footsteps approaching the door. “Who's there?” Reyes voice is gruff, suspicious. He sounds like he's been gargling rocks.

“Morrison,” Clara replies. “In all my overrated little twink glory.”

The door opens to Reyes' scowling face, complete with bags under his eyes and an askew beanie. He's in a gray sweatshirt and pajama shorts, and currently scratching at his stomach. Hanzo wrinkles his nose at the strong scent of sweat and smoke wafting off the man. “What do you want, Clara? I'm working.”

“Y'look like you were sleeping.”

“I can do both.”

“How come you haven't paid Hanzo?” Clara asks abruptly.

Reyes' scowl deepens. “Excuse me?”

“I did not mean to disturb you,” Hanzo begins.

“I did,” Clara interrupts.

“But I wanted to ask if I could be paid for my services to Blackwatch,” Hanzo continues respectfully. “I do not need much.”

Reyes pinches his brow, rubbing at it with his index finger. “Why.”

“Sorry?”
“Why do you need money?” Reyes asks tonelessly. “Been months and you never asked. Why now.”

“Boss, c'mon, you gotta pay him,” Clara protests. “He's earned his keep.”

“He started out in debt, and not the kind you can put a price on,” Reyes corrects sharply. "Still. Didn't say I wouldn't. He's just..." Reyes waves a hand irritably. "Asset paperwork is tricky. Y'gotta get money set aside for it without telling 'em why."

"Can't you just give him something under the table?"

"I could. Suppose he's done enough to earn some change." Reyes' gaze snaps back to Hanzo. "But I want to know why now."

Hanzo shifts uncomfortably in his wheelchair. “It is not for me.”

“Who?” Reyes presses. “Got someone on the surface you're chatting with? Someone who needs bailing out?”


“Tell me what it's for.”

“Yeah, actually, what is it for?” Now Clara's looking at him in interest. Hanzo's ears pin, and he mumbles.

“What?"

Hanzo huffs and briefly averts his eyes. “It is for a present, if you must know.”

Clara's brows lift, but Reyes just shoots him a disgruntled look. “Christ. Are you two doin' anniversary gifts? Is that what this is about?”

Hanzo debates briefly, before just deciding to be honest. “Yes.”

Reyes pulls a hand down his face while Clara chuckles. “Come off it, Boss,” she says. “He's earned a paycheck or two, hasn't he? How he wants to use it should be up to him.”

There's a series of dark grumblings as Reyes disappears back into his room, only to return with a bulging envelope in hand. “I don't want to see any kink shit on my base,” he warns. “You're not using this to buy stupid-ass underwear or candy thongs.”

“Hypocritical, much?” Clara remarks. Reyes shoots her a murderous look, and she shuts her mouth.

“I have no plans to do so,” Hanzo replies, struggling to keep his face neutral. “I only wish to purchase something meaningful.”

Reyes grunts. He sticks a hand into the envelope and pulls out a stack of rainbow-colored bills. “Fine. Here.” He tosses the stack into Hanzo's lap. “An advance. I'll work out how to get you a steady supply later.”

Hanzo picks up the money, flicking through the bills with his claws. It seems like a lot. “... Thank you.” He gets a grunt in reply as Reyes moves to close the door. “Besides,” Hanzo adds suddenly. “I do not need props to thoroughly pleasure McCree.”

There's an angry snarl of disgust before Reyes slams the door shut – Clara starts laughing so hard
that Hanzo can see her knees buckle.

“God damn, kid,” she gasps, grasping at the wall to stay upright. “Those are some balls on you!”

“Yes, well,” Hanzo murmurs, stuffing the money into his pocket as he tries to fight the giddy flush on his face. “He should not act so repulsed by us.” He turns to wheel back down the hall.

Clara wipes at pinpricks of tears at the corner of her eyes, inhaling sharply as she tries to catch her breath and then coughing on it. “Y’know,” she says, thumping on her chest as she follows him. “If you were messin’ around with anyone else, I don't think he'd be so prickly. Reyes loves romantic gestures.”

“I know,” Hanzo says evenly.

“Yeah, right? He actually likes seeing people get together and be happy, true love and shmoopy shit like that. Hell, he helped me out with Ramón.”

“How?”

“Ah, well, it's a little personal. I got a little too hammered drinking with Pritishka on one of my off-days. Apparently I stumbled into Reyes on my way back and started venting to him too. Mouthing off on stuff I was supposed to be keeping to myself because I was a little too sloshed.”

“How did that help?” Hanzo asks curiously.

Clara's mirth seems to slowly evaporate; her mouth sets in a hard line and she seems to be thinking. “Jesse doesn't know about this,” she says suddenly. “And I know he wouldn't care, but it's still something Ramón prefers to be kept as close to the chest as possible. Can you keep this to yourself?”

“... Alright?” Hanzo quirks a brow in interest.

“Ramón’s trans. And back then, some higher-ups weren't too pleased about having to pay for his costs on the matter – or anyone's. There was a whole group of people in Blackwatch who all had the same stories - getting their insurance rejected, operations canceled or meds changed around, all that stuff, while the senior officers were popping Viagra like candy. And it was making Ramón absolutely miserable, and me miserable watching him. So I vented to Reyes about it.”

“What happened?”

Clara lets out a low whistle. “Lemme tell you, you think you’ve been on the end of his bulldog impression? He was furious. I woke up with a pounding headache and Reyes calling me back into his office the moment I was a quarter conscious. I stayed out of the line of sight for the videoconference, but he tore into the big bosses and their cronies something fierce. Morrison was on the call too, and I don't think I've ever seen him look so stressed. Found out later that Overwatch was having the same problem, but Morrison hadn't mustered the nerve or planned how to approach them about it.”

“What happened?”

Hanzo hums. “I suppose he yelled at Reyes for making a scene?”

“Dunno. I don't think so. Jack’s not really a bad guy as far as I can tell, just strangled by red tape and always wanting to please everyone. Doesn't stop me and Paulie from crank-calling him when we're wasted, though.”

“How do you reach him?” Hanzo says curiously. “I hardly imagine a commander answers many
outside calls.”

“Reyes has Morrison's personal number on his own phone; we copied it off that. Easy as shit to remember. 57-734-5993. Flip it over 180 degrees and it spells eggshells - which is what the guy walks around on all day.”

Hanzo snorts.

“Anyway, the difference between him and a guy like Reyes is that Reyes doesn't care what the uppercrust thinks. He got what needed done, and fast. And because of it, Ramón brightened up like a summer day. Months later the goober went to Reyes asking for advice on how to propose. I know because he played what Reyes considers to be the most romantic song in the world, even if I'm not super into Whitney Houston.”

“That is... pleasant to know,” Hanzo admits. “And I will not tell McCree, as you requested.”

Clara drops her hand and jams both back into her pockets. “It's fine. I told you because I figured it was something you needed to hear. Just know, Reyes isn't always direct about letting his people know he cares.”

“I am very distinctly under the impression he does not care for McCree and I together. He has not done anything to convince me otherwise.” Hanzo gives a miserable glance down at his claws.

“Mm. Y'never know. Jesse and Reyes are real close; close enough that Jesse's always fighting off accusations of him being the favorite. I don't think it bothers Reyes that you're, eh, you or have scales and shit. I'm just guessing he doesn't like thinking about you sexin' up someone who he took under his wing. They aren't literally father and son, but some days they might as well be. Deep down, I'm sure he wants Jesse to be happy. Might be showing it in subtler ways than you've noticed.”

Hanzo considers this as they turn a corner in the halls. “You think so?”

“Maybe. But either way, you've got the cash now. What are you going to get Jesse?”

“...I have no idea,” Hanzo mutters. “I was not sure I would get this far.”

Clara clicks her tongue. “Could take you to the mall for ideas. We're not on active watch at the moment, so a quick trip won't land us in the slammer.”

“McCree tried to bring me there, the Storsenter something. It was far too loud for my ears to bear.”

“Hm. There's another option, an outdoor shopping place near one of our exits. Open spaces, not busy at all on the weekdays. And I know for certain McCree favors a certain shop near there.”

“Really?” Hanzo asks. “What is it called?”

“Western Store.”

“What.”

Clara laughs. “I shit you not, that's the actual name. Tell you what, I'll go with. And I'll bet the others wouldn't mind a quick surface trip to stock up on frivolities and such. I'll ask 'em.”

“I do not do well in crowds,” Hanzo admits. “I fear I would become cross with you all too quickly.”
“Eh.” Clara shrugs. “I gotta offer to be polite, or they'll get sulky about it. To be honest, they'll probably split off from us to do their own thing. You and I can just hit up the Western Store, and I'll play buffer if anyone insists on following.”

“Thank you,” Hanzo says after a moment. “That is most appreciated.”

“No problem. I don't really enjoy people either.” Clara sticks her hand into her pocket and pulls out a pack of gum. “I like maybe six people, tops.”

“Are you including me?” Hanzo asks curiously.

“Maybe. Don't jinx it.” Clara chomps on her gum, blowing a small bubble. “I'm going left here. Gonna change up my clothes, it's pretty warm up there. Meet you in the mess hall?”

“Sure.” Hanzo rolls to a stop. “And... thank you, again.”

“No sappy shit,” Clara replies.

“Have you been spending time with Jolene?”

Clara offers a smirk and a wave before wordlessly disappearing around the corner.

A strange, feisty woman.
Chapter 31

The trip to the surface hasn't been as bad as Hanzo had expected – to his immense surprise.

The elevator ride up had been uncomfortable; Hanzo had refused to abandon his chair, so he'd been squashed between Clara, Juan, and Lance in the tight space. Alex had politely declined, having set up in their room with a new knitting project. But they'd wished Hanzo luck, and offered to come visit whenever he'd like.

Once Clara had finished piling on cover-up and powder all over Hanzo's facial scales, the elevator doors had opened and Hanzo and the rest had stepped – and wheeled – out onto a cracked, asphalt parking lot. There'd been about five rusting cars scattered throughout the parking spaces; most of them had been missing their wheels, were tagged with graffiti, and had their windows smashed in. As a space, it doesn't look like it's been used in months. It also doesn't give Hanzo the best impression of where they might be heading to.

Hanzo had glanced back as the Blackwatch elevator doors shut and lowered – there was a small video camera posted on top and an Out Of Order sign was taped over the buttons.

“I know,” Clara had said, as if reading his mind. “But you'd be surprised how many people believe it.”

After exiting through the parking lot, it had only been a short trip around three blocks to reach their destination. Contrary to Hanzo's trepidation, the derelict area they come from gives way to much more pleasant scenery after merely rounding a few corners. A variety of colorful shops line a long, paved street that's filled with stalls and booths set up on the edges of the road. The sidewalks are bustling with patrons, but most of the crowds are filling up the street and flocking around the stalls.

“I thought you said this place would not be busy,” Hanzo hisses.

“Forgot,” Clara'd replies easily. “Might be Labour Day or Constitution Day. Can never remember which is which date.”

Despite Hanzo's reservations about the crowds, he is – completely and utterly ignored. Beyond moving out of the path of his wheelchair, the shoppers don't give him a second glance. Patrons are too caught up chattering around the booths, bartering and speaking rapid-fire nynorsk that Hanzo doesn't understand a word of.

Clara waves him on through, leading him in the direction of the store she'd had in mind – Juan and Lance both give them quick salutes before immediately disappearing into the crowd to seek out their own purchases. "See? Told you they'd fuck off," she says with a shrug. "Those two are always slinking away together to do who-knows-what. Be convinced they're fucking if I didn't know better."

Unpleasant imagery aside, Hanzo shakes his head and follows Clara inside across the threshold of a very small, very homey shop that makes his nose immediately wrinkle at the stench of fresh leather. Western Store has wooden walls and floors and its the earthy tones blend in seamlessly with its decorations of cowboy paraphernalia. Ten-gallon hats, rifles, lassos, and even fake bull heads are mounted on the walls, alongside metal signs with varying slogans and pictures of horses.

A lot of pictures of horses.

There's a man behind the register, but he hasn't bothered looking up. He's got a cowboy hat
crammed onto his head and is nose-deep in a magazine with his elbows on the counter, licking his fingertips and turning the pages. Good. The last thing Hanzo wants is an attentive, doting salesperson.

“Now, I know Jesse comes in here a lot,” Clara remarks. “But as far as gifts go, you're a bit on your own. You probably know what he likes better than me, seein' as you're one of the things he likes.”

Hanzo grunts noncommittally. He wheels deeper into the store, peering up and around as he tries to narrow down his options.

There's a hearty selection of fake firearms, but what use are those when McCree has a real one? Hanzo picks up a cow-shaped bottle-opener before replacing it; it's small and cheap, and not even close to what he wants. He passes by hats, saddles – not like McCree has a horse... does he? - and even a lasso woven out of thick carbon fibers. Nothing appeals. It's all too strange, ugly, or foreign in use.

Clara's trying on boots over in the footwear section and gives Hanzo a nod as he passes by. “Any luck?” she queries, and Hanzo just shakes his head and continues on.

There's a healthy selection of beer in a dairy case, but Hanzo has never asked what type McCree prefers; he could guess, but he figures it's better to abstain and let the man choose his own liquor. Cow hides are lain across a rack, tanned and soft beneath Hanzo's claws – but he's a little off-put by the thought of a dead animal on their floor. His wheelchair might have difficulties going over the uneven fur, too.

Hanzo methodically goes through the store, rejecting trinkets, clothes, and gadgets alike. He'd lingered on a t-shirt promising to save horses by riding cowboys – it seemed just in line with McCree's sense of humor – but had ultimately passed over it, deciding that it was still too close to sexual. He wanted something genuine, something-

A flash of silver catches Hanzo's eye, interrupting his thoughts. He wheels over for a closer look at a variety of belts and buckles hung up on tiny pegs. He sifts through a few dozen – too plain, too gaudy, and who still wore rhinestones? - before pausing in surprise. His fingers grasp and pull out a thick, rectangular belt buckle. It's golden, shining brilliantly as he holds it up towards the light. Engraved on its surface are the letters B-A-M-F, surrounded by a thin border.

Hanzo's heart swells. It's perfect.

“God damn.” Clara's meandering over, her steps awkward as she clunks around in oversized cowboy boots. “Where'd you find that? Fits that tacky goon to a T.”

“I know,” Hanzo murmurs. He places the belt buckle down into his lap almost reverently.

Clara, however, holds out a hand for it. “Lemme do the sales-talk. Lot of people speak English here, but we're better off using Norwegian to not stand out as tourists.”

Hanzo reluctantly passes it over before jamming his hand in his pockets to hand her a stack of bills. “I do not care what it costs,” he admits. “Just make sure to get it.”

“And that desperation there's the second reason I'm doing the talking. Why don't you go check out some of the booths? I'm going to see if they have a pair of these boots in my size, but I shouldn't be too long.”

Hanzo nods. The smell of leather is getting a little too overpowering, anyway. “Just make sure to get it,” he repeats.
“I know,” Clara says with an eye roll. “Now scat.”

Hanzo exits the store, but he's unsure where to go; he ends up sitting curbside in his chair, tucked between two covered stalls. The sun's warm on his black hoodie, but not unpleasant. He'd never been much of a fan before, but now he finds it's nice to simply sit back and watch the busy flow of people pass by. Especially when he is not being watched back.

It's almost deliberate, the way someone will glance at him and immediately look away. It might be his dark hoodie or resting 'bitch face' as Genji had called it - but Hanzo quietly wonders if it's the wheelchair. Hanzo himself had been guilty of averting his eyes in his youth, not wanting to stare or offend. Perhaps a stranger's discomfort is a boon if it keeps their eyes off his face.

Juan and Lance are nowhere to be seen – Hanzo briefly entertains the idea of going to look for them, or perhaps visiting a booth for a bite to eat. But he's not really hungry, and he's sure the men are more than fine without him. They could always find their way back to the base later. So Hanzo settles into his chair, letting his ears flick and swivel beneath his hood as he listens to the sounds of the market. Idle chatter, barked demands and the sound of laughter all filter through, blending into a pleasant muddle in the back of his mind.

His scales itch beneath the hastily-applied makeup. It takes all his willpower not to scratch at them; he can feel his fingers twitching at the urge to do so. Perhaps the warm sun is causing the foundation to run?

He's got a claw reaching up to scratch before he realizes it, only to have it slapped away at the last second.

“Stop that.” It's Clara, a shopping back swung over her arm and a phone in hand. “Come on. Alex is gonna meet us over at Cubus.”

Hanzo folds his hands back in his lap with an indignant huff. “I thought Alex was staying behind,” he retorts. “And what is a Cubus?”

“They were, until I texted them that you seriously need a new wardrobe. Consider it our gift to you and McCree – you stop looking like you got dropped into a bargain bin, and he gets to look at you... not looking like that.” Clara stows the phone in her pocket and steps into the street. “So, yeah, we're going clothes shopping. C'mon.”

“You do not have to,” Hanzo protests, wheeling after her. His chair drops with an unpleasant lurch over the small curb. “McCree wanted to-”

“You really want Jesse dressing you?” Clara draws, pushing through the crowds. “Think long and hard about how that place is his favorite store.”

A fair point.

Alex is already waiting outside Cubus, bouncing up and down on their heels. Hanzo glances over the store's exterior – white, crisp, with its name hung in bright neon letters – before his eyes are drawn back down to Alex's exuberant grin.

“This one fuckin' loves makeovers,” Clara remarks fondly.

“Shhhhh,” Alex replies, holding a finger to their lips. “You'll spook him.”

Hanzo is feeling more than a little 'spooked' as Alex grabs his chair's handlebars and rapidly wheels him inside the store.
The store's interior is packed with clothes hung on walls, draped over mannequins and folded up into neat little piles - at least, the ones that customers are not actively rifling through. Florescent lights burn bright overhead in tiny circular lamps and Hanzo wrinkles his nose - the sheer whiteness of lights, walls, and floors unpleasantly reminds him of his second cell. Unlike his cell, however, this place is busy with people; Alex has to quickly divert a saleswoman from latching onto them before wheeling Hanzo over to the dressing rooms.

The next few hours pass in a blur of cotton, denim and polyester. Hanzo stays inside a dressing room and out of sight, Clara standing guard while Alex moves about the shop selecting items. Over the top of the stall, Hanzo is handed multicolored tank-tops by the bushel, along with a variety of hoodies, vests and skinny jeans. He'd had to point out the latter simply would not fit over his prosthetics before Alex switched to shorts only, and even various hats for Hanzo to try and smush over his horns. None of those worked, but he'd appreciated the sentiment.

Clara's covered up the dressing room camera, but the small area Hanzo has to change in quickly fills with clothes. It leaves him with little option but to continually stand and abandon the comfort of his wheelchair. It's exhausting – far more than it had any right to be – to put on and divest clothing over and over like this; more than once, Hanzo selfishly misses the days when he had servants to dress him. As his fatigue reaches its peak, he gives up and pushes the chair out entirely to allow Alex into the dressing room stall. They make no comments or stares on his body, just hum and pose him, comparing this and that to one color or the next.

He feels a bit like a child's dress-up doll.

Alex seems to settle on a long-sleeved black shirt for him, layering over it with a hooded vest - even giving Hanzo's loose hair a quick, solid braid to complete the look. They step back and appraise him with a critical eye, before a big smile dawns on their face. “I think it looks really good,” they say happily. “Want to go out and show Clara?”

“No,” Hanzo says tiredly. “I trust you.”

“Are you saying that because you really trust me?” Alex asks. “Or because you want to go back?”

“My fashion sense is four years out of date. I would not trust myself to make a proper call. But, yes, take me home.”

Alex chuckles, picking up Hanzo's hoodie off a hangar and tossing it to him. “Alright. Get changed back, and bring out...” They point to a sorted pile of clothes. “Those ones. You're going to look great in them, I promise.”

Hanzo rubs the bridge of his nose. “Fine.” And then, begrudgingly: “Thank you for your assistance. It is appreciated, even if I am now...” He waves a hand. Tired. Cranky.

Alex laughs. “Nah, it's fine. You're way better about letting me dress you than Clara.”

“I have a very specific look,” Clara replies from behind the stall door. “Only I know how to pick for it.”

“But you'd look really good in faux-fur!”

“No.”

Eventually the two operatives stop their wheedling and bickering, and Hanzo's able to open the stall and settle back in his wheelchair, stacking the clothes on his lap. He reaches into his pocket to pull out his money, but Clara holds up a hand.
“None of that. My treat.”

“Our treat!” Alex protests.

“Fine, ours.”

“What? No,” Hanzo replies, bewildered. “These are clothes for me. They are too expensive for gifts.”

“Boss gave you pocket change compared to what we have in our accounts,” Clara says, jerking a thumb in Alex's direction. “Bl- our work pays handsomely, so don't worry about it. This is our way of bein' nice.”

“But McCree said even a few bottles of sake was a lot of money for him. Surely-”

“Oh, well.” Clara looks briefly uncomfortable. “That's more of a... Jesse situation.”

“What do you mean?” Hanzo asks, growing suspicious. “Is he a gambler?”

“No, no. He just...”

“Jesse doesn't get paid quite as much as we do,” Alex cuts in, voice gentle. “We sort of picked up on it over the years.”


“Well...” Clara's rubbing the back of her head. “It's because he's a ward, we think.”

“A ward,” Hanzo repeats tonelessly.

“Yeah. He doesn't really have anyone, y'know? Picked up and dusted off, but the org's sort of... paying to keep him.”

“We can take charge of our food, healthcare, other costs – really, board's the only non-negotiable expense since we have restrictions on leaving our posts,” Alex says. “If you, y'know, buy your own food and choose your own plans, Blackwatch passes the savings on to your paycheck. If you don't, the organization tallies up the cost for using their resources, so you get paid less.”

“No one ever really taught Jesse how to manage the first option,” Clara adds. “And he's never been keen on learning when we try to talk to him about it. Pretty sure he's just accepted that he's locked into this life till he dies, so he doesn't care.” Clara grimaces and shrugs her shoulders. “My theory, anyway. Maybe you can change his mind.”

Hanzo feels his stomach drop. He'd never really thought about Blackwatch as something... long-term. Retiring as quickly as possible appealed – if the dragons' premonitions about his gifts came to pass, he'd always hoped he could get them to remove his deformities - tell Reyes they'd left him, maybe start a life somewhere new.

Locked into this life till he dies.

But now he has McCree to factor into his future. The realization makes him giddy and terribly anxious all at once.

“Sorry.” Alex's expression is kind. “We didn't mean to upset you.”

“No. You are not at fault,” Hanzo mumbles after a moment. “It is just... something to think about. I
would like to go home now.”

“Yes thing.” Even Clara seems a little gentler. “We'll go pay.”

The two step back, as if testing the waters – Hanzo makes no move to stop them, so Clara stoops down to quickly take his pile of clothes and the two head off towards the nearest cashier.

Hanzo casts a weary gaze down at his lap.

*Do Blackwatch operatives fall often?*

*That's the job.*

Would McCree even consider leaving with him? Or are his loyalties to Reyes alone?

There's no answers to be found, staring miserably at his feet. He needs to get home, back to McCree and his comforting embrace.

Maybe you can change his mind.

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As the trio had left the store, something... odd had happened. Hanzo hadn't given it much thought at the time, but looking back – it discomforts him in ways he can't place.

There'd been a tingling in his skin as they'd exited the doors. It hadn't rattled him; he'd been buzzing on anxious energy and absorbed in his worries. Just a sort of prickling, electrical sensation that he'd chalked up to nerves. The dragons had stirred beneath his skin, put off by his discomfort as he'd tried to push them back.

And maybe it really had been nerves. But as Hanzo is wheeled back through the elevator doors, he can't help but recall the moment he'd lifted his head to scan the crowds and been drawn to the gaze of another. A older woman with auburn hair tucked beneath a straw hat had been looking directly at him. Her thick sunglasses had obscured most of her face, but Hanzo had watched in confusion as her head had turned, tracking his movement as Alex pushed him away. Her lips had twitched into a small smile before she'd abruptly vanished into the crowd.

Most strangely of all, the moment she'd disappeared, the prickling sensation had stopped.

As Clara and Alex cram into the elevator with him, Hanzo reaches up to finally scratch at the scales on his cheek. When he pulls his fingers away, he's surprised to see wet splotches of foundation stuck to his claws.

How long has it been melting?
By the time Hanzo arrives back at the base, he's been thoroughly assaulted by Clara and Alex – at least, that's how he feels.

Crammed into the elevator, he'd been trapped between the two operatives with little room to escape. They'd descended on him like a pack of jackals, lying in wait for the moment he was most vulnerable - or perhaps he's being dramatic. Regardless, they'd ended up wheedling him, picking at him, begging to be allowed to *doll him up* as Alex so unpleasantly remarked. They'd sung sweet promises of his future beauty and McCree's delight before he'd finally acquiesced to their demands. Clara had immediately popped open her eyeliner and bent down to apply it on him, while Alex set about reworking Hanzo's braid.

“I am not a girl,” he'd grumbled, squinting slightly as Clara pulled on his eyelid. The liquid tickles; he feels like someone's drawing on his face with a crayon.

“Hey, me neither,” Alex had replied. “But that doesn't mean you can't look good.”

“A face like yours, and you never rocked wings or blush?” Clara'd remarked. “You could have looked twice as cute.”

“I did not need such things,” Hanzo had retorted sourly. “Besides... that was my brother's look. I preferred natural.”

“Should have swallowed your pride and let him teach you.” Clara'd snapped the eyeliner top back on before offering Hanzo her phone. “Here. Tap the swivel button.”

Hanzo had done so, albeit with suspicion. When the camera had reversed to reveal his own image, he'd been surprised. He'd actually looked... nice. The dark tips of the eyeliner were curved almost perfectly, and glistened in the phone screen's light.

“Teach me to do this,” he'd said, and Clara had merely smirked.

Now, he's alone, wheeling his way through Blackwatch Headquarters with his new clothes and McCree's gift on his lap as Alex and Clara's footsteps retreat down the opposite hall. They never had heard back from Lance or Juan – it seemed the two had become far too preoccupied with their above-ground shopping list to respond. Hanzo briefly wonders what could be taking them so long before dismissing the thought from his mind. It's none of his business.

The trek back to his room isn't long on normal days, but Hanzo's so emotionally - or is it socially? - drained that it feels like hours. His arms ache from spinning the chair's wheels by the time he's reached the front door – he resorts to knocking on it with his metal foot. Three heavy *thunks*, loud and obvious.

But no answer.

Curious. Is McCree still sleeping after all this time?

Hanzo punches in the code and presses his fingertip to the scanner – the door gives an agreeable beep. Good. At least Reyes has him in the system for this door. Hanzo gives it a light push, and the door swings open.

No McCree. The bed's made and the lights are off, with no sign of the man anywhere. Had he
woken and gone to get something to eat?

Either way, his absence allows Hanzo to prepare in peace. He has no access to any present boxes or wrapping paper, so he ends up stuffing the small Western Store paper bag with tissues from the bathroom. It's not the best gift display he's ever made, but it's not the worst either.

A childhood memory of noodles and glitter dripping with glue surfaces in the back of his mind before he pushes it away.

Once he's finished and placed McCree's present on the nightstand, Hanzo sets about cleaning the rest of the room. Clothes spread on the floor get balled up and tossed into the laundry basket. Hanzo's new wardrobe gets carefully hung in the closet and slid into drawers, after he re-folds McCree's crumpled, shoved-in shirts. He even has time to idle in the bathroom and fix the smudges on his make-up. He's wiping away the remaining foundation on his scales when his ears prick up at approaching footsteps.

Another beep and the door handle turns; Hanzo can hear McCree stumble inside and abruptly collapse on the bed. When Hanzo cracks open the bathroom door to peer into the room, he can see McCree lying on his back with legs dangling over the side. The man looks... absurdly serious. He's rubbing at his brow with a frustrated expression and a look so stern it unpleasantly reminds Hanzo of his first meeting with Reyes.

"Are you alright?"

McCree looks up and over, his harsh expression instantly melting as he fixes his gaze on the sliver of Hanzo's visage. "Hey, sugar pea. Where'd you go?"

"Shopping. What is wrong?" Hanzo pushes the door open without thinking – then lets out an embarrassed huff as McCree's eyes widen into an outright stare.

"Goddamn," McCree breathes, drinking Hanzo in blatant appreciation.

"Stop." Hanzo never should have let Clara near his face. McCree looks downright dazed. "I needed new clothes. But never mind me, what has happened to you?"

"Don't think I can just 'never mind' ya, darlin," McCree purrs. He makes a small beckoning motion with his hand.

With another huff, Hanzo takes a few steps forward to stand directly in front of McCree. "Better?"

"Feelin' loads better." McCree's hands gently grip either side of Hanzo's waist, leading him down to straddle McCree's lap. "Damn. Ain't you a sight." McCree fervently nips and kisses at the underside of Hanzo's chin before he's met with a claw against his mouth.

"Stop," Hanzo says with no heat. He lets his hand drop, but only to trail it down McCree's cheek. "Tell me what has happened. Why did you look so unhappy?"

"Ah, well." McCree reaches upward, scratching at the hair just below his hat. "Just got a bit of a bad briefing."

"Briefing?" Hanzo takes McCree's hat by the brim, carefully pulling it off the man's head and tossing it to the floor. "Did Reyes yell at you?"

"Nah, nothing like that. Just uh, bad information. Unpleasant." McCree shrugs his shoulders, but some of the previous tension has returned to his face.
“What do you mean?”

“Well...” McCree's hands squeeze Hanzo's hips. “It's not really somethin' I can talk about. Classified.”

“Excuse me?” Hanzo says indignantly. “But I am Blackwatch. Have I not proved myself?”

“You are, y'have,” McCree replies quickly. Another squeeze, an apologetic kiss to Hanzo's disgruntled frown. “But, not every Blackwatch member is, mm, cleared. For knowin' everything. If Boss says to keep my trap shut, then I gotta. It's not a personal slight, sugar.”

_Locked into this life till he dies._

“You are very loyal to your 'Boss';” Hanzo mutters.

McCree grimaces. “Yeah, well. Like I said, I respect the hell out of Reyes. I trust his calls on this stuff. Y'know I'd tell you if I could.”

Hanzo purses his lips. “And how long will you follow his call?”

“Huh?”

Hanzo averts his eyes. “How long do you intend to remain under him? How long do you plan to keep up this kind of life?”

“This kind of... You mean I should be looking for a promotion or-?”

"No. That is not what I mean," Hanzo says shortly. "I mean, how long do you intend to stay with Blackwatch? Clara and Alex said you are exceptionally loyal to Reyes. Do you intend to stay as a soldier until you die?"

"Until I... so that's what you're frettin over?” McCree's brow unfurrows and he lets out a short laugh, to Hanzo's brief annoyance. “Oh, sweet thing. Y'worried about me again?”

“I am worried about-” Hanzo clears his throat at the crack in his voice. “Both. Of us. I do not want to live like this forever, McCree.”

“Oh, sweet pea.” McCree's voice is incredibly fond.

“Stop calling me pet names,” Hanzo says crossly. “I am being serious.”

“I know. An' it's just touching me, that's all. But you don't got to worry.” McCree's smile is genuine and his gaze softens. “I ain't gonna live like this forever. And Reyes don't want that for me either. He's told me himself.”

Hanzo blinks. “He has?”

“Yes. I'll admit, I didn't really have any interest in figurin' out bein' anywhere but here. A life with a gun in hand and people tryin' to kill me's all I've known for a long, long time.” McCree sighs through his nose. “But Reyes' always been firm on me about it. Wants me to go back and get my high school diploma - old man's even talked about college. I always brushed him off, but-”

“I'd like that,” Hanzo interrupts. “For you. I cannot tell you what to do with your life, but...” Hanzo rests his hands on each of McCree's shoulders. “It sounds like it would be good for you. Something you would excel at. You have impressed me more than once with your intelligence.”
“Really?” McCree seems delighted. “When?”

“Your languages,” Hanzo replies easily. “The drop-off – how you tricked a confession from that man. Your skill in combat may be for the battlefield, but it betrays a sharp mind.”

“Yer flatterin' me,” McCree purrs.

“No. I am telling you what I have observed.” Hanzo loops his arms around McCree's neck. “You deserve better than a soldier's life. I do not want to see you fall like the others.”

“I won't.” McCree lifts up his left hand. “I swear it.”

“Do not make promises you cannot keep.” Hanzo leans back, scooting off of McCree's lap. “But we can set this aside, for now. Your gift is waiting.”

McCree's fingers latch onto Hanzo's wrist. “Whoah there. Y'mean your getup ain't my gift?”

Hanzo rolls his eyes with a fond huff. “No.” He pulls out of McCree's grasp to go fetch the bag off the nightstand. “This is.”

McCree's brows lift, reading the logo on the bag as Hanzo deposits it into his lap. “Western Store? Y'went there? How'd you-?”

“Clara.”

“Course. Bless her heart, and yours.” McCree eagerly pulls out handfuls of tissues, tossing them onto the bed before his fingers find the thick belt buckle. He pulls it free, holding it aloft in the dim light streaming in from the bathroom door.

“I still do not know what it stands for,” Hanzo murmurs, a slight flush forming in his cheeks as McCree just stares at the thing. “But it was upon your door, so I-”

McCree hops to his feet and is on Hanzo in an instant – strong hands scooping under Hanzo's thighs, who gives a startled noise as McCree lifts him up in one fluid motion. He's being picked up and absolutely peppered with kisses before Hanzo can dazedly realize what had occurred – it takes two playful nips at his lower lip for him to finally, fondly begin reciprocating in earnest.

“I love it,” McCree purrs against Hanzo's lips, tightening his hold on Hanzo's thighs.

“I had not guessed,” Hanzo murmurs, nuzzling the tip of McCree's nose. “I was afraid it might be too tacky.”

“No such thing.”

Hanzo scoffs, which quickly changes to a grunt as McCree buries his face in Hanzo's neck to begin sucking a new mark. “I-I should have known. But I still do not understand the acronym-”

“BAMF,” McCree laughs, withdrawing slightly to speak, “is stupid. An old call-back from Deadlock days that I kept. Means Bad Ass Mother Fucker.”

Hanzo snorts, and it's uglier than he likes. “That is stupid.”

“Toldja.” McCree's diving back in for more kisses, but Hanzo catches him by the chin and straightens up to tower slightly over McCree.

“Hmm...” Hanzo gently squeezes on McCree's lips, enjoying the sight of the confused half-pucker
state they were in. “Should it not be Bad Ass Monster Fucker?”

McCree stumbles – literally – and he looks somewhere between incredibly amused and deeply concerned. “Uh, I-”

Hanzo rolls his eyes fondly. “I can make that joke,” he chides. “But no one else may.”

“Deal,” McCree breathes. “Y’want me to live up to the name?”

“I would very much like to see the Bad Ass side tonight, yes.”

“That, I can do.” It's all the warning Hanzo gets before he's turned and tossed onto the bed, with McCree all grins and hands following closely behind.

Hanzo sighs in pleasure as McCree clambers atop him. He feels better, so much better knowing that Reyes had no plans to keep McCree – that McCree has an out, the promise of a new life that was his for the taking.

Yet a single question lingers - would Blackwatch ever grant Hanzo the same?
McCree's briefing discomfort lasts beyond a single night.

Day after day, Reyes calls McCree away from Hanzo's side to summon the man to various meetings. Hanzo still has no idea what for, and no amount of huffing or sullen glares can elicit more than apologetic kisses and murmurs from McCree. Whatever he and Reyes are discussing, Hanzo is simply not allowed to be a part of it. Hanzo wouldn't mind if that was the only slight – but every time McCree returns, he seems quieter and more withdrawn. It takes coaxing, gentle words and touches to bring McCree back to his former cheeky self. Each time it takes a little longer.

“Stuff isn't turning out how we'd hoped,” McCree admits one night, after Hanzo has all but pleaded for him to share some of his burden. “That's really all I can say about it.”

It isn't much, but it's enough for Hanzo to comfort on. He only wishes he had more to go on, and wonders why Reyes isn't calling him in to deal with the problem.

“I've noticed it too,” Alex remarks. They're sitting together in the mess hall to have lunch; McCree is fast asleep after a long night. “Reyes isn't barking or relaxing. He's in some sort of weird middle state right now. He's quiet, like something's bothering him. Roberto's been picking up his slack with the new recruits too.”

“Have you seen him discussing the issue with anyone but McCree? Perhaps yourself?” Hanzo queries. His right hand's twirling his fork, mindlessly stirring his ramen in circles. “I do not understand what is so secretive.”

Alex shakes their head. “Nah. Haven't seen anyone mention it besides you, and I haven't seen Reyes at all these past couple days. Whoever he's briefing with, it's not in my circle.”

Curious. Then again, Hanzo is not well-acquainted with Reyes' most seasoned officers; perhaps it really is a situation for elites only.

That's his theory, at least, until two days later Reyes calls for McCree to report again – but to bring Hanzo along.

“Do you know what for?” Hanzo asks, bending over the bed's edge to strap on his prosthetics.

“Ya never really know with Reyes,” McCree replies evasively. “Stop,” he adds in a whine as Hanzo shoots him a suspicious glare. “Look, you'll find out in bout ten minutes, tops. I ain't givin Reyes an easy excuse to whoop me.”

Reyes doesn't really look in a 'whooping' mood when the pair arrive in the quite literally cavernous conference room – there's even a steady trickle of water from a stalactite overhead, that someone's wisely left a bucket under. Instead, the commander looks... subdued. He's got a serious expression and folded arms, even if his boots kicked up on the table slightly ruins the professional look of it all.

“Lock it,” he instructs McCree, who taps out a short code onto a nearby console. There's a sound of bolts sliding into place, which instantly unsettles Hanzo.

He hates that sound.
“I'm going to skip small-talk and pleasantries,” Reyes begins, as if Hanzo expected them, “and get to the point. I need you to tell me about the Shimadas.”

Hanzo's brows lift in surprise as he settles into a nearby seat. “The Shimadas?” he repeats. “But you have already breached my family's castle and slain its leader. Is there more trouble?”

“Not the castle,” Reyes says with an impatient wave of his hand. “I want to know about the people in your clan. Saburo's dead, we did that op, it's over. I want to hear about the rest.” Reyes takes his feet off the table before leaning forward. “The people and events that led you to that cell.”

Hanzo's instantly suspicious. “Why?”

Reyes says nothing. Hanzo glances at McCree, but the man's got his hat drawn over his eyes and his fingers jammed into the hem of his pants. Had McCree known this was going to be asked?

“What exactly do you want to know?” Hanzo continues reluctantly. “About my father's death?”

“No, we've got pretty solid information on that. More like...” Reyes gives him an appraising look. “Why you agreed to serve them.”

Hanzo bristles. “Am I being accused- ?”

“No,” Reyes cuts in. “You're not. I just need an answer, not a defense.”

Hanzo briefly closes his mouth, but he's still intensely wary. “I told you,” he says after a moment. “I did it to secure my brother's freedom. After Saburo started making his moves to take control of the clan, I... let him. I had planned to flee with my brother and leave the clan in his hands. I wanted nothing more to do with them, especially after I learned...”

“Was it after you were certain your father had been poisoned intentionally?” Reyes queries.

“Yes.” Hanzo's lips thin. “How did you-?”

“I told you , I'm good at what I do.” Reyes makes a 'continue' motion.

Hanzo huffs. “Yes. Someone close to my father had betrayed him. I already had my doubts about my future in the clan, and the prospect of being betrayed by my kin sealed it. So I planned to leave with the only kin left that I could trust – my brother.”

“But they didn't want you to leave.”

“No.” Hanzo's shoulders slump. “I should not have been so short-sighted, presuming that Saburo would not care if I left the door open for him to seize control. As long as Genji and I lived, we would always be a threat to his power. Blood loyalties run strong in our clan.”

“They cut you up and imprisoned you,” Reyes says. “But what I don't understand is your brother. Why were you so certain they had let him go? Couldn't they just have killed him and lied to you?”

“I am not an idiot,” Hanzo snaps, “and neither were they. I was taken to the surface and hidden from view on the day they released Genji – I watched him walk through the doors and disappear into the streets.”

“Pointless. They could have quickly sent an assassin out after him.”

“Are you going to let me finish, or are you going to keep interrupting and presuming my naiveté?”
Reyes motions for Hanzo to continue, perking a brow. “Where’d you learn the word naïveté?”

Hanzo ignores him. “After Genji’s release, I followed up weekly by asking for proof of his whereabouts and health. The proof varied, but it was usually pictures taken from afar or video recordings. If I was not convinced it was him, I would do nothing for them. They always followed up with a more substantial photo or other evidence.”

“So they tailed him around,” Reyes says slowly. “Watching him.”

Hanzo deflates. “That is why I began asking less. It worried me, watching him through their eyes. My asking became more infrequent. Once in a while, to seldom. Eventually it took them so long to be able to find him and procure a photo that I stopped asking altogether.”

“When?”

“I do not know. I lost track of the days, months, and years in that cell.” Hanzo starts when he feels a hand on his shoulder – but it’s only McCree, gently rubbing soothing circles with his thumb. His face is still ominously serious, an eerie contrast to his comforting touch.

“You still seemed pretty fuckin’ certain they weren’t going to kill him,” Reyes continues. “Which is what I would have done in their shoes.”

“My personal worry for him aside,” Hanzo says, “I always assumed they were abstaining for my mother's sake.”

“Your mother?” Instead of Reyes, it’s McCree who blurts out in surprise.

“Yes. I have a mother.” Hanzo gives the pair of them unimpressed looks. “Had she really escaped your notice? I thought you were an elite spy organization.”

“We're a lot of things.” Reyes' expression has hardened. “Tell me about your mother.”

“She's no matriarch, if that is what you're wondering. She and my father had a falling out not long after Genji's birth. She left to pursue her own interests, but if both her children were killed, she would have the right to return and claim a seat of power. She has rights through marriage that Saburo did not, but as long as an heir lives – even if not within the clan's walls - she cannot lay claim to leadership.”

“Both her children?” McCree prompts.

“Another assumption of mine but I presume that among the clan, I had somehow 'perished’.” Hanzo shrugs.

Reyes has pulled a small notebook from his pocket and is jotting something down. “How close to her were you?” he asks.

“Not at all,” Hanzo replies easily. “She was mostly absent from our lives, even before she left completely. Save Genji, I care nothing for any remaining members of my clan.”

“Good. Then this won’t be as difficult.” Reyes picks up a remote off the conference room table, clicking on the projector. After a few whirs and beeps, the screen flickers on to an image of the Shimada crest.

“At o-six-hundred hours two days ago,” Reyes remarks. “We received intelligence stating that a set of villas in Italy had been attacked by an unknown assailant.” He presses the remote again, and a
photograph of a large, mahogany gate fills the screen. There's deep claw marks etched in the wood on the left side, marring the beginnings of an intricate crest of circular vines. The right door has been torn completely off its hinges. An unpleasant sensation crawls down Hanzo's spine; he knows this place and he knows who wields those claws.

"I have been there before," he says quietly. "My family would travel there to avoid the August heat. That is Shimada land."

"I know," Reyes remarks. "We've been watching them for a while. It's some sort of retirement village for some of your clan elders, right?"

"I-" Hanzo hesitates. "They did not call it that. It was a summer home for us, and a reward for years of service to the clan for others, where you would be taken care of-"

Reyes waves a hand impatiently. "Same thing. Point is, they caught our notice a couple of years ago when someone we'd been tailing moved in. But the walls are too high, and the place is guarded to hell and back. We didn't have anything solid on the rest of them, and our tail seemed to settle down and fuck off the life of crime, so we couldn't justify wasting resources to investigate further."

"The damage to the gate-"

"Mitra," Reyes supplies. "As far as we can tell. Further evidenced by the fact that every single goddamn person in that little gated community is presumed dead."

"Presumed?" Hanzo's heart skips unpleasantly.

"We can't get in. This isn't Blackwatch or Overwatch territory. It's in the hands of the Carabinieri unless they say otherwise, so we're not cleared for shit. We've sent in some stealth drones for preliminary surveillance; what we do know is that it's a gorefest in there, through and through. Your friend doesn't know the meaning of holding back."

"They are not my friend," Hanzo snaps.

Reyes perks a brow. "Sure fuckin' seems like it." He leans back to rap his knuckles on the screen. "This thing kills as it pleases – but first spares your scaly butt, and then goes on to massacre members of your clan? Seems like something a friend would do, considering what was forced on you."

"Nice rhyming, Boss."

"Fuck off."

"I did not want this," Hanzo interrupts testily. "And I did not ask for it, if that is what you are implying. Not every person in the clan knew of my imprisonment. I may not care for them, but the retired elders did not deserve such a fate. As I have told you, blood loyalty runs strong."

Reyes makes a thoughtful noise, even if his expression is still deadly serious. "Fair point. Doesn't change the fact that this Mitra seems to have decided to hunt down some Shimadas."

"So what?"

"So, this." Reyes clicks the remote again, and images of documents spring up. "You said that Mitra was a byproduct of Helga Jepsen's fuckery, right?"

"That is what the omnic said," Hanzo replies curtly.
“I've been going through Overwatch's classified records on every person under Jepsen's care prior to her forcible termination.”

“They let you do that?” Hanzo interrupts in surprise.

“No.” Reyes perks a brow. “Can I keep going?”

“... Yes.”

“Anyway, nothing really stood out. I figured between you getting spared and your clan getting gutted, this Mitra had to be connected to you somehow.” Reyes taps the remote, and the screen changes to a blank, grey profile.

“What's that?” Hanzo asks.

“Jepsen's last patient. After the arm scandal surfaced, she packed her things and ran before we could close in. She'd been working on a new patient and he disappeared with her. Blackwatch doesn't know if he went willingly, but we also know next to squat in the first place.” Reyes shoots a glare back at the screen. “His file lists him as a John Doe with no picture. Fuckin' odd for an organization that prides itself on details. But there were a couple of things.”

“Such as?” Hanzo prompts.

“They were flown in from Nepal after the Talon assault on the Shambali temple. Someone checked the ‘injured bystander’ box for ‘em.”

I journeyed here in search of an old friend.

“And,” Reyes continues, “they were a Japanese male.”

Hanzo's blood runs cold. He looks over at McCree, but the man is still avoiding his gaze. “A Japanese male could be anyone,” Hanzo finally hisses, whipping his head back towards Reyes. “It does not mean-”

“There's a fuckload it could mean,” Reyes interrupts, rising from his chair. “But everything's pointing in the right direction. You being spared. The massacre on clan members following. Angela's decision to fucking hide this from me-!” Reyes slams his fist onto the table. “And the unexplained deaths.”

“What unexplained-”

Reyes mashes his thumb onto the remote, and the screen changes to an image so repulsive that Hanzo physically recoils. It's a body, cleaved in two – at least, that's all Hanzo sees before he averts his gaze.

“Remember how I asked if you were killin' people without my consent?”

“I do not tear people apart!” Hanzo snarls, glaring at the floor. “I could not possibly-!”

“I know. But this?” Hanzo can only assume Reyes is pointing at the picture. “Same shit as you, and it's been turning up near areas flagged by Talon activity. Same charred up hearts, something I have only seen with your handiwork. This is dragon-work, with a physical effect. And it keeps happening. At first we were sure it was done with a blade, but if there's sharp enough claws involved...”
“It is not him,” Hanzo says through gritted teeth.

“You have no idea what happened to him, and neither do we. Four years is a fucking long time to lose track of your brother, Shimada.”

Shimada. “It is not him.”

“We have to operate like it is.” Reyes clicks the projector off. “As far as Blackwatch is concerned, Mitra and Genji Shimada are one and the same. Which is why our next mission, we'll need your help neutralizing—”

The room blurs, an eerie similarity to his confrontation with Parker. The blackness creeping at the edges of his vision, his complete loss of self and space. He swears he can feel himself moving this time, but he's not sure how, where, or even why. His brother's name and the dragons' furious roars echo in his ears – until he can hear his own being shouted repeatedly.

When Hanzo's vision clears, he finds Reyes' face mere inches from his own. There's visible sweat beading at the man's brow, and his face is scrunched up in an uncomfortable grimace. He's being pressed back against the wall.

Hanzo's surprised to find that he's the one holding Reyes there, one claw clenched tightly around the man's throat and the other holding down Reyes' right arm.

McCree's standing at the side, his pistol drawn and held to Hanzo's head.

“Y’good?” he asks gruffly, once he sees Hanzo's gaze upon him.

Hanzo instantly releases his grip on Reyes and takes a step back. McCree lowers the gun and Reyes touches his throat to cough hoarsely.

“Cell,” Reyes rasps venemously. “Now.”

McCree takes Hanzo by the arm, and Hanzo doesn't fight it. There's a gentle press on his back as McCree leads him away, out of the conference room in utter silence.

The last thing Hanzo hears before the door shuts is an angry mutter from Reyes.

"Fucking Shimadas."
Chapter 34

The cells of Blackwatch Headquarters are scarcely different from their Californian counterparts; the one Hanzo's been sent to even has the same style of cot, shower-head, and toilet as before. The only real change lies in the walls; where blinding white tile had been inlaid, now Hanzo gazes across craggy, onyx rock that juts out haphazardly around the room.

Hanzo can barely remember walking through the halls to reach his cell. All he can recall is McCree's hand on his shoulder, guiding him toward their destination; it had only been the sound of the glass door's locks had clicked into place that broken Hanzo's daze into wretched lucidity. He'd blinked thrice, then turned to look at McCree.

The man's expression had been somber; he'd tipped his hat over his eyes. “I have to get back to Reyes,” was all McCree's murmured before he'd disappeared back the way they'd come.

Hanzo had taken the desertion as permission to sink down onto the bed and lay flat on his back; he's now staring vacantly up at the ceiling with a head that's still swimming and pounding unpleasantly as anxiety pools in his gut.

Reyes is mistaken; Hanzo is sure of it. Flighty coincidences prove nothing; a faceless Japanese man could be anyone. It shouldn't matter if Reyes wants to hunt him down. Hanzo could have been spared for any number of reasons by Mitra – perhaps he just looks enough of an oddity to confuse and disorient the man. Maybe McCree's the one with a brother, and he'd recognized Hanzo from photos exchanged between them. Does McCree have any lingering family? He'd never mentioned a soul.

But it does not matter. Whoever Mitra is - Reyes' false assumptions or not - there is little excuse for Hanzo's actions. A fleeting loss of control has landed him back in a cell, and it's disturbing how familiar it is, how easy it's become to simply accept being placed here. Hanzo is anxious for McCree, for his own future, for Genji – the real Genji, wherever he is. But he has no qualms about his re-imprisonment. He spitefully reasons that it doesn't feel that much different than being tied to Blackwatch's whims while 'free'.

Only now, there is no McCree by his side.

Hanzo drapes an arm over his face, forcing down a weak noise as the dragons itch beneath his skin. They're furious, snarling, demanding he listen to them – but Hanzo ignores them, tunes them out in favor of his own thoughts.

Will he be killed? It's not much of a stretch; Hanzo has just attacked Blackwatch's commander. Whether it was the dragons or his own temper getting the best of him, Hanzo isn't sure – what he is certain of is that it won't matter either way. Blackwatch has no use for someone who cannot control his weapons, and even less use for someone who wields them against their handlers. Perhaps he'd just be left here to rot. He might never breach the surface again to feel sunlight on his scales, or taste food that isn't slid through a crack in the door. Reyes might just bring him scraps to hunt with, same as Saburo, and leave Hanzo in here forever.

It's not like McCree will stop him.

Hanzo knows that he's being petty on that end, even as residual anger stirs in his veins. Yes, McCree had pulled a gun on him. But even now, with his fury not fully abated, Hanzo knows that there hadn't been a choice. Hanzo had had little to no control over his own actions; McCree suffers
the same fate.

The loyalties of duty. To his commander. His new family.

*It's because he's a ward.*

How foolish Hanzo had been. Pretending, romancing the idea of freedom with McCree at his side. So what if Reyes wanted McCree to pursue an education. It would make McCree a better soldier, a better tactician. It didn't mean McCree would ever truly be free, or that the man would ever know a life without a gun in hand. And where would Hanzo go, anyway? A life of hoods pulled over his eyes and make-up smeared on his scales? Slinking around in the shadows, constantly on the run from those who would know him, take him, and try to use him like all the rest? Had McCree's gentle touches really deluded Hanzo so badly that he'd thought he might have a normal life someday?

That they might have one together?

Blackwatch will never let him go. Not as Hanzo, not as a wild beast. There would always be another to hunt, to kill. His fate is cyclical. Inescapable. It is time to accept it.

Hanzo rolls over onto his side, letting his eyes close as grief and fatigue washes over him.

No more pretending. It is time to harden, seal up the cracks false hope had opened up.

Time to end this charade.

---

When food is brought, Hanzo does not touch it. When it's time to sleep, he refuses. If someone arrives to speak with him, he says nothing.

It's simpler than he'd thought. Like all things, tuning his surroundings out had become much easier with practice.

Hanzo bathes beneath the showerhead and drinks to quench his thirst, pooling the water together in his palms. He rests when he cannot abstain any longer – but his sleep is always fitful and full of nightmares. He changes into the clothes they bring every few days, but keeps his gifted hoodie on. When he hears footsteps, Hanzo turns his cot onto its side and curls on the floor, creating a literal wall between his back and intruders.

Most of the time, it's Alex. They always had been the kindest to him, and their tone is always gentle and soft. They bring him his food, and sigh when they return to see it uneaten. Hanzo doesn't listen to what they have to say – swiveling ears are easily pinned down to muffle words he doesn't want to hear. Only one saying had slipped through, and it sticks to his mind like a burr.

“*You're not being fair.*”

Hanzo's life is anything but *fair*.

Clara had come by a few times. She's the hardest to ignore, all snapping and brief shouts as she tries to force him to respond. But Hanzo's been on the receiving end of barks and growls, and he
knows she'll tire out. She always does, and leaves him in peace with a slammed door to punctuate her departure.

Reyes hasn't visited. Neither has McCree.

For the former, Hanzo's not sure what he would do. Would he be able to apologize? Does Reyes deserve it? Hanzo hadn't meant to attack him, not really. The man sometimes gets on his nerves, but bold claims still hadn't warranted claws at the commander's throat.

Hanzo wonders if Reyes is the one keeping McCree from him. As a commander, it would be the smart thing to do. Pistol or not, Hanzo has been turning McCree into a liability. Hanzo is distracting. Pointlessly distracting.

He fuckin' ruined McCree.

Or maybe McCree's old fear of Hanzo has been reignited.

None of these are pleasant thoughts, so Hanzo pushes them away. He continually clears all emotions and lingering doubts from his mind, trying to force himself into a blank state. Most thoughts of Blackwatch can be muffled, but his mind incessantly returns to Genji.

Perhaps he had been naive. Presuming that Genji would have the chance to have a normal life, that his brother was running around free and blissful. He'd looked content in the pictures Saburo had brought, but his speech on recordings had always been... subdued. Hanzo had hoped that it was just Genji missing his brother and home, and that the pain would fade in time.

But then the memory of claw marks and smell of village gore rise up and cause bile to form in Hanzo's throat. None of what Reyes said meant Mitra had to be Genji – but the insinuation is vile and unsettling. The mere thought of Talon or Klo, whatever they were, laying their hands on his little brother. Deforming and enraging him, turning Genji into even more of a monster than Hanzo.

I have horns, and even I am not that savage.

No matter who Mitra might be, Hanzo is glad that Helga Jepsen is one of the dead painted on her facility's walls.

- 

Time passes unremarkably in Hanzo's cell. He's not really keeping track of how long he's been here, but the timers on the lights flicking on and off alert him to night and day. Perhaps this is where he'll spend another four years of his life, or more.

Today is no different. There've been no visitors yet, something Hanzo's stomach sharply protests. Even if he refuses to eat the food, looking at and smelling it is a warped sort of comfort. Gulping down water only suppresses his hunger so much.

Hanzo's ears prick up at the sound of approaching footsteps – and something on wheels following closely behind. It's not the sound of his chair, strangely. What is being brought? His curiosity gets the best of him, and he doesn't even bother hiding behind his overturned cot this time. He sits, and he waits.
The door on the far end of the room opens, and to Hanzo's surprise, it's Lilac who steps through. She pushes her glasses up the bridge of her nose with a single finger, her other hand holding onto an IV stand.

"Please don't make this difficult for me," she says quietly.

Hanzo considers her plea as she starts punching in the code to his cell. Letting her put the IV in would keep him alive and considerably more lucid, something he's honestly not sure he wants anymore. But if he's uncertain, then part of him might want to persist in living, even in this miserable state. Lilac has never done him any wrong; still, she works for Blackwatch.

He's so deep in thought that the feeling of her hand on his wrist startles him, breaking his reverie and causing him to tense at the touch. His skin crawls and his scales bristle – she instantly releases her grip and steps back with a wary look.

Ah. No doubt rumors of his attacks on Reyes and Palmer were circulating throughout the base now. Perhaps she thinks he might attack.

Good. She has every right to be afraid.

"May I continue?" Lilac asks evenly.

Hanzo says nothing; he merely turns his head away from her and huffs.

Lilac gingerly takes hold of his wrist again, fingers searching out for a vein. A wet cotton swab, and then there's a small prick that makes Hanzo grit his teeth and tense up again.

But the IV's already been inserted, and Lilac is removing her hands and taking a step back. "I am here to offer counseling, if you are willing to take it. I'm to understand you acted without thinking, and I'm willing to work with you on the matter."

Hanzo shoots her a glare and then pointedly rolls his eyes. Lilac draws in a breath.

"I don't know why you're doing this," she remarks suddenly. "Acting this way."

Hanzo looks away with a huff.

"I don't think you really know either," Lilac continues. "You are being difficult for no reason."

That's enough to get Hanzo to snap his gaze back to her and bare his teeth. "I have every reason," he snarls. "You cannot possibly understand."

"You aren't being fair," Lilac argues. There's that word again. Fair. "A simple altercation does not mean you have to throw away everything you've built. I saw you, Hanzo. You were happy here."

"I was deluded," Hanzo hisses back. "I fell for Blackwatch's pretense. But no more."

"Jesse was not a pretense."

Lilac's curt words cut Hanzo, but he keeps his expression schooled. "No," he says shortly. "He was not. And that is why he was so effective at distracting me. Why I let you use me."

"You were repaying your debt for killing our men," Lilac replies coldly. "Do you really think Jesse deserves this? To find out you're refusing food?"

"How would he know? He hasn't been here," Hanzo spits.
“He's not here. He and others left on a mission days ago.”

“Yes, and I bet I know exactly what that mission will entail. To hunt down and kill someone who they believe to be my brother. And you ask if I think he deserves this?”

Lilac's expression grows startled. Hanzo feels a surge of vicious satisfaction. Good. She hadn't known before presuming to lecture him.

“Your brother?”

“Or so they think. It is not him. I am sure of it,” Hanzo mutters. “But it does not matter. They think he is Genji, and they will try to cut him down under that belief. And that is enough.” He turns, putting his back to Lilac. “Leave me. I am tired of you, and all of Blackwatch. Let your precious commander know he is better off killing me than expecting my aid ever again.”

Lilac lingers for several moments, long enough to irk Hanzo at her silent persistence. Finally, her footsteps retreat. The two doors are locked shut behind her, and Hanzo is finally left alone with his thoughts. Something he'd said himself lingers in the back of his mind.

_They will try to cut him down under that belief._

He hadn't given it much thought before, the reality of Blackwatch and McCree going off to face Mitra. He'd presumed they'd wait - but they really had no reason to, did they? Mitra is a problem, one Reyes wants to solve. One he'll send Blackwatch soldiers in to handle.

Unbidden, the image of the silent, murdered village surfaces in Hanzo's memory.

But is there a chance Blackwatch could fail?
Nowadays, Lilac is the only person to visit Hanzo in his cell. Alex and Clara have ceased their attempts – mercifully – but Lilac has informed Hanzo that they too have been sent on their respective missions.

Perhaps she tells him because she thinks Hanzo is missing them. He doesn’t.

Lilac comes every day now, to change out Hanzo’s IV and initiate a half-sort of conversation with him. Most days, he gives her the silent treatment but on occasion she can coax a few snaps and grumbled words out of him.

“You could have come out, you know,” she’d said. “All Reyes is waiting for is an apology.”

As far as Blackwatch is concerned, Mitra and Genji Shimada are one and the same.

Reyes isn't getting one, and Hanzo'd informed her of that as curtly as possible. Lilac had merely sighed.

“You don't have to live this way.”

Apparently, he did. No amount of coaxing the dragons, as irritated as they were, would have them strip Hanzo of his scales or even consider helping him break free of his cell. Ami outright refused Hanzo's pleas to shatter the door's hardware or sap life from the guards so he could make his escape. He doesn't want to kill the Blackwatch operatives outright - just sap their energy. But the dragons refuse to co-operate.

We cannot take half a life, Ami’d hissed at him. It is all or it is nothing. And you are being childish.

If you leave, we will not be able to see him again, Eri had added forlornly. We miss him.

McCree does not matter anymore, Hanzo had snapped. There is no life to be had with him. Are you not as tired of being used as I am?

This is not about our hunts, Ami had replied curtly. You risk everything attempting to flee this place. Do you think they would not find us?

What of Genji, then? Hanzo'd demanded. What of my brother? Your brother?

The dragons refuse to speak on the matter, no many how times he asks. They scold him, ignore him, or outright push him from their world so that Hanzo is forced again and again back into consciousness with many a hiss. A repeating cycle.

Everything he does is like... ah. What had his father called it? An Ouroboros?

Hanzo wants to leave, but his dragons will not help him. He wants to find his brother, but they refuse.

He thinks he wants to forget McCree. They want him held closer than ever.

What had he expected? They'd never respected his wishes, not from the first day that scales had begun to grow onto his skin. Protecting his frail, human body is the only thing they seem to desire.
- and nowhere is safer than a military cell.

“I hate you,” he’d snarled aloud one day, voice echoing in the empty room. “I’d tear you from my body if I could. Leave you to die like your precious prey.”

There’d been no response, just a crackle of painful energy down his spine that made Hanzo grimace. He doesn't attempt to speak with them after that.

Today, however, is devoid of squabbles and incessantly quiet. No one's been by, and Hanzo's IV bag is bone dry. He can't muster the energy to drag himself up and drink from the shower, either. He settles for lying on his cot, exhausted from a night of fitful sleep and unceasing internal frustration.

Where is Lilac? She should be here by now. Hanzo's almost annoyed at her lateness, or would be if he wanted to see her.

He doesn't. He's just hungry, he's sure of it.

Footsteps approach down the hall eventually, but Hanzo's mood has deteriorated too far. He rolls over to put his back to the door and focuses on ignoring her. As long as Lilac's coming, his interest has waned; he has no interest in greeting the woman if she was going to be late. She'd swap the bag and hopefully, leave quicker than she'd come.

It's not until the footsteps have stopped in front of the door that Hanzo realizes they'd been far too heavy-stepped to belong to Lilac.

There's a sound of buttons beeping and the lock sliding out of place. The intruder enters the cell, each step cautious as Hanzo's scales bristle, on-edge.

A faint clink of spurs.

“Y'ain't gonna look at me?”

McCree's voice is so terribly soft and it only adds to the tension in Hanzo's shoulders. He doesn't turn towards the man. He doesn't speak.

After a few moments of silence, McCree makes a low grunt and Hanzo can feel the cot dip as the man settles down on its edge. McCree's not touching him, but Hanzo can still feel the weight of the man's stare on his back.

“Lilac let me come in,” McCree murmurs quietly. “Argued about it a bit. But she gave me this.” Hanzo hears a familiar crinkle, and realizes McCree must be holding the IV bag. “Said you still haven't been eatin’.”

Hanzo shifts uncomfortably on the cot, but gives no other indication he's listening.

There's a small clatter, and the cot creaks as McCree leans up to swap out the bags. “The mission failed,” McCree says suddenly. “If you were curious. Intel was sour. Helga had cleared out days ago. She's on the move, but we can't get a solid lead.”

That's enough to get Hanzo to sit up and give McCree a startled look.

McCree looks tired, to put it mildly. There's dark bags under the man's eyes, and his hair looks greasy and unkempt beneath his hat. Stubble's begun to form on his chin and lip, and he's got a mottled bruise on his forehead.
“Helga Jepsen is dead,” Hanzo says quickly, before he's caught staring. “She was killed in the village.”

“Nah.” McCree is shaking his head. “We never recovered a DNA match from that splatterfest back in Denmark. That omnic said a couple folks escaped, so Reyes kept an eye out. We've gotten whiffs of a trail, but she's definitely still out there. Talon's harboring her and keeping her out of sight until we lose any trace completely, I reckon.”

“I thought Reyes would be out hunting for Mitra.” Hanzo makes sure to keep his voice clipped and curt. “Or have you all been calling him Genji, now?”

McCree shifts uncomfortably. “Jepsen's a bigger threat,” he says finally.

“I find that very hard to believe,” Hanzo replies coolly.

“Look, Hanzo.” McCree sighs, itching at the bridge of his nose. “We don't know that Mitra is your brother. Not for sure.”

“Reyes seems oh so certain.”

“Yeah, well, it's not set in stone.” Another shrug. “Look, he was pissed off going into that meeting. News that Overwatch is intentionally classifying shit he needed to know always puts him in a rough mood. And he's still real sore over Tessa and the rest.”

“That is no excuse,” Hanzo hisses.

“No, it ain't. There's a difference between makin' excuses and shedding a little light on the 'why'. “ McCree pulls his hat off and runs gloved hands through greasy locks. “And this stuff’s complicated, Hanzo. You don't got to believe me, but I chewed his ear off for not approachin' it more sensitively. I know how important Genji is to you.”

Hanzo's ears flick when mentioned, and his shoulders slacken slightly. “Your rant did not seem to do much to sway Reyes,” he replies, bitterness giving way to genuine fatigue. “He is asking for an apology from me.”

“That's for show. Y'gotta give him something to justify releasin' ya. Attacking a commander is-”

“Punishable by death?” Hanzo sneers, making a gun with his fingers and holding it up to his own head.

“I didn't have a choice,” McCree says quietly, expression full of pain.

Hanzo drops his hand back into his lap. “I know.”

“I wouldn't have shot.”

“I know,” Hanzo repeats irritably. “It was what you had to do. You had no real choice in the matter. You would have ended up imprisoned, or removed from Blackwatch for lack of loyalty if you hadn't.”

“But you're upset,” McCree presses.

“Yes. Because it was what you had to do.” Hanzo averts his gaze again. “I am not a fool, McCree. Your loyalty to Blackwatch will always come first. I am too new, too unstable. They are your family.” Hanzo folds his fingers together. “I know where I will fall when you are forced to choose
between. It should not be a choice you have to make.”

“What are you sayin’?”

“I am saying that we should end this,” Hanzo replies curtly. “Our camaraderie, companionship. You are Blackwatch, McCree, and Reyes might set you free someday. But he will not do the same for me, and we both know it. There is no point in pursuing any sort of relationship. We are both holding the other back.”

“Now, hang on a moment!” McCree protests.

“You know I am right.”

“I really don't!”

Hanzo bares his teeth and snarls – a tight, painful feeling bubbles up as McCree recoils. “We have to end this,” he hisses. Trying to look frightening. Trying to scare McCree away. Trying to deafen his own hammering heart.

But McCree merely redoubles on his stern expression. “We don't have to end shit.”

“There is no point in being together,” Hanzo snaps. “Seek out someone else. Someone you can build a real life with.”

“I don't want someone else!” McCree still doesn't touch him, but he leans in close with an expression torn between fury and hurt. “Y'aint being fair!”

Fair.

“We have nothing to gain from this!” Hanzo says in rising exasperation. “I am never going to be free!”

“You don't know that!” McCree looks like he wants to take Hanzo's hand – but he refrains, and takes a steadying breath instead. “Yer actin' out,” McCree continues, his voice wavering as he tries to keep it calm. “And yer not being rational.”

“I have had plenty of time to think and be rational,” Hanzo snaps. “More than you!”

“You've had time to be alone,” McCree counters. “And I've had time to miss you something fierce. And I know right now you're gonna lie to my face and say you ain't missed me-”

“I haven't,” Hanzo mutters.

“But,” McCree continues, “I know you have. And I know that's why you're all sore and spitting fire at me. Because you're convinced you're gonna keep ending up back in cells, and you think you're doing me some sort of favor by backing away. I know you're scared.”

“I am not-”

“I'm not gonna let Blackwatch keep you,” McCree interrupts firmly. “And I ain't gonna stick with them forever.”

Hanzo looks away. “You have no say in my freedom.”

“Y'don't got to be a prisoner. I know Reyes. He doesn't hate you, Hanzo, and he wants to be able
treat and trust you like any other operative. And you don't hate him either.”

“That I am not certain of,” Hanzo hisses.

“Did you mean to do it?” McCree asks.

“Did I-?”

“Attack him. Did you mean to do that?”

“... No,” Hanzo admits begrudgingly. “Even if he-”

“Then,” McCree interrupts yet again, “let him help you. All of us. You've had two accounts now where you've acted without realizing. Gotten consequences you never wanted. Don't you want to get a handle on that before making your way into the world?”

Hanzo hesitates instead of answering.

“Blackwatch has the most advanced medical care in the world, Hanzo. Blackouts aren't something new in the medical world, and neither is depression or even PTSD. I don't know the extent of what you're dealing with, but we can help you. Angela, Lilac, any of the doctors. And if you let them, they can help you in ways you want them to.”

“Angela took my scales,” Hanzo mutters.

“Yeah, well, she's a bit of a creep sometimes. So we just use Lilac, then. Has she ever done anything wrong to you?”

“There isn't any we,” Hanzo replies unconvincingly. “We-”

“Care about each other,” McCree finishes gently.

Hanzo huffs. “Were you this clingy with your old companions?” he accuses. “Did you refuse to let them go too?”

“No. One of us usually had pretty good reasons to make the split.” McCree gingerly places a hand above Hanzo's knee, like he's testing the waters. “But I know you. You get in your own head, Hanzo. You focus on reasons you shouldn't be happy and ignore the ways you could be. And we were makin' each other pretty happy.”

“Until you pulled a gun on me.”

“That's what I mean, that focusing right there. Y'think I would have done any different if our positions were switched around, mixed up? Doesn't matter who you are or who I'm loyal to. If I care for you, and you try to attack one of the most powerful and dangerous men in the world? I'm gonna pull that gun so he won't pull his own. Because I want to keep you safe, and I know I won't shoot.”

“And Reyes might,” Hanzo murmurs. But the anger's gone out of his voice again. His fury is losing to simple exhaustion under McCree's stubborn persistence.

“But he didn't,” McCree points out. The hand on Hanzo's knee gives a gentle squeeze. “And he ain't calling for your head. Y’offer up an apology that he can defend to others, and he'll let you out.”

“I did not mean to attack him.”
“I know.”

“I want to find my brother,” Hanzo adds pointedly.

“I know,” McCree repeats. “And we will. We just have to get Helga out of the way first. Doesn't matter if Mitra is or isn't your brother, she's the one who has to go down.” McCree picks up his hat and plants it back on his head. “That's why I'm shipping out again tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow? But you have just barely returned.”

McCree shrugs. “We're going to keep going until we find her. This was just a stopover to refuel and rest. And to see you.” McCree shifts on the bed, and a wink of gold catches Hanzo's eye.

BAMF. That ridiculous belt buckle, still proudly worn at McCree's hips.

“Is that for my sake?” Hanzo says dryly.

McCree follows Hanzo's gaze, brow arching in surprise. “Huh? Y'lookin for a boner?”

“Not-!” Hanzo hisses, ears flushing and flattening in embarrassment. “Not that. Your buckle.”

“What, this?” McCree's hand comes to rest on the golden plating. “Hell nah. I told you I loved the thing. Pissed off damn near everyone who saw it, they're so jealous about it. Got to brag about my cute beau and his excellent taste in gifts.”

“I am not – what is a beau?”

“Boyfriend. And, look,” McCree says suddenly. “I'll be honest. If you really want to split from me, I won't stop you. And I'm not gonna put up much more of a fight than this. If I've done something wrong, or if you're just not in the right mental place - I ain't gonna be your warden. It's your life. I can help if you want it, or I can fuck off if you don't.”

Hanzo grumbles in aggravation, at the term and admittance as two fingers coming up to pinch his brow. “I- you do not have to fuck off. I do not want...” What does he want? “I do not want you to leave,” he admits with a sigh, shoulders slumping. “And Blackwatch by itself has not been - awful. But I do not want to to help them find Genji, Mitra or not, and if you are a part of it-”

“Hanzo,” McCree lifts a hand, hovering it inches from Hanzo's cheek. Silently asking permission. “If you don't want to, I'm not gonna be the one to force you. But I want you to be able to talk to us about it, instead of shutting me out and not hearing what I got to say. Blackwatch ain't tryin to find your brother by himself. And killing Mitra, whoever they are, don't got to be the final answer. Maybe we can contain him, even help him. Be easier to do it with your help than without. You can have a say if you're willing to talk to us.”

After a moment of bitter internal debate, Hanzo leans almost imperceptibly into the touch. “That is... fair,” he says begrudgingly. “But I am not ready to apologize to Reyes.”

“Then don't.” McCree's hand crosses the distance and is now gently stroking its thumb down Hanzo's cheek, the man's eyes unbearably kind. “There's no rush if you don't feel the need. We're going after Helga first, and I don't ship out until tomorrow. You won't be alone tonight if you don't want to be.”

Hanzo closes his eyes, letting McCree brush a strand of hair behind his ears. “What, you are declaring intentions to stay in this cell with me?”
“Sure.”

Hanzo scoffs. “You have a perfectly good bed waiting outside.”

“Ain't perfect unless you're in it,” McCree croons.

Another scoff that devolves into an bitter laugh. “Stop. Five minutes ago I was trying to break up with you.”

“Didn't do too good a job of it, sweet pea.”

Hanzo's heart swells at the familiar nickname, even as he tries to force a frown. “You are not being fair.”

“All's fair in love and war,” McCree replies gently. “And we're caught up in a bit o' both at the moment.”

Hanzo cracks open an eye to give the man a glare. But McCree's all smiles and gentle looks – before Hanzo realizes what he's done, his hand beckons McCree closer with a wave. McCree gives him an agreeable smile before obliging, scooting over and laying down on his side on the bed. Hanzo lowers down next to him, curling close to his chest to seek out his heat; McCree gets the hint and tugs the thin blanket up and over them before settling down with an arm over Hanzo's hip.

“I cannot see a future for myself,” Hanzo mutters. McCree's heartbeat is steady and strong against his ear. “Here, or anywhere else.”

“Then stop tryin' to look so far ahead,” McCree replies quietly. “I know you were alone for a long time, Hanzo. But you're not anymore, y'know? Talk to us. Open up and communicate a bit. And then maybe we can help find a way.” There's a tiny pinch on Hanzo's side. “Y'stubborn git.”

“Ow,” Hanzo murmurs.

“Shit, sorry. Did that actually hurt?”

Not as much as your absence.

The thought is unbidden – Hanzo blames his dragons - but mercifully he doesn't let it slip aloud. Instead Hanzo merely huffs and nestles deeper into McCree's embrace.

“We can talk more in the morning, okay?” McCree's hand is stroking gently through Hanzo's hair. “Real tired from the trip. Y'mind if I conk out for a bit?”

“That is fair,” Hanzo mumbles against him.

Fair, fair, fair. That word had come up so often during his time here.

But McCree's life hadn't been fair either, had it? A life in a gang, a ward of a military operation. And yet the man seems... happy. Content. He'd made a life and friends for himself, despite his circumstances and chains.

Maybe it didn't matter how fair anything was. Maybe it just mattered what Hanzo made of what he had.

Hanzo turns his head, and after a moment of debate, brushes a tiny kiss against the side of McCree's chin.
And maybe he could have something good after all.
Hanzo expects to be woken by a kiss against his neck, a touch to his back – perhaps even a loving murmur into his ear. The last thing he expects is to hear a rapping on his cell door and to open his eyes to an empty bed.

The first thing he registers is that he's cold. There's no warmth where McCree should have lain; the man must have left some time ago. His scent lingers, convincing Hanzo it hadn't been merely a dream – but his absence makes his heart clench uncomfortably.

Why had he not been woken for good-byes?

The rapping sound persists, and Hanzo swivels his ears and turns his head towards the source.

Juan and Lance are on the other side of the transparent cell door, clad in Blackwatch uniforms and body armor. Juan's got an electronic rifle held at the ready against his chest, but Lance's is dangling loosely in his free hand. He gives Hanzo a little wave and a wink, before holding a finger to his lips – Hanzo blinks back at him in confusion.

Bizarre. What is going on?

Lance bends down to fiddle with the cell's keypad. He doesn't look like he's punching in the code, but Hanzo can't quite make out what's happening. By the time Hanzo's reached down and reattached his prosthetics to get a better look, the door's beeping agreeably and swinging open.

Hanzo stands, opening his mouth to pose questions – but Lance rapidly taps that single finger against his own lips. A plea for silence. Fine. Hanzo closes his mouth, giving the pair a bemused look. He can be silent. He'd like to know why, though.

Lance motions to the IV stand, shaking his head before making a beckoning motion towards the door. Hanzo gives him and the stand a considering once-over before reaching to carefully pry the needle loose.

Apparently, he's being taken somewhere.

Lance and Juan say nothing as they lead Hanzo out of the cell and towards the exiting hallway. Juan seems... tense. Careful and cautious, gaze sweeping constantly over their surroundings. Lance is the opposite, all secretive little smiles and apologetic glances every time Hanzo tries to mime a question. There's no answers given, verbal or otherwise, so Hanzo has no choice but to follow. Perhaps they are taking him to McCree - or has Reyes forgiven him without notice? The first seems plausible, at least more so than the second.

The hallways are empty as they pass through, but that's nothing new. Once, footsteps approach from the opposite direction and Juan and Lance make a sharp turn down a corner, as if to avoid them. Their path is meandering and nonsensical to Hanzo, but they seem to have a clear destination in mind – if not direction. Why so many twists and turns? Even Hanzo can navigate better than this.

They arrive at one of Blackwatch's elevators, a dingy, water-soaked looking thing even with Hanzo's lowered expectations. Juan waits at Hanzo's back as Lance steps on-board before beckoning the pair over. After an incredibly befuddled look at Lance, Hanzo follows him inside. Juan casts one last sweeping look over the corridor before hopping in after them.
Lance punches the elevator button 7 twice, followed by 3 and 4. The elevator doors shut and with a shuddering creak, the machine groans to life and begins moving upwards.

“Where-?” Hanzo begins.

Lance quickly covers Hanzo's mouth with his hand, and Hanzo is unpleasantly reminded of McCree doing the same. That's right. Blackwatch's rules about speaking in the elevator. Fortunately, unlike McCree, Lance doesn't have the sense to remove his hand before Hanzo can give it an irritable bite.

Lance is still shaking his fingers and wincing by the time the elevator doors open. The party steps off into a location Hanzo has never seen before – a run-down looking arcade. The lights are all off, save one overhead, and every game console is powered down. Hanzo can just barely glean traces of logos and artwork on the machines in the dim light, and there appear to be half-dismantled animatronics lying haphazardly on a small stage.

Lance taps Hanzo's shoulder, grabbing his attention again before beckoning with a quick jerk of his head. Hanzo follows him through the building with Juan close at his back, passing by stained plastic tables and run-down vending machines. By the entrance sign, there's a rotating admittance bar against an emptied prize counter – Lance simply hops right over it. Hanzo's forced to do the same, albeit more awkwardly. Jumping in prosthetics has never been his strong suit.

They exit through a set of double doors, locks clicking into place automatically once the pair have shut. Outside is another fairly unremarkable parking lot, but there's an gray, unmarked van waiting in one of the stalls. The thing looks positively ancient - even has wheels, instead of hovering like its more advanced counterparts. Hanzo's ears prick up curiously at the sound of the engine running – the car's windows are heavily tinted, and he can't get a good view of who's behind the wheel.

“Come on.” Lance is finally speaking as he heads towards the back of the van, motioning with his rifle. “Hop in.”

“What is this all about?” Hanzo asks suspiciously, following behind. “If this is Reyes attempting to take me on a mission, then I will walk right back to my cell.”

Juan and Lance exchange looks of surprise with each other. After a beat, Lance let's out a weak chuckle and bends to open the van's back doors. “Nah. Nothing like that.”

“Then what?” Hanzo presses.

Lance looks briefly discomforted. “Ah, well. You know, it's-”

“McCree made us,” Juan grunts. Hanzo shoots him a curious look and the man shrugs. “No point in keeping it a secret, now that we're above-ground. Don't worry, Reyes has no hand in this. He's not even on base.”

“Juan,” Lance whines – his tone is almost scolding, but Hanzo can swear he looks oddly relieved. “He said to keep it quiet.”

“No point,” Juan repeats. He motions to the back of the van. “Get in. I'll follow up, make sure there's no eyes on us.”

“Need any help up, Hanzo?” Lance offers.

Hanzo gives him a cutting look, lips pursing in distaste. “No, I do not,” he says shortly. He glances at the back of the van. “Where am I being taken to, then, on McCree's whims? And why did he not
“Scouting point,” Juan supplies stiffly. “He got called up early along with Alex and Clara after Reyes left. Gave us a buzz on the private lines, said he needed your input on something. Didn't elaborate.”

Mitra, perhaps? How much has McCree told Juan and Lance – and how much should Hanzo keep silent on? Did Clara and Alex know? Is it urgent?

Is it Genji?

“Very well,” Hanzo says after a moment. He plants a hand on the car door handle before pulling himself up and into the van. There's a small double-seat anchored where a normal trunk would be. Hanzo settles onto the leftmost seat, tucking his knees up to his chin; it's a little too cramped for his liking. Lance walks around towards the front, presumably getting into the passenger side. Juan casts one last sweeping look around before hopping inside the trunk with Hanzo and pulling the van's doors shut.

Hanzo's discomforted when Juan takes the seat next to him. The man's proximity gives him a clear whiff of the fact the man's pits are sweat-soaked, and his breathing is a little too fast for Hanzo's liking.

He also notices, as the car begins to roll forward, that Juan refuses to let go of his gun.

Hanzo had expected a relatively short ride – after all, if McCree is sending them somewhere far, they could always have taken a plane.

 Couldn't they have?

Regardless, the car ride is agonizingly long and absolutely sweltering; for a group with access to cutting-edge technology, Blackwatch's vans are severely lacking in adequate air-conditioning. Juan's close presence radiates heat next to Hanzo's side, and crammed into the back means that the pitiful airflow from the vents up front scarcely graze him.

“Can I not sit passenger-side?” Hanzo had complained an hour back. “I have no room back here.”

“Sorry,” Lance had said. “Need to keep an eye out. Almost there.”

An eye out for what? Lance hadn't elaborated and Hanzo had fallen back into an annoyed stupor. Almost there. As if. All he sees are dirt roads and dead trees through the opaque tint of the windows. It made sense to have a Blackwatch scouting post be remote – but surely there could have been a closer elevator ride to it? And why so much secrecy anyway?

He doesn't ask Juan. The man's been tense the entire way, refusing to release his gun – not that Hanzo had asked – and keeping his lips tightly pursed. Wherever he's being taken, it sounds serious.

And yet Reyes is not involved? Strange. At least he's on his way to see Alex and Clara. Perhaps he can apologize and make amends for ignoring them in the cell. Now that he'd made his peace, he
was feeling more than a prickle of guilt about showing his back to those that had only extended kindness.

Hanzo loses track of time over the passing hours; it's only when the sinking sun's begun to crest the top of faraway hills that the van finally makes a sharp turn right, heading down a new path.

“We're here,” Lance says, answering Hanzo's question before he can pose it. “Give or take a few minutes to get through and park. Just keeps quiet and easy with the guards before we get inside, alright?”

Hanzo has no intention of ruffling any heavily-armed feathers.

The van rolls down the dirt road at a leisurely pace, several deep bumps in the road causing Hanzo to nearly jerk out of his seat. They seem to be approaching the outskirts of a city now – not quaint or open like his other encounters, but cramped and filthy. They pass through a run-down gate, yet there's no trace of guards at the front; only a view of a less than spectacular city inside. The buildings they pass by are stained, dilapidated and shoddy; the streets are narrow and choked with trash. Slums, Hanzo realizes. Even the people he glimpses in the alleyways often have their faces covered with worn-out hoods or cloaks and shirk away from the vehicle.

The driver – Hanzo still can't get a clear glimpse of him – is speaking into a handheld device, but whatever he's mumbling is obscured by the rumbling engine. Out of the tinted windows, Hanzo can spot a large, rectangular building surrounded by high fences; they seem to be approaching it. The place is almost prison-like in appearance and seems to be set apart from the rest of the town - he cannot see other buildings on either side of it, like the city's planners had decided to give it a wide berth. The building bears no Overwatch logo; but then again, neither had the arcade or Out of Order elevator. Perhaps this is another front.

The engine finally cuts out, and the van rolls to a stop just outside the gates. Hanzo shoots Juan a curious look – had they run out of gas? - but the man pays him no mind. Instead he grunts, getting to his feet in a halfway crouch before opening up the back of the van's doors. He jumps out, and then motions for Hanzo to follow.

Hanzo can hear Lance and the driver opening up their own doors before slamming it shut. After only a brief moment of uncertainty, Hanzo gingerly lowers himself down and out of the van. It's just about as miserably hot outside as it was in the vehicle and smells twice as bad; Hanzo reaches up to wipe a bead of sweat already forming on his brow, absolutely simmering beneath his black hoodie. The towering carcasses of what appeared to be office buildings behind him cast long shadows and darken the streets, but do little to quell the miserable humidity and thick odor.

The prison-like building's gates are deep gray and massive, the epitome of impenetrable and lined with barbed wire. Hanzo can glimpse only a few windows, scarcely making out a few people milling about inside. He can spot armed men in masks positioned in guard towers along the wall; the ones closest to the van have already turned towards them, their guns at the ready.

“Just be cool,” Lance remarks easily; Hanzo's ears flick at the odd tremor in his voice. “Everything will be fine once we get inside.”

“At least,” Juan grunts, and then motions for Hanzo to follow.

Electronic handcuffs.

Without thinking, Hanzo slaps them away and straight out of Juan's hands – they fall into the dirt as Juan takes a step back, expression hardening. “Are you mad?” Hanzo hisses, eyes narrowing into a
glare. “I am not here to be bound!”

“It's just for show, Hanzo,” Lance says soothingly. He's coming up behind Hanzo now, who has to stumble backwards before they corner him on both ends. “They'll come off inside.”

“They will not be coming on,” Hanzo snaps, flicking his gaze between the two men still attempting to advance on him. “Do not come near me with those!”

“We have to go see McCree,” Lance presses. “He's waiting for you.”

“Then have him come out here.” Hanzo takes another step back and bares his teeth, effectively halting Lance and Juan in their tracks. “He would not ask this of me.”

That's right, now that Hanzo thinks of it. McCree would not ask this of him; the man knows how Hanzo hates to be bound first-hand. Why would he call Hanzo here? To some sort of faux-prison, a place of his worst fears? Why would he beckon him from one cell to another?

Why had he sent these two instead of waking Hanzo himself?

Hanzo's skin is crawling, the dragons stirring underneath his wave of unpleasant suspicion. “Have him come out,” he repeats dangerously. “And do not come near me.”

“We don't have time for this,” Juan snaps. He hoists up his gun, aiming it at Hanzo's chest. “Move.”

“We- ah, we can't be out in the open like this,” Lance adds hurriedly, but he too is nervously fingering his gun. “You're leaving us vulnerable.”

“Have. Him. Come. Out.” Hanzo eyes Juan with displeasure, claws uncurling from the fists he'd made. Baring and flexing his daggered fingers. The man still makes no move to lower his gun – if anything, his grip tightens. “You have private lines, do you not?”

“Get inside,” Juan orders, ignoring him. The guards on the towers are all looking at them now; Hanzo can feel eyes trained on him and, he can only guess, alongside the barrel of guns. They're drawing attention, and his ears flick as he hears footsteps on all sides closing in.

“I will not,” Hanzo snarls, baring his teeth at the pair. He shifts his feet in the dirt, taking an aggressive stance as he scans his surroundings as his dragons ripple again. The footsteps give way to people, silent and ominous, slinking out of the shadows of alleyways. Coming to watch, but he can find no gaze to meet beneath drawn hoods. They're armed, but no weapons are raised. Yet.

The foulness is close.

Hanzo hears Ami's voice rumble in his ears, her thoughts overriding his own. She sounds more strained than Hanzo's ever heard; he can feel her tense and shiver within him.

It is coming. You must run!

Tension grips his chest like a vice as the guards begin barking unintelligible orders overhead. His skin crackles with unfamiliar energy as Ami begins to tremble – Eri is consoling her, shuddering under the power of her fear, growing and stark and furious as it seeps into their host's bones. There's an ugly twist inside Hanzo, and the corners of his eyes bleed red as a sick feeling grips his gut. She's throwing him off-balance as Lance and Juan bark something he cannot hear, drowned out by the pounding of his heartbeat filling his ears and a cry of-
Ten yards away, a guard tower shatters. A startled scream is all Hanzo hears before stone comes crashing down, crumbling to the ground and toppling the fence beneath it. The rockslide raises a cloud of dirt and dust, obscuring Hanzo's vision of the site as the guards begin shouting orders over the din. Juan and Lance have stumbled back, confusion and fear plain on their faces – Juan's leveled his gun at the cloud, but Lance keeps his trained on Hanzo. “Did you-?!” he barks.

“No!” Hanzo snaps back. “What is that?!"

An immense, shadowed figure appears within the dust cloud; the moment Hanzo's eyes land upon it, his skin **burns.**

The person- no, creature, Hanzo can see a long, plated tail lashing about at its feet - takes a step forward, then another. It hurts to look at, literally; Hanzo has to avert his eyes and clutch at his arm as the dragons snarl their challenge, their fury, their **fear.**

The next thing he feels is a rush of wind and a splatter of something hot and wet spraying onto his cheek. A sudden, piercing shriek cuts through the clamor of the guards, ringing loudly in Hanzo's pinned ears. The shriek becomes a scream, unending and agonized that is only broken through sharp inhales and terrified cries. Something metal clatters to the ground, pulling Hanzo's gaze to it. Lance's gun. Lying in the street abandoned, barrel and trigger still being clutched tight by -

By the man's arms. They've been torn off at the elbows - Hanzo can see bone poking out at the blood-soaked edges of the man's sleeves. Blood he knows, can practically smell is now decorating Hanzo's own cheek.

The screams and sobs continue, but Hanzo cannot bear to look. He can hear Juan taking steps back, terrified rabbit-quick gasps ripped from the man's throat. Something metal glints in the sun a few feet away, and Hanzo finally braves a glance towards it.

It's the tail again - reptilian in shape, sleek and cone-like with a long, pointed tip. But where scaly flesh should be, there is only sleek metal plating. Each segment of the tail moves and clicks in a wave effortlessly, lashing about in slow, lazy movements. Beside the tip of the tail lies a pair of equally-plated feet, each with three massive talons for toes digging into the dirt and holding the base of the foot aloft. Hanzo's eyes travel upward, ignoring the searing sensation in his own arm, to find immense, razor-sharp claws and an armored chest. Every piece of this creature is covered in molded white armor, tail to feet to-­

Hanzo isn't sure what he'd been expecting for a head, but it hadn't been a dragon-like face complete with snout, rows of bared fangs and dagged horns. Two glassy, oval eyes are centered in the middle of its face - deep pools of obsidian that show no hint of light within.

It's a beast. An metal abomination, a **foul** monster, it's-

*Mitra.*
Chapter 37

Mitra is immense.

It’s the first, only thing that runs through Hanzo’s mind whenever he glances at the beast currently towering over the collapsed, sobbing form of Lance. The thing’s breathing is belabored, ragged and quick as it takes another step towards the prone agent and snarls. Hanzo has to look away again, clenching his eyes shut as Ami shrieks in fury, terror – he cannot name it. The dragon is overpowering, molten lava in his veins - she is burning away every scrap of awareness he has in favor of dizzying pain.

“Now, now. No need for that.”

A calm voice cuts through the scene – in an instant, the guards of the towers are hushed. Even the beast stills; the only sounds Hanzo can now hear are Lance’s warbling gasps and a soft, repetitive click - like someone in high-heeled shoes is approaching.

When Hanzo reopens his eyes, a woman has appeared atop the pile of rubble. She’s carefully stepping over fallen rocks and debris; there’s a slight stumble to her step before she gingerly hops down to the ground. She’s donned in a white labcoat that flutters in the breeze as she walks towards them; there’s thick sunglasses atop her face and auburn hair coiled high in a messy bun.

Hanzo’s skin prickles painfully, and realization dawns on him. He knows this woman. She’d been the straw-hat woman, the woman he’d seen when coming out of the clothes shop. He’d been with Alex and Clara at the time; and a nasty suspicion blooms in his gut on why Lance and Juan had been absent.

“You,” Hanzo hisses.


Hanzo chances a glance to see the beast lifts its head towards the woman, as if analyzing her command. After a moment, it lets out a low groan and takes a step back from Lance to focus its gaze on her and her alone.

The woman smiles, stepping forward to place a hand on the creature’s arm and giving it a small pat. “There, there. See? He is fine. They have not hurt him.” She looks over at Lance’s stricken figure. “Could you not bring him without weapons? I did warn you.”

“My arms,” Lance sobs.

“Hush. They were only flesh.” Hanzo suppresses a horrified shiver at the woman's amused eye-roll; it takes only a moment before her gaze is back on him. “Hanzo,” she says sweetly, and another unpleasant shudder threatens to wrack his body. No surname, no formalities. Just a ravenous, almost reverent look in her eyes. “How wonderful to see you again.” She’s drinking him in, head to toe – eating him up with her gaze. “Won't you come inside?”

“No.” The answer is automatic before Hanzo can even register his mouth moving. His tongue feels electric, numb and sparking. “I will not.”

The woman tuts. “Now, now. It is only a short walk. Won't you come in?”

“You are not my warden,” Hanzo hisses back. He can suddenly feel the beast’s gaze upon him, and
his knees almost buckle under the weight of its stare. “You have no say over where I go; and I will not be trapped in another cell.”

The woman's eyes gleam as her lips twitch in amusement. “It doesn't have to be a cell,” she says smoothly. “I could take such wonderful care of you, Hanzo.” Her gaze flicks over his form and Hanzo knows she's looking right through his hood, picking out the scales on his cheeks and lumps of his horns. “Such a fascinating bloodline,” she finishes. “Splendid, regal creatures. And I could make you even more beautiful than you are now.”

“Like them?” Hanzo hisses, jerking his head towards Musling or Mitra; whatever it was. “You think such a thing is beautiful? I have no interest in being your experiment, Doctor Jetsen.”

“It's Jepsen,” she corrects sweetly. “Helga Jepsen. And as for who they are? Well...” She runs a hand down the creature's flank before letting out a little scoff. “There's no accounting for taste, I suppose. I will admit, you are already quite a sight.”

*You're a sight, alright?*

“But,” Jepsen continues. “You could be better.” She flexes her hand and holds out her palm for Hanzo to see; it's decorated with ugly wounds and scarred tissue. A stark contrast to the woman's tidy appearance. “Flesh gives, Hanzo. You only have to ask your comrade.” She waves a hand over at Lance, curled up and continuing to sob with Juan kneeling at his side.

“Some *comrades,*” Hanzo hisses. Lance is too stricken to respond, but it's enough to earn a glare from Juan.

“No need for unpleasantness. They've done you a service, bringing you here - even if they've served *me* poorly.” Jepsen lifts a hand into the air and gives a crisp *snap* of her fingers. On cue, half a dozen onlookers stumble from the shadows to flank Juan and Lance. As they draw closer, Hanzo can finally glimpse what's beneath their hoods – grey, metal masks. The same masks he'd seen on men swarming McCree down in that bunker so long ago.

Their hidden visages betray no emotion as they lay their hands on the pair. Lance is dragged sniffing and sobbing back down an alleyway; Juan attempts to put up a fight, swinging his gun around like a club when they try to wrest it from his hands. But he's overwhelmed and overpowered in mere moments, shoved to the ground and pulled back forcibly into the shadows of the alleys.

“That is how you reward them?” Hanzo asks through gritted teeth. He has no sympathy left to spare for traitors - but the actions horrify him just the same. “Your loyal little rats?”

“They've been waning,” Jepsen says dismissively. “Look at this mess.” She lazily waves a hand at the pile of rubble. “I tell them again and again, don't upset him, don't threaten him – did they listen?”

“Why would they help you in the first place?” Hanzo spits. “What could you possibly have to offer?”

“I think the better question is, what does Gabriel's little outfit have to offer?” Jepsen taps her chin theatrically, as if pretending to ponder the question. “Let's see. Lower pay, under Overwatch's glory-hounding boots – not to mention *comrades* plucked from the sewers and thrown into battle alongside you. All of the best soldiers and doctors went to Overwatch's ranks; I would know, wouldn't I? Yet still, Talon has so much more to offer than either side. Much more creative freedom.”
“Some offer. Your men shot Juan.”

Jepsen scoffs in amusement. “You mean the botched base? We nearly had them, you know – so much preparation went into that little scene. Planting the information, cornering the little rats; Juan really can act when he wants to. But he got in the line of fire, didn't he? All that work and his wounds, and still we didn't get our hands on Gabriel's little protege.” Jepsen's eyes widen unpleasantly, smile unyielding. “But I've been told you're quite familiar with the latter. Didn't even let Lance get close to you, did he? So possessive.”

“With good reason,” Hanzo hisses back.

“Oh, I don't know. Some operatives are happy to join us. Lance was our little shadow recruiter, you know? But he's been slacking. Made me wait ages to see you – never the right opportunity, according to him. And then he manages to muck up the one he gets?”

“Lance did not cause this destruction.” Hanzo glances at the beast again, forcing himself not to visibly shrink under its stare. “This monstrosity did.”

“That's not a very nice thing to say.” Jepsen shakes her head condescendingly. “Didn't your mother teach you any manners? My little Musling has feelings, you know. Only trying to protect you, and how do you repay the favor?”

Protect you.

Ami writhes under Hanzo's skin, and he has to swallow thickly to keep her down. “Your Musling has shown undue interest in me,” he says carefully, trying to keep his voice even. “Is that on your behalf?”

Jepsen throws back her head and lets out a laugh – delighted and undeniably cruel with how her lips twist into a smirk. “Oh,” she murmurs, reaching up to wipe away an imaginary tear from her eye. “Oh, it really is wonderful how little Blackwatch knows. You know, I imagined Gabriel might be keeping something from my boys. And I wondered if you might be playing coy. But...” Jepsen tilts her head, giving Hanzo an amused once-over. “You don't know. Delightful.”

Hanzo lets out an angry snarl, taking a menacing step forward – and is immediately overridden by the beast doing the same, heavy steps and looming shadow forcing the growls to die in his throat.

Another laugh from Jepsen who's shoved her hands into her coat's pockets. “We've got a much better handle on my little Musling, now. You shouldn't try anything.” A sudden hard set to her mouth. “There'll be no more escapes, no more daring rescues and romps. Not from any of you.”

Any of you?

“Come inside, Hanzo.” Jepsen beckons him with a jerk of her head. “Don't make this difficult. Flesh will always give to machine. And I like to begin from scratch.”

The beast takes another threatening step and reaches towards Hanzo, who's rooted to the spot. Jepsen's words are swirling inside his head as he looks up, really looks at the creature looming over him with outstretched claws. Their eyes meet – those glassy, obsidian eyes – and Ami wails and burns within Hanzo with an emotion he cannot name. His entire body is trembling, twisting and sick as he feels massive claws brush the side of his neck. He swallows, trying to force the word from his raw throat.

“Gen-?”
Something gold glints in the corner of Hanzo's vision. He sees it for just a moment – something or someone lithe and small is clambering over a rooftop before disappearing from sight. The surprise of it all momentarily stills his tongue and furrows his brow.

The beast's claws retract instantly and it stumbles back with a terrible screech; its tail lashes angrily and its head whips back and forth, scanning the skyline. The guards begin shouting again and even Jepsen tenses; her lips are pursed and her eyes narrow suspiciously.

“Take him,” she snaps suddenly.

The beast lunges; Hanzo's body ducks instinctively, palms slapping onto the road as a swipe narrowly misses his back. He hits the pavement and rolls as an angry snarl sounds overhead – a clawed foot slams down inches from his head had been. A spray of bullets rains down overhead, shattering pieces of the granite road and plinking loudly off the beast's armored form. Its angry roar is drowned out by Jepsen's screeching.

“NO!! DON'T SHOOT NEAR HIM, YOU IDIOTS!”

Hanzo glimpses the beast turning, powerful haunches bending before it leaps clear out of sight – but the new, terrified screams of the guardsmen betray its landing. A body falls from a guard tower in a sickening crunch, blood splattering on the pavement as Hanzo scrambles to his feet. The beast is distracted, Jepsen is shouting something unintelligible at it – it's time to run. Any of you.

No. Hanzo's steps falter halfway down a path; those that had choked the alleyways have already fled, but it's not them that stops his flight. Ami is still trembling, moaning as if in pain – it's Eri who speaks, voice flooding Hanzo's mind and freezing his body.

Do not run!

Hanzo's claws clench and his fangs bare – his gaze is swimming, blending with the wall as Eri struggles for control. He can feel the dragon reaching through him, trying to force his body to obey. Hanzo's feet turn unbidden, facing him back towards the direction he'd fled.

Stay! Fight!

Hanzo's control wavers briefly before he snaps his mouth shut, sinking sharp teeth deep into his lower lips. Eri reels back from the sensation and the dragon's hold is broken; Hanzo wipes at his bloodied mouth and begins running again.

It's not Genji. He know it's not, because he would... he would just know. That beast, that monster that tears through flesh and devours its allies at a moment's notice – that is not his brother. There is no trace of Genji's spirit; no exuberance or youthful mischievousness sparks beneath those dead eyes. Hanzo would know his brother in any form, he's sure of it. That thing is not him. But Ami-

He can scarcely sense her beneath Eri's snarls of outrage at being denied. But her grief, her agony is overwhelming at the sight of this creature. Yet Eri does not share her pain. Why?

Hanzo has no time to dwell. He has to run. Back to Blackwatch, back to McCree. Maybe he can't make it, but he has to try.

He rounds a corner sharply, clawed toes scraping on the pavement as he stumbles before clambering to his feet and continuing his flight down the twisting alleyways. He leaps over
discarded cartons that litter the path and nearly slips on rags of clothes strewn about; he hopes the
filth will make for a decent stall on the others as well. The shadows of the buildings hide him well
as he dashes through the labyrinth, but he can hear them. Heavy, angry footfalls of the men –
Jepsen's men, Talon's men – that fan out into the streets of the slums in pursuit. Shouting that he
cannot hear or bear to try, pursuers pressing in on all sides as he runs blindly through the town.

What bitter irony. The hunter who can kill across land and sea, becoming the hunted on foot.

He cannot hear Musling or Mitra, whatever their true name is. He prays the beast is still feeding on
their attackers and not joining the chase. The streets have been empty of on-lookers so far –
Hanzo's only glimpsed a few startled forms as he flies by, and they're quickly left behind. The rest
of the slums have vanished into hiding; they're staying out of his way, or perhaps wisely keeping
out of the beast's path. He may have to hide in one of their homes soon, filthy or not. Hanzo's
losing ground; he can hear the voices growing louder and angrier, even if they are not upon him
yet. His limbs can only take him so far on adrenaline and fear – they're already beginning to tire
and ache from the impact of his sprints, and he's stumbling more and more often through the
shadows.

He cannot run forever. And he has no idea where to go.

Something flashes out of the corner of his eye – the familiar glint of gold, high on a rooftop.
Hanzo's steps falter for a moment as he slows to a jog, turning his head this way and that as he tries
to glimpse what it had been.

Two seconds later, something pierces the side of Hanzo's neck.

His hand flies to it instantly, letting out a bark of pain; his fingers close around something small
and cylindrical and he swiftly yanks it from his skin. He grasps it firmly and grimaces, rubbing his
neck thoroughly before glancing down at the object.

A tiny hypodermic needle is laying in his palm.

The world swims. Whether it's from the drugs or the instant panic flooding through his system,
Hanzo doesn't know. His knees buckle and he has to grasp blindly on a nearby wall to keep himself
upright. Everything is suddenly moving too fast and he's sluggish, as if struggling underwater to
move and even breathe properly.

Ah. There it is again. His heartbeat, drumming and pounding in his head as the dragons writhe and
shout-

Someone's hand touches his shoulder and another comes around to cover his mouth. Hanzo
struggles to breathe in one last time before darkness encompasses his vision and he slips into
nothingness.
Chapter 38

He can hear something moving in the room.

Hanzo's awake – has been for some time – but his eyelids are so heavy, and his body aches in places he didn't know he had. His pulse is sluggish - or at least feels so, like blood is not quite reaching the rest of his body. The only thing convincing him that he is not dying is the immutable knowledge that he has definitely been drugged again.

He's been captured by Talon, he's sure of it. The gentle hum of machinery shifting to and fro is no doubt some wretched contraption come to take him apart, or perhaps a new set of limbs Jepsen is going to force upon him. Strange that he can feel his hoodie is still upon him, if lowered from his face, and that his prosthetics are still attached. Would she not want to craft new ones?

At least their beds are soft, even if they do reek of mildew. Hanzo's not entirely sure why he can't feel restraints upon his wrists, or ankles or any part of him to tie him to the mattress. Perhaps the drugs are simply that strong? He's faintly aware of the sensation of a blanket covering him – but that can't be right. Perhaps it is merely a surgical sheet. Something crisp and clean to cover him while surgeons pull apart his intestines and lay them out for inspection.

The dragons are still and silent beneath Hanzo's skin. He cannot hear them at all – no wail from Ami, no snap of teeth or nettled growls from her brother. They've mercifully quieted, but Hanzo can't fathom why. Should they not be tearing apart his captors while he'd lain unconscious?

Had Jepsen somehow muted them, or ripped them from him completely?

There is nothing to be gained by guessing as to their fate, or his own. But Hanzo cannot bear to open his eyes. Seeing his surroundings will only bring panic and pain, he's sure of it.

Something clatters to the floor, and there's a static hiss like a sharp exhale. A murmur he can't quite make out, and then:

"I really cannot cook, it seems."

Wait. Hanzo's brows draw together in irritation at the familiarity. He knows that voice.

"Oh. Are you awake?"

Hanzo opens his eyes; he turns his head with an irritated growl towards the source of the sounds.

The damnable omnic monk is there, floating by his bedside with folded fingers and a curious tilt to its - no, Reyes, had called it a he, right? His head, then. A few feet off lies a small camping stove, and an overturned pan of what looked to be half-cooked eggs on the floor. Hanzo's gaze is drawn back to the omnic as he reaches out, as if to touch Hanzo's forehead.

Hanzo lets out an agonized groan. "You."

The fingers retreat and refold with their brethren. "Yes, I. How are you feeling, Hanzo?"

Another groan creeps out of his throat as Hanzo grimaces unhappily; it takes all of his willpower to
force his body to sit upright in bed. He shoves the hair from his eyes and runs a palm over his face with another growl before surveying the rest of his surroundings.

There's no other beds or furniture to be found, save for a small, stained couch in the corner. The room is spacious yet stripped of amenities – an upstairs loft held together by graffitied concrete on all sides, with mold growing freely around the corners. Light is filtering in through what appears to be the entrance to a patio, but it lacks the typical glass doors. Instead, a tattered curtain that flaps gently in the breeze covers the entrance. Hanzo thinks he can see the shadow of a figure leaking through underneath it – but the omnic is drawing his attention again with a circular wave of a hand.

“Hanzo? Are you alright?”

“How do you know my name?” Hanzo snaps. “I did not give it to you.”

“No, you did not,” the omnic admits. “And I did not give mine to you. Would you like it?”

Hanzo merely glares.

“It is Zenyatta.” Another wave. “A pleasure to meet you, Hanzo.”

“We have met,” Hanzo replies curtly. “And it was no pleasure of mine.”

“Our circumstances have not been ideal, have they? Then, and now.”

“Why am I here?” Hanzo demands. “Where have you taken me this time?”

“I, again, have not taken you far. We are still in Ønskede.” Zenyatta tilts his head towards the patio opening. “But it seemed you were first brought to this city against your will, so I will elaborate – you are in the same place as before, merely hidden in one of the buildings.

Oh. That had been Hanzo's plan all along. “Why are you here? And how did you know I was taken?”

“We have been watching you,” Zenyatta replies simply. “Or more precisely, we have been scouting a Talon base of operations, and you stumbled into sight.”

“I did not stumble,” Hanzo snaps.

“Not literally, no. Have I used an idiom incorrectly?”

“Be silent,” Hanzo snaps. “Why were you scouting here? How do you know where Talon is operating?”

Zenyatta makes a considering noise, then says nothing.

“Well?”

“You told me to be silent,” the omnic points out, earning a groan of frustration from Hanzo.

“Fine. Speak. **Tell me.**”

“I am an omnic,” Zenyatta says.

“I am aware.”

“Are you?”
Hanzo merely glares.

“I am a member of the Shambali, yes,” Zenyatta continues, unperturbed, “but I was not created to meditate. We were all crafted to serve an original purpose, even if some of us have abandoned it. My body is comprised of excellent auditory surveillance equipment. Or as some might say, I am a very good listener.”

“That does not answer my question,” Hanzo snaps.

“No, but I am not finished. You must learn patience to receive all sides of an answer.” Zenyatta tilts his head in a thoughtful gesture. “You know that I and my guard have been in search of Mitra. Do you remember our first encounter?”

“How could I possibly forget?” Hanzo makes a face. “You were playing with human corpses and consorting with beasts. I have met your friend, by the way. I am not convinced that thing was ever human. It looks like an omnic.”

“I was not playing,” the omnic corrects. “I told you my purpose. And, while I cannot force your trust, I am telling the truth. Mitra may look machine-like in appearance, but that is merely one of Jepsen's... inclinations. Peculiarities. She vocally abhors flesh, and I am inclined to believe she would become a machine if she could.”

“Her heart is already as cold as one,” Hanzo mutters.

“Regardless, I will try to answer your first question. My guard managed to track Mitra after our first chance encounter through... unconventional means. That is how we have been able to follow Talon and Mitra from place to place, and how we were able to uncover Skærmet.”

Hanzo scrunches his nose. “A piece of its- wait, how did you even survive a first encounter with such a creature? It tore its own guards to shreds.”

The omnic looks like it's musing. “As I told you before, I have seen Mitra halt and choose not to inflict violence on myself. We were attempting to track down Jepsen, and were currently in the middle of listening on an interrogation between your goat-skull crested companions and a captured member of Talon. Mitra was sent in to kill them before they could reveal more of the organization. A fight broke out between my guard, the agents, and Mitra, with the latter having a clear upper hand. Mitra was only halted in the battle by my presence, and after some consideration, attempted to flee. While Jepsen was forced to try and grasp control over her creation, I recovered my wounded guard and fled.”

Wounded guard? And yet they’d gone in search of Mitra in the forest alone? Hanzo purses his lips. “How did you find these 'goat-crested companions' in the first place?”

“I am to understand they are a secretive sort, but they do not blend in as well as they think. They were easy to pick out and become curious about. Tailing Overwatch and its allies hold a vast source of information at their disposal. We only have to listen well to find much.”

Spying machine, Hanzo thinks sourly. “Why is Mitra with Talon again? I thought you said that thing had killed Talon's men and fled.”

“You have seen Mitra.” The omnic extends a palm, then shrugs. “Where to go? Freedom came as the result of hasty decisions my guard made out of anger. He quietly slew the Talon men in their homes and carved the way for Mitra’s escape, but his work was for naught. Mitra was free for a while, yes, but ran feral and almost mindlessly. It did not take Talon terribly long to follow the trail
and recapture its prize, and now they are more on guard than ever. We are now rethinking our strategy and deciding how to best proceed.”

“Wait – your guard slew them? How did he kill that village without causing harm to the surroundings?”

“A penchant for stealth and subtlety, fueled by bitterness and hatred. He has already expressed remorse for disobeying me, and regrets his haste and error.”

Hanzo grunts, unimpressed. “Were you tracking me, as well?”

The omnic looks thoughtful. “Were we? I was not told if we were.”

Another groan. Of all days and times, now is not when Hanzo wants to deal with this particular omnic’s ways. He shoves the covers off himself to try and stand – but the world tilts dangerously and he has to grab onto the mattress to keep himself from slumping forward.

“Careful!” Zenyatta grasps Hanzo's by the shoulders, but immediately releases him upon receiving an angry snarl. “Careful,” he repeats, pressing his palms together. “The drugs have not left your system yet. Your mind may be clear now, but your body is weakened.”

Drugs. So he'd been right. “And you inflicted this upon me?” Hanzo accuses with a hiss, reaching up to touch his neck.

“I- no. Well...” Zenyatta pauses, and Hanzo can read discomfort in the omnic's strange posture. “Not I. My guard made the choice in desperation, so he could save you without being slowed by explanations.”

“Because I am not owed explanations!” Hanzo slams an angry fist onto the bed. “All you have done is speak vaguely and port me from place to place, acting so casually and-!”

“No,” Zenyatta interrupts. “I think you are owed explanations. But they are not mine to give, not fully.” A turned head towards the patio door, and the omnic's lights blink as one. “Would you not agree?”

There is silence from the figure, and Hanzo does not see its shadow move.

“It is time to come out,” Zenyatta continues gently, then adds something in a language Hanzo cannot understand. Nepali, perhaps.

The figure's shadow shifts. A muffled voice replies in the same, inscrutable language.

“I know the doubts that plague you.” Zenyatta has switched back to English. “But you must overcome them.”

There's a huff from the figure and the curtain finally draws back.

The figure that steps out isn't what Hanzo had been envisioning; for a Shambali guard, he'd been expecting some muscled monstrosity - but they're barely shorter than Hanzo. If there's muscle definition to be had, Hanzo can't glimpse it. The figure is dressed in heavy cloaks that hide their form well, wrapped around their shoulders like a shawl yet draping down all the way to their knees. A long scarf is wrapped around their head like a turban, but functions as a niqab, covering their mouth and down to their neck. Where Hanzo should be glimpsing eyes, a pair of goggles lies half-hidden beneath the cloth; their golden polish glints, even in the dim light.
For the first time since waking, a dragon stirs within Hanzo. One of them is reaching out curiously, probing his thoughts and gazing through his eyes.

What has caused their interest?

The figure reaches up, hands grasping at the long, coiled cloth over their face. Slowly, carefully, they begin unwrapping their coverings. Tufts of black hair begin peeking through as the scarf falls away bit by bit; Hanzo glimpses a scarred chin and the dragon crackles in excitement.

The goggles are pushed up, and Hanzo stares back at two brown eyes – eyes he knows, eyes that make his chest seize up and ache with how instantly, how deeply he knows those eyes. The dragon is like lightning in his veins as the man's lips crinkle into a smile, his gaze painfully fond.

“Hello, Brother.”

Chapter End Notes

Hm...
Chapter 39

Hanzo is off the bed in an instant, stumbling forward – but the world spins again and he's halfway collapsed before Genji - and it's Genji, it's really Genji – catches him by the arms with a startled noise. “Brother, please.” Genji's swapped to Japanese, and there's an amused chuckle as Hanzo's lifted up and kept steady as he tries to find balance. “Be careful, I-”

The moment he's able, Hanzo throws his arms around Genji. He pulls his brother into a fierce hug, earning another startled noise – but then, a soft sound and Genji’s arms are lifting to wrap around Hanzo in turn. Returning the embrace as they stand there, Hanzo on shaking legs and Genji holding him firmly upright. Their dragons purr in adoration and Hanzo can feel it – can feel Genji's dragon nuzzling back against his own, spirits nosing at each other beneath their vessels' skin. The appreciative rumble that comes forth belongs to Eri; Ami is silent.

“I knew it was not you,” Hanzo says, keeping in their mother tongue and wincing at the choke in his voice and the rawness of his throat. There's pinprick tears forming in his eyes; he clenches them shut and the tears run in tiny rivulets down his face. “I knew.”

“What?” Genji sounds surprised, but Hanzo will not let go of him as the man tries once to pull away. “Of course it's me, Brother.”

“Not- I know,” Hanzo rasps, squeezing tighter. “I know.”

“Then-?”

“They-” Hanzo swallows thickly. “They told me. The beast was you. Mitra, Musling. They said you were a monster but I, I knew-!”


And it is, isn't it? Because Genji is here, Genji is alive and unharmed with only a few scars decorating his chin and nose – Genji is here, and Hanzo is with him.

“It was not for nothing,” Hanzo murmurs into his brother's shoulder.

“Hanzo.” The hand gently strokes his hair, as Genji gently attempts to pull away again. “I have missed you as well. But I have so much to say to you, and you are not ready to stand for so long. Come. Can we not sit?”

Hanzo can. But doing so would mean releasing his brother, and a terrible fear has spiked up that this is all a dream and the moment he lets go, Genji will disappear again.


Hanzo is slowly coaxed back to the bed, lowered onto the mattress until he is sitting on the edge and Genji can settle beside him. Genji's hand comes to rest comfortably atop Hanzo's knee; Hanzo takes hold of his brother's wrist, a vice to make sure his brother cannot leave. Genji does not seem to mind.

“I am sure you have questions,” Genji begins gently.
“Why are you here?” Hanzo blurts out instead. “Why am I here, with you?”

Genji uses his free hand to scratch at his chin. “Ah. Well, those answers have a complicated past, Brother. But, as Master Zenyatta said, I came here with him to survey the Talon base within this town.”

“You and-” Hanzo flicks his gaze towards the omnic, who’s been floating and watching their exchange in silence. “Him. You are his guard?”

“Yes,” Genji chuckles. “Though my Master has no need of any real guard. He can handle himself.”

“Why is he your master?” Hanzo asks suspiciously. “He cannot possibly own you.”

Another laugh, honest and delighted – even the omnic seems amused with a soft titter. The machine understands Japanese? “No,” Genji replies with a smile. “No, Hanzo. It is merely an honorific. Zenyatta is my teacher. We met during my travels, after my exile from the clan.”

“Exile,” Hanzo repeats in a murmur. His hold tightens slightly. “Is that what they called it?”

“I do not know.”

“I saw you leave,” Hanzo admits. “From afar. I knew they had let you go, but to where-”

“And I knew they had kept you.” Genji’s voice has hardened, but his gaze is elsewhere – staring a hole into the floor. “I cannot even remember what lie they told. But I knew they had not let you go. And I wanted to come back to free you, Hanzo. Never think for a minute I forgot you.”

“You were no match,” Hanzo counters softly. “Neither of us were. You would have been killed, and-”

“I know.” Stark bitterness is lining Genji’s expression. “They kept their men on my tail. Always being forced to move, never allowing me near Japan. They said they would hurt you, even kill you if I drew near. Once in desperation, I tried to hop a ship, but...” Genji reaches up to touch his scarred face.

“They never told me,” Hanzo murmurs. “They gave me pictures, recordings of you so I would know you were safe. All I knew is that you were living free, as you chose.”

An unhappy snort. “As I chose? No.” Genji’s gaze turns to the right, over at Hanzo’s prosthetics dangling over the bed. “Is it armor?” he asks abruptly.

“What?” Hanzo follows his gaze – then his own shoulders slump. “Oh. They – no. It is not armor.” He shifts his legs uncomfortably.

Genji casts a forlorn look back to the floor. “I thought as much. But I had hoped...”

“It does not matter,” Hanzo mutters.

“Of course it matters!” Genji’s expression is suddenly filled with rage; his fingers tighten into fists as his teeth clench. “You think I do not know why?!”

“Genji,” Hanzo says pleadingly, unnerved by his brother’s sudden outburst. “It is not-”

“It is my fault.” Genji’s eyes have squeezed shut as he doubles over. “They taunted me, and I - I told you to run, and we, and they-”
“It was both of our mistakes,” Hanzo says frantically. “Not yours! I have never blamed you! I was the one who slipped-”

“Because I took a wrong turn and-!”

“Genji.” Zenyatta's voice cuts through their clamor like a knife; Genji is instantly silenced and Hanzo in turn is surprised into muteness. “A closed mind is already defeated,” the omnic remarks in Japanese. “Can you not hear what your brother has to say?”

Genji blinks, then bows his head as if showing remorse.

“He does not resent you,” Zenyatta continues in a kind voice. “And I have sensed only love pouring from him. Accept forgiveness for the act, and know he does not cast blame for it. Anchor yourself to the present. There is nothing to be gained from this regret.”

“Thank you, Master,” Genji murmurs quietly. He seems... not subdued. But peaceful, content. As if the omnic's words had sunk straight to his core.

Hanzo stares in bewilderment between the pair. “You... listen?” he says incredulously. “You?”

Genji lifts his head, and his passive expression has been replaced by amusement once again. “Yes,” he says with a smile. “I do. Zenyatta has helped me through much. I sought advice from the Shambali when I was consumed with rage and pain over what I- what had befallen us. And Zenyatta led me to a clearer path. He has been a great friend to me.”

“Not I alone, Genji,” the omnic remarks. “There was another.”


Hanzo gives his brother a curious look. “Another? Another student, you mean?”

Genji visibly hesitates. “Yes,” he says after a moment. “I was not the first to seek enlightenment under Master Zenyatta.” Another pause as Genji's fingers tighten into fists again. “And I was not the first Shimada, either.”

Hanzo's brow knits in confusion. “What do you mean?”

Genji looks to Zenyatta, as if asking him to speak instead. The omnic says nothing, and Genji lowers his gaze once more. “Our mother came to him before I,” he says finally. “She was his first student.”

Hanzo blinks in surprise. “Mother?” he says incredulously. “She went to Nepal? Why?”

“For the same reason as your brother.” Zenyatta is finally speaking, and Genji looks visibly relieved. “She carried a deep burden. She was unhappy with her life and sought wisdom from the Shambali. I allowed her to stay with me, and she became my first pupil.”

“I knew she'd left,” Hanzo mutters. “But to learn from omnics-?”

An amused chuckle follows. “Yes, your brother and mother, despite seeking us out, were both skeptical of the idea at first. They have both informed my your clan engaged in heavy trafficking of my kind, and did not see us as equals. I like to think I changed both of their minds.”


“It is alright, my student,” Zenyatta replies gently. “I do not begrudge you for your past. You are
seeking a better future.”

“I do not understand.” Hanzo interrupts. “Why are you telling me this? Where is Mother now?”

“We were attacked.” Genji shifts uncomfortably on the bed before continuing with: “At the temple. I had been staying with Zenyatta only a few months, but Mother had been studying under him for years. At first I wanted nothing to do with her, but we eventually talked, and...” He shakes his head. “She is not the person we thought she was. Father poisoned her imagery. But...” Genji closes his eyes. “Talon came. I do not know if they tracked me, or if it was the monks message of peace that drew them – but they swarmed the village, all the way to the temple. Overwatch came to stop them, and I tried to help them.” Genji reaches up to touch the scar running atop his nose. “I wasn't enough. I was nothing compared to them.”

“I know about Overwatch,” Hanzo says with a touch of irritation. “What about Mother?”

“She was... taken. Talon kidnapped several and fled after inflicting massive damage on the surroundings - I was caught in the crossfire. Overwatch rescued me and flew me away for medical care. Apparently one of the heroes saw me attempting to assist.” Genji scoffs. “And it made me wish I'd gone unnoticed.”

“That is where you met Helga Jepsen.” Hanzo's own grip tightens as he puts the pieces together. “They gave you to her.”

“Yes.” Genji's giving him a curious look. “How do you know of her?”

“I – work for Overwatch, in a way,” Hanzo sighs. “A subdivision called Blackwatch.”

“That's a stupid name.”

“I know. It is a covert spy section. They looked into her and saw she'd disappeared with a Japanese male. Apparently, you were nothing more than a John Doe to them.”

“I wasn't often conscious enough to really give them a name,” Genji says with a shrug. “And I was no fool. An heir of the Shimadas, a criminal empire?”

“I am aware of how prized we are,” Hanzo says dryly.

“Anyway, she gave me this.” Genji turns, pushing up his hair to display the base of his neck. There's an oval piece of machinery embedded into scarred skin, deep black and with green lights that blink repetitively.

“What is that?”

“It's hard to explain,” Genji admits, letting his hand drop and turning back. “But it let me be mobile. I'd taken a bad blow to my back – couldn't move below the neck. And this let me recover nearly instantly.”

“Impressive.”

“It's not.” Genji's voice is bitter again. “It's keeping me from healing. She disabled it once with a direct EMP blast. I was paralyzed completely for days until Zenyatta managed to fix it; this was years after my initial injury. Because of her meddling, my body never recovered properly and I'm stuck with her work in the back of my neck.”

“Reyes- ah.” Hanzo clears his throat. “Blackwatch said that Jepsen disappeared with you to avoid
“She did.” Genji’s hands fold in his lap. “She ran into Talon’s arms, who embraced her desire to improve the human form. And that’s where I found Mother again. Imprisoned like me, first to be used for ransom and now at the mercy of Jepsen and her experiments. Jepsen had fallen in love with us, Hanzo. She’d researched Mother and our clan, Shimadas and our dragons. What marvelous creatures we are,” Genji adds sarcastically.

“But,” Hanzo says in confusion. “Mother is not a Shimada. She married into the family.”

Genji shakes his head. “Remember how we asked why we’d never seen Father’s dragon? How he and the rest told us it was something beastly and terrible, and we were to be shielded from it?”

“Yes?”

“They lied,” Genji says simply. “Sojiro was the one who married in, not Mother. But they changed the story after you were born.”

“Why?” Hanzo furrows his brow. “What was so important about my birth?”

Genji cocks his head. “Have you never wondered about why you had two dragons, Hanzo? When no other Shimada has accomplished such a thing?”

“I-” Hanzo hesitates. “No? I am the first-born. I thought maybe-?”

“That you were special?” Genji says with a small smile.

“That in such an arrogant fashion,” Hanzo protests, but Genji merely rolls his eyes.

“As I said, Mother and I talked. A lot. We shared our pasts, and our fears. I told her what had happened to you, and she in turn...” Genji fidgets again. “Told me about you. That you were...” A sigh. “You were a stillborn.”

Hanzo stares at him. “What?”

“You died,” Genji says regretfully. “Or, you were dying. Inside mother’s womb. She was in labor, but you... you weren’t going to make it. Her dragon could feel you fading away.”

“I...” Hanzo reaches up to touch his chest. “Died?”

“Almost. She begged for your life, and her dragon... left her. She came into you instead, Hanzo. She kept you and her kin alive through the birth, gave you strength and settled down into your soul. Mother gave up her spirit so you could live.”

“She...” Hanzo clenches a hand into his hoodie. “I don’t...” The memory of Ami’s screams and wails surfaces violently in Hanzo’s mind. “How,” he says slowly, “are you here, and not still in Jepsen’s grasp?”

Genji looks away. “Mother used Jepsen’s adoration against her. She distracted her and helped me escape a not long after my capture. I fled back to the temple in search of Zenyatta.”

“And when did she escape? After?”

Genji doesn’t raise his gaze. “She didn’t, Hanzo,”

“She is dead?”
“No,” Genji says quietly. “Not entirely.” Another roll of Genji’s shoulders. “She wishes she were, I am sure.”

Ami is silent beneath Hanzo’s skin but he knows, he remembers the sound of her anguish. He can still hear it reverberating in his ears, incessant and mournful.

“Mitra was torn apart,” Hanzo says slowly, voice barely above a whisper. “And remade in a bestial image of Jepsen’s choosing.”

“Yes,” Zenyatta says, just as quietly. “She was.”

A long silence passes.

“We tried, Brother,” Genji says suddenly, voice and expression absolutely miserable. “When I returned to Zenyatta, and told him of her fate. We searched and searched, but Talon was so elusive...” A scoff. “Of all things, to stumble onto them by chance. I didn't even realize it was her, when I first...”

“Even though the flesh may change,” Zenyatta remarks as Genji trails off. “The soul remains. She is still there, trapped and fragmented.”

“She knew you,” Genji is looking at Zenyatta. “But not me. Even as I tore down her captors and set her free – she did not know me. She ran.”

“You time with her was shorter than deserved,” Zenyatta says gently. “These things are not your fault or hers.”

Genji looks away and says nothing.

“But,” Hanzo interjects. “If she did not know you, then why did she spare me? Back in the village, and just now – she tore apart her own guards. Even Helga warned them against harming me, that it risked angering her? Why? My time with her was even smaller than yours.”

“It is only a theory,” Zenyatta replies softly. “But I think perhaps, your Draconian features gave her pause. They betray the spirits within you, to the knowing.”

Oh.

After that remark, silence falls for several minutes. No one seeming willing to break it; Genji is staring mindlessly down into his lap and even Zenyatta's lights look... dimmer.

Unable to bear it any longer, Hanzo finally clears his throat. “You have not asked.”

Genji lifts his head with a sullen expression. “What?”

“You have not asked,” Hanzo repeats. He lifts a hand to point to his ears, then his horns. “About my, ah, Draconian features. Are you not curious? You were always so curious.”

“It seemed rude,” Genji admits, the scarce smile on his face. “And I had already accessed Zenyatta's memory database after he described you to me. I was overjoyed to find you alive, scales or not. They looked real, but I hoped perhaps you were merely going through a 'phase' in make-up.”

Hanzo snorts. “No. It is the dragons' work.” He drops his hand back into his lap. “They have deemed I needed protecting in such a manner.”

“I understand,” Genji replies gently. “Isao has done such things on occasion.”
“Isao?” Hanzo’s brow furrows. “Genji, do not tell me you have named another dragon.”

Genji’s lips twitch into a smile. “I may have. It is my dragon; I can do as I please.”

Hanzo huffs fondly. “They are not pets.”

“No, but they are willful.” Genji hooks a finger under his top lip and pulls up, displaying his teeth. “I have never born scales or horns, but thrice when I have been separated from Master Zenyatta in a fight, my teeth have become jagged fangs. Sometimes when I strain to listen, my hearing becomes sharper and I feel... strange.” Genji glances at Hanzo’s ears. “I never examined them, but perhaps they became something like yours at that moment.”

Hanzo gives Genji a cursory once-over. “You have no such deformities now.”

“The changes fade. Perhaps yours do not because you are the vessel for two.”

“Perhaps because they will not allow it,” Hanzo mutters. He turns his gaze away to look at the patio entrance, watching the tattered curtain flap helplessly in the breeze. “Are we safe here?” he asks suddenly.

“Hm? Oh, yes. We have been staked out here for a while. Talon patrols the streets, but this place has existed long before them. Everyone here is the discarded remains of society – thieves at best, the unthinkable at worst. Every person here is armed to the teeth to protect themselves against the others. Talon may have weaponry to spare, but they dare not break down doors or risk enraging the residents. They are outnumbered, to put it mildly.”

“Good.” Hanzo closes his eyes, drinking in a deep breath as he seeks to clear his mind. “I will need peace and safety for some time. Can you give this to me?”

“Of course, Brother. I will watch your back. Are you-?”

“Yes.” Hanzo inhales once again as darkness begins creeping at the edges of his vision.

It is time to speak with Ami.
Chapter 40

When the darkness surrounds him, Hanzo can feel something cool and wet at his back.

His spirit opens its eyes and cranes its neck to the right. He attempts to lift an arm and the coolness behind him ripples at the movement. It’s as if he’s lying in a pool of water that’s completely still and letting him float above its surface.

Hanzo places a hand against the water and it does not give. His fingers splay out, sending out more ripples as he pushes up; he gets to his feet, shivering at the sensation of wet droplets trailing down his back. He stands alone with his feet solidly atop the surface as if it were solid ground.

It’s bizarre to see his legs like this, whole and flesh. The spirit remains when the flesh gives, it seems.

A glimpse of a blue glow catches Hanzo's eyes; he tilts his head up to find Eri coiled in a ball and floating high above his head. The dragon's snout is tucked over the tip of its tail and he's fixing Hanzo with an absolutely miserable look.

Where is your sister? Hanzo asks.

Eri inclines his head towards the water; Hanzo follows his gaze and looks downward. There – hidden deep beneath the water lies another cerulean glow. Whether it's from the water or something else, Hanzo cannot tell; but the color is muted and faint as the light pulses weakly from below.

She is hiding?

She is grieving. Eri's voice is low and mournful as he gazes down at his sister's light.

Hanzo watches Ami's glow flicker for a few moments before pulling his gaze back to Eri. Did you know? About where Ami really came from?

Eri won't meet his eyes. Yes.

Why did you never tell me?

We are not meant to leave our original vessels. Giving herself to you was an act born out of the deepest love for your mother. It pains her to speak of it, to remember the day she was taken from her. And in the end, it was why your mother left.

Hanzo's heart flutters. What?

I was as young as you, but I remember. The pain and longing coming from my sister whenever she glimpsed your mother through your eyes. Sometimes she would rise against me, wrest control from your infant body to speak with her directly. It only brought pain to them both. After your brother was born, I saw she could stand it no more. Your mother left, and my sister saw it as her fault. She hardened and swore to protect you as best she could, to honor your mother's last wishes.

An unpleasant sensation pools in Hanzo's gut. Is that why you have done all this to me? These changes, my horns and scales? Because of a promise?
Eri flicks his tail uneasily. She sensed it.

What?

I lack the bond with your mother, but my sister's never truly faded. She could sense that something had gone amiss with your mother during your imprisonment – as if she was being fragmented. She became afraid the same would befall you in your helpless state. So she insisted I help change you, to steel your soft form, and I...

Supported her? Hanzo stares up in disbelief, the stark betrayal hardening his features. You obeyed her? You did this to me?!

She is the elder, the wiser, Eri says regretfully. And she was not wrong. A great ill has befallen your mother. She has become so broken that my sister did not recognize her from afar; that too adds to her pain. To be spared her fate, you may still need our gifts. And...

And what? Hanzo demands.

Eri lowers his gaze again. I do not know if my sister will aid you in this. She will not speak to me, and I am not strong enough to hunt without her. It is her power, not mine that lets us separate from your body.

The information startles Hanzo – he can feel his body twitch unhappily as he turns the dragon's words over in his mind. She will not- but we must hunt Talon! Free Mother from her confines, at the very least slaughter those who cage her!

I have said the same. My sister will not listen; she is too deep in her grief. Even I cannot fathom what she will do now.

Perhaps she will listen to me. Hanzo kneels down to press a hand against the water. He concentrates, trying to envision the surface parting. It remains as solid as ever; no amount of pushing or shoving makes the liquid so much as dip from his efforts. Hanzo lets out a huff of frustration and stands again. How do I reach her?

She does not want to be disturbed; her tears of grief have walled her off from us. I cannot reach her, and neither can you. We must wait until she is ready.

I do not have time for this!

And what do you intend to do? Eri uncoils in a smooth, undulating motion before gliding down to eye-level; the spirit's massive maw is now mere inches from Hanzo's face. I long for revenge as you do, but I cannot force my sister to act. And even if we were to pluck every soul, every scrap of defense from Talon's fortress – what then? Your mother will run as rampant, pained and mindless as she did before.

You do not know that, Hanzo protests.

My sister will not take your mother's life. And if I tried to do so without her-

The surface of the water rolls suddenly, an angry wave rising and sinking under Hanzo's feet; he stumbles badly and nearly falls completely. Eri merely watches, tail flicking in agitation.

We could help her. Hanzo is finding his balance again, trying to keep steady on the tumultuous
You cannot. Your brother has already tried and failed. Even together, you are not strong enough.

Then what would you have me do?

Go home. Go to your allies and rally them. They are stronger than you and your brother alone. They can help.

Blackwatch will kill her!

Your mate has promised to listen and to help you. You are safer by his side. Even now, I can feel your longing beneath this turmoil.

Hanzo bristles, squashing down a flicker of embarrassment beneath his irritation. Do not call him that.

As you wish. Eri's ears flick idly. But you must go to him. I will remain vigilant in my sister's absence, and free you if an attempt to cage you is made again; I can do that much, at least. But I have listened through your ears and watched through your eyes, Hanzo. They do not mean harm to us.

We attacked them.

No. Eri cocks his head. You attacked. We had no part in that. There is a sickness deep inside you, locked away but surging forth unbidden. We can shield you from physical harm – but you must find help elsewhere to cure this ill.

McCree's voice echoes inside Hanzo's mind. I don't know the extent of what you're dealing with, but we can help you.

Hanzo can feel his head twitch in the waking world, as if trying to dislodge the memory. Very well. I will take this... into consideration. But I must consult with Genji, first.

I am not troubled. I know you will not be kept apart from him, one way or another.

Stop.

Eri lets out an amused rumble and bumps his snout against Hanzo's shoulders. Go, then. Speak with your brother. I will try to do the same with my own kin, when she is willing to listen.

Hanzo shoots a glance down at the water; the blue glow beneath his feet seems fainter than ever before. After a moment, he nods and closes his eyes once more.

The damp feeling at his back lessens as Hanzo feels his spirit retreat.

If time is what Ami needs, Hanzo can spare a little.
When Hanzo opens his eyes again, it's to almost equal darkness.

He lifts his head from the mattress, casting a bleary gaze to the patio entrance and finding no light slipping in beneath the curtain. He can never tell how long his spirit trips take in the waking world, but clearly the sun has already set. Hanzo rubs his eyes with the back of his hand and glances over the room; his gaze sharpens and his gut lurches painfully when he realizes he's alone.

Hanzo shoves the covers off himself and plants his feet on the floor; there's a wobble to his step, but he's able to keep himself upright. He stumbles towards the patio, throwing aside the curtain with a surge of hope that evaporates all but instantly; the small, concrete overlook is devoid of any person, omnic or otherwise.

“It is alright.”

There. Hanzo's ears flick upwards and over at the sound of a muffled voice, robotic and soothing – the monk. He's using English?

“You are both safe. This will pass.”

Hanzo brushes aside the curtain as he re-enters the room, ears swiveling back and forth. He can hear the omnic's gentle tones, but no matter where he casts his gaze, there's no trace of the monk or his brother to be found.

“Breathe, Genji.”

Hanzo tracks the noise carefully with slow steps and quiet breathing, searching out the source. The omnic is close; even muffled, he can tell that much.

“That's right. Breathe.”

There. Hanzo follows the sounds to the wall parallel to his bed and runs a curious hand over the concrete. His fingers catch on a small, brass handle; something his eyes had not been able to pick out in the dark. He gives it a small tug and a small door creaks out of the wall and swings outward.

It's a closet – or would be, had this been a normal home. Likely more of a panic room, a hidden spot to sequester away illicit items or persons. Currently, the tiny space is occupied by the monk, holding a shuddering Genji in his arms.

Genji, however, has his teeth sunk into the robot's neck. His eyes are squeezed shut as if in pain, and his ears – his ears are pinned back, like Hanzo's. Not as long, but curving in sharp tips; now that Hanzo is staring, he realizes that his brother's teeth are far too numerous and fanged. The tips of his fingers digging into Zenyatta's arms are pointed and unforgiving, the very beginnings of the claws Hanzo sports.

Zenyatta looks up at Hanzo, as if finally taking notice. “Ah,” he breathes, a garble of static. “You are awake.”

“What is happening?” Hanzo's eyes are trained on his brother's shuddering form. “What is wrong with him?”

Zenyatta smooths a hand over Genji's brow. “See, Genji? It is alright. Hanzo is right here. You can hear him, awake and alive.”

Genji merely shivers in response, not opening his eyes.
“What is happening?” Hanzo demands, fear gripping at his chest. “What have you done?”

“Nothing. Your reappearance has done this, but no one here is truly to blame.” Zenyatta cards slim fingers through Genji’s hair. “My student omitted information from you. I believe he hoped it would become irrelevant.”

“Explain.”

“He is afraid.” The words are so simple, so calm. “He has been afraid as long as I have known him. Guilt and blame cast upon himself morphs into nightmares that plague his mind and cause his dragon to stir.”

Genji’s grip on Zenyatta tightens and lets out a guttural growl; but his brother makes no movement or sound to indicate he is fully listening.

“Is he... asleep?” Hanzo crouches down beside the omnic before reaching out a hand towards his brother.

“Don’t!” Zenyatta's voice is sharp – more serious and pointed than Hanzo's ever heard. Hanzo retracts his hand and gives the omnic a look mixed with irritation and apprehension.

“I am sorry,” Zenyatta continues in a calmer voice. “I do not know how he will react to a foreign touch. His teeth have been wearing on my fluid lines as it is.”

Hanzo peers over at Genji’s fangs, sunken dangerously close to thick cords hidden beneath the omnic's plating. “He is not biting them.”

“Not now. But he has before. I would prefer not to antagonize him.”

“How often does this happen?”

“It used to be infrequent. The nightmares were rare within the temple's walls; they increased and became more violent after your brother escaped Helga Jepsen's grasp. When he saw you in my memories, the guilt of your fate flooded over him.” Zenyatta shifts, slightly re-positioning Genji in his grasp. “The nightmares have come incessantly since.”

“But it was not his fault,” Hanzo replies softly, miserably.

“I am not the one who needs to accept your lack of blame,” Zenyatta replies, equally quiet. “I can only encourage him to do so.”

Hanzo has nothing to say to that. Zenyatta doesn't seem bothered; he's preoccupied gently stroking Genji's hair and hushing his angry mutters.

After a few moments, Hanzo lowers himself out of his crouch to settle on the floor. “May I stay with him?”

“Of course.” Zenyatta pats Genji's back comfortingly before tilting his head to inspect Hanzo. “What did your dragons have to say? Any advice?”

Hanzo gives him a wordless look of surprise.

“I have been among Shimadas for many years,” Zenyatta remarks. “I know much of the spirits that inhabit your family's body and how they guide your paths.”

Perhaps that is how Mother became so lost. Hanzo doesn't say it; he merely clears his throat. “Yes.
I spoke with them. They...” Hanzo hesitates. “Eri wishes me to return to Blackwatch. He thinks they can help us with Mother.

The sound Zenyatta makes is thoughtful; Hanzo's almost amused at how the omnic whirs its processors to mimic the human noise. “The goat-skulls. I remember.”

“Among the dead. You told me.”

“Yes. And...” Zenyatta shifts Genji in his arms again; Hanzo's brother's quieted under their calm conversation. Even his fingers look a little less clawed. “We ran across the goat-skulls before when we were tracking Talon to find your mother. They had captured a Talon member – we spoke of this, did we not?”

“A bit earlier, yes,” Hanzo admits.

“Yes, well. We overheard them interrogating him, and he confessed that Talon had hold of a monster he was forced to help contain. That Helga Jepsen forced his squadmates along, and he no longer wanted any part of it.” Zenyatta lets out a staticky sigh. “Of course, that is when Mitra arrived.”

“Why do you call her that?” Hanzo asks curiously. “You've known my mother for years.”

A shrug of Zenyatta's slender shoulders. “She cast away her name not long after coming to me. She did not wish to be a Shimada any longer. I have honored her wishes.”

“That is not what you said in the village,” Hanzo points out.

The omnic shrugs again. “I did not know you.” Zenyatta says easily. “Your features led me to believe you could be Genji's lost brother – but I did not know for certain. I could not give you every secret, not until I truly knew you.”

Hanzo huffs. “You said you managed to track Mother.”

“Oh, yes. Jepsen sent in Mitra to go after the Talon captive – I am to assume, at least. The prisoner was slain in a flash of crumbling walls and slicing claws, and a battle erupted between... you call them Blackwatch?”

Hanzo nods, a bit bewildered. Apparently the omnic can speak poetically.

“Yes, Blackwatch and Mitra. She quickly overwhelmed them, and Genji leapt into the fray to assist them. He did not recognize her, not in that form - but I saw her. Her soul, the fragments encased in the armor. I warned him the moment I could. Of course, he was conflicted about harming his own mother; but that was not an emotional restraint she shared. He distracted her long enough for Blackwatch to escape, but was physically thrown from the battlefield after an unlucky slip. She turned to me, as if to strike.”

“But she did not,” Hanzo supplies. “You have told me.”

“Yes. She hesitated and then simply – fled. After the dust had settled Genji found a scrap of her armor, chipped off from the battle. Isao uses it to follow her from place to place.”

“That is not unlike what I do.” Hanzo glances down at his sleeping brother; his teeth have retracted and his ears are rounding out again. Slowly, the dragon is retreating. “For Blackwatch, I mean. I track for them, and I kill.”
“Why?” Zenyatta queries.

Hanzo huffs. “To repay a debt. But perhaps it has already been repaid. And now, if Ami – my mother's dragon – if she will not help me...”

“I had wondered,” Zenyatta remarks. “How she would feel about all of this. Did she have anything to say?”

“No. She has given my dragon and I silence. She is grieving, but she has made it clear she will not help us take Mother's life.” Hanzo lifts his head suddenly. “Is that what you and Genji plan to do? Take her life?”

“We have never discussed it. Our thought has only been to find her and free her. Even I cannot say if she is beyond saving. Do you think Blackwatch will try to kill her?”

“I do not know,” Hanzo admits in turn. “My dragon does not think so. And I am... close. To some of the operatives. They might help me. One has promised to.”

“Having an extra set of companions would help. I do not see how we can retake your mother as it stands; she will be too well-guarded, now that they know our aims. But what I do not know is how we can contact your friends from here.”

“What do you mean?” Hanzo asks curiously.

Zenyatta tilts his head towards the door. “Uønskede, or Unwanted in this tongue, is a refuse born of the beginnings of the Omnic Crisis. It began as a group of hold-outs amassing weapons to protect themselves; they did not trust Overwatch or others to do it for them. Quickly it became a slum-city of the lawless and has sprung up to an immense size – but it holds true to the tradition of keeping itself well-armed. I cannot go out on the streets without risk of being attacked, unless Genji is at my side and claims me to be his property. And while Talon flourishes here, where Overwatch and the like dare not tread, they do cannot wage outright war on the citizens.”

“What does that have to do with leaving?”

“Ah. I lost my train of thought,” Zenyatta remarks. “What I meant is that we cannot rely on the people of this city, or expect any public form of Overwatch to be able to breach this place. We also cannot expect to simply walk out undetected. Talon no doubt has watchers posted at every exit after your escape.”

Hanzo purses his lips. “Oh.”

“Does Blackwatch know where you are?” Zenyatta queries. “I overheard much of what was said between you and the others. You were betrayed by them?”

“By two. Mc- the rest would not do this,” Hanzo says confidently. “And they will come to rescue me, if-”

If he can get in touch with them. But how?

_Blackwatch doesn't officially exist. You think we have a public hotline for just anybody to call?_

He has no idea where the various entrances and exits to Headquarters are. He hadn't paid attention to the car ride here, and it's not like he can leave the city anyway. Calling Overwatch publicly is out of the question; they'd draw too much attention, ask too many questions – and Hanzo really doesn't want to end up in Palmer's grasp again. If only there was a way to circumvent the chain of
command system, to directly speak to someone.. Ah.

Reyes has Morrison's personal number. Easy as shit to remember.

Flip it over 180 degrees and it spells eggshells.

“Do...” Hanzo clears his throat, suddenly feeling a bit awkward. “Do you have a phone? Or... function as one?”

Zenyatta titters, clearly amused. “No, to both of your queries. But Genji has amassed items to trade; if we were to slip into the market tomorrow, no doubt we could return with a disposable one. Do you intend to call your friends?”

“... In a way.”

Jack Morrison might not be the safest ticket to freedom; but right now, the man may be the best chance Hanzo has.
Hanzo has missed his brother terribly; he's missed his laugh, his quick wit, and the way Genji can read his mood by the slightest tic of a brow.

He is not, however, enjoying this new, horrifically domestic side of his brother.

He supposes it's fair; Zenyatta and Genji have every right to have drawn close, practically glued at the hip and sharing unspoken words that result in a smile upon his face. It's been years since Hanzo has seen his brother, and he honestly doesn't begrudge him for seeking comfort from another in Hanzo's absence.

Yet still it's... uncomfortable. He remains the odd one out in this strange arrangement; Zenyatta cleans the room to chase away the vermin and Genji cooks with the food he buys at market. Hanzo does nothing. He wants to do something, but they reassure him that everything is handled.

“It's fine, Brother. Do not think of yourself as a burden. I would not want you anywhere but here.”

It's not like Hanzo or Genji had had much practice, well... doing things for themselves in their youth. Their meals had been prepared by the finest cooks, their quarters cleaned and scrubbed down daily – they had even had servants to dress them in the mornings and forcibly roll them out of bed in Genji's case.

But Genji, it seems, has learned how to fend for himself. His meals are appetizing instead of appalling, his layers of clothes are well kept and washed by hand. He carries pails of water from a communal well to do the former, using the excess only when they've portioned off enough to drink. Genji even takes the time to sharpen his sword - Ryūichi moji, he proudly calls it - with a specialized stone before stowing the thing back in a worn-out golf bag for safekeeping.

Hanzo has learned how to do none of these things. The realization is mortifying, even more so by the fact Zenyatta and Genji routinely turn down his offers to help. He knows they mean well, that they consider him a guest – yet it still brings shame to him.

Blackwatch has done everything for him. Meals, clothes, and Hanzo had never even given thought before to how the base rooms were always relatively clean; even the bathrooms were always sparkling. Who washed them? Did McCree care for his own room? Had he scrubbed the toilet Hanzo used daily without even mentioning to Hanzo that he should pitch in? It's unbearable to think about.

Yet there's little to do but think. Genji had roused the morning after his episode in Zenyatta's arms – no one had brought it up, and Hanzo has no plans to – and had agreed to search out a disposable phone within the markets for Hanzo's use.

“Overwatch may have harbored Jepsen unknowingly, but I know they are good people. If you think they will be able to help us with Mother, I trust you.”

An uncomfortable amount of trust to have when Hanzo himself is unsure of how either Watch will react to his reappearance.

Despite Genji's agreeableness to the thought of enlisting for help, finding a phone is not as easy as convincing his brother to search. Zenyatta and Genji dress in varying disguises and leave every day to go into the markets, but always return empty-handed - save for the food they purchase.

“Technology is a rare commodity in this city,” Genji had explained. “You would not believe how
many have attempted to scrap Master Zenyatta for parts.”

“Do you think you can even find one?” Hanzo had asked desperately.

“I am sure we will. We just have to find the right seller. I do not trust Big Casper's wares; the last thing he sold me fell apart before I'd reached home.”

It's a funny thing to hear his brother call this ramshackle space home. Genji can't have been staked out here terribly long; though, admittedly, Hanzo had not been tracking the weeks since he left the village. Yet Genji works hard to polish the mildew away from the walls, and he seems delighted to show Hanzo each and every secret nook and cranny hidden away in various parts of the loft. He and the monk have stowed away an impressive collection of items, but any intruders would be hard-pressed to find them. Yet it's still an incredibly shoddy, dismal space – does his brother truly consider it home?

*Home is not a place. Home is a person.*

Hanzo brushes off the echo of Ami's words. It's not like the dragon had spoken to him recently, no matter how many times he dipped into darkness to seek her out. She's immovable, impossibly stubborn with no hint of wavering.

Perhaps Hanzo had inherited his own stubborn streak from his mother's side.

Without his dragons to speak with and his brother's frequent trips to market, Hanzo is often left alone within the loft. Sometimes Zenyatta stays behind, but Hanzo resents the implication that he might become lonely. He worries for his brother, and while the omnic may have cared for him, he's still wary of the thing. His first impression of the floating, absurdly-calm automaton had not been pleasant.

Today he's been left completely; both Zenyatta and Genji claimed to have found a new lead last night and were eager to chase after it the moment dawn had broke. Hanzo had watched them go with only a trace of a sigh before he'd settled back down on his bed. Genji had procured a few books in his treasure trove; he'd allowed Hanzo to sift through them, provided he did not damage them.

*Just be careful, Brother. Every scratch lessens their value.*

Hanzo's currently flipping through a chapter book he'd selected from the pile; the words *Vampire Academy* are emblazoned on the front, and that honestly had been the best title of the bunch. He's barely reading it at this point; his eyes are unfocusing regularly as the words begin to blur.

He's bored. Even being in cells hadn't been this boring. He can't even go outside; or, he can, but only on the patio and only in heavy, uncomfortable disguises. The view to greet him is the dull back of a building – it hasn't even been grafittied on. At least back in actual prisons, he'd had something to focus his hatred onto and gripe internally over; admittedly, those hadn't been the healthiest distractions.

Perhaps he should be worried more about his mother. Hanzo feels a gap, a distance between his companions when it comes down to her. Genji and Zenyatta are closer to her than he's ever been, and his- no, her dragon has gone all but catatonic in her grief inside him. But Hanzo doesn't know her; he hasn't known her in years. She's a faint memory, a blip in his past that had never held any real consequence. She'd given him life, given him her dragon – and he doesn't even remember her face. Genji has told him stories – how mother was a fierce warrior, a skilled leader. How she'd loved peaches, hated the rain and how much she'd said her sons meant to her.
The words mean nothing to him. Hanzo desires to give his mother peace for Genji's sake, and Ami's; but it's uncomfortable to try and drum up love for her in himself. He doesn't know this woman; part of him doesn't wish to. It will be easier. Whatever becomes of her – not knowing her will be easier.

His past with the clan aside, Hanzo tries not to dwell on his other old life – the life he'd build in Blackwatch. He misses McCree fiercely, and he misses having someone to talk to about him. There's no Clara, no Alex – not even Reyes to confide in with his worries and thoughts about the man. Hanzo may love Genji, but he doesn't feel ready to discuss McCree with his brother; he'd rather talk to the wall than get relationship advice from the monk.

But the feeling of pining and longing does not dissipate. Hanzo dreams of being wrapped up in McCree's arms, held close and murmured to in sweet, unintelligible words. The feeling of waking to a cold room and empty bed is agonizing. Sometimes he'll hear a clink like that of McCree's spurs and Hanzo's heart will leap – only to have his ears and shoulders droop when he finds it's only Zenyatta's gears at work.

He knows McCree will be worrying. The Blackwatch cameras would no doubt have captured Lance and Juan's escape with him; the cowboy no doubt fears the worst. But there is nothing Hanzo can do, no way to reach him except to sit and wait and worry.

And be bored.

Hanzo's halfway asleep, reading the same paragraph over and over without absorption when he hears a knock at the door. He drops the book on the bed and leans down to re-attach his prosthetics; once they've snugly clipped into place he hops off the bed and heads towards the doorway.

There's no codeword the they share, no secret knock or gesture to be glimpsed through a crack in the doorway. The renewed proximity between their dragons have left Hanzo and his brother able to glean how close or far their kin might be; sometimes Hanzo can even sense his brother an entire street away before he disappears into market.

Hanzo knows it's Genji at the door. He unlocks the chains to open it – then he recoils back with a start, ears pinning as something is shoved into his face.

It's a cellular phone, shaped like a brick and being held aloft by his triumphant brother. Genji's smile is absolutely splitting his face as he pulls the device back and nudges the door open with his shoulder. “We found one!”

“So I can see,” Hanzo drawls, stepping back and trying to recoup his composure.

“We were very fortunate.” Zenyatta is following Genji through the doorway, bags of groceries on either arm. The omnic is covered head to toe in blankets, scarves and other accessories; when the machine chooses to actually walk, no one can tell who or what he was beneath his layers. “It was saved for another.”

“I beat the price,” Genji adds proudly. “Gave him more than it was worth, I'd saved up so well.” He tosses the phone towards Hanzo. “Here you go.”

Hanzo fumbles more than once to catch the thing in his claws; when he finally seize hold, he brings it back up to his face for a closer look. It's got a shine to it, even with a few nicks and scratches on the plastic covering. It's heavy – it might even be older than Hanzo. “How do you know it works?”
“I ran diagnostics,” Zenyatta replies. “It’s been pre-paid for an hour of communication. We will have to return to the vendor in hopes of more.”

Hanzo flips the device over. “And the battery will last that long?”

“Doubtful. But he gave us a charger,” Genji says, pulling the thin wire from his pocket. “And Zenyatta has a universal port we can use on the back of his neck.”

Hanzo shoots the omnic a curious look. “How do you charge? I have seen no stations around here.”

“When necessary, I can reveal paneling to absorb solar energy.” Zenyatta then shrugs. “It is not the most efficient when I seek to conceal myself, so we often make due with old batteries in a back-up slot I had installed to prepare for traveling.”

Hanzo grunts and flips the phone over in his palm to inspect the worn numbers. Now that he finally has a way to communicate with Morrison, a spike of anxiety is surfacing. What if the man does not agree to help? What if he has changed his number, lost it or simply does not answer?

What if he decides to make them his enemies?

Worrying brings nothing, so he decides to act. Genji and Zenyatta are watching closely as Hanzo scrunches up his brow and attempts to recall the code.

*Flip it over 180 degrees and it spells eggshells.*

After a few seconds of thinking, Hanzo begins carefully punching in the numbers. A five for an s, two sevens for l’s. He slowly types out 57-734-5993 onto the tiny screen, then glances up at his brother. “Are you sure?” he says hesitantly. “There is no un-calling him. If we ask for his help, we may get it in ways we do not want.”

“I trust you,” Genji says simply and adds a shrug. “If we must run from him, we will. I have evaded Talon this long. I cannot imagine Overwatch to be that much more difficult.”

Genji’s tone is firm and his expression is one of complete trust. After a moment, Hanzo nods back on him and presses Call. He places the phone to his ear – then pulls it slightly away. Even the sound of ringing is too sharp for his ears now, it seems.

The phone rings. And rings, and rings. There’s a click, then the phone cuts to a nondescript voicemail. No personalized message, no hint that this actually was Jack Morrison's phone. Just the automatic list-off of the number called followed by the familiar beep.

Hanzo takes in a breath to steady himself. “This is... Hanzo,” he says haltingly into the receiver. “We have met once. At a mutual friend's hospital bed. You told me of your superiors?” He winces. This sounded so strange, but he could not be sure this was the correct number. “I am hoping that this is your phone – Clara said she calls you sometimes?” He clears his throat. “I need... I need your help. I have been separated from... Gabriel. I was taken somewhere against my will, and am now trapped. I need to get into contact with him.” Another pause. “I will try to call you again in ten minutes. I hope you have heard this message by then.” Hanzo presses the End Call button, then runs a hand over his face.

“No answer?” Genji asks helpfully.

Hanzo merely rolls his eyes. “No. No message for voicemail either. I cannot be sure I called the correct number.”
“If he does not reply, why not call the Overwatch general hotline?” Genji’s settling down on the floor beside Zenyatta, picking through their new wares. “Surely they could help as well.”

“If we have to, I will.” Hanzo glances back at the phone in his hand, lips pursing. “But it did not end well the last time.”

“What happened?” Genji’s perked a brow curiously.

“I do not wish to speak of it.” Hanzo sits back on the bed, prosthetics dangling over the edge. “Suffice to say, the 'help' they sent saw me as more beast than human.”

Genji’s look is instantly sympathetic. “I am sorry, Brother.”

Hanzo shakes his head. “It does not matter. We have tried Morrison only once. It has not even been a minute.”

A minute does pass, then three, then five. Hanzo watches the time tick by on the phone's dim screen; the moment ten minutes have passed, he hits the re-dial button.

The phone rings again, and Hanzo’s spirit begins to deflate on the eighth ring. No answer, again.

Then, just he's expecting another voicemail tone – there's a click, the sound of the call being picked up. Hanzo's breath catches, but no one makes a sound.

“Hello?” he says carefully. There's a breath on the other end; scarcely noticeable, but Hanzo's ears had caught it. “Commander Morrison?” Another pause, more silence. “I can hear you breathing,” he adds. “Do you remember my ears?”

There's a muffled grunt on the other side. “How did you get this number?”

“Is this Jack Morrison?” Hanzo says instead.

“Who is this?”

“Hanzo. I- did you not get my voicemail?”

“I saw a call from an Anonymous number, to a phone that only three people in the world should be calling. I did not think you would call again. Who is this?”

“Hanzo. I- we met. At ah, Jesse's bedside. You spoke to me of your bosses? I am sorry, I- I do not know how secure this line is. I am on a pre-paid phone. It is all I have.”

“Why are you calling me?” Morrison sounds suspicious, almost aggressive. “Is this one of Clara's drunken pranks?”

“No.” Hanzo swallows thickly, and he's sure the commander can hear it over the phone. “But she is how I learned this number. I am separated from... Gabriel. I was tricked and taken against my will by... he has rats, in his house. Like you did, once.”

A sharp inhale on Morrison's end.

“I am trapped in a city. I have no way of contacting Jesse, or the others. I cannot leave, or the ah, claw group will find me. I need help.”

“What are your coordinates?” Morrison's voice is brusque, no-nonsense.
Hanzo pulls the phone away from his mouth and looks helplessly at his brother. “He needs our coordinates.”

“69.586729 North, 22.495081 East,” Zenyatta rattles off matter-of-factly. When Hanzo shoots him a surprised look, the omnic merely shrugs. “I am equipped with GPS functionality. It is how I never lose my way.”

Hanzo's not sure if that's a joke or not, but he returns his attention to the call. “69.58...”

“6729 North,” Zenyatta supplies patiently.

“6729 North, and...”

“22.495081 East.”


Morrison goes quiet, but Hanzo thinks he can hear a keyboard clacking away in the background. Another inhale. “You're in Uønskede?”

“Yes. That is where I was taken. The clawed ones have a base there. They intended to capture me.”

“Why? What is so important about you?” Morrison's tone has harshened again. “Why has Gabriel shrouded you in secrecy?”

“This line is not secure,” Hanzo replies uncomfortably. “Or I cannot be sure it is.”

“I need answers.”

Hanzo winces. “And I need help. Please, contact them for me. Send someone. I will...” A sigh. “I will tell you if you can do this. Even if Gabriel does not want me to.”

Not like it matters. With Ami comatose, Hanzo cannot even function as Blackwatch's weapon. But that is a problem for later.

“We've got a lock on this phone. Keep it alive, or stay in position where you are. You'll get someone out there within a few days at most.”

“Thank you,” Hanzo exhalles in relief. “Please, let them know I came here out of trust of Gabriel's men; I had no intention of escaping.”

“I was not aware you were a prisoner,” Morrison replies coolly, earning another wince from Hanzo. “But I will keep that in mind. Do not call this number unless the situation changes.” An abrupt click follows – the call has ended.

Hanzo stares wordlessly at the screen, before finally pressing the End Call button and slumping down to the bed with a groan.

“Is someone coming?” Genji asks curiously.

“Yes.” Hanzo throws an arm over his face, resisting the urge to groan again like a child.

Someone is coming, but he has an unpleasant feeling he's about to be caught between two sides.
Morrison had promised that someone would arrive within a few days. The trouble is, Hanzo has no idea who will be coming, how – he'd even settle for a better idea of when.

Zenyatta is their night watchman. The omnic stays awake and afloat, listening to the sounds of the city while Genji and Hanzo rest. The former hasn't had another episode yet, no thrashing nightmares or fangs threatening to sprout. Hanzo hopes it is because of their new closeness; he had swallowed his pride and offered half the bed to Genji under the pretext that it was he who suffered from terrors. Genji hadn't teased him, had been gentle as a lamb – but now Hanzo has to tamp down on thoughts of McCree even further, and pray he does not rouse from a dream with lips upon his brother's neck instead.

Hanzo hopes McCree is the one to come. Reyes knows Hanzo would do anything for him – the thought, once realized, is disturbing – and even Morrison must know they're close, considering where he and Hanzo had first met. Perhaps the Strike Commander had even requested McCree personally, or at the very least wouldn't be foolish enough to send Palmer again.

If it's Reyes coming, things might get ugly. Hanzo's last encounter with the man had been anything but friendly, and although his exit from the base hadn't been entirely voluntary, Reyes might not see it that way. He might come in tow with new soldiers, soldiers that don't know Hanzo or like him like Clara and Alex do. Soldiers that will take Reyes side and shoot first, ask questions never.

The thought of it makes Hanzo anxious, and he tries to reason that showing Reyes that Mitra is not, has never been Genji might help his case. Being told Mitra is simply another, even more dangerous Shimada might not - not to mention Hanzo's own failings with his dragons.

He really, really hopes that it'll just be McCree.

Two days have already passed since the call. As requested, Hanzo had not tried Morrison's number again; even if the passing days do make him antsy. Any moment now there could be a busted-down door, a fight in the streets – Morrison had said they had a lock on the phone, and Zenyatta dutifully making sure it keeps its charge, but would Blackwatch be able to find the house? Would they scout first? Would they attack?

Currently, Hanzo's sprawled on the floor and fretting silently over the possibilities; his brother is resting by his side, propping his head up on Hanzo's stomach and flipping through a magazine. Hanzo would enjoy it had he not been so consumed with restless anxiety. It's a familiar position, a call-back to their days as boys. Caution and embarrassment after being separated for so long have fallen away over the days; they've grown comfortable faster than Hanzo had anticipated. He expects it won't be long before they're able to properly bicker again.

Zenyatta is meditating – at least, that's what he and Genji call it. To Hanzo, it looks suspiciously like simply powering down for a nap. The omnic is sitting, not floating on the floor with criss-crossed legs and the back of his hands resting on his knees. His head is bowed, but Hanzo sees it give a little jerk every now and again.

He's pretty sure the omnic is just sleeping.
So wrapped up in his thoughts, Hanzo doesn't really notice the knocking sound at first. It's faint; the first time, he thinks its Genji's knees slapping together out of boredom. Perhaps the omnic is finally getting up. The soft noise persists, Hanzo wrinkles his brow. He glances over at Zenyatta, then his brother. Neither of them is moving.

Hanzo tilts his head to look at the door – then the realization hits him.

_Oh._

Hanzo scrambles to his feet; Genji's head is dropped unceremoniously to the floor, earning an annoyed grunt from his brother. The scowl shot Hanzo's way is morphed into a look of surprise; Genji hops to his own feet, going to shake Zenyatta by the shoulders. The omnic blinks awake, then glances between them.

“What is the matter?”

Hanzo gestures wildly to the door, but the knocking has stopped. The omnic gives the pair of them a curious tilt of his head; Genji's already strode over to his bag to pull his sword from its sheath. He holds it level at the door in a defensive stance. Even Zenyatta looks tense - an impressive feat, considering the omnic has no facial expressions to spare.

Hanzo nods at them, and they nod back. He places his claws on the door locks, and they are unwavering.

“What is there?” Hanzo calls.

No one answers.

To test the waters, Hanzo slides one lock out of place. His ears prick up at the sound of a boot scraping on the floor; whoever is outside has just shifted their weight. They're tall, but Hanzo cannot quite tell if it's Jesse, cannot smell any scent familiar or foreign through the door.

Another lock slips out, but there's no sound this time. Nothing gives the intruder away, but Hanzo will not open the door for nothing.

“Give me something,” he murmurs under his breath. “Or we will attack.”

The intruder exhales. “You asked me to trust another. Can you not do the same?”

The voice is familiar, shockingly so. Dumbfounded and almost disbelieving his own ears, Hanzo slides the last lock out of place and opens the door.

The intruder - a male, a tall male brushes past him almost instantly, a heavy pulse rifle held close to his chest. He's got a heavy sweatshirt on and baggy jeans; his face is covered by a pulled-up hood but Hanzo can see his eyes sweep the room. When his gaze lands on Genji, each man bristles at the sight.

“Who is that?” they both demand at the same time; had it not been for the situation, Hanzo would have been amused.

“Stand down,” he says instead. “Commander Morrison, what are you doing here? Where is Blackwatch?”

Genji's brows shoot up, but Morrison merely scowls as he pulls down the hood over his head to reveal grey-speckled blond hair. “Answer the question. You made no mention of hostiles or
friendlies over communications.” Morrison is all business, tense and tactical – it's eerie, the complete opposite of what Hanzo has seen of Reyes.

“This is my brother,” Hanzo says reluctantly. “And a Shambali monk. They travel together, and found me by chance. They are why I am still alive and not in Talon's clutches.”

Morrison sweeps his gaze over Genji again, surprise sharpening to a critical once-over. “Genji Shimada? I was told you were dead.”

“Didn't take,” Genji quips, eyes equally hard. “Why are you here? My brother told me you were to call Blackwatch.”

“I did.” Morrison looks back at Hanzo. “They have been briefed on the situation.”

“Then why are they not here?” Hanzo demands.

Morrison pulls a round device from his pocket, pressing down on a button on its side and bringing it to his lips. “Ana, we've added two. Make whatever preparations you need.” He pauses. “One second.” He takes his thumb off the button. “Are we taking them with us?”

“Yes- Wait, you did not answer the question!” Hanzo jabs a finger at Morrison's chest. “Why are you here? Why is-?!”

“Because you called me,” Morrison interrupts harshly. “This isn't a Blackwatch operation. It's in Overwatch's jurisdiction now.”

“But-!”

“I came here myself because you owe me answers,” Morrison continues over Hanzo's protests. “You and Gabriel. But only one of those people can I make talk to me.” The commander returns his attention to the communicator. “I swept the area,” he says into it. “Seems clear. I'm going to run the Q&A ASAP. Call me if anything changes.”

“A affirmative.” A woman's voice through the line; it's unfamiliar, yet strangely... pleasant. A dulcet sort of tone. “I've got eyes on your exits. No one's noticed us yet.”

“Roger.” Morrison stuffs the communicator back in his pocket. “Right. Hanzo Shimada. I'd like as much information about yourself divulged as quickly as possible so we can get back on-route.”

“Why can we not leave now?” Genji says what Hanzo's thinking before he can. “Why must you interrogate my brother here?”

“Because,” Morrison says harshly, “I need to know what we're up against. Why are you mixed up in Talon? Why were you alone on a Blackwatch aircraft with no strike team to be found? Why are you still here? Gabriel hasn't run any ops on the Shimadas since taking you, hasn't requested a lick of resources for Japan; yet I get intel that a Shimada complex has been ripped apart in Italy with none of our troops anywhere near it. Was that you?”

“No.” Hanzo's getting uncomfortable under the man's scrutinizing stare. “It was not.”

“Good to know, if it's true. And the rest?”

Hanzo flicks his gaze towards his brother – he looks even more tense than Hanzo. This isn't going well. “I would prefer to speak in private,” Hanzo admits after a moment.
That gets Genji's attention; his brother's suspicious stare morphs into an expression of surprise – then hurt. The sword finally lowers as Genji takes a step back. Zenyatta floats closer to him, placing a comforting hand on his shoulder and murmuring something in Nepali.

Hanzo doesn't know what to say. There's no words in Japanese or otherwise that will make this easier; none that he can drum up, anyway. So much time has passed between them. It will be hard enough to admit to his brother what he's done, who he has killed to protect the last person he'd cared for. It is not a discussion he wishes to have in front of Jack Morrison.

Said man clears his throat, almost awkwardly. “Is there a private place to speak?”

“Genji and I will retire to the nook,” Zenyatta replies calmly. “We will give you two the space.” A gentle squeeze and then the omnic is leading Genji away, back into the small space Hanzo had found his brother trembling in just a few nights ago.

An unpleasant image. Hanzo will have to make this quick.

When it comes down to it, it doesn't take terribly long to tell his story. Hanzo's voice is quiet, low so his brother will not overhear; Morrison's face is impassive with his mouth set in a hard line. Hanzo explains his gifts – how they'd been used and abused, how he'd made a choice and Reyes had made him pay for it. He doesn't say if he thinks he deserved it or not, and Morrison mercifully does not ask.

It's difficult to describe the hunts - always has been, and it isn't any easier in front of this stranger. Hanzo finds himself bizarrely defending the actions, pointing out that they'd been the right calls and that those who had died under Reyes' orders had all but deserved it. Hanzo hadn't made an error in his hunts, and Reyes hadn't led him astray.

When it comes to Mitra, Hanzo's words slip and stumble. He hasn't even told Reyes the truth of the beast's origins, so he merely admits that Mitra is a Shimada that's been broken down and stripped of her dragon - and that Jepsen now seeks to claim his and his brother's bloodline for her experiments. He describes the base, the high walls and ominous towers. Morrison's expression isn't satisfied like Hanzo's expected when they reach the Talon traitors in Blackwatch. He'd thought the man would be smug, considering how Reyes had chewed his fellow commander out for it. But Morrison only looks grim, almost exhausted by the time Hanzo's finished.

“The ability to hunt and kill through walls, on only a scent and without leaving the comfort of a room miles away,” Morrison sighs, running a hand down his face. “I see now why Reyes kept this from me.”

“You would use me too?”

“No.” Hanzo's surprised by the sudden sharpness in the commander's voice. “You're far too dangerous for me to keep. Even Reyes is risking it by having you on-board. News of your power could start a world war in an instant. There's no telling what people would do to get you on their side.”

“If it is any help,” Hanzo says carefully. “It is not working at the moment. Jepsen...” Ah, how to say this? “Sealed it off, in a way. I do not know when it will return.”

“That isn't a comfort. I could have used you to wipe out that Talon base, here and now. But we'll work with what we have.” Morrison fishes his communicator out again. “Ana, checking in. We're ready to move out. Still all clear?”
“Still all-clear,” the women repeats back. She sounds amused. “How did it go, Jack?”

Morrison glances at Hanzo. “It's complicated,” he says finally. “But we're leaving with him. Reyes and I are going to have to talk when we reach Blackwatch.”

“And I can tell by your tone that that's going to go well. What's he done this time?”

“I'll tell you later. You probably won't believe me either way.” Hanzo quirks a brow at the banter. These two seemed familiar with each other, more so than a commander and a sub-ordinate. Who is this woman?

“When it comes to Gabriel, nothing surprises me anymore,” the woman replies with a laugh. “You're covered. Mirembe is ready to rendez-vous with you on the eastern block, and Singh's on the opposite side. Someone approached him, but they left shortly after.”

Morrison's brow furrowed. “Do we know why?”

“They thought he might be for sale. Apparently, he was leaning on a street lamp.”

Morrison snorts. “Right. We'll be down in five.” He lowers the comm, then gestures with it at Hanzo. “Go get your brother and the monk. Gather whatever supplies you need to take with you. We're leaving.”

Leaving. The thought is as exciting as it is dizzyingly terrifying. Out of safety, descending from the loft with a new organization escorting them through Talon's streets. In Talon's sights, with people Hanzo doesn't know, can't trust watching their back.

But it's the only way home. The only way back to Blackwatch, Reyes.

McCree.

At least Hanzo is secure in one thought; of all the supplies they might need to take, Vampire Academy will not be one of them.

Chapter End Notes

There've been so many wonderful, thoughtful comments pouring in - I'm overwhelmed! Thank you all so much for your support!
Chapter 43

As intimidating as Gabriel Reyes might be, being alone with Jack Morrison is worse.

Leaving the loft had been easy. The party had slipped out untouched with Genji and Zenyatta hoisting heavy packs of their belongings on their backs. They'd traveled in silence through the streets with Ana's observations coming in softly over the communicator. All clear on east, west. No hostiles in sight. Mirembe approaching from the north, Singh waiting for them at the northeast block's end. No sign of anyone suspicious, no one approaching, no one leveling sights on them – scoped or otherwise.

Mirembe is a black woman that'd given them a sharp nod before slipping to their sides, joining the ranks with her hands drumming impatiently on the rifle she carries. Singh's a little chattier; he'd greeted them with a pleasant Indian accent before Jack had silenced him with a quick gesture. The man's lips had closed, and shortly after the party had slipped into an alleyway and ducked down at Jack's bidding.

Then Hanzo had been informed they'd be splitting up.

It had made sense, even if he hadn't been expecting it. Six people are a lot more noticeable than two, which is exactly how the commander draws the lines. Mirembe with Zenyatta, Singh with Genji – leaving Hanzo uncomfortable and stuck with Morrison. Not that being with his brother would be much better; Genji's been curt with him, brushing off Hanzo when he tries to approach or whisper an apology.

It's fair. They've spent years apart, but Genji always could hold onto a grudge. It's too soon to seek his brother's forgiveness – especially when Hanzo is not yet ready to offer explanations. Perhaps he'll be able to after they've escaped.

If they escape.

After Genji had detailed to Mirembe how best to protect and conceal Zenyatta – even if Hanzo doesn't think the woman's really listening – Morrison had passed out communicators between the three groups. Short-range, he'd explained, but each wired to the other. If something happened, everyone would hear.

But nothing has happened so far. Hanzo's currently cloaked and keeping his head down, following Morrison's heavy footsteps through the streets – but there hasn't been a peep from anyone. Ana's the only voice he hears, soft and muffled when Morrison picks up his official comm to listen to her. She never has anything real to report, but it seems to aggravate her. There's no trace of Talon as far as she can see. No one is following them, watching them.

Or if they are, Ana hasn't spotted them.

"It's too quiet," she says suddenly, comm crackling with static. "No activity on the exits as far as I can see. Where are they?"

"Might have pulled back," Jack murmurs. "Trouble with the locals?"

Hanzo doubts it. They've yet to encounter anyone on the streets. "What about the base?"

Morrison doesn't glance back. "Too far in. We'd be stretched if we tried to keep eyes on everything."
“I’m going to go scout the base,” Ana announces instead.

“Ana.” Morrison’s lifted up the communicator again, expression stern. “No. We need you watching our backs.”

“There’s nothing to watch. Something is wrong. Lay low for two minutes. I need to get a better lay. We shouldn’t continue like this. There’s too many uncertainties.”

“But nothing is wrong,” Hanzo protests.

“That’s what she doesn’t like,” Morrison mutters. Then, back to the comm: “Fine. We’re stopping here. You see us?” Jack turns sharply down a side-street into a narrow alleyway, beckoning Hanzo along with him.

“I see you. Two minutes. Stay low and safe.”

Morrison doesn’t respond, merely stows the communicator back in his pocket. He squats down next to a filthy garbage bag and crooks a finger, motioning for Hanzo to do the same.

Hanzo sits. Disgusting alley or not, he doesn't want to risk exhausting his legs if they need to run. That, and Morrison's unwavering, serious expression compels Hanzo to obey him – even if it isn't doing much to help calm his jitters. At least Reyes makes jokes sometimes. “If you had brought Blackwatch, you would not be stretched so thin,” Hanzo mutters moodily. “They could have helped.”

“I trust Commander Reyes to watch my back,” Morrison replies shortly. “But I do not trust him to be honest with me when it comes to you. He has already broken that trust.”

“You could have brought McCree,” Hanzo mutters.

“I am well aware. And I did, in a way.”

Hanzo's brows shoot up – he dares to hope. “He is here?”

“No.”

Oh. Hanzo's ears droop even as he tries to school an expression of annoyance. “Then what do you mean?”

Morrison pulls out another communicator from his breast pocket. This one is tiny and oval in matte black, with a tiny switch flicked to off and a single button in the middle.

“How many comms do you have?” Hanzo asks, bewildered.

“Too damn many,” Morrison sighs. “But this one is for Blackwatch. I promised Reyes I would let him know when the mission was over; he informed me that he passed the brother to this device over to Jesse.”

“Let me talk to him,” Hanzo says immediately.

“No,” Morrison replies, just as quick. He stuffs the comm back in his pocket. “We need to be sharp. I can’t have you distracted with him.” The look Morrison gives Hanzo is uncomfortably knowing. What else had Reyes informed him of?

“It is too late,” Hanzo counters. “I am already distracted. Let me speak to him. Briefly.”
“You can wait.”

“I cannot,” Hanzo presses. “Please.”

“I did not show you so you would fixate,” Morrison says wearily. “Now is not the time.”

“We are waiting for your associate. No one is hunting us. Now is the perfect time.”

“Hanzo-“

“One minute,” Hanzo pleads. “Even less, if Ana calls in. Please.”

Morrison visibly hesitates.

“Please.”

Finally, a sigh. “A minute,” Morrison warns, pulling the comm back out of his pocket. “It's off the moment I hear Ana check in.”

Hanzo snatches the device from the man's palm instantly; his fingers already flicking the switch to on and smashing down on the middle button. He holds the comm up to his face and softly calls: “McCree?”

When Hanzo releases the button, he can hear the sounds of – a scuffle? Something is moving in the background. There's a series of muffled grunts and something crashes. A faraway cry of: “JESSE MY FUCKING FOOT!” before there's panting breath, close and loud. “Han?!?”

“McCree?” Hanzo has to squash down the elation blooming in his stomach – he fights to keep his expression from becoming too delighted and settles on amused. He can feel Morrison's studious gaze upon him. “Are you alright? I heard a crash.”

“Am I- Han, I should be asking if you're alright!” McCree sputters. “Jesus, you disappeared-!”

“I did not mean to,” Hanzo interrupts apologetically. “I was misled.”

“I know, Christ I know,” and ah, now McCree's anxious tone has morphed into anger. “Reyes went through the video tapes-”

“McCree,” Hanzo says, trying to speak over him. “I am sorry. I do not mean to silence you. But I have little time.”

“Are you in danger? Where are you? Morrison wouldn't fucking give us shit, wouldn't-”

“I am with him. Right now.” McCree goes mercifully quiet at that. “We are safe. His men are searching an area, and I only have a minute before we must continue.” A pause. “I found my brother.”

“You...” McCree sounds momentarily awed. “You mean-?”

“He is not Mitra- my mother is. But you cannot kill her either.”

“Your mother?”

Morrison makes a sharp gesture, drawing Hanzo's eyes up. His other comm is in hand – Ana is speaking, but Hanzo can't focus enough to hear her. “I have to go,” he says softly.
“Han!”

“I love you.”

The words are out of his mouth before he fully realizes what he's said; Hanzo can feel the instant, ugly flush creep up on his face. He clenches his eyes shut in embarrassment, doesn't dare look at Morrison.

“Han...” McCree's voice is so terribly soft. “I love ya too. But you're scarin' me right now.”

“I have to go.” It's too much; saying it without thinking, having it reciprocated is even worse. Or better. Hanzo doesn't know, this is simply agony and it's happening at the worst timing in front of the leader of Overwatch. “Ana has called. I will come home to you.” It's a simple promise, but it does nothing to quell the hammering in Hanzo's chest. “I will come back.”

“Han-”

“Goodbye, McCree.” Hanzo clicks the communicator off. He holds it out to Morrison, eyes still closed tightly. He can feel the man take the device, and the moment his hands are free Hanzo uses them to cover his face.

He has never been this embarrassed in his life.

Morrison clears his throat. “Ana has returned,” he says neutrally. Thank the spirits. He's not going to mention it.

“What did she say?” Hanzo mutters back.

“No one's home.”

Hanzo lifts his head in confusion, hands dropping away. “What?”

“She says she went to the area, description checked out. But aside from a few guards, she can't spot any movement, inside or out. Looks like they've evacuated, which is why we're getting through without being accosted.”

Hanzo's brow wrinkles. “That does not make sense.”

Morrison stands, brushing off the seat of his pants. “They might be thinking you've already slipped out or managed to contact us. Under that assumption, clearing out before Overwatch or Blackwatch could launch an assault would be an understandable decision.”

“I do not think Jepsen would give up on me so easily,” Hanzo says uncertainly.

Morrison shoulders his rifle. “We can dwell on it later. For now the path is clear, and there aren't any hostiles converging. We're not sticking around until that changes.” A quick motion and the commander is heading back out into the streets. After a moment of hesitation, Hanzo follows him.

Evacuated. Would Talon really give up so easily? How many years had they spent building that base, fortifying it and blending in with the locals? Are they so afraid of Blackwatch? Of Hanzo? They would not really just leave, would they?
Contrary to Hanzo's beliefs, it seems Talon truly has left.

He'd never been more tense than walking out of a city gate, simply waiting for a hail of bullets or physical ambush to rain down upon them. But nothing had happened. He and Morrison had simply stroll right out of the city into the dusty fields of the outskirts; even a small group of teenagers lounging near the exit hadn't given them more than a glance.

Perhaps that had been due to the heavy pulse rifle Morrison had flashed at them.

The other two groups are already waiting for them, standing in the shade of a scraggly tree. They seem unscathed; Genji is chatting with Singh quite animatedly while Zenyatta and Mirembe seem content to lounge side-by-side.

“Report,” Morrison orders as he strides up to them. “Any engagement.”

“None on either end,” Mirembe remarks easily. “Was afraid the comms were broken. Any word on why?”

“Ana thinks Talon evacuated. Might have thought we were bringing in a whole team. But for now...” Morrison makes a two-fingered gesture at the horizon. “Move out.”

“Where are we going?” Hanzo falls back in line with Morrison's steps as the rest of the group does the same.

“Drop-off. We couldn't drive up to the city without arousing suspicion. People come and go from here on foot, and vehicles get scrapped if left unattended – or unarmed.” Morrison shoulders his rifle, glancing back to make sure the rest are following. “As long as we make it before nightfall, we should be fine.”

Nightfall. How far away are they? Hanzo glances up at the sun; it's evening now, but he can't be sure of how late. Maybe the walk won't be too long?

Hanzo's steps slow – he lets Mirembe and Zenyatta outpace him until he's walking side-by-side with Genji again. His brother glances over at him, but makes no attempt at conversation.

So it falls to Hanzo. “I am ready to talk if you are,” he says quietly, swapping to their mother tongue.

Genji's mouth thins. “Are you?”

“I have been uncomfortable thrice over today already,” Hanzo admits. “I cannot imagine this will be much worse. And we may be walking for a while.”

“Why could I not stay?” Genji asks immediately, impulsively. “You know I hate that.”

He does. Hanzo hadn't recalled it at the time, but the words bring back unpleasant memories. Times when he or his father had forbidden Genji from the room. When he'd push Genji away, engage in secrets he didn't want to burden his brother with. Genji had resented being shut-out, but beneath the clan's thumb, Hanzo hadn't always had a choice in it.

“I did not mean to open old wounds,” Hanzo replies softly. “I was afraid.”

“Afraid of what?” Genji demands.
“Explaining myself to you.” Hanzo glances over at the party; he and Genji have fallen back several paces. Morrison glances over at them now and again, but it looks like he’s checking up on them, not listening in. “I have made difficult choices while we have been apart.”

“And I cannot be trusted to understand?” Genji replies tartly.

Hanzo sighs in frustration, bringing a hand up to rub the bridge of his nose. “You are not being very understanding now.”

That's enough to get Genji's hackles to lower; a look of brief remorse crosses his face. “I am sorry. But it is unpleasant, you know? To have my brother speak of his past to a stranger before me.”

“I know. But you must realize he was forcing me.”

“I did not force you. I gave you space on it, and figured you would tell me in time. To have force be what worked...”

“Genji,” Hanzo replies sharply.

“I know. I am being unreasonable,” Genji mutters. “But it does not lessen the sting.”

An uncomfortable silence falls as they continue to walk. Morrison is leading their little pack, a clear destination in mind. He's speaking into a comm, but Hanzo can't make out which one it is. Perhaps reporting in to Blackwatch?

“We're taking a left here,” Morrison announces suddenly. “Ana and her squad are about intersect with us.”

Ah. Not Blackwatch, then.

Ana turns out to be a slim, sable-skinned woman with long, ebony hair that trails to her hips. The long blue trenchcoat she wears isn't the first thing Hanzo would have expected of a sniper; or at least, he presumes that's her calling, based on the deadly-looking rifle strapped to her back. There's two other operatives with her carrying similar guns, but they've got grey hoods pulled up and aren't sparing him a second glance.

“Jack,” Ana greets with a smile and a quick salute. “All well?”

“For now,” the commander replies. “And yourself?”

“Uneventful.” She motions at her companions. “No trace of activity all throughout the city. Are we sure Talon was ever there?”

“Yes. They were,” Hanzo says shortly. Ana's eyes are drawn to him – but then they suddenly flick away. She's staring at Zenyatta; her brow scrunches up, then her gaze moves to Genji. A warped sort of smile forms on her face.

“Oh,” she says unpleasantly. “Old friends.”

Hanzo glances over; Genji is shifting uncomfortably on his feet, not meeting the woman's gaze. Even Zenyatta seems... uncomfortable.

Morrison looks between the scene. “Something to tell me?”

“Port Said,” Ana drawls.
Genji rubs the back of his head awkwardly, even avoiding Hanzo's curious stare.

“Port Said,” Morrison repeats slowly, like he's trying to recall. “The incidental?”

“Perhaps it was just incidental on the books.” Ana folds her arms across her chest. “It was a Talon surveillance mission. I had a scuffle with an unknown assailant, accompanied by an omnic.”

“I thought you were one of them,” Genji says regretfully.

“The feeling was mutual. Moreso when you stole from me.”

“I still have most of them,” Genji mumbles. “We could give them back.”

“What did you steal from her?” Hanzo interrupts.

“Sleeping darts,” Genji and Ana say as one.

“Sleep- is that what you used on me?!” Hanzo demands indignantly. “You used stolen darts-!”

“I knew how they worked!” Genji interrupts, voice and posture defensive. “She got me with it the first time!”

“So you-!”

“We needed them for-!”

“Boys!” Morrison interrupts sharply. “Enough. Genji, do you have Ana's items with you?”

“They're in the green backpack,” Genji mutters.

Ana takes the initiative, stalking over to begin rifling through said pack. After a few moments of rummaging, she produces a thin black case with a metal handle; she pops it open, and a handful of syringes filled with purple fluid lay within the case. Ana counts them off, then makes a noise of irritation. “You've already used five of them?”

“We needed them,” Genji repeats, sounding wounded. “And I thought you were Talon.”

Ana snaps the case shut. “At least they are recovered. I was afraid Talon was going to reverse-engineer the formula.”

“If it is any consolation,” Zenyatta remarks. “They were only used on agents. And Hanzo,” he adds.

“Yes, and me,” Hanzo repeats sarcastically.

“Enough,” Morrison repeats. “This is finished. It's time to get moving again.” He shoulders his rifle again, jerking his neck in the direction of the horizon. “We need to reach the drop point before dark.”

Ana stows the case in her own pack. “Very well. Lead the way. But I would prefer to have those three in front of me.”

Genji has the grace to look abashed; Zenyatta's faceplates betray nothing as the two shuffle and glide to follow closely behind Morrison with Ana at their back. Hanzo's merely bemused at the spectacle – perhaps his brother really does feel bad about stealing from the women. Or maybe it's more about using her gadgets on his own brother.
“Before we leave,” Hanzo adds, stepping over to Morrison. “May I have the Blackwatch communicator back? We have left the city, and I would like to report in.”

Morrison casts a purposeful gaze over the assembled group, then looks back at Hanzo to perk a disbelieving brow. Hanzo's ears pin slightly at the unsaid remark before he clears his throat. “Yes, I am sure. It will be brief.” And, he plans to trail at the back.

A shrug before Morrison fishes the device out of his breast pocket and tosses it over; Hanzo has to stumble to catch it. His legs are sort and not moving as well as he'd like, but there's little to do but keep walking. He'd rather die than ask anyone assembled to carry him.

There's some hesitation as Hanzo holds the device in his palm – he'd desired it on instinct, but there's trepidation to be had. He and McCree had ended on an... awkward note. Hanzo knows his confession had been met by reciprocation. He knows McCree cares for him deeply. That the man had missed him and had already forgiven him; that there'd been nothing to forgive, and the traitors' actions are known. Hanzo knows deep down that he'd be just as eager to shower McCree in affections, had he been alone.

But he's not, and embarrassment holds Hanzo back. Morrison had been right to be skeptical; Hanzo doesn't want a repeat of their conversation to be held in front of the rest of the group. Perhaps if Hanzo keeps his tone and words professional, McCree will pick up on his stiffness and get the hint. Hopefully.

After a breath to steady himself, Hanzo flicks the communicator on and holds down button to speak. “McCree? We have exited the city.”

There's no immediate answer, so Hanzo takes his hand off the button and leans in to listen. But there's no background noise this time – no panting breaths or muffled yells. Just complete silence on the other end.

Strange. Hanzo purses his lips as an unsettling feeling tightens his chest. McCree had been so eager to pick up the comm the first time; it had sounded like the man had literally run people over to reach it. Why would he abandon it somewhere now? Why is he not waiting at the other end?

“McCree?” Hanzo tries, a little louder. “McCree?”

Nothing. Not even a gust of static to falsely raise Hanzo's hopes.

“No answer?” Mirembe's fallen back to match his pace; Hanzo glances up at the woman and shakes his head.

“Your friend probably just left to report,” Mirembe says with a shrug. “Try again in a bit, and do not look so worried.”

“I am not worried,” Hanzo snaps, shoving the communicator into his pocket.

He is.
Chapter 44

Hanzo had expected a fleet of cars to await them, hidden beneath a layer of dust in the dried-out fields surrounding the city.

Instead, he's greeted by the sight of an immense plane; it's twice as big as anything Blackwatch had ported Hanzo onto and far from being unmarked, it bears a gleaming portrait of the Overwatch logo. At least a dozen guards are posted around it, all wearing the same crest and keeping rifles held aloft. They turn in eerie, practiced unison towards the approaching party; hands snap up in a salute when Morrison lowers his hood and begins issuing orders.

“Subtle,” Hanzo remarks.

“We had to park far away regardless,” Ana replies. “And Jack does like to ride in style.”

“It was the most practical solution,” Morrison counters.

Hanzo doubts that. Coming on-board with the rest, he finds the plane is even more extravagant inside than its exterior. It's outfitted almost like a commercial flight with plush seats and screens outfitted into the back of chairs; there's a lounge area near the emergency exits, and only in the far, far back does Hanzo glimpse the beginnings of a weaponry dock. It's stylish, sleek and must have cost a small fortune; Hanzo immediately sympathizes with Reyes' distaste for the group. Blackwatch doesn't even have cable.

“It is very posh,” Hanzo says lightly, lowering himself into a seat. “The taxpayers signed off on this?”

“Not the taxpayers,” Morrison replies. He's walking past, heading to the back to stow his rifle. “A gift from the Numbani consulate for the incident three years ago.”

“The city had a lot to offer,” Singh says; he's putting away a pack in an overhead bin. “Very generous.”

Hanzo isn't familiar with the Numbani incident – how could he be? Three years ago still found him in a cell. Regardless, he isn't interested. “That is nice,” he says curtly. “How long until the plane reaches Blackwatch Headquarters? Have you managed to contact Reyes?”

“No, but I don't think we've tried.” Ana's the one speaking now; the woman settles into a seat in the row across from Hanzo. “Did I not see Jack give you the communicator?”

“McCree is not answering.” Hanzo shifts unhappily in his seat. “I was hoping you had another way.”

“Jesse?” Ana says curiously; a small smile appears on her lips. “What is that little charmer doing with the comm?”

Hanzo doesn't care for her tone. “Commander Reyes asked him to monitor us.”

“Why isn't Gabriel doing it himself?” Ana's gaze is curious; Hanzo likes that even less.

“Perhaps he is busy,” Hanzo answers shortly. He fishes the comm out of his pocket, holds the button down. “McCree?” Another long pause and more silence. Hanzo huffs, trying to let irritation quell the anxiety threatening to creep up on him. “Perhaps that is why no one is answering. They
are busy.”

Ana makes a thoughtful noise. “They knew we were coming. I can't think of anything that ranks higher than Talon-related debriefing for Gabriel. Especially since his own men were involved.” She leans over the side of her chair as Morrison passes by, heading towards the cabin. “Jack. Have you heard from Reyes, or any member of Blackwatch? Do you know if they've left on a mission?”

“No.” Morrison shakes his head, continuing past them. “Reyes said he would wait for our arrival. They're not going anywhere.”

Hanzo's lips thin as he settles back in his seat – then Genji appears at his side, dropping down into the one next to him. Ana gives his brother a cursory glance before leaning away, apparently not wanting to continue the conversation. It appears the woman is holding a grudge.

“Is all well?” Genji asks in Japanese. His golden goggles are pushed high up on his face, resting atop his brow. “You seem tense, Brother. We've cleared the city, you know.”

“I am not concerned about the city,” Hanzo mutters back in the same tongue. He glances down at the comm in his hand, then irritably stuffs it back into his pocket. “Blackwatch is not answering. I do not like it.”

“Why?”

“Because they should be answering.” Hanzo glances around the plane; it seems everyone is finding their seats, stowing their items away. There's a distant rumble – likely the plane's engines starting up for flight. “But I suppose McCree does have a habit of turning his comm off.”

It's an easy remark, one Hanzo makes without thinking – it even soothes him a bit, remembering the man's tendencies. Genji, however, seems intrigued. “Ma-Cree? Who is that?”

Ah. Hanzo's lips purse; he forces his face neutral. “One of the Blackwatch operatives,” he replies as casually as he can. “Just a man in charge of hearing us report in.”

“Just a man?” Genji quips. He's watching Hanzo closely, who has to struggle to keep his composure. Genji was always revoltingly good at this - finding Hanzo's weaknesses, his slip-ups in speech. “What a strange way of describing him. As if he is unimportant?”

“I am sure all operatives are important to Blackwatch,” Hanzo replies tonelessly.

It's too late. Genji's got a grin on his face that's all teeth; like a shark that's caught the scent of blood. “You are in Blackwatch.”

“Yes,” Hanzo replies tersely. His eyes close as he pinches his brow. “Get to your point.”

“If you are in Blackwatch, would that not mean this operative is important to you?”

Hanzo can't smother the massive sigh that leaves him, rubbing his palm over his face as his nose wrinkles in irritation. Always. It's always like this. Why is Genji so adept at this nonsense? Is it a sibling telepathy? The dragons subtly communicating to each other? There's nothing to be gained from lying to Genji, not at this point – but that does not mean Hanzo wants to discuss it. “He is a friend.”

“He is a boy who is a friend?”

“I am not doing this,” Hanzo snaps immediately, lowering his hand to shoot Genji a glare. “You
are acting like a child.”

“Is it not more adult to be honest with each other?” Genji quips back, all smiles.

“I am tired.” Hanzo rolls onto his side, putting his back to Genji. “I am going to sleep until we land.” As if on cue, the plane jolts and begins to move; the engines roar with new life as the frame shudders.

“Hanzo.” There's a prod against his shoulders; Hanzo shifts away, but it persists. Genji has the nerve to laugh. “Hanzo, now you are being childish. Tell me about him.”

Hanzo will do no such thing. He keeps his back turned, ignoring his brother's pokes and prods and little wheedling remarks.

“Are you embarrassed of him?”

“No.”

The response is automatic, defensive and absolutely the wrong call. Hanzo can feel his brother's delight even through closed eyes; the pokes on his backs become erratic, energetic thumps. “You are!” Genji exclaims – at least he has the decency to keep his voice hushed now. “Hanzo!”

“I am not.” And he's not, really. Hanzo knows McCree, knows the person he is and how kind and thoughtful the man can be – how talented, intelligent, and loving he is beneath his surface. It is his surface and the first impression he makes that worries Hanzo. He knows what Genji will say about that hat, knows he will no doubt suffer teasing little remarks about his tastes once more.

“Tell me about him,” Genji repeats, all but kneading his palms into Hanzo's back now. “Please. You never tell me about your friends.”

It's an attempt to guilt, and had Genji not led with teasing, Hanzo might have fallen for it. “I do not have to tell you about him,” Hanzo replies shortly, attempting to shrug off Genji's hands. “Communicator failings or not, he will likely be there to meet us when we arrive.”

He damn well better.

“How will I know him? What does he look like?”

“You will know.” Hanzo drones. Spirits help him, Genji will know. He'll pick McCree's sunny smile and adoring eyes out like a hawk, and Hanzo's never going to hear the end of it.

“I cannot wait to land,” Genji declares.

And despite his brother's unavoidable teasing, Hanzo cannot help but fondly think the same.

Falling asleep had been easy; the plane's engines had hummed a droning, repetitive beat into Hanzo's ears that had lulled him into dozing. Once, there'd been a loud noise that had made him stir – but then someone had lain a thin blanket over his shoulders and he'd quickly fallen back into slumber. He'd like to sleep more, perhaps another hour or ten going off his body's weariness; he'd do just that, except someone is gently jostling his shoulder.
“Brother?”

Hanzo grunts unattractively, hoping Genji will get the hint.

“Very becoming, but we have landed,” Genji continues in Japanese. “It's time to get up.”

Hanzo's grunt turns into a groan as he cracks open an eye. He's still faced away from his brother; his bleary gaze falls on the plane's window. There's no sky or clouds to be seen, just a glimpse of a tarmac and a familiar view of green and rustling grass.

Oh. Hanzo sits up a little straighter, shrugging off the blanket as he leans closer to squint. The sky is overcast, not filled with puffy white clouds like before – but he knows this place. He recognizes the little spruce trees lining the walkway between a perfectly maintained lawn, and perhaps more notably, the giant Overwatch logo on the building the path leads to.

A Blackwatch entrance. His first Blackwatch entrance.

“Oh,” Hanzo remarks. “I know this place.”

“You do?” Hanzo glances over, but Genji's no longer seated; his brother is standing, fully cloaked in his disguise and shouldering the golf bag used to contain his sword. “That's a relief.”

“Why?” Hanzo looks around the plane to get his bearings, and he's surprised to find it's relatively empty. Ana, Morrison, the snipers – everyone has disappeared, save for Singh and Zenyatta. The latter seem to be engaged in some sort of card game, though Hanzo's a little unnerved at how the omnic makes the cards float in the air.

“Because,” Genji replies, drawing Hanzo's attention back, “I plan to go inside. If you are familiar with the layout, that will make things easier.”

“Where is Overwatch?” Hanzo queries, arching his back to stretch and grimace. “Why are we not going in with them?”

“They already entered. They said they simply planned to get the formalities of our arrival out of the way, but it's been nearly half an hour. We don't know where they are.”

That wakes Hanzo sharply. “What? What do you mean?”

Genji shrugs. “They went in, but they haven't come out. Singh stayed behind to guard us-”

Singh gives a two fingered wave without looking up from his cards. Apparently the man can pick his name out of the string of Japanese.

“Yes, him. Anyway, it's been quite some time. Zenyatta has said he will stay behind, but I would like to go in and see what's taking so long.”

Hanzo shuffles sideways out of his seat; Genji steps back to accommodate him as Hanzo struggles to stand. “It is likely nothing. The commanders fight like cats and dogs. They are likely still warming up their fuming.”

Still, it's a little disappointing to glance outside and not see McCree waiting for him. Perhaps Reyes is keeping the man on a tighter leash.

“The agent guarding us does not want us to leave,” Genji says, carefully omitting Singh's name this time. “Perhaps you can sway him?”
“Of course,” Hanzo replies. He bends slightly to straighten his shorts before brushing past Genji, heading for the north-most exit.

“No leaving, alright?” Singh calls from his seat. The man hasn't even bothered glancing up.

Genji's giving Hanzo a curious look, but he's following after him. Hanzo's ignoring Singh; he searches out the door's handle before giving it a hard push – the mechanism unlocks, and the door swings open.

“Hey!” Now Singh's paying attention, rapidly discarding his cards and getting to his feet; Zenyatta doesn't even glance up from his seat. “I just said-”

“I know what you said,” Hanzo says in crisp English, turning his head to give the man an unimpressed look. “It does not matter. I am not under Overwatch. I am under Blackwatch, and this Blackwatch operative is back on his base. So I am going back to my Blackwatch room, where my Blackwatch commander will call for me if I am needed further.”

Singh looks taken aback; perhaps it's Hanzo's purposeful overuse of his organization's name. “You can't...”

“I can, and it is not your fault. It is merely a matter of not outranking me.” Hanzo turns away to begin descending the plane's small staircase; there's a muffled snort of delight from Genji before his brother follows suit.

“What if he comes after us?” Genji asks, voice thick with amusement.

“He will not,” Hanzo replies easily. “He will be too hesitant. I have already seen men flattened by superior officers in these organizations.”

“Do you really outrank him?”

Hanzo shrugs. “No idea.”

Genji’s amused titters follow Hanzo all the way into the building.
In hindsight, the stormy clouds and ominous rumblings of thunder overhead should have tipped Hanzo off that something is wrong – even if it is just old, clan superstition. The ancestral dragons are angry, they’d say. Their displeasure will split the heavens until the wrong is righted.

_Do you have nothing to confess, Young Master? Nothing is troubling you?_

Hanzo'd expected to find the interior of the faux-Overwatch building as he had before. There's supposed to be bustling operatives in fake Overwatch garb milling around the building, clipboards in hands and eyes on their work. There should at least be some guards at their posts, and perhaps the Overwatch team themselves held up by the latter.

Hanzo finds no one.

There's no damage to the entrance, the security desk – no scratches on the floors or walls that look new, at least. There's no notice, no flyers posted around to indicate why the building might be so empty - it's as if every operative had simply vanished into thin air. The lights are all off, save for a few dim florescents that seem to be running non-stop, and the halls he and Genji walk down are silent; the only sound comes from the metallic pats of Hanzo's feet.

“Is it always so quiet?” Genji muses.

“No,” Hanzo murmurs back. There's a sinking, anxious feeling twisting in his stomach and each empty room they pass only makes it worse.

_Looks like they've evacuated._

First Talon, now Blackwatch's upper base. Hanzo's pressed the comm a few more times, calling into the minuscule mic in hopes of an answer – but McCree is as silent as ever. No hint of a breath or any sound can be heard on the other end. It's like the man has disappeared, along with everyone else in Hanzo's path. Genji, mercifully, doesn't tease Hanzo about the calls this time; his brother looks equally tense, as if he sees right through Hanzo's meager attempt at stoicism.

Where has everyone gone – and why? Neither of them know, and empty halls offer no answer.

It takes Hanzo several tries to locate the elevator; his memory of the place is fuzzier than he'd realized. He stumbles across it almost on accident; he rounds a corner and the vision of the contraption springs into view. His startled revelation at the sight is magnified tenfold when suddenly there's a sharp bark that makes his ears pin and a glimpse of a gun swung in his direction.

Genji's sword is out in a flash of steel and Hanzo bares his fangs – before both of their hackles lower, along with the gun. It's only Morrison, pointing his rifle's barrel back at the floor with an expression of frustration. Ana and Mirembe are behind him, along with the rest of the snipers; the party seems to be stalled in front of the elevator doors. “Why are you two here?” Morrison demands, straightening up to look authoritative. “You were told to wait on the plane.”

“Why are you five here?” Hanzo shoots back immediately, brow furrowing in distrust. “It has been a long time. Where is everyone?”

“We don't know.” Ana's the one answering now, physically brushing Morrison aside to speak to Hanzo. “I can't reach Gabriel. Topside should never be vacant, and if there's a problem, he should have called me.”
“He should have called *Overwatch,*” Morrison corrects.

Ana ignores him. “We need to get down there, but there's no one here to escort us or give us access. Do you have the Blackwatch code for the elevator?”

Hanzo hesitates – apparently visibly, based on how Ana's eyes narrow. “I did not pay attention to it,” he mutters finally, prompting a sea of groans up from the snipers. “Could you not try a few combinations?”

“Three errors sends you plummeting to your death,” Mirembe replies. “Same with all Blackwatch entrances. I hear each one has a different means of dying.”

Oh.

“So you see why we're stuck.” Morrison is Shouldering his rifle, thin lips pursed in displeasure. “I've called our own headquarters, but they haven't managed to get a line connected to Blackwatch either. The Blackwatch operatives responding are stationed at locations outside of here, and they haven't heard anything from here either. We've got Overwatch teams already en-route as back-up, but I want to be sure there's an absolute problem before I call in a raid.”

Hanzo cocks his head towards the elevator. “Have you tried pressing the button to open the doors?”

“Of course.” Mirembe shrugs. “Doesn't budge. Guessing we need the access code, and it's not safe to try and force it.”

Hanzo shakes his head. “That is not right,” he says carefully, turning over the memories in his head. “I may not remember the code, but I do remember McCree and the others simply wheeling me inside. The code is used on the interior. The doors should open without issue.”

“Then the power's out,” Ana supplies, gesturing at the dimly-lit halls. “These might be from a back-up generator. It seems that is why they've left.”

“Or perhaps someone is blocking off the entrances,” Morrison mutters.

“It might be both.” Hanzo glances back in surprise at Genji; the rest of the party does the same. Hanzo's brother merely shrugs his shoulders before motioning at the elevator. “If you cannot reach this Gabriel or any others, it may be that the power lines are down - but we should be cautious. It could be this base of yours has been compromised, and is without power everywhere. Maybe that is why no one is answering.”

“No,” Morrison counters sharply. “I was- that was a joke at Commander Reyes' expense. Blackwatch has better security tech than we do. The base would not just go offline – they have backups, emergency channels.”

“And if someone knew how to disable it?” Genji challenges. “Talon had spies within Blackwatch; it is why we called for you. And now Talon has slipped away and no one answers here? I cannot be the first to think of this.”

An unpleasant chill runs down Hanzo's spine.

“You think of it because it's irrational,” Mirembe cuts in. “Talon is not idiotic enough to attack Blackwatch outright. And for what? Hanzo isn't even here. They wouldn't alert us to something being wrong, like-!” Mirembe waves an impatient hand at the empty halls, the lights, the elevator. “This!”
“Enough!” Ana interrupts sharply. “This is getting us nowhere.” Morrison and Mirembe fall silent; the other masked snipers seem entirely unaffected. “Stop arguing and think. If we could disable the security in place, I could get the elevator running with my Yeti. The true problem is that we don't have a way in, not with all of Reyes precautions in check.”

Hanzo swallows down his surge of nerves, trying to focus on Ana instead. “Yeti?”

“A portable battery pack I carry,” Ana explains. “Solar-powered. There's plug-in ports for this exact reason on all of our devices – but again, I can't get in. Hanzo, can you think of any other way to open the elevator safely? Something Blackwatch might have taught you, or at least another way in?”

Hanzo almost blurts out No before he thinks better of it; instead, he closes his eyes and tries to center his mind. True, he has no idea of any Blackwatch 'elevator secrets' or where any other access points might be - but he should at least attempt to think of something. Genji's theories are making him nervous; Overwatch is so sure he's wrong, and Hanzo wants to believe them. Perhaps it is merely the communications that are down, some sort of glitch in the power.

Power.

Eri stirs within Hanzo, as if woken by the revelation. There's a speck of blue beneath Hanzo's eyes; he's not dipped into the darkness, not fully, but he can hear the dragon rumbling in his ears.

Can you do it alone?

I have never tried. Eri's voice is considering, curious. But if you maintain contact, it should be within my grasp. Should I fail, I am certain Ami will intervene to save you.

Certain?

Fairly certain.

Comforting.

When Hanzo opens his eyes again, everyone is looking at him. Ana looks concerned – Morrison and Mirembe, suspicious. Only Genji looks curious instead of cautious. “Well?”

“I have one idea,” Hanzo replies carefully.

Elevator rides have never been Hanzo's favorite. Being crammed into one alongside stony-faced Overwatch operatives and an anxious brother is not making his consensus on them any more positive.

Hanzo knows Genji's constant reassuring, questioning murmurs are just him trying to be thoughtful and attentive. Hanzo's all too aware that Genji's relationship with draconic powers is tainted; he cannot shake the image of his brother, fanged, snarling and wracked with shivers in the small closet. Although... Genji must have some proficiency, Hanzo reasons. It's almost laughable now, to
recall how Reyes had connected the dragonwork, the charred hearts and dead men in Talon areas to Genji. The man had been correct, in a way – Genji had been the one wielding the power. He is simply not the monstrosity in armor.

Still, the spirits are never... kind, to their hosts. The small use of Eri's energies had been taxing enough on Hanzo to send Eri reaching through the walls to disable the ridiculous amounts of security Reyes had strapped into its panels. Eri's consumption of their lingering electricity had sent sparks and smoky tendrils out from behind the panel – smoke that wafted out through the slit of the elevator doors. After that image, it had taken much coaxing to convince the Overwatch operatives that no, the trap function was no longer working and no, there was no risk of it plummeting them to their death. The effort had left Hanzo wiped, and he still had had to be the first to pull open the disabled doors on the wretched contraption to convince the others to follow.

Luckily, his part had ended with that. Hanzo could simply lean back against the wall, let Ana hook up her ridiculous device, and reassure Genji for the hundredth time that yes, he will be alright, and yes, he does have a headache forming. The latter is more from Genji’s good-intentioned pestering, but Hanzo doesn't say it.

“I did not know you could do that,” Genji had murmured quietly.

The admittance had sent a flicker of guilt through Hanzo. They'd never really discussed their dragons in their youth. Genji had been overjoyed and boastful when his own had strengthened enough to speak to him; Hanzo distinctly remembers the flash of eerie green light that appeared when Genji had carved through a mannequin to display it. Months later, he'd begun to see traces of the dragon's fire and fury behind his brother's eyes whenever he and Genji squabbled.

Hanzo had not been as open about his own. Eri and Ami are quiet and dignified; they'd shown cursory interest in their spirit brother, but not much of one. He had felt no need to show them or their abilities off, even at Genji's coaxing. Leaving his powers unknown to the world had made him more dangerous to his enemies; only a few members of the clan had been privy to the knowledge.

Of course, a few was all it had taken to subdue and cage him.

For now, however, they ride in silence. Hanzo is leaning back, letting a corner of the elevator support with closed eyes and measured breathing – anxiety is creeping up on him again, and the cramped, stuffy quarters are not helping. Genji has mercifully stepped back to give him some space, but there's not much; even with physical distance, the tension in the air is overpowering.

Overwatch is concerned. Hanzo could see it before he closed his eyes, can smell it in the sweat beading on Morrison's skin. It's repugnant, but worse than that, it's telling. Something is wrong, something is amiss that Overwatch has not handled before. Hanzo is new to Blackwatch; Morrison and the rest might not be part of it, but they've worked with them, they know Reyes. Blackwatch shouldn't be offline – not above-ground, and certainly not below.

But it could still be a simple power outage. It could be nothing is truly amiss, and Talon had evacuated to escape notice and wrath. It could be just that, and nothing more. Hanzo is trying his hardest to convince himself of it.

There's a shudder from the elevator, then an outright halt. Morrison and the rest gather themselves as if to disembark. Hanzo merely adjusts himself, bracing. “Wait,” he calls to them.

Then, the violent, sideways lurch. It's comical to watch the Strike-Commander of Overwatch stumble into his men and accidentally knock an elbow against Ana's side. The woman scowls,
rubbing the spot and adjusting herself as the rest of the agents try to get their balance again; Hanzo allows himself a small smile. “It will only be a few minutes more,” he tells them, trying to keep the amusement out of his voice. “The lift goes sideways here.”

“So we've noticed,” a sniper mutters.

“Look sharp.” Morrison's straightening back up and inspecting his rifle. “We're here to scout only. Back-up's on standby.” The commander fishes a small device out of his pocket, pressing the button twice before stowing it back in his coat. “They're on twenty-minute stand-by, starting now.”

“It's probably nothing.” Mirembe's tensed shoulders betray her casual tone. “It's Blackwatch. They can handle themselves.”

The memory of McCree's proficiency on the training range surfaces in Hanzo's mind – it's a comfort, even a small one.

The soothing thought does not last.

It starts off small – a sharp, screeching sound. At first, Hanzo thinks he's just hearing the creaking of the elevator. None of his companions look alarmed, so he brushes the noise off. His ears are overtuned – it's likely nothing. But the sound persists and changes; Hanzo's ears prick up at what he thinks is a clatter, a clash. A raised voice, so faint he can barely make it out – but it has to be raised, has to be screaming if he can make it out from here.

Then gunfire. Unmistakable and almost incessant as the elevator travels onward and draws ever closer to its destination. The rest of the party has begun picking it up too; curious glances at Hanzo's pricked up, swiveling ears had been replaced with looks of unmistakable concern and unease. An explosion of sound – quite possibly a literal explosion – rocks the elevator, and for a terrifying moment, Hanzo thinks the contraption might stop, might trap them all inside under a pile of rubble. But the machine gives a terrible groan and metallic screeching and presses onward, even if the trawl seems to be a little bumpier.

They're nearly upon the exit now. Hanzo knows they must, because the sounds are only getting more thunderous and ominous. Men are shouting above them, their words drowned out by the hail of gunfire and echoing rumbles. A hellish, guttural roar pierces through the din just as the elevator slows to a stop.

The dragons stir.

**Here.**

“Mother,” Genji whispers hoarsely.

Something snaps within Hanzo. New energy, new purpose that is not his own have him moving, almost ripping the elevator doors apart as he stumbles out to face the caverns.

Chaos. It's the first and only word that can describe the indescribable; the sheer pandemonium stretching out before Hanzo leaves him momentarily, physically stunned. Every passageway is choked with men and women with Blackwatch logos emblazoned on their guns and gear, firing down on masked – silver masked, Talon masked invaders.

*Can you not hear, boy?! There are invaders in our home! Your home!*

Rifle fire glows like bursts of flickering flames in the dark. The almost lightless cavern is being flooded by the noises of gunfire that's being equally exchanged on both sides – minuscule rockets
and grenades are flying every which way as small explosions burst on cliffs, walls, and shoot down passageways. The scent of blood is soaking the air and gagging Hanzo's breaths; corpses are lain out, smashed and broken and some left behind to dangle, impaled on jagged rocks.

Another, louder explosion draws Hanzo's eyes up and up to the dome above, the clouded skies behind it a feeble source of light to illuminate the caverns. There's a crack in the barrier, the protection that McCree had boasted of. Hanzo sees the wound immediately – ugly and jagged, a scar that's been carved into the translucent material and ripped open with crumbling pieces still falling down. Ropes are dangling through the opening, swaying precariously over the cliffs; Hanzo can see more men, Talon men rappelling down to aid their comrades.

They do not matter.

The thought is unbidden, forceful and angry; Ami's voice is speaking to him, raw and more terrible than Hanzo's ever heard.

She is here. Find her.

Hanzo can feel Genji's hands upon him, grasping his shoulders; Morrison and his team are saying words he cannot hear, cannot even tell if they're directed at him. They sound frightened, and some are angrier than others. They are five, and what Hanzo is looking out across is a war.

Find her!

Find him! Eri is joining in now, voice filled with fear. Your mate is in danger!

Find her!

Find him!

FIND THEM.

A shot rings out close to Hanzo's ears; one of the Overwatch operatives has fired into the fray. The crack of the shot is like a signal Hanzo hadn't known he'd been waiting for. He's running forward, Genji's hands thrown off with ease as Hanzo hurtles down the path towards the passageways. The scent of gore and death is choking his senses; he can't be sure where he's heading but he has to. He has to move forward, he has to find them. The dragons are pressing him onward, forcing his legs to move with their singular thoughts. He might be scrabbling on all fours at this point. He doesn't know. He can't tell, can't care.

Running forward, heading deeper into the caverns is the only thing that matters. The dragons clash within, snarling and struggling for control – but as long as they agree on this one thing, Hanzo can keep running.

As long as he keeps moving, he will find them.
Chapter 46

Trying to navigate Blackwatch Headquarters is akin to running blind – and in a way, Hanzo's doing just that.

The stench of smoke, blood and gore clogs his nose and burns his eyes; searching out McCree by scent is impossible, and by sight, even less so. Whatever feeble source of power had kept the above-ground base flickering on does not reach here; the hallways boasting sconces full of flame Hanzo had scoffed at are dead and lifeless. Only the tiny orange lights set into the floor provide any illumination – no doubt built in for emergency evacuation in case of an outage.

With his senses next to useless, memories are what guide Hanzo through the base. Even in darkness, weeks – has it been months? – of learning the paths, figuring out what slopes to take for his chair is proving useful; when he's not certain which turn to take, he lets instinct take him down what he deems most familiar. Ami is almost mindless in her frenzy beneath his skin, agitated and furious at every echoed howl and snarl that reaches Hanzo's swiveling ears from somewhere inside the base. Yet it is Eri who holds the power now; the dragon has formed a clear goal in his mind, a definite area to search. That's where Hanzo lets himself be taken first.

When Hanzo finds the corridor to their room, it's empty. The fighting has not reached it; the Blackwatch operatives housed within its rooms are likely barricaded inside or have joined their comrades in the fray. When Hanzo pounds on the door, there's no answer. The fingerprint scanner has no power, so Eri encourages Hanzo to do the next best thing. Hanzo's claws find the corners of the door to grip and pull – and Hanzo's surprised at how easily the wood and metal bends, breaks, and shatters beneath his fingers. A fierce tug has pulled the door off its hinges entirely; startled, Hanzo heaves it away and watches in disbelief as the piece bounces off the walls to clatter away on the floor.

"By the spirits," a voice coughs. “You can do that too? What haven't they gifted you?”

Hanzo whips his head around, teeth bared – but it's only Genji, just his brother with a sword at his side and wearing a look that's somewhere between impressed and disbelieving. Hanzo can smell blood on him, fresh and potent; his eyes are drawn back down to the sword and by the dim light of the floor, Hanzo can see that the dark wetness decorating the blade.

"You-?"

“I had a feeling you did not notice I was following.” Genji's breath is rushed, uneven; he's panting, but trying to hide it. “Did you even notice the men you ran by near the entrance?”

Men? Hanzo had not noticed any men. Perhaps he'd become tunnel-visioned - literally.

“Why did you run off? What are you looking for?” Genji motions vaguely to the door. “A weapon, a person?”

Person. Hanzo's neck snaps back towards the door, but he doesn't know why he'd expected anything. If McCree had been here, Hanzo would have been barreled over, wrapped in a hug – acknowledged at least. Their room is as empty as the corridor; it's a small relief to peer through the darkness and find no hint of a struggle. When Hanzo stumbles in to test the bed, it's made and there's no hint of ominous blood stains or shrapnel. When he runs his hand along the nightstand, two fingers catch on something. He pulls it up towards his face, but he can't quite make it out in the darkness. Still, it feels familiar; rubbing a thumb over it and finding a button in the center
solidifies the image in Hanzo's mind.

A Blackwatch communicator. The twin to Hanzo's own.

It's hard to think rationally with two dragons snarling their displeasure beneath Hanzo's skin, but he tries to focus for the moment. McCree has left the communicator behind. If he'd been here for the attack, he'd have called Hanzo on it. The man would have given some warning, some message. But he hadn't. He'd left it, willingly left behind his connection to Hanzo because no doubt, he'd been called somewhere else. And there's only one person Hanzo can think of with the power to pull McCree away from him.

“Commander,” he rasps; his own voice sounds foreign and hoarse in his ears.

“Morrison?” Genji supplies.

“No.”

Reyes.

Reyes has never been any easy man to find, and Hanzo's starting to hate him for it.

Hanzo's already torn half the base apart – at least, it feels as such. The massive caverns feel claustrophobic in his panicked haze; walls seem to be closing as he forces open room after room to no success. The now-empty armory, the shooting range – Hanzo had even ripped off the door of Reyes' personal bedroom to find all three areas empty. A frantic search had turned up nothing, not even a hint of where the man had gone or where McCree had followed him to.

He can still hear Mitra's calls, shrieking and pulled out of the rumblings of the base with sharp clarity. He hasn't run across her yet.

He's not sure what he'll do if he does.

The dragons have reached a fevered frenzy, and Hanzo feels as if he's being run like a machine; he barely registers what's happening beneath the haze of slashing claws and cutting his way through those who stumble into his path. Blackwatch insignias are the only thing that stays his claws from the throat of another – there've been no faces he recognizes, not yet. Not on the living, and mercifully, not on the dead.

He's in the mess hall now, overturning tables and smashing his way through a section of Talon soldiers that have decided to hole up here. There's others too – hostages or prisoners, Hanzo doesn't know – but they're wearing Blackwatch uniforms and had had guns trained on their heads moments before Hanzo had arrived. The element of surprise had worked in Hanzo's favor on that end; the Talon intruders had been startled, thrown off-guard as they'd turned around. They'd been easy prey for his fangs and claws, the dragons beneath his skin all too eager to devour, kill, hunt those standing in their way. He's never killed like this before, never felt his spirits pull life into him from another as blue energy sparks from the fallen's wounds.

It feels hot, electric and dizzying.
He likes it.

A small beeping sound pulls Hanzo back from the brink; he finds himself wrist-deep in the chest of a dying Talon soldier before the sound had cut through his fog and turned his head towards the source. Slowly, he picks out Genji standing behind him – Genji who'd been on his heels, Genji following him loyally through the chaos and cutting down those who tried to flank and oh, even in this hell Hanzo feels a fresh new surge of affection forming. His brother's blade and clothes are wet and soaked with blood; in his coated hands is a tiny device with a lit up screen. Genji seems to be listening closely to it.

“What?” Hanzo croaks, voice still throaty and raw – whether from emotion or the dragons leaking through, he cannot tell.

“Morrison,” Genji says, ear against the device and brow wrinkled in concentration. “Hang on.”

Hanzo can feel the surprise cross his face. “When-?”

Genji doesn't reply immediately; it's only when the message seems to have ended and he removes the device from his ear that he responds. “It was given to me shortly after you bolted. A way to keep in touch and some short-range GPS functionality.”

A good idea. Hanzo wishes he'd thought of it before dashing around on all fours in a blind frenzy. “And-?”

“Says he found the Blackwatch Commander and-”

“Where?” Hanzo snarls, then flinches – that voice is definitely not his own. Too deep, angry and guttural.

Genji inspects the device's screen before gesturing down a hall. “Well, they're that way, but-”

Hanzo's already bolting in the direction; he's halfway to the door before a cry pierces the room. “Wait!”

Hanzo had expected it to be Genji, but when he turns around his brother looks as surprised as him. Their gazes travel to the group of Blackwatch agents; most of the operatives are huddled, tending to a wounded woman. One man is standing up to face them, but Hanzo can't quite make out his face in the light.

“You're – Hanzo, right?”

That's a surprise. Hanzo's brow lifts – this man's timbre is unfamiliar, tinged with a Spanish accent that's unlike Reyes' own. “How do you know me?” he asks curtly, voice more of a growl than he'd like.

The man takes a cautious step forward, like he's testing the waters. “Clara told me about a man graced with dragon scales and claws. That is you, is it not?”

“I would not say graced,” Hanzo mutters. “Who are you?”

“Ramón,” the man answers.

Ah.

“I know of you,” Hanzo admits begrudgingly, clearing his throat to try and smooth his voice.
“Where is Clara?”

“I was hoping you had seen her.” Ramón's tone turns desperate. “We were separated on the first hit. She said she was going to find the Commander, but I-”

“First hit?” Genji's speaking now; Hanzo's grateful for the chance to save his voice. “What happened here? Why is your base offline?”

“We don't know. We can't check the cameras either, but someone or someones breached the security surrounding the power cores. They took us offline and set up a jamming signal to specifically block the Blackwatch channels – none of our communicators have been working, and cell phones are useless this deep underground. But whoever did this had to have already been inside – the rest of Talon arrived only after the black-out.”

“Rats,” Hanzo says gruffly; Ramón merely nods.

“Overwatch is en-route,” Genji replies, flicking his blade to dislodge some of the blood. “You'll have back-up soon.”

“Thank you.” Ramón glances back at the other operatives. “We'll stay here; hold it down until Overwatch arrives. Though I'm sure the boss won't be happy about that.”

“Reyes will manage,” Hanzo growls. He's already turned away, heading back down the direction Genji had pointed.

“Brother, wait.”

“What now?” Hanzo snarls, whipping his head back around.

Genji, far from frightened, looks mildly annoyed. “We do not have to go to them. Morrison asked to speak to you – he has the Blackwatch commander on the line.” Genji tosses the device towards Hanzo, who quickly catches it in his claws. A wise move. Had Genji held onto it, Hanzo can't be sure he wouldn't have snatched it from his brother's hands.

“Morrison?” Hanzo growls into the mic.

“Guess again. Jesus kid, you swallow some glass?” Reyes voice isn't nearly as confident as his words; Hanzo's ears prick up in concern at the weariness in the man's tone. “Sound like shit.” A hacking cough follows and someone murmurs something in the background.

“You are the same. Where-?”

“Shut up.” It's said with no venom; there's a smacking sound in the background and a grunt, like Reyes is batting something away. “No, fuck off with that, Jack. I'm trying to talk.”

“Lie still.” Ana's voice is sharp and no-nonsense; Reyes lets out an irritable grunt.

“Reyes,” Hanzo snaps.

“Still here.” Another cough, then a snrrrk, like Reyes is trying to clear his nose. “Right. Again, kid, shut up. I need-”

“You need to explain-!” Hanzo says furiously.

“I need.” Reyes interrupts loudly, speaking over him. “I need you to shut up and listen. You have
to go find McCree.”

“I am trying to!”

“Shut.” Another hiss on Reyes' end, followed by a comforting murmur from – Jack? Couldn't be Ana. “Look, kid. I've got a hole in me the size of Gibraltar, talking's hard enough. Don't fucking interrupt.”

“Christ, then stop trying to command. Give me that.” Clara's speaking now; Hanzo feels some of the tension leave his shoulders. Good. She's alright. There's a sound of fumbling, a sharp intake of breath as the comm is passed over – that, or Clara's wrenching it out of the man's grasp. “Hanzo?”

“Yes.”


“No,” Hanzo rasps. And, come to think of it: “Neither is Ramón.” He glances over at said man, who's wearing a look of relief at the sound of his fiancée's voice. “Oh,” Clara says, and Hanzo can hear her relief in that single syllable. “That's – thank you.” She clears her throat. “I can't return the favor. Jesse's gone.”

Hanzo's heart seizes up in his chest as his breath stalls. Something cold and bitter swells in his lungs.

“Not- not gone, gone,” Clara says quickly, as if realizing her mistake. “He- we don't know where. Talon took him. Some big, metal beast thing broke through with the rest of them and, fuck, it took him. He shot it, we all did, it didn't fucking matter. Ripped through, apart,” Clara halts, tripping over her words, “ah, ripped through everyone in its way. Reyes tried to get between – it, it disappeared down the halls – Christ, Hanzo, we need you to find him. Reyes is in bad shape, I couldn't leave him-

Hanzo stopped listening. He couldn't hear her if he tried; the ringing that had started in his ears after Clara's first words has only gotten louder and louder – now, it's deafening. The device is humming in his hands, jittering whenever Clara speaks up; it's meaningless. The words she's saying don't matter. He's heard what counts.

We must find her.

The dragons have finally reached an agreement.

There's a hand on Hanzo's shoulder; Genji's, by the weight and feel. Hanzo knows the gesture is meant to be comforting – or perhaps his brother is merely trying to hold him steady. The dragons are re-aligning inside of him; before, they had been split in purpose, their fury wasted in halves. Now, they are singular and Hanzo feels a dangerous sort of unhinging growing beneath his skin. A crackle of energy and-

A crackle of static. Loud and grating, enough to draw Hanzo out of his momentary daze and back to the communicator. A hiss, clicks and beeps. Hanzo's brow furrows; when had Clara stopped speaking? What is she doing to the comm?

There's a snap, a strange pop. A throat is cleared, followed by a small, unpleasantly familiar titter.

Hanzo's scales bristle.
“Naughty, naughty. Bringing in new lines.” Jepsen's voice is coming on the comm; her tone is amused, steady. “Were you looking for a private conversation?”

Hanzo says nothing; Genji’s grip on his shoulder tightens.

“Hate to cut in, but you've kept everyone waiting long enough, Hanzo. If you want to find your little cowboy, come back to the center. We're waiting up above, me and my Musling. She's left you a present; I think you'll find it easily enough.”

Center – of course. The center of the base.

“Oh, and Genji?”

Hanzo can feel his brother's grip turn vice-like.

“I expect to see you too. I'd like to keep the family together.”

There's another crackle and pop; the line goes mercifully silent before Clara's voice cuts in. “How did that bitch-?”

It's all Hanzo hears. He's already running, leaping over strewn-about chairs and tables as he bolts back through the halls. Genji might be following, might have been left behind. Hanzo can't be certain; can't look back, not now, not yet.

She's left you a present.

It doesn't take long. It's almost seamless the way time and space blends before Hanzo's eyes; he just had to keep moving, keep running and one of the pathways inevitably leads him to the center. The heart of Blackwatch where the waterfall flows and crashes, as if attempting to wipe away the fresh blood and tears painted into the walls of the caverns.

Talon is retreating. Perhaps Jepsen's heard Overwatch is coming, perhaps they've just got what they needed. Soldiers are fleeing the scene; some are disappearing back down the paths, some are climbing the ropes back up through the shattered skylight above. Some are going limp and falling, gunned down as Hanzo's gaze flits over them before moving onward.

I think you'll find it easily enough.

Hanzo takes unsteady steps forward; there's something glinting on the rocks up ahead. It's too small to be a body; the smallest flicker of relief blooms in Hanzo's chest. It's not McCree. It's not the man's corpse.

He draws closer. The gleam is what draws Hanzo's eyes first; it's a splinter of something tiny and metallic, a shard left behind and balanced precariously atop –

An arm. An arm impaled on the jagged rocks of the cliffs, who holds Mitra's scale jabbed into its flesh.

An arm that Hanzo is sickeningly familiar with, whose warmth he'd known when it had cradled him close and stroked lovingly down his back.

An arm whose tattoo he's able to recognize, even in darkness and the stench of death all around him.

Jepsen's voice rings out overhead – magnified and terrible, distorted through electronic speakers.
“Come on up, Hanzo.”

“We're waiting.”
Chapter 47

It's a funny sort of feeling, being lighter on one side.

McCree knows he should be hollering his damn head off, yelping in pain like a newly three-legged dog – shouldn't even be conscious, really. The sight of his arm, or the lack of it as it stands, makes him queasy and light-headed; he's willing to admit the former might have something to do with skipping lunch. He hadn't expected, hadn't dreamed of having to deal with getting Headquarters blacked out and swarmed. Had he expected it, he might have sprung for some empanadas to keep his strength up. Instead, nerves over Hanzo had got the best of him, and now he's bleeding out here in the grassy field above his home with an empty stomach and veins full of poison.

He figures it's poison, at least partly. Whatever Jepsen's shot him full of is keeping his arm from hemorrhaging too badly and his pain mercifully muted - but it itches beneath his skin, leaves him sore and hazy and is making the cloudy, darkened sky swim around like he's downed one too many shots. It's been a long time since he's felt this fogged out of his mind; he reckons maybe he should just be thankful Jepsen'd given him anything at all. Being doped up sure beat the feeling of hot blood, severed flesh and screaming nerves - then again, he's pretty sure she'd just wanted to shut him up to listen.

It's going to be wonderful, you know? All of my little Shimadas, together again. And you're the one who's going to bring them to me, the little trap that's going to keep them at my side. I wonder, did the Blackwatch dog ever see himself as the damsel in distress?

He hadn't, and McCree doesn't much care for the feeling.

Jepsen's only a few feet away; it's kind of funny, really, how she seems to have planned this out. She's standing, poised, watching the area like a hawk with no elite Talon team at her back, not even snipers trained on the remains of Blackwatch's dome. Hell, even their planes are several hundred feet off. Like they're giving the woman space for her theatrics – or more probably, her monster.

Mitra's a big fellow – or, really, a big lady. That's what Hanzo had said, hadn't he? A mother. His mother. Would that make her McCree's mother-in-law someday? Is he supposed to call her Shimama?

He's definitely out of it, McCree realizes, to make a joke when looking at this thing. It's huge, metal beast – sharp on every corner with fangs bared in a snarl that could put Hanzo's own to shame. The creature's staying close to Jepsen, looming over her from the back like a protective shield. Only the lashing of its – her? - tail gives away the beast's agitation.

They're waiting for Hanzo. The call-out had been dramatic, almost laughable in McCree's opinion. He'd been too doped out to notice much, but Jepsen's speech had been hard to miss. On and on, creepier and creepier – he'd be making fun of her for it any other day. Course, she had snatched him. Taken him down an arm, trussed him up as bait. Maybe he doesn't have room to talk.

Where is his arm, anyway? If she'd left it lying around somewhere, he'd rather not have the crows pick at it.

A clap of thunder overhead breaks his musing and draws his hazy gaze upward. The clouds are getting darker, thicker – what little light they'd had is fading fast. Storm'd been a-brewing, and now it looks like it's here.
Damn. Is he going to get rained on? A fine cherry on this shit sundae.

Another thunderclap makes McCree wince; he thinks he hears Mitra utter a low growl, but it's hard to tell over the din. A crack of lightning provides a second of illumination; McCree misses where it hits, but it'd still been a little too close for comfort. Being only a few feet from an incredibly metal monster is making him nervous on that end.

Course, the creature itself is probably more dangerous than a lightning strike.

Jepsen titters. The sound has McCree's head lolling over to look at her; the woman's eyes are wide, delighted and the smile on her face is nothing short of ravenous. McCree tilts his neck to follow her gaze – and that's when the clearing is sharply illuminated with light.

It's not lightning, though. Instead of hot, white flashes, this light is blue and bright as the dickens, shining like a falling star and making McCree squint as he tries to pinpoint the source. He can't quite make out the shape, vision's too fuzzy, but he can see – something. A form quickly rising through the air out of Headquarters, glowing with light that reflects off the shattered pieces of the dome scattered around the cliffs.

Mitra snarls a challenge and the figure's answer comes in the form of a guttural, feral roar – a roar that McCree knows, even beneath its rumbling, warped tones.

"Han," he mumbles.

Jepsen barks an order; Mitra surges toward the light, and the light streaks forward to meet the beast. The clash is deafening, electric and screeching – McCree can't tell if they'd collided or simply been covered up by a thunderclap. It hurts to look at; Mitra is glowing, white plating shining and painful to glimpse under the harshness of Hanzo's light. Each arc of the creature's scything talons is like a flash of a camera in a dark room; the battle is literally blinding.

It's hard to make out Hanzo beneath the light, hard to even be sure it's really him. He hears the man's snarls and screeches, the clash of Hanzo's claws against Mitra's own as the two combatants seamlessly separate, strike, separate and strike again. Two cobras, clashing and dancing in a struggle that's impossible to follow – the struggle turns almost aerial as Mitra hurls Hanzo into the air, powerful haunches flexing before leaping after him. More clashing, clangs – then Mitra is hurtled back to the ground, impact sending up a cloud of dirt before Hanzo is hurtling after her.

"They're beautiful," Jepsen whispers. Her tone is reverent; when McCree glances at her, she looks nothing short of enraptured. "Min skat. His spirits are marvelous."

McCree agrees, but he's not going to say it. He's going to let the woman keep watching, keep being entranced by the battle unfolding. As long as her eyes are on the dragonfolk, they're not going to see his right hand inching its way towards his boot. Always keep an extra on hand, that's what Reyes always said.

Heh. On hand. McCree's sure he's not going to be laughing about it later, but right now Jepsen's rat poison is leaving him feeling mighty fine. Best enjoy it while he can.

A loud clash makes him flinch, glancing up at the doctor – but she's still watching the fight, still oblivious. McCree chances a look at the battle and his eyes lift in surprise; Hanzo's light has lifted, separated from him, like the man's being split in two. One half of it is still swirling around him, but Hanzo is – duller. Still shining like a beacon in the dark, but McCree can make out his face now – can see hatred and rage etched into his snarl, can see Hanzo's claws caught and straining against Mitra's own as the two struggle and try to force the other back to the ground. Hanzo's horns have
become downright antlers, a crown of horns that any stag would be proud to bear. Pointed teeth have grown into massive fangs that curve all the way past the man's lower lip; the slight pattern of scale surrounding Hanzo's claws has thickened to the point that no skin can be seen, like scale-hide gloves that reach all the way to his elbows.

And then there's the light. The split of Hanzo's spirits, the other half of his glowing, ethereal form is reaching out towards Mitra, glancing off the beast's armor and crawling over unrelenting plating. It dips into grooves before being shoved back, as if battling with an invisible force. The dragon, energy, whatever the hell Hanzo's channeling is clearly seeking a way inside.

It looks painful. McCree knows Hanzo's expression too well; has sworn to do his best to keep it off the man's face. Hanzo doesn't deserve to look like that – especially in front of his own mother. Doesn't matter what she is now.

Well. Better make this quick.

The feeling of his hand – remaining hand – closing around the tiny pistol strapped to his boot reminds McCree that it's a gamble. A big gamble, a risky-as-shit move that Reyes might not approve of, considering the circumstances. Hanzo ain't losing, not by a long shot – but he's not winning, either. Jepsen might have another trick up her sleeve; almost certainly does, no matter how whacked out of her gourd the woman is. No telling what she's gonna do if he does nothing. And if he misses, well – he's gonna have to turn that gun on his own head.

He might be a damsel, but he's not going to be the reason for Jepsen's collar around Hanzo's neck.

McCree flicks the safety off, hand still down his boot while Jepsen draws in an awed breath. “He's beautiful,” she murmurs, eyes still on the battlefield. “Simply beautiful.”

“Yeah,” McCree replies. “He's a real sight.” Jepsen's turning, eyes finally lowering to him as he speaks – and then McCree whips out the pistol, aims it between her eyes. He waits a second, waits for the realization and that first flicker of fear to hit her eyes – then he draws.

He doesn't miss. He never misses, not when it counts - that's what Reyes always said.

Jepsen crumples instantly, body dropping into the grass and sprawling there like a puppet without strings. Blood's already flowing from her cracked skull, wetting the dirt at McCree's feet. McCree slumps down again, pistol still in his grip as the world swims dangerously. Hard to tell if his vision's going dark, or that's just the storm at work.

A cold droplet hits McCree's cheek. Rain. Coming on, coming fast. He scoffs at the fleeting notion that the sky is crying for the loss – probably just here to wash away what's left of the damned woman. A fitting end.

Something's still happening in the battle. McCree can hear screeches and snarls – but they sound awfully one-sided now. Something's shifted, but he doesn't have the energy to lift himself up and get a good look. Jepsen's dead. That's what matters. All spirited-up, McCree has no doubts that Hanzo can scrap with the best of them – Mitra's life is in his hands now.

Family disputes are always ugly affairs. McCree hopes it'll end well.

If it doesn't, he thinks as his eyes close, body slumping with exhaustion, well.

He does have five bullets left.
Chapter 48

Hanzo has never drifted like this before. Certainly he's floated, but not aimlessly and never without a dragon guiding his path, enveloping his spirit as he gazes through their eyes.

But this is not that; in truth, Hanzo's not sure what this is. He can see the world around him, muted and distant. The ground below is several feet lower than it should be; he's a spirit, floating above the heads of the earthly bound. The world around him is muted and dull; the cloudy sky and rippling grass are all painted the same lifeless grey. The only flash of color that catches Hanzo's eye is the blinding, blue flashes coming off his body below.

Eri is the one tethering his physical form. Hanzo can see the dragon moving him, flexing his arms, curling his claws. Baring his teeth. It hurts to look at the burning blue of the dragon's energy, fully enveloping Hanzo's body and surging around him like a tornado. Hanzo can glimpse the dragon's own eyes burning like stars inside of Hanzo's form, eyes that are narrowed in hatred as Hanzo's body clashes again and again, over and over beneath the thundering sky with -

*It's not pretty, is it?*

A woman's voice is calling Hanzo's attention. He lifts his gaze upward, and there's a woman hovering beside him. She's translucent as a ghost, form shimmering with the same spiritual energy as Hanzo's own soul. Yet, she is-

Fragmented. It's the only word for it, the first thing that comes to Hanzo's mind when he lays eyes on her. It's as if she is comprised of pieces of a shattered mirror, strewn about with gaps where body should be. The shards are floating as if barely held together in an outline of a form. Kind eyes glimmer at him from one jagged piece, and she sports a smile that Hanzo can just scarcely make out upon her split lips.

*Who are you?*

It's a ridiculous question, and it's answered instantly by the realization that the woman is suspended several feet above Mitra's own battling form. The woman's smile falters slightly; her eyes crinkle as if slightly saddened.

*My apologies*, Hanzo murmurs.

*There is no need.* The woman's splintered head is lowered, looking down at their two bodies clashing against each other; neither is giving an inch, moving with the clear intent to kill with no instruction from their true masters.

How ironic.

*What now?*

A hollow question. Still, it's enough to earn Hanzo another smile – no matter how sad her eyes are. *Fear not. Your dragon will be victorious.*

*How can you know?*

*Flesh may give to machine, but the spirit always triumphs. And I will finally die.*

The admittance is startling; Hanzo is temporarily muted in surprise. The sight of his astonishment
seems to amuse her; Hanzo shakes his head, trying to focus again. *I am – sorry. I did not expect such a statement. Do you wish to die?*

**It is time,** she replies calmly. **We both knew this was how it had to be.**

*I did not-?* Hanzo furrows his brow. He's more perplexed than anything; he hadn't expected her to simply... allow it, like this.

The woman motions towards Hanzo – rather, she motions at the space above him. Hanzo tilts his head upwards, following her gesture.

Ami. Massive, floating above Hanzo's head and staring down at the woman – Mother, Hanzo's Mother, her true master – with mournful eyes and a solemn dip to her head. The dragon is not howling or trembling; she seems almost cowed by her master's presence. Anguished cries of the past have faded into quiet, sorrowful rumbles.

**She knew.** The words are still calm and steady – accepting. *My dear one, you have always known.*

Ami says nothing; she leans out, stretching past Hanzo as if trying to reach the woman.

**No.**

The rebuke is firm, but not unkind; Ami retreats with a mournful warble.

*Why do you refuse her?* Hanzo asks.

**You still need her.**

*No, I do not.* The woman seems surprised, but Hanzo presses on. *I know what you did for me. But I have grown. I am no longer a stillborn. I am no longer alone. If this is what she wants-*

**I have to pass on. If I go, she will go with me.**

*But it is what she wants.* Hanzo gestures at the spirit above him. *You have asked so much of her. We both have. Can you not let her be with you in your final moments, if that is her desire?*

The woman tilts her head upwards, smile drooping as her gaze softens. *She does not know what she wants. She holds to loyalty I do not deserve. She must press on.*

*You are being selfish.*

The woman looks at him in surprise.

*My brother and his- your friend have been working hard. Have been tracking you down for –* I do not know. I do not know how much time has passed between them. Us. But they have seen you, the scrap of your self fighting this beast-thing you are imprisoned in. Your death will break her heart - and Genji's.

**I must pass on,** she says simply. *There is nothing left. I am a spirit encased in a body that is no longer my own. What little I had left has been stripped away by that woman; I lack any will to spare you, now. You must kill me and put a stop to this.*

*Why me?* Hanzo asks desperately. *Why can we not save you?*

*My existence is agony. I have hurt too many, and now, I must end. Genji will understand – just*
as you do.

I do not understand, Hanzo argues back. I-

Perhaps not. But you can do this because you do not know me.

The simple, stated truth makes Hanzo's stomach twist, even beneath the woman's calm gaze.

You are my mother.

Hanzo. It's the first time she's said his name; it feels strange, hollow in her mouth. My son.

Don't - It's instinctive; Hanzo regrets it immediately, can feel his body cringe. I am sorry. I did not-

You did. And that is why it must be you. You do not know me. Your heart has hardened to me, and that is the kindest thing you could have done. Genji and I were blessed with time I could not have with you; he would refuse my wish, no matter the cost to himself. You are the only one I can speak to, the only one who can bear this act.

Speak to - because of Ami?

Yes.

Then take her.

Another flash of surprise crosses the woman's face.

If you want – if you want me to do this. Then you must take her. It is what she wants; no matter what you have asked of her, she has done it. She left you for me, and the resentment will never fade until this is righted.

Now there's a ripple of shock coming from Ami. Little one, I do not-

You do.

Ami falls silent.

I accept that. I do not blame you. Hanzo's eyes shift to - to his mother. You have done enough; you have kept me alive. But I will not keep you in me as your true host dies. You love her. An image of McCree flickers in Hanzo's mind; he takes in a breath with lungs he does not have, trying to steady himself. You should not be apart from her.

Ami's tail flicks erratically; a low, unhappy grumble issues from her chest.

Go. I will be fine. Hanzo glances down at the battle still underway; but the victor seems clear. Eri is still fighting, still striking at Mitra with claws that should do nothing, shouldn't even make a dent in the beast's armor. Yet still – Mitra is faltering. The creature's being beaten back; down to the ground, against rocks and dirt. Flesh may give, but spiritual energy is sapping away at the monstrosity's strength, draining the power no doubt injected into its very veins.

Go. Before it is too late . Even now Hanzo can feel himself slipping; the battle is taking its toll on him, physically and spiritually. He's tiring, quickly – it's going to end soon, one way or another. Ami lets out a tiny warble, and Hanzo raises a hand to silence her. Go.

Part of Hanzo expects something magical to instantly pass. A flash of lights, some spiritual energy
charging up and blasting into his mother as the dragon changes hosts once more. But it's not anything like that. Instead, Hanzo watches Ami stretch over him and outwards; the dragon elongates and reaches over and over until her snout is hovering mere inches from the woman's face. A hand lifts up to gently caress her, and sad eyes turn towards Hanzo again.

**You are sure?**

*It is not about me. But, yes. I am sure.*

She seems to accept this. The two spirits lean together, nose brushing nose. There's – the only way Hanzo can describe it is a ripple. A ripple that shudders over each spirit's body, making every scale and piece of the two distort briefly before returning to their original form. And then light, soft pink light that envelops both of them and grows brighter and brighter, blinding Hanzo even in his spiritual form until he's forced to close his eyes.

When he opens them again, there are no longer two spirits looking back. Simply one; that of his mother, gazing at him with two clear eyes. The gaps in her fragmented body have been filled by a gentle pink light, every space filled with glimpses of Ami's own body. Delicate hands are covered by the glow of claws; long hair has been crowned with the same massive horns Hanzo sports upon himself. Ami's energy is visibly filling in what has been taken – what has been lost.

**Thank you.**

The rosy light holding his mother together gleams; the eyes looking back at Hanzo close as the spirit begins to rise, shining like the sun. The last thing Hanzo sees is her smile, a twin to Ami's own before he feels a sharp pulling sensation, and the world goes black.

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He's won.

It's about the only thing Hanzo knows when he comes to over Mitra's shattered form. It had been dizzying, going from hovering to blackness to sharp, unhappy clarity. To find himself standing over the remains of a broken beast, the sensation of raindrops hitting his back and coating his soaking form; the thin, greasy feeling of oil coating his claws. Perhaps the beast had ceased when his mother's soul had departed; perhaps Eri had simply just torn it apart.

It doesn't matter. Eri's victorious rumbles nearly drown out the thunder overhead; but Hanzo doesn't care. Mitra is dead, but it's not Mitra Hanzo is interested in. His mother had accepted her fate, even embraced it. But there's another who isn't, who can't, who is alive and hurt and near – Eri can sense him, is pulling Hanzo over and Hanzo is all too eager to obey.

He can see McCree's form lying still in the muddy grass. Jepsen's body lies crumpled to his side, but Hanzo can only drum up a flickering feeling of satisfaction. Hanzo nearly trips several times as he stumbles towards the man; his prosthetics feel like lead, dragging him down on every step. There's blood pooling near McCree; Hanzo can make out a gap, a shattered emptiness where the man's left arm should lay and Hanzo has to swallow a hiccupsing sob when he lays eyes on it.

He needs to call for help. He needs to lift McCree, stumble back to Headquarters and scream until someone finds them. Someone who can help them.
But Talon is still nearby, and Hanzo knows he doesn't have the strength to fight them anymore. He can feel his energy dwindling, Eri using what must be the last of his own to keep Hanzo barely upright. Hanzo's knees buckle; he sinks to the ground beside McCree, sprawling haphazardly with his head coming to rest in the blood-soaked space, the gap.

The emptiness.

Hanzo is fading. He doesn't know what it means; how long it might last, if perhaps he is finally dying. There's no way to tell; Eri himself seems to be quieting in exhaustion. Hanzo closes his eyes, one hand reaching out blindly to find and grasp at McCree's chest. Using the last of his strength, Hanzo pulls himself forward and up, until his head can come to rest on McCree's collarbone.

*I will come home to you.*

Darkness encompasses Hanzo's mind once more – he is falling, back to Eri. Back to the emptiness where Ami had once lain.

*I love you.*

It is time to rest.
Chapter 49

The next time McCree opens his eyes, it's to a white ceiling and the distinct feeling of something heavy lying against his chest.

He decides to take stock of his surroundings first. Bleary eyes blink and squint, attempting to refocus his vision. He lowers his gaze from the ceiling and – ah. A familiar setting. He knows this kind of place; knows the instruments, curtains, and smell of disinfectant. He even recognizes the subtle beeping of the monitor coming from his right. A hospital room – Overwatch's, if he's not mistaken. Too homey and cozy for one of Blackwatch's; there's lacy curtains on the windows and needlepoint framed on the walls. Pretty unlikely to be one of Reyes'; if it is, he doesn't recognize it.

Course, the last thing he remembers is lying in the dirt and bleeding out in the rain. Could be his mind's not at its sharpest.

There's a twitch from the weight against his chest; it subtly shifts and draws McCree's gaze down with the motion.

It's Hanzo; the man's fast asleep, tucked under the blankets with McCree and curled up against his chest. Hanzo's face is hidden beneath his long hair – dirty, mussed and McCree's remaining fingers twitch with the desire to run through it. He looks smaller. His horns have shrunken back to their original size; the scales on his arms have shed down to his claws. His prosthetics are missing, no doubt set aside somewhere – still, McCree feels... larger, beside him. This tiny ball Hanzo has drawn himself into feels intended, like the man's hiding from the world. Like he's letting McCree be the buffer, trusting him to protect his form in its sleeping state.

Or maybe McCree's just really doped up. Both explanations seem pretty plausible.

McCree reaches for Hanzo's face – at least, he tries to. It takes a few moments of furrowing his brow, fidgeting with the blanket and wondering why it's not moving for the realization to hit; the memories come flooding back and phantom pain sparks sharply up the remains of McCree's left arm. He closes his eyes at the sensation, leaning back to try and catch his breath as his heart starts hammering inside his chest.

"Are you alright?"

The voice isn't familiar. McCree drags his gaze over to the western corner of the room, seeking out the location of the inquiry. There's a man in the room; he's heavily layered in various clothing and cloaks, with a scarf pooled around his shoulders. His face is bared with slicked-back onyx hair and a pair of goggles resting atop his head. Two sharp eyes are trained on McCree; the man's expression isn't unfriendly, just – cautious. Curious.

"Yeah," McCree mumbles hoarsely after a few moments. "M alright." A pause as his mind ticks through the phrase. "Literally now, I guess."

The man doesn't laugh; he probably isn't supposed to. What are the rules for this sort of thing? McCree doesn't know. He's just saying the first thing that comes to mind.

"Would you like me to call Doctor Ziegler?" the man asks.

McCree glances down at Hanzo's sleeping form before he shakes his head. "Nah," he rasps. "Don't wanna wake him."
“You won't.” McCree's brow lifts in surprise as the man continues with: “He's been sleeping for days. Conversation will not be the thing to rouse him.”

“Huh.” McCree looks down again; his right hand lifts and stretches over until he can rest a palm against the back of Hanzo's head. “He gonna be okay?”

“We do not know. Doctor Ziegler says his vital signs are all stable, but he has taken in much spiritual energy. His condition is something she cannot pinpoint or hope to understand. Still, he is not unwell. He is merely sleeping.” The man ends his reply with a shrug, as if disaffected; only his hardened expression betrays his discontent. Strange. Who is this guy?

Starting off with that seems rude, so McCree asks: “Ain'tcha hot in that get-up? Lot of layers.”

“I have lived like this for a while. I am used to it.” The man folds his arms across his chest; a symbol of a closed-off topic.

Alright. McCree can take a hint. “Where am I?”

“Doctor Ziegler's private clinic. You were both flown in after being stabilized back on the base.”

Angela's own clinic? It's not good news; if he's here, it's because he's been in real bad shape, or their own docs and medical areas are all shot to shit by Talon. Might be both. Either way, McCree's squirming. He's never been comfortable in the hands of Overwatch personnel, even with Angela.

“How long've I been here?” he asks after a moment. “How long've I been out?”

“Four days. You two were found collapsed together in the fields, and you are now the first to wake.”

Shit. McCree lifts his right hand from Hanzo's head to drag it down over his face. Coupla days out were never good. No telling what had happened, and now he's got to play catch-up. Still – better worrying about that than the arm. Don't think about the arm. Keep asking things. “Why's Hanzo here? I ain't complainin' by a long shot, but Angela was never keen on letting patients bunk together.”

The man cocks his head; his sharp stare becomes downright scrutinizing. “As I told you,” the man says after a moment, “Hanzo is stable. He does not need care beyond fluids—” And ah, McCree's eyes track to the side, to the twin IV's side-by-side - “and to remove him from you would be – risky.”

“Risky?” McCree echoes, looking back at the man.

The stranger doesn't elaborate; he merely tenses.

“Fine then,” McCree grunts, shifting to accommodate Hanzo's weight better. “Enough about me 'n him. Who are you and why're you here? Some Overwatch-issued guard?”

“I am myself, and I am here because I do not trust Overwatch doctors,” the man replies sharply. “I remain to ensure nothing goes amiss.”

“Why don't you like 'em?” McCree says curiously.

“Experience.” The answer is colder than McCree's expecting; his brow lifts in surprise.

“You've got something to do with Jepsen,” he says after a moment. “Don't ya?”
No reply. McCree grunts; he shifts again on the bed, rolling slightly to tuck Hanzo better into his arm. He's putting his back to the man, deciding to focus on who matters right now. Hanzo's breathing is even and warm against McCree's neck – breath is foul, sure. But that doesn't matter.

McCree brushes Hanzo's hair from his eyes, tucking the long strands behind his ears. It's really such a pretty face; sparkling scales make the man's eyes positively glow when they're opened, and thin, soft lips that are curved in a perpetual frown. Sometimes they rise in a smile; McCree's not sure if he loves that image or Hanzo's twitchy little nose wrinkled in distaste more.

Both are pretty damn cute.

"Who is he to you?"

McCree chuckles at the man's question. "Yer playing guard dog for – what, days? And yer asking me now?"

"Yes." The man's tone is even and calm. "You were not awake yet, and you would know the answer best."

"Fair point." McCree cranes his neck over, trying to look the man properly in the eye. "Well-"

"Don't strain yourself," the man interrupts. "I can hear you just fine."

"Alrighty." McCree shifts back into his previous position; admittedly, it's a little awkward to know the man's probably staring him down out of sight. "Y'asked who he is to me?"

"Yes."

"Well..." McCree clucks his tongue. "Someone important."

"How vague."

"I ain't a wordsmith, give me a second. A man just woke after days and you're pryin' him to wax poetic and do his emotions justice."

The silence that follows is surprising, even more so when the man breaks it with: "I am sorry. That was rude of me."

"Yer fine." McCree's glad he doesn't have to look at the stranger now. "Hanzo's important to me. Probably ain't a better way to say it. We're close. I'd kill to keep him safe – hell, I just did. And I know he's done the same. Got it?"

There's a thoughtful noise from the stranger, but no verbal reply.

McCree huffs through his nose. "Did he do it, though? Do you know?"

"Did he what?"

"Mitra. Big ol' creature he was fighting. Said it was his mom. Y'know how it ended?"

"I do," the stranger says after a moment. "Though I arrived at the scene too late. It is difficult to catch up to someone who is given the ability to fly."

"Oh, you saw that?" McCree raises his brows. "Incredible, right?"

"That is... a word for it," the man murmurs. "Regardless. He won."
“She dead? Mitra?”

“Yes.” The reply is quiet; the man's gaze lowers.

McCree lets out a soft whistle. “Damn. I was hoping they could work it out. He shouldn't have had to do that.”

“No, he should not. But my mentor came by, after the dust had settled. He sensed that despite the outcome, her spirit had departed peacefully. I do not know the details, and my mentor could not glean them. I will have to wait until my brother wakes to know the truth.”

“Your-” Oh, hells. McCree immediately turns over in the bed, fixing the stranger with a wide-eyed stare. “Brother?”

The man smiles. “Genji Shimada. A pleasure, Mister McCree.”

The usual quip *Mister McCree was my father's name* dies on McCree's tongue; he's been rendered mute in surprise and sudden, overwhelming embarrassment. “Ah.”

Genji seems amused. “You must forgive my earlier coldness. My brother has remained guarded about you; I wished to see who you were in the presence of a stranger. I must admit, you are not what I expected.”

“Expecting someone better?” McCree's tone ends up a little more defensive than he'd like.

“No,” Genji seems to amend. “No, that is not right. I suppose I did not know what to expect. My brother's tastes have always been... unpredictable. But you do not confound me like the others.”

McCree's brow wrinkles. “If that's a compliment, it's a hell of a round-about one.”

Genji lets out a scoff, but his smile does not waver. “Perhaps. Have this, then: you have lasted beyond a single night, and clearly mean the world to my brother. For that, I am impressed. Beyond that, I have been told you are the one that has cared for him and helped him since his release from our clan. My gratitude can never be fully expressed for what you have done for him.”

“Alright, now you're just embarrassing me,” McCree mumbles awkwardly. “Hells. Wake straight up and it's right to brunch with the family.”

“If you count IV bags as brunch.”

Now it's McCree's turn to chuckle. He glances over at Hanzo, still sound asleep without the hint of a murmur. “Suppose he'd be embarrassed too, if he was awake for it. Maybe he's faking.”

“He's exhausted.” Genji pushes himself off the wall, stepping closer to his brother's side of the bed. “I chased him to the center of your base; I saw what his spirits did to him. The transformation and expulsion of energy has drained him – even more so, now that one of his spirits has left him.”

“Left? What'd it go and do that for?”

“I have a theory,” Genji says calmly. “But I would have to ask him to be sure. My own dragon is certain, though; my brother has only one spirit within him now. His power has waned considerably.”

“But he'll be alright?”

“I think so. Perhaps he just needs a prince's kiss to wake him.”
“Don't sass me,” McCree warns, face instantly flashing hot; Genji laughs again.

“I will let your commander know you are awake. He has been asking to see you.”

“Angela took him in too?” The image of Reyes, crumpled and bleeding freely from his side surges unpleasantly to the front of McCree's mind. “He okay?”

“Your doctor seems to think so. He will need a gracious amount of recovery time; though she has mentioned an experimental procedure to accelerate his healing.” Genji's gaze momentarily darkens. “I have advised him against it.”

Hm. Bit of a history going on there, but McCree's not in the mood to pry. “Yeah. I'd like to talk to Reyes, if he's feeling up to it.”

Genji nods once before sweeping from the room; his wordless departure leaves McCree free to settle down, shoulders slumping as some of the tension leaves him. Hells. A man shouldn't have to meet a brother-in-law on his death bed. McCree knows he was being silently judged, he just knows it.

Still, a glance down at the man curled against his chest is all it takes to reassure him that it'd been worth it.

McCree lets his hand travel over again, fingers carding through Hanzo's hair and catching on little tangles at the ends. Poor guy. Sleeping for days or not, he still looks exhausted – looks like he needs a shower and someone to rub those knots out of his back. Hanzo deserves all that and more; the softest bed McCree can find might still not be good enough for him. Some crappy hospital cot certainly ain't.

But there's nowhere to go, and if Hanzo doesn't want to leave McCree's side, he's sure as shit not going to be the one to make him. Best now to just wait for Reyes; catch a little shut-eye, sort out those dangerous, despairing feelings he's pushing down at the moment. Can't keep them bottled for too long – McCree knows what happens to the men that do.

He'd best save the cry until Reyes has come and gone.
Chapter 50

Reyes is taking a while to show. Maybe he's gotten lost along the way? McCree's never been here before; he has no idea how big this clinic might actually be.

Genji hasn't come back, though, so he must still be fetching Reyes; course, he might have gotten distracted. Might have forgotten, or been told to try again some other time. Maybe Reyes is in worse shape than Genji'd let on.

Maybe he doesn't want to see McCree?

Worrying doesn't do McCree a lick of good, so he tries to focus over on Hanzo instead. The man's still fast asleep, not making a peep. It's a familiar sight, and under different circumstances, a regularly welcome one.

“Y’always such a sleepy fella,” McCree murmurs aloud, brushing a strand of hair from Hanzo's eyes. “Cuddly, too. Ain't liked having that part mentioned, though.”

Hanzo doesn't stir. McCree hadn't been expecting him too; hell, he doubts the man is even listening. Still. Feels nice to talk.

“Ain't really sure what you did up there, but I saw a bit. All glowin' and hissing; you were in a right state, coming to save my hide. I'm real sorry about that. Shouldn't have been that way, me worrying you again. Course, you also had me in a real fit, panicked all about where you'd gone. Guess we just traded worries, huh?”

Hanzo sighs; McCree's brow perks in hope. But it's simply an involuntary motion, just Hanzo's breath shifting in his sleep. McCree gives him a gentle jostle to test it - no response. Ah, well.

“Wonder what I got to do to wake you,” McCree muses softly. “Or if I should just letcha lie. God knows y'deserve the break.” He gently strokes the side of Hanzo's right ear, chuckling when it gives his fingers a scolding flick. “Can't say it when you're awake, but damned if you ain't the cutest thing I've ever seen.” McCree cranes his neck, brushing a light kiss against Hanzo's forehead. “Hurry up and get done with your healin','” he murmurs, closing his eyes again to rest. “Already miss you.”

“Real fuckin' sappy, Jesse.”

McCree's eyes snap back open, flicking over to the door. He must be off his game – gonna blame the drugs in his system – to miss the sound of Reyes entering. Course, he'd been listening for footsteps; he's surprised to see his commander instead in a wheelchair, nudging the door open with his shoulder.

“Well, shit,” McCree remarks, brows lifting. “Y'stealing Hanzo's look?”

“Yeah. Getting maimed was my plan, all for the aesthetic.” Reyes pushes the door shut with one hand. The commander's dressed in loose sweatpants and his chest is bared. His stomach is firmly wrapped in ugly bandages that makes McCree's heart tighten - at least the wrappings haven't darkened with exertion. Reyes shakes his head, wheeling over to McCree's bedside. “Wipe that look off your face. You know I'm kidding.”

“Y'got hurt protecting me,” McCree mumbles regretfully.
“And I did a pretty shit job of that, too.” Reyes leans back in his chair; McCree's surprised to realize the man's missing his trademark beanie. Reyes runs a hand through what's left of his hair before blowing out an irritable stream of air. “You thinking about it?”

“Not yet,” McCree admits. Reyes doesn't need to elaborate; he knows what he means. “Pushing it off. Was gonna have a nice cry once we were finished here.”

“Don't gotta hold back on my account.”

“Just might anyway.”

“How much did Genji tell you?” Reyes asks, abruptly changing subjects. Bit merciful of him, really. “Seeing as he was the one to fetch me. You talked to Angela?”

“No,” Reyes says shortly; his tone is clipped even as his eyes soften.

Ah, shit. “Genji told me I'd been asleep a while.” Time to swap the conversation back, don't dwell, not yet. “Coupla days. Hanzo too. Said Mitra's dead?”

“Yeah.” Reyes rolls his shoulders. “On all accounts. Overwatch got the body. Harvesting it for reverse-engineering, no doubt; but I got them to agree to bury the flesh.”

“Kind of you. Thought you'd be sore about being wrong, 'bout Genji and all.”

“Shut up,” Reyes replies with no heat. “I didn't want it to be him in the first place.”

“I know.” McCree glances over at the door, making sure it's shut. “You got enough to worry about, even with that scrubbed up. How's everyone? Lose anyone I know?”

“None you were close with,” Reyes promises. "Alex got a nick on their hip but it's minor. They've been helping out with the other wounded back on base."

"They ever pinpoint the rats chewin holes in our wires?"

“Some.” Reyes' look has darkened from almost miserable to outright malicious. “Not all of 'em. But the ones we do have will crack. Metaphorically or physically, whichever's gonna come first. Clara's having the time of her goddamn life - let her break out the big guns.”

“Speaking of busted balls, betting Morrison gave yours a kicking once the dust cleared, huh? Not that he has any room to talk,” McCree adds kindly.

“He hasn't said a word. Don't know if he's going soft or...” Reyes drags a hand down his face. If McCree didn't know any better, he'd say Reyes almost looked - regretful. “Anyway. If Jack knows what's good for him, he'll stay the fuck away from my balls and help me finish this without a peep.”

“Really great sentence there, Boss. Stellar on all accounts.”

“Shut the fuck up.” Reyes rolls his shoulders before leaning forward in his chair, elbows resting atop his knees as he peers at Hanzo. “His brother tell you about the dragon nonsense?”

“Yeah.” McCree glances down at the man, a fond smile twitching on his lips as Hanzo lets out another tiny, tired sigh. “Said that's why he's sleeping, that he lost one his dragons.”
“Not sleeping,” Reyes corrects. “Dead.”

McCree can feel his heart skip; one clammy hand instantly clamps down on Hanzo's shoulders. No that's – that's not right, he'd heard Hanzo sigh, and Genji, Genji would have said something. “No-No, that ain't-”

“It's okay,” Reyes interrupts, “to make mistakes. You just woke up. Happens to everybody.” The look Reyes is giving McCree is steady, deliberate; McCree matches his stare with his own frightened one. He can feel Hanzo's pulse beneath his fingers; it's soft and steady, but it's there and McCree can feel the gentle warmth of the man's skin.

“Real shame,” Reyes continues slowly. “How Hanzo Shimada died on that field. Could have made real use of him. Though if he'd lived, the higher-ups would have taken him away in a heartbeat. Can't keep a secret like that, not after this mess.”

Ah. The penny drops, so to speak.

“Yeah,” McCree says after a moment, attempting to school his face into a neutral expression. “Real shame. Should- talk to Genji. Might be in denial.”

“I plan to,” Reyes replies evenly. “Just wanted to make sure I told you that Hanzo Shimada's dead, and that we can both state I've never said anything to the contrary.” Ah. Gotcha. “But Genji's not talking to anyone. The only people in this clinic are the ones I know I can trust. And while that might not extend to Angela, but she's agreed to keep her trap shut as recompense for this evil apprentice thriller.”

“Y'know it ain't her fault.”

“She's not blameless, either.”

“If Hanzo's 'dead,'” McCree asks, switching the subject again, “then what about Genji? What's his status?”


“Yeah,” McCree repeats carefully. “Real fuckin' shame.”

“Watch your language.”

“So fuckin' sorry, won't happen the fuck again.”

“We're getting rid of him,” Reyes continues, ignoring McCree's quip. “Y'know. Genji.” It's not subtle. “I don't want any trace of this Shimada shitshow left on my base.”

“You can't just-”

“We just need him to disappear, get off Talon's radar. And away from us.”

“Are you talking about the cloak'n folk?” McCree says in surprise.

Reyes scowls. “Stop giving shitty-ass countryisms to our programs. Witness relocation isn't that fucking simple.”

“Hang on,” McCree interjects, brows knitting together. “Y'can't just ship him off to god knows where-”
“You think he's any safer here?” Reyes gives him an incredulous look. “After this?”

The rebuttal stings; McCree shuts his mouth. If Reyes is willing to take a self-blow, he must mean it.

“I still don't have all the rats on lock. No one is safe under us at the moment; least of all him, and second in line to that is you. Talon didn't snatch you on a whim and you know it.”

“Now hang on-”

“You're leaving too,” Reyes says firmly.

“Now hang on!” McCree protests, sitting up in bed; Hanzo slumps down at the motion. “A man loses his arm and you just-”

“Sit the fuck down,” Reyes snaps. “You're not getting thrown away. Untwist your shorts.”

McCree's mouth closes again, even if he's still shooting Reyes a glare.

“We already talked about this,” Reyes continues, voice suddenly patient. “You remember? You need to go back to school.”

“This ain't the time-!”

“This is exactly the time,” Reyes interrupts. “Sure, you're down an arm. But all that means is you need rest time. And I'm not the one who needs you here right now.” Reyes jerks a thumb over at Hanzo's sleeping form. “You're going with Genji. Get him settled, pick a quaint little countryside cottage and fall off the face of the earth. Settle down and get a taste of normal fucking life so I can sort out this mess without worrying about either of you fuck-ups.”

It's phrased as an insult, a brush-off meant to undermine the kindness of the actions Reyes is describing. McCree knows this trick; he's seen it a dozen times on fellow operatives. Hell, Reyes has done it to his enemies. McCree just hadn't expected to have it turned on himself. “Y'kicking me out for good?” he mumbles after a moment. “Or can I come back?”

“If that's what you want.” Reyes' look is steady, his tone calm. “Can't fuckin' see why you'd want to come back to this kind of life-”

“Yeah, you can.”

Reyes' lips purse. “It's not something I want to see. This might have turned out differently if I hadn't had you drop off the comm.”

McCree blows a stream of air upwards, ruffling his own bangs. “I wasn't paying attention.”

“It was still more important,” Reyes replies, suddenly sounding exhausted. “I was being petty over Jack's op-”

“Boss, I've known for years that you're petty as shit, and I know mistakes happen. I'm not blaming you for something none of us could have predicted.” McCree's lips twitch into a lopsided smile. “You picked me up, dusted me off and demanded loyalty. You can't just turn it off. Cabrón,” he tacks on as an afterthought.

Reyes holds up a single finger. “You get one of those. You get to walk away with that, scot-free, because you lost a limb.”
“Y’mean I gotta go and chop off a leg to call you worse?”

“Both legs.”

McCree laughs, loud and honest; he can't help but chance a glance downwards. Hanzo hasn't stirred, hadn't even twitched at the sound. The man's as silent and motionless as ever; McCree can feel his pleased expression falter.

“I'll leave you alone.” Reyes voice is more kind than gruff, even as the man is wheeling to put his back to McCree. “Use the buzzer to get Angela's attention. I don't want you and your 'body pillow' there to start wandering.”

McCree doesn't lift his gaze from Hanzo's sleeping form. “Yeah.”

“Have her contact me when you're ready to get started on the move.”

McCree brushes the tip of Hanzo's ear; it gives the tiniest flick at the touch.

“Yeah,” McCree repeats quietly. “I'll let you know.”
Chapter 51

Help me.

Please. I have to go back.

I will be alright. Just, please, bring me back. Let me wake.

He needs me.

It's unnerving, living with a corpse.

McCree doesn't think he'll ever get used to it, not really. It's a right awful feeling to wake up and feel warm breath in your ear, breath that gets your heart racing and daring to hope – only to have that hope smashed into pieces again and again when he gives Hanzo a little shake and confirms, yes, he's still asleep.

Hanzo should be awake by now. Genji isn't saying it but McCree can read him like a book with those folded arms and furrowed brows. They're dabbling in unknown territory and they both know it; Hanzo's never taken on energy like this, never had a spirit ripped out of him like this. He needs time and he needs rest.

Problem is, Hanzo's had plenty of it. Now, they're getting worried.

Genji's set himself up in McCree's room. Angela's wheeled in a small cot for him and by the Almighty, McCree's never seen a man so tense in his life. Usually men took to her like a dog to a bone, but Genji hadn't been lying when he said he didn't trust Overwatch doctors. There'd been a solid minute of sniffing, poking and prodding before the cloaked-up man had decided that the cot seemed innocent enough.

It's not like he and Genji have hit it off themselves. Genji doesn't seem like a bad guy, and there hasn't been any tiffs. Just – tension. Unspoken, never-fading tension over the sleeping elephant in the room. The only time it seems to lift is when that strange, floating omnic shows up. Then Genji's lighting up like a firecracker on July, all talkative and pleased as punch as the two disappear to – hell, McCree doesn't know. Debriefing? Lunch date? All he can look forward to is the knowledge that Genji will be in a hell of a better mood for at least an hour upon returning.

'Course, looking at his brother's pseudo-corpse has a way of turning Genji prickly again real quick.

Their morning routine is pretty standard. Angela will come in, run some tests and Genji’ll glare and watch her like a hawk the whole way through. McCree's pretty sure he saw the man growl when Angela'd accidentally bumped Hanzo's arm. She updates McCree on his bloodwork and vitals, as if he gives a damn, and disappears until dinner. An omnic brings all the meals, so at least McCree is spared Genji's hateful bristling over dinner.

Ain't easy eating with his right. McCree'd always favored his left, and he's finding it more difficult than he'd imagined to just get a spoon up properly to his lips. At least Genji doesn't look when his fingers start to tremble with the effort; he vacates the room when McCree's lower lip does the same.

Been a while since he cried this often, to this extent. Feels strange. In a way, he's glad Hanzo ain't
Angela's talked about prosthetics, but at the moment, McCree isn't interested. Gonna work with what he's got until he's perfected it, then worry about the rest. No point adding anything to his plate when he still hasn't solved the biggest problem on his mind.

Embarrassing to admit, but he had tried to kiss Hanzo to waking. Genji hadn't been in the room and McCree feels downright foolish thinking back on it – like he'd really expected it to work. Like they're in some fairy-tale nonsense where locking lips is going to right the wrongs.

Having failed that, he'd tried gentle pinching, splashing water in Hanzo's face and even tugging on his ears. Nothing had worked, and he'd been left making little apologetic noises to Hanzo's reddened earlobes. They'd merely flicked irritably in response.

It's been over two weeks since McCree'd woken, and Reyes is getting impatient. McCree doesn't blame him, knows the man's heart is in the right place. The Shimadas are dangerous to keep around; the longer Hanzo's here, the longer they run the risk of others finding out the corpse has a pulse. McCree knows Reyes has already started the paperwork without him, has probably forged his name on the dotted line to take over Genji's relocation assignment. Not like anyone can prove it – McCree's pretty sure his new right-handed scrawl will be far worse than whatever Reyes comes up with.

McCree doesn't mind. It's sort of nice to let someone else take the reins; as long as Reyes welcomes him back when he's on his feet – hand? - he supposes that taking a little break will suit him. Knock out the rest of high school, tuck a GE or whatever the hell it's called under his belt. Really, how hard could it be? Plus, he's sure wherever Reyes is shipping them off to will be nice – maybe it'll be a quaint little cottage, just like the man had suggested.

Course, Genji will be coming along too. And likely the omnic he's so keen on. Hells. Is Hanzo going to leave McCree all alone with them?

Turns out, he is. One day while McCree is mindlessly playing with his bangs, Reyes walks in - healed beyond the chair, apparently - and announces that it's time to go. Everything's kind of a whirlled daze after that; McCree mindlessly follows orders to pack this, move this there. Hanzo's curled, sleeping form gets unceremoniously slipped into a giant duffel bag; Genji's got some nasty things to say about that in Japanese, but McCree and Reyes pretend like they can't hear. It's practical, and it's not going to raise any alarms. Besides, McCree cleaned it out from the last mission. It only smells a little like mothballs.

Then it's just a hop, skip and an uneasy stumbling onto the helicopter parked outside. McCree hadn't been outside the clinic yet, had just barely glimpsed his surroundings through Angela's lacy curtains. The location's more remote than he'd expected – instead of busy streets and a bustling metropolis, he's surprised to find that it really is just plains and tufts of wilderness surrounding the place. A private clinic indeed. He'd ask where exactly there were, but he has a feeling Reyes doesn't want to answer that. No point in picking up sensitive information without a purpose.

“Did we really need the bag?” McCree says instead, watching Reyes readjust Hanzo's form slumped over the commander's shoulder. “And are you sure you can carry the weight so soon?”

“Satellites,” Reyes grunts, ignoring the latter question. “Always taking pics.”

Fair enough.

Genji's still sour as shit when they board; his face is covered and he's fully cloaked from head to
toe, but McCree's spent enough time around the man to know he's less than pleased. Even the omnic tagging alongside him doesn't seem to be soothing his mood.

“Sit,” Reyes instructs. McCree obeys, dropping down into one of the four seats crammed into the back of the slick, black helicopter. Genji and the omnic – Gods, what had Genji said his name was? Zendaya? - are taking the two across as McCree scooches over to make room for the bag. Reyes unzips the top, letting Hanzo's head loll out for some fresh air; McCree helps prop him upright, trying to keep his limp, sleeping form in place as Reyes buckles the seat-belt.

“Who's gonna do his IV's?” McCree asks, pulling a strand of hair out of Hanzo's lips. “Is Angela coming?”

“No,” Reyes says shortly. “Where you lot are going is classified. She can't follow.”

“And where are we going?”

“Classified,” Reyes repeats, just as tonelessly.

“I'm the one goin' there!” McCree says indignantly.

“Satellites. Always recording audio.”

“Boss-”

“It's not Texas, if that's what you're so afraid of.”

McCree's head turns towards the cockpit; he's forced to twist in his seat and crane his neck until Clara's smug face is visible, complete with noise-dampening headphones hanging around her neck. “Hey, Jesse,” she says with a grin. “You don't look pleased to see me.”

“I'd be over the moon,” McCree replies in a deadpan. “If you were sitting anywhere but there. You can't be serious.”

“What? You think only omnics can do this job?” Clara quips. “Racist.”

“Clara, I've been in your fucking car. You took out a Drive Slowly child cut-out on our way to coffee!”

“And I drove much slower while it was stuck to the front of my car.” Clara taps the cockpit's dashboard. “You'll be fine, you big baby.”

“Great, so I lived through losing an arm to die in a fiery-”

“Enough.” It's Genji's voice that cuts through the clamor, sharp and unamused. “I wish to leave, and for the commander to answer the first question. Who will care for my brother in this state?”

“I will.” McCree glances over in surprise at the monk; Genji seems to have been caught equally off-guard. “Doctor Ziegler directed me to the download used for omnics in her clinic. And yes,” the omnic continues, holding up a hand to halt Genji's stammered protest. “I scanned the files thoroughly. It is the knowledge I need to help the comatose – nothing more, nothing less.”

“You should not have trusted her,” Genji snaps. “There could still be something hidden-!”

“Would you have us bring one of her doctors along?”

Genji's mouth closes; McCree can't see his eyes, but can practically feel the frustration radiating
"If you're done," Reyes drawls, and damn, McCree'd forgotten he was even here, "I'm going to go back inside. Clara will page me after the drop-off but after that? Unless there's trouble, you should all get used to operating like Blackwatch doesn't exist."

"Easy," Genji mutters.

Easy for him, maybe. McCree tries to catch Reyes' eye; the man's gaze is lowered, one hand coming up to scratch uselessly atop his beanie. He's not saying anything; McCree has to purposefully clear his throat before Reyes reluctantly raises his gaze.

"I'm coming back. No matter what.” It's firm, a statement that makes Reyes' lips purse. “So you better not forget about me.”

That's enough to get Reyes' brows to lift in surprise; the look of astonishment on his face is quickly lost as his eyes crinkle in amusement and he lets out a short scoff. “Pendejo. Who was ever going to forget you in the first place?” Reyes reaches forward, his broad palm coming down to squash McCree's hat down in a vigorous, ruffling motion. “Shitty cowboy.”

McCree smiles, pushing up at the brim of his hat to look Reyes in the eyes. “Sappy papi. Play nice with Morrison while I'm gone.”

"Oh, they have," Clara mutters.

Reyes shoots Clara a glare, but when he returns his gaze to McCree the fond look hasn't left them completely. Reyes takes a step back, thumping a fist on the helicopter's exterior. “Right. Clara, shut up and take them up. Good luck, you lot. Call if there's trouble.”

“Or if we need mone-” McCree huffs as Reyes closes the helicopter doors, cutting off his quip. Ah, well. He settles back into his seat as Clara begins flipping switches and setting off a series of beeps from the cockpit. Best start saying his prayers now.

“I did not know the Commander was your father.” McCree looks over at Genji; the man's still tense, but there's a curious tilt to his head. “It must be difficult for him to say goodbye.”

McCree opens his mouth to correct Genji – then pauses. Slowly, his mouth closes and he glances away. He can still see Reyes' silhouette through the windows; the man's stepped back, given the chopper some space. But he's still there, still watching as the overhead blades begin to spin and the roar of the engine begins filling the air.

“Yeah,” McCree says finally. He can see Reyes lifting a hand, arcing into a salute as the helicopter begins swaying and lifts into the air.

“It's hard for both of us.
I know she is gone, and I know you are fearful. But we have to keep going!

I cannot bear this! I call his name and he hears nothing! I cannot even comfort him when he cries over something that is my fault!

I am not afraid of pain! I am afraid of this!

We must wake!

Reyes gets them a cottage, just like he promised.

They end up going north – way north. McCree’d expected to settle somewhere in Europe, somewhere close to Headquarters; Clara's terrifying, death-defying piloting had ended up taking them to an airport and the next thing McCree'd known he'd been shuffled onto a Blackwatch plane headed for the States. That time there'd been omnis at the wheel, and McCree'd never been happier – even if he had feel a little bad watching Clara wipe their data banks once the flight was over. Seems Reyes isn't keen on leaving any trails for this.

They'd landed in Washington; this time, McCree himself had insisted on driving as Clara'd sulked and read him off directions from her dossier. Genji and the omnic hadn't said a word on the flight over, and had continued their silence all the way up to the cottage gates. The tension'd been ugly, and probably hadn't been helped by Hanzo's limp form continually slumping over into his brother's lap.

McCree'd have been back there with them, but, well, he'd wanted to live. Clara driving often shortened his lifespan just on the stress alone.

Where she'd ended up leading them turns out to be, just as Reyes said – quaint. It's really the only word for it, a cute little house in the hills, nestled securely in a thick of trees with no neighbors to speak of. There's a dirt road leading up to the cottage; iron gating sits next to a barn-shaped mailbox at the bottom of sloped driveway. The forest only goes so far; it's a pretty short walk to reach the main, paved road. An easy jog into town, but far enough to keep snooping eyes off their property.

And hell, it is their property now, isn't it? No one else but them. Clara'd stuck around long enough to pass over an envelope stuffed with cash, an emergency comm – with heavy emphasis on emergency – and the keys to the car and informing McCree that if he broke it, he bought it. She'd stayed less than a minute, and McCree hadn't had the heart to blame her. He'd seen her say goodbye before; the woman's tough, brusque about it. She always had to get out before she started to waver – and he could respect that. Might have done the same thing in her boots.

“Take care, Jesse. Y'all come back, y'hear?”

The teasing drawl was the last he'd heard of her; he'd thought maybe she'd bend the rules, give him a quip or two over the comm on the slower days.

She hasn't, and he can sort of respect that too.
Two weeks have passed since McCree'd first been sent here. He's got a routine now, got his days planned out and a familiar pattern to every move he makes.

Waking's a mindless activity. McCree gets up out of his empty double bed and gets dressed under the orange glow of his positively ancient lamp. He takes a shower if he needs it and brushes his fluffed out hair to the best of his ability before promptly squashing his hat down on his locks. He eats the breakfast of his own choosing, marks down what he's taken if it's the last in the box. McCree's partial to Poptarts nowadays, buttered on both sides and toasted into a nice, crispy brown. Genji claims it tastes like hot garbage but what does he know? Cultural differences, that's what McCree chalks it up to.

Not that Genji has much room to talk. Sure, the man can cook swell; he's got a knack for it that leaves McCree's mouth watering for more. There's some dishes though that McCree can't help but dump an extra gallon of sriracha on – rice, mainly – and that always leads to some tiff or another over specialized tastes that usually devolves into name-calling and exaggerated hand motions. It's never escalated beyond playful banter – though they'd gotten pretty damn close over ketchup on ice cream. Genji's wrong on that front, and McCree's never going to give him an inch on it.

Zenyatta usually breaks it up before it hits the boiling point. McCree knows his name now, had been downright sheepish to get it wrong to his face. He likes the omnic, is grateful for everything he's done. Zenyatta keeps Genji balanced, soothes out the man's rough edges on the days that McCree can just see the frustration and anxiety creeping up the man's back. Genji's mellowed mostly since their first arrival; he'd made up with the omnic in under a day to McCree's surprise. Zenyatta's good at what he does; he keeps the peace between the two of them and offers McCree advice and comforting words on the days when he's not doing so hot himself. Most importantly, the omnic takes care of Hanzo.

It's been over a month since Hanzo first fell into his slumber. He hasn't woken. They'd tried everything. It's probably not true, not literally – but Gods, McCree feels like they have. Shaking, shouting, gentle words and teary pleas have no effect. Even the riskier options have been tried and tested; against Zenyatta's cautions, they've taken off his IV's to try and starve him awake. All he'd gotten was weaker until they'd had to hastily reapply them to bring him back. Genji's dragon had tried... how had the man described it? McCree's a little fuzzy on the details, but he's pretty sure it'd been akin to getting spiritually zapped by electric paddles. There'd be no effect; the attempt had only drained and driven Genji into a depressive funk for days.

“He's still there,” Genji's muttered that day, mere hours after the failure. His hand had been caressing the back of his neck; it's a familiar motion. McCree's never seen Genji less than fully clothed – hasn't asked to – but the man's hand always seems to end up back there when he's unhappy. “I can feel him. It's scarce but – he's there. He's still fighting.”

It's that knowledge that keeps McCree going. It's what helps him get out of that bed and go through his morning routine; it's what gives him the will to keep brushing his teeth so he can bend over and give Hanzo a minty-fresh kiss every morning. No matter how much the motion hurts, no matter how pointless it's beginning to seem, he does it. If Hanzo's still fighting, then McCree's not giving up on him either.

The only thing he does want to give up on is his schoolwork. McCree hasn't had a chance to talk to Reyes, but the commander's managed to get his courses all lined up. A high school completion program, complete with textbooks and tedious homework that all gets mailed right to his doorstep. McCree's not sure how Reyes got them to agree to that – maybe faked an illness on McCree's records? - but part of him is glad that he doesn't have to leave and sit in some stuffy classroom all
The other part wants to find the stuffy classroom of whoever drafted this busy work and hurl his textbooks through their window.

Sometimes McCree does his schoolwork in Hanzo's room; there's an old, roll-up desk in the corner of the man's room that lets him spread out his papers and work in silence that's only broken by the beeping of a heart monitor. On the days that he feels like casually reading a textbook – only the history one, mind – he'll scooch over and settle on the edge of Hanzo's bed. McCree reads aloud to him if his voice is up to it; he figures Hanzo probably gets mighty bored if he's conscious beneath his skin. It can't hurt to give him something to listen to, either way.

Genji seems to like it. McCree'll catch him slipping inside the room on those days, coming to sit by his brother on the opposite end of the bed. He doesn't really say anything – barely makes any noise in the house at all unless he's talking or cleaning – but he watches Hanzo, takes his brother's hand and gently strokes the top of it with his thumb. Making sure Hanzo knows he's still there. Genji has a harder time talking to him; Zenyatta's the one who coaxes him to speak on the rare occasions he does. McCree stays out of it – it's none of his business and besides, he's pretty sure Hanzo'd understand.

He hopes Hanzo understands. It's selfish, in a way – he knows it'd be hell to be conscious of this all. Trapped in a body that's not obeying, aware and muted. He doesn't want that; at the same time, part of him wishes Hanzo is here, Hanzo knows what they're doing for him and that they haven't given up. Maybe if he knows that, it'll give him the strength to fight a little harder.

McCree's still only got one hand for Hanzo to hold at the moment. He's not sure what'd be better, having a prosthetic ready to go or just... leaving it be. Angela's the only one who really keeps in contact with them, sending in new shipments of IV every week and notes along with them. She's offered to whip up a new arm several times, even sent him preliminary sketches and asked for his feedback. McCree's politely declined so far, told her he wasn't ready yet – though he had admitted the one with the skull on it had looked a little bad-ass. She'd told him she'd set it aside for when he did feel up to it, and McCree guesses he's a little thankful for it.

He doesn't like thinking about it. Thinking about it is acknowledging it beyond noticing its absence and hey, he's getting better about that too. Using a spoon's gotten a mile easier; learning to use a pencil all over again had been the worst feeling in the world, but he'd moved past that too. He's just not ready to do anything beyond that. Adapt. Master it. Then – Hanzo. When Hanzo's awake, McCree can manage. Hanzo's got prosthetics of his own, he's done it – all of it. He's been through the ropes, and McCree quietly hopes Hanzo'll be able to offer him some guidance.

Ain't ready to face it all alone.

Today McCree finds himself drifting in and out while at Hanzo's desk; he's half-slumped over his Biology textbook with crossed eyes and a budding restlessness in his veins. His leg jitters; he chews on a toothpick crammed between his teeth in place of a cigarette. Damned if he doesn't want a cigarette. His fingers tighten around his pencil as the steady beat of the heart machine begins to wear on his nerves; he feels the wood give for a half-second before an audible snap pierces the room.

Hells. That was his last pencil.

McCree stands, pushing himself up from the desk with a sigh as heavy as his heart. He's too stifled in here. It's been too long since he's had a breath of fresh air, even longer since he took a jog. He's getting pudgy in the middle again – without Blackwatch to keep him in shape, seems he's going to
have to take the matter into his own hands.

He hasn't actually left the cottage yet. Sure, McCree's roamed in the gardens. Zenyatta and Genji like to idle there, pulling weeds and chatting away in Nepali while they tend to their sprouts. It's nice and serene, but the area's still too damn cramped for McCree's liking. The town's not far. A quick jog, in and out of whatever they've for a convenience store. A couple Slim Jim's and a pack of beer sound downright heavenly right now.

Maybe the diet and exercise bit can start tomorrow.

McCree's already shucking on his boots when Genji steps through the door; the man's got dirt on his knees, a spade in hand and a generous amount of sweat dotting his brow. Ah, right. They're planting apple seeds today. “McCree? I thought you were studying.”

“Too fidgety,” McCree admits. “I've been cooped up too long.” He stands up straight, arching his back and groaning when it makes an audible click. “Too long bent over, too. Figured I'd pop down to the store.”

Genji's brow furrows; he makes no move to leave the doorway. “The store? Our supplies are delivered.”

“Like I said, I'm restless.” McCree rubs at the base of his back before glancing up at Genji again. “Besides, I snapped my last pencil. Can't get the grip right. So I'm just going to jog down and get some supplies. Don't worry, only took a couple dollars out of the stash.”

Genji still doesn't budge. “I don't think that's wise,” he says, tone suddenly cautious.

McCree blinks. “Wise? What, y'believed Reyes about the satellites? I'll be fine.”

“It is not you I am worried about,” Genji counters. “You should not be apart from my brother.”

McCree blinks again, his expression morphing to one of astonishment. “What? It's – Genji, it's less than, what? Couple miles? I'll be back quick-”

“No.” It's firm, a complete rebuke. “You cannot leave.”

“Excuse me?” Now McCree's getting a little nettled, brow furrowing in irritation. “I ain't your captive. I can go where I want.”

“It's too risky.”

McCree throws his hands up in the air. “There it is again! Risky! Y'said that the first time I woke, and you never explained it! It's not like I'm at his bedside all the time!”

“You are close. You are within reach,” Genji stresses. His expression's become downright pained. “My brother- I do not know what has happened to his dragon. I saw what it did when it could not find you. If they wake, and you are not here-”

“It's been a month,” McCree interrupts – his tone comes out colder than he'd wanted. Genji flinches just the same. “A half-hour trip ain't going to be what pulls him out of this. We've got no idea what will.”

“There must be a way.” Genji looks wounded, not even a flicker of anger in his gaze. “We will find something.”
“Yeah, well, I'm not going to play prisoner until we do.” McCree takes a step forward; when Genji still doesn't move, he's forced to shove the man out of his way with his shoulder. “Like I said. Back in a half-hour.”

Genji says nothing, but he doesn't move to stop him. McCree avoids Zenyatta's gaze; the omnic's floating above a row of strawberries, thin neck swiveling to track McCree's movements. McCree pushes down the petty notion to glare back at him and instead kicks a rock out of his way as he stomps down the dirt path.

We will find something.

They've long passed finding something. Right now?

What they need is a miracle.
Chapter 53

Where is he?

McCree ends up more winded than he'd like; what should have been ten ends up as a twenty-minute jog to the convenience store. He's panting by the time he hears the familiar ding of the automatic doors sliding open; as he steps inside McCree decides then and there that he has to start working out again.

The air is cool and stale inside the store; recycled, no doubt, run constantly through an air conditioner that probably hasn't been cleaned in months. There's a teenager at the counter, but he's not giving McCree a second glance – or even a first. His eyes are on his phone, and the long sleeves of McCree's plaid shirt seem to be paying off. Kid hasn't noticed what's off, hasn't resorted to gawking at him yet. Or maybe McCree's just not as interesting as some Instagram video of a dog falling down the stairs.

That's fair.

McCree peruses the shelves, ends up grabbing a handful of Slim Jims that he internally argues has protein for muscle mass, a pack of pencils and a few candy bars that he has more trouble justifying. When he tosses the assortment onto the counter the teen doesn't even blink, doesn't even look up from his phone. The kid scans the lot one-handed, eyes never leaving his screen except to momentarily glance at the total.

“Ten fifty-nine,” comes the bored drone.

McCree reaches into his pocket, ready to pull out his bills to pay – but his gaze catches on the case behind the counter. Shiny, freshly-cleaned glass that gives him a clear view to the treasures inside.

Shouldn't is McCree's immediate thought. He made a promise. Did he? Was it a promise? It's been a while – feels like a lifetime. Maybe he deserves it. Just one. A little break, take the stress off.

It's not like Hanzo's around to notice.

McCree'd left whatever fake ID Blackwatch had drummed up back in their bags, but the kid doesn't card him. Probably too much effort, considering it'd require actually looking up from his screen. Damn. When did McCree become the cynical youth-hating adult? He's not old enough for this shit.

Especially since the clerk's laziness is what lets McCree end up out behind the store, leaning against the wall by the dumpster and taking a long, grateful drag on a cigarette.

It's not a good smoke. They hadn't had cigars or the cig brand he'd preferred – plus, the stick tastes stale in his mouth. It's his first in – hells. He'd lost track of how long it's been. Kicking the habit hadn't been that hard, not with Blackwatch's medical team to patch him through it. Hanzo probably hadn't even noticed his shakes. Might be a bit more unpleasant now.

Still, the smoke's enough to take some of McCree's angry jitters down a notch, even if they'd mostly been over his difficulty lighting the damn thing one-handed. It's giving him something to do and concentrate on while he stalls going home.

Heh. Home. Sure doesn't feel like it. But McCree doubts it will, long as Hanzo keeps snoozing.
Maybe he'll be awake by the time McCree comes back. Maybe this separation is going to kick him and his dragon out of bed, through fear or something. It wouldn't be pleasant, and it might end up leveling the house – but McCree thinks he'll take it at this point. He'll take anything as long as Hanzo finally opens his eyes.

There's a bubble of anticipation springing up in McCree's chest now; his teeth grind down on the cigarette and he plucks it from his mouth. Fine. Time to head back. See if Genji's fuss was all for nothing – or maybe something. Either way, his half-hour's up. McCree pulls his index finger up, ready to flick the half-used cigarette down to the ground.

“Don't be wasteful.”

The voice is colder and a hell of a lot crisper than the air in the store; it's also the first thing today that sends a shiver down McCree's spine. A slender hand reaches over to take the cigarette from McCree's trembling fingers; the cigarette is lifted to soft lips that are always, always curved into a disproving frown. There's a slow drag, a long exhalation and McCree watches dumbly as the smoke wafts skyward.

There's clouds forming overhead. Looks like a storm's brewing.

“No hello? That's impolite, Jesse.”

“Hello, Harper,” McCree finally rasps, lowering his gaze to the stony-faced woman. She's still got the cigarette poised in her fingers, the picture of grace and discontentment as sharp eyes sweep over McCree. He gaze is unimpressed - when is it not? - and her hair is coiled tight in a bun, not a single strand loose. The only thing out of place is her outfit – McCree's used to her in combat gear, black all over and blood on her boots. She looks strange and alien here, leaning against the wall in nothing but a gray tank-top, skinny jeans and stiletto boots.

Blending in with the commonfolk. Like she needed it. Reyes himself could never hear her coming.

“You look like shit,” Harper comments before taking in another drag of the cigarette.

“Lance looks worse,” McCree shoots back immediately. It's petty, he knows it. He doesn't care. What little Genji had told him of the rats' fates, McCree's going to use.

There's a trace of a smile, but it's anything but friendly. “Lance was an idiot and a coward. I'm well aware he's dead, and I'm not sorry for it.” Another long inhale and exhalation of smoke; Harper crafts an O shape in the air. Show-off. “Holding onto old grudges isn't healthy.”

“It's a pretty damn recent one. He took-”

“Liar.” She cuts him off like a knife at his throat; McCree swallows in anger. “Gabriel taught you better. Do not lie to someone who is better at it than you.”

“Y'got no right to talk about Reyes.”

“Perhaps not.” Harper tilts the cigarette back and forth in her fingers, casting McCree a considering look. “But I will stand by my first statement. Do not hold onto old grudges. You and I were never going to happen. You were young and confused, and I, an object of misplaced affection. I don't find it nearly as amusing now.”

“I don't care about you anymore.”

Harper gives him another considering look. “No,” she says finally, placing the cigarette back
between her lips. “You don't, do you?”

“Why are you here?” McCree demands. “To kill me? Them?”

Harper inhales through her nose. “I loathe clichés,” she murmurs. “But I cannot think of a more concise response than 'if I wanted you dead, you already would be’.”

Deep down, McCree knows it, even if he doesn't like it. “Then what?”

Harper removes the cigarette from her lips; her gaze lifts up towards the sky as she exhales another plume of smoke. “Talon is abandoning their pursuit of the Shimada clan.”

McCree scoffs. “No, they aren't.”

“They are – in the way that matters to you. We have no more interest in trying to force either brother to our side.” Harper crushes the spent cigarette between her fingers and flicks it down to the ground. “New leadership has taken effect. New policies. It's clear this is not a fruitful endeavor.”

“Raiding Blackwatch's base didn't turn out so well?” McCree replies snarkily.

“To put it mildly.” Harper doesn't seem remotely bothered; that ticks McCree off more than anything. “It was a fools' errand. Jepsen coaxed the weaker of the Council to allow her brief command, promising untold power. She failed, she is dead, and the weak have been... removed. Talon is putting this behind them – for now.”

“For now,” McCree echoes hollowly.

Harper pushes herself off the wall, straightening up as she lowers her gaze from the sky back to him. “I did not join Talon because I was even remotely enamored with Lance,” she says calmly. “No matter what he crowed back to you, I'm sure. I left because Blackwatch has no ambition.”

McCree scoffs. “You obviously haven't-”

“Met Gabriel? Listened to him, known him?” Harper interrupts. “I knew him, Jesse.” Her stiletto boots come down hard, crushing the smoldering cigarette into the dirt. “Gabriel is content to play the role of a shadow. He will gripe and moan and posture, but again and again he will fall in line. Let me guess - he and Morrison have made up over Talon's failure? How long do you think it will last this time?”

McCree says nothing.

“Gabriel needs a guiding hand from the uncollared. He will never be happy as Morrison's bulldog, and he will never amount to anything as it. There is still hope for him – and you. You are talented, Jesse. You could do great things with us.” Harper inclines her head slightly, eyes raking him over again. “But we can wait until you are ready to see the truth of this world. We will wait for you... and your little dragon family.”

“Hanzo's dead,” McCree rasps back.

Harper's scoff is one of the barest amusement.

Do not lie to someone who is better at it than you.

“I could shoot you,” McCree continues, voice just as hoarse. “Bet I'd get a medal.”
“I bet you would.” Harper reaches over towards McCree's chest; he has to fight down a flinch as she plucks the cigarette carton from his shirt pocket and holds it out in her palm. “But we both know these have a better chance of killing me than you do.”

There's a clatter in the alleyway behind him; by the time McCree's looked away and back, Harper's already gone.

“Hey, man.” McCree turns around fully; the clerk is standing there, holding two heavy trashbags and giving him an annoyed look. “No smoking back here.”

“That's fine,” McCree replies finally.

“I'm going home anyway.”

---

_I can't find him!

_I can't find him and it's your fault!

---

When McCree returns, Hanzo's still fast asleep.

McCree feels kind of silly for thinking otherwise but hell, he doesn't know how this spirit stuff works. He'd come home to an empty garden and kitchen, had made a beeline straight to Hanzo's room in hopes of finding Genji and Zenyatta in there and either celebrating or dealing with one angry dragon. They'd been in the room, as McCree had hoped – but with Hanzo still out like a light.

Genji'd seemed grief-stricken the moment McCree'd walked into the room, huddled over Hanzo's form with Zenyatta at his side. Currently, the omnic seems to be taking Hanzo's readings; Genji's just outright despondent, judging by his stance.

“What happened?” McCree asks.

“You left,” Genji snaps back, and McCree's brows lift as the man turns a sudden glare on him. “Now he's agitated.”

“Agitated?” McCree steps closer to the bed, albeit cautiously. “Him, or his dragon?”

“Him. Both. I do not know.” Genji puts his back to McCree again, looking over his brother again. “Isao can sense a disturbance.”

“His resting heart-rate has risen substantially,” Zenyatta supplies, wiping at Hanzo's forehead with a small towel. “A natural response to high amounts of stress. This change occurred a few minutes after you left.”

The last bit is spoken gently, and somehow that's worse. At least Genji's being honest about his anger at McCree right now.
“I'm sorry.” Genji merely huffs; Zenyatta says nothing. “I am,” McCree continues softly. “I lost my temper. It's hard, but...” McCree takes another step forward and Zenyatta floats back to give him some room. “That ain't an excuse.” McCree reaches down to give Hanzo's hand a comforting squeeze. “I'm sorry. I shouldn't have left. I'm right here.”

If McCree didn't know any better, he could swear there was a faint tremble to Hanzo's hand. That can't be right.

“You said you would be back in half an hour,” Genji mutters. He's picked up Zenyatta's abandoned cloth, patting Hanzo's neck. The comatose sweat? “What took you so long?”

“Not as good a runner as I thought I was.”

“That cannot be all,” Genji deadpans.

“I stopped to have a smoke,” McCree admits. It's faint, but – was that a twitch? A wiggle of a finger? McCree casts a curious gaze downwards, but Hanzo's expression hasn't changed.

Huh.

“I can tell,” Genji comments. “The scent is strong. I did not know you smoked.”

“Hanzo asked me to stop, but my nerves haven't been the best.” McCree exhales, shoulder slumping a little. “Then I ran into my ex.”

There's no mistaking it this time. There's no twitch or tremble; Hanzo's hand curls into a tight grip around McCree's own and his sleeping expression tightens.

McCree stares. He stares at Hanzo, then over to Genji who looks just as shocked as McCree feels. Zenyatta's modeled face-plates betray nothing but every LED node on his forehead is lit up and glowing something fierce.

Genji looks at McCree – really looks at him. Then, fervently, he begins to wave his hand in a circling motion. Like – he's asking McCree to continue. Hells. Can Hanzo hear them?

“Yeah, I, ah-” McCree begins, fumbling over the words. Shit, what to say? What's going to keep this going? “Like I said, ran into my ex?” Hanzo's grip remains, doesn't slacken. “We talked for a while.”

Hanzo's claws curl, tightening. The tightened expression turns to one of displeasure – like he's having a bad dream.

“Was your ex from Blackwatch?” Genji asks, and damn that's a loaded question.

“Was,” McCree replies carefully. “Now, uh. Now she works for Talon- Ahh! Ahh!!” McCree hisses in pain as Hanzo's claws are digging into his flesh; there's fangs starting to show on that scowl. Hells. McCree needs that prosthetic right about now. “Ow! Ow!”

“Talon?” Genji's alarmed, already jumping to his feet. “They're here? They're on their way?!”

It's a fight to piece together a coherent sentence through the pain, much less try to figure out if poking the dragon-bear is really going to accomplish anything. But it's the most reaction they've gotten in a month so- “No!” McCree gasps. “No- they're- not. Safe. Promise.”

Hanzo's claws retract enough for McCree to groan in relief; Genji doesn't look nearly as abated.
“What's going on?” he demands.

McCree blows out an exhausted stream of air, glancing between his mildly-bleeding arm and Genji's defensive stance. Ah, hell. Go big or go home. And it won't be a lie, technically. “She wants me to run away with her.”

The last thing McCree hears is a snarl, guttural and furious before the world is ripped away to black.
McCree can feel something cool and wet at his back.

It's really a non-issue, the least of his problems. So he might have some wet jeans later, big deal. Whatever form of liquid he's laying on is clearly keeping him afloat – even with this massive dragon paw pinning him down.

Lord, that's a really big dragon. It's not a particularly eloquent statement, but it's the only thing running through McCree's head as he stares saucer-eyed back at the creature snarling in his face. There's massive curved fangs hovering inches from his nose and hot, belabored breath blasting in McCree's face. There's no scent to it; no smell to anything around McCree. All he can see is darkness and this one, shining beast looming over him in terrible fury, and-

McCree!

Well, shit.

Hanzo's floating in the air a few feet away from the dragon; an angrily whipping tail is keeping the man at bay. He looks – young. Young ain't the right word, but... untouched. There's no scales, no horns, not even any cute, flicking ears. Hanzo, this glowy, spirit-like version of him is just... Hanzo. Is this him, as he is? Is this what he'd look like without his dragons?

Gods, the sight is enough to make McCree's heart skip three beats – seeing Hanzo here, talking, looking at him again. It's so much after so little. It's been too long.

McCree reaches out towards Hanzo; his brows shoot way up when he realizes he's reaching with his left hand, his left hand that is actually there – even if it and the rest of him attached to it look translucent? Fuck it, he's not a poet.

Eri!

McCree blinks, attention brought back. Hanzo is shoving at the dragon's tail whenever it lashes near him; the man's clearly trying to get closer. Release him!

Another snarl from the dragon – Eri? - who doesn't lessen his hold on McCree. No. The voice is tremendous, ringing around in McCree's ears like a shotgun blast. He has to learn.

Let him go! Hanzo manages to duck underneath an angry smack of Eri's tail; McCree watches in dazed amazement as Hanzo glides over like an actual ghost and attempts to tug on the dragon's massive forearm. You cannot keep us prisoners!


Eri seems to be outright ignoring Hanzo, focusing his angry glare solely on McCree with an angry rumble. You cannot leave. The claws tighten, digging into McCree's shoulders and goddamn, shouldn't things not hurt when he's a ghost? Eri's grip is painful, a growl reverberating in his throat as McCree winces at the added noise. You are our mate. You cannot leave us.

Eri!

The dragon snarls again, an inch from McCree's face. You. Cannot. Leave Us!

In any other situation, McCree might be downright smitten. Hanzo's ghostly form doesn't have blood to blush with but McCree can see it written all over his face – his embarrassed scowl, the
way he's hiding his face even as he punches at the dragon's shoulder. The term mate, hoo. Hell. That's a loaded word and it's making McCree fight down a bit of a giggle just thinking about it.

Course, he does have one hell of an angry, furious spirit dragon looming down over him. Also, he might be dead or dying. He's not sure, and it's killing some of the romantic vibe.

McCree clears his throat. Ah. Eri, is it? Yer one of Hanzo's dragons, right?

The grip doesn't loosen, but Eri's look – softens? Some of the rage has ebbed out, replaced by a gaze that's briefly averted. I am his only spirit. I am his protector now.

You are an idiot, Hanzo snarls back. Some protector. Hanzo looks down at McCree, expression pained. He is what has been keeping me trapped. I never wanted to stay like this, please, believe me.

You are safe.

I am a vegetable!

I am keeping you safe. Eri snaps his gaze back to McCree, lips curling to bare his teeth. And you must stay. You must help me do this.


Do not humor him, Hanzo hisses. He's floating downward, abandoning his assault on Eri's arm to try tugging the dragon's paw. He is being a coward.

Can I ask how him keeping you sleeping is helping protect you? McCree asks carefully. I'd think-

I can see. I can watch over him.

Pardon?

I can see, Eri stresses, like that's gonna make it clearer. Everything. All around him. I can watch for danger that his eyes cannot. We- my sister had that task. Now I am the only one left.

It is not your task! Hanzo cries in frustration. He's given up on pulling and is looking up at the dragon in exasperation. I have told you this a hundred times and more!

You can't, er, see around if Hanzo's awake? McCree supplies gently.

No. Eri shifts, scales shimmering as the dragon's lips close and thin in discontent. I cannot. Which is why you- and oh, ow, pressure's back, claws claws claws! - cannot leave. I cannot rely on my sister anymore. We must both keep him safe.

Now, hold on, McCree protests. He's not wheezing – doesn't think a spirit actually breathes – but damned if those claws don't pinch to the point of distraction. Like I said, I didn't want to leave. But, c'mon. If dragons are a Shimada thing, surely there's been other single-dragon hosts. They can't possibly be unconscious their whole lives.

Eri lowers his gaze again. I am not them. I have been with my sister since my creation. She has guided me and done what I could not. The dragon cranes his neck, looking over and past McCree – and down. Like the creature is staring beyond the pool of water at McCree's back, gazing at
something beyond McCree's vision.

Hanzo's floated down on McCree's other side – he's placing a comforting hand on the top of McCree's own, even if his lips are pursed in unhappiness. Hanzo's eyes are lowered; he looks downright miserable. Can't blame him, really. McCree twists his palm, turning his hand over to he can interlock his fingers and give Hanzo's hand a squeeze.

There's only the faintest of a response, but hell, McCree can't really blame him for that either.

I do not, Eri continues, still looking away. I do not know what to do without her. I need you, and my brother at our sides. You can protect my host in one way, while I-

No, we can't.

Eri's gaze immediately returns to McCree, eyes sharpening and slitting like a cat. Dangerous. What?

I know we've been watching over Hanzo real close, but this ain't fair. To him, or to us. It can't keep going on.

Eri growls, low and threatening.

No. Like I said, this ain't fair. And once I get back- hang on. McCree pauses. I'm not dead, am I?

No, Hanzo says gently – there's a bit of a scoff to his voice as a thumb rubs gently over the back of McCree's hand. You are not. You can be returned to your body, the same as I. He would not have taken you if that was not the case.

Cause you love me?

The hand holding McCree's stills as Hanzo brings his free hand up to cover his face. McCree...

Cause I'm your mate.

McCree.

And since I'm your mate, McCree declares, earning an audible groan. I'm telling you, Eri – can I call you Eri?

No, the dragon growls.

Fine, I'm telling you, Almighty Spirit Dragon, that the second I get back to my body, I'm telling Genji and everybody else to pack it up and let Hanzo fend for himself.

Another growl, angrier and more dangerous than the last. No.

Yes. Put him back. Genji loves him – I love him too, and this isn't right. You can't just keep him here because you think that's safer. I'll make it unsafe if that's what gets you to wake him. I'll stay away... McCree swallows. For the rest of my life if that's what he needs to function again.

Eri snarls again, scales bristling as those gigantic fangs bare at McCree's throat. Then I will not let you leave.

Yeah, you will, McCree challenges. Both know I'm useless in here, and Zen can't take care of two of us. We don't have enough shit in the house to keep me stable. I'll die.
McCree's not fully sure about that, but he figures if he's not sure, the dragon can't call his bluff. Seems it worked, though; Eri's glare falters, replaced by a flash of uncertainty.

*I'll die*, McCree states. *And Hanzo will be alone. So let us go.*

The uncertainty on the dragon's face vanishes, replaced by utter fury. Still, the claws lift off McCree's pinned form and curl back towards the dragon's chest – but there's no fading, no sudden feeling of being shot back to his own body. Not that McCree has any idea what to expect there. Eri simply tosses his head like an angry horse and pushes off with the back of his feet, floating backwards and upwards. The creature is curling in on itself, gliding up high above their heads. The dragon's tucked itself into a coiled ball, hiding its snout from view.

If McCree didn't know any better, he'd think the Almighty Spirit Dragon was having a bit of a sulk.

Hanzo sighs, low and exhausted. *It has been like this since I came here. He will not listen to reason.*

*I can relate*, McCree grunts back. He moves his hand out from under Hanzo's, placing his palms on the water and pushing himself up into a sitting position. *Wanting to protect what you love, even if you're being a git about it.*

*It is not about me*, Hanzo grumbles. *I am his host. He is only protecting himself.*

*Y'know that ain't true.*

Hanzo falls silent; McCree reaches over, taking his hand in his own again. *I missed you. It's nice seein' you, even like this.*

Hanzo scoffs, quiet and miserable. *You are here as a spirit, ripped from your body and torn into a spirit world. Even now, I have only brought pain to you.*

Alright, time for this conversation. It's fine, McCree's been ready. He knows how Hanzo ticks, knew it was coming. *Y'know that ain't true either.*

Hanzo won't look at him, won't respond when McCree gives his hand a comforting squeeze. Alright. Slow now, nice and easy. *None of this was your fault.*

Hanzo's lips set in a hard line. *If you really think that, you are blind.*

*Blinded by love?* Hanzo doesn't laugh; alright, not ready to joke about it. *Han, seriously. Y'got a shit deal with these dragons and clan and everything else. Y'hardly invited-*

*I left with them*, Hanzo snaps, cutting McCree off. *I was only in that cell for being petty and-*

*Han-*

*It was pointless! I attacked Reyes for nothing, I antagonized Talon and then-*

*Han.*

*They took you! They took you because of me, and in the waking world?! You can't even- Hanzo jerks his hand from McCree's grasp. That hand is not real. It is gone, forever. And it is my fault.*

*To be fair, I shouldn't have let Reyes call me out of that cell without wakin' you. I thought you needed your sleep after emotions ran high, and well... Ironic, now. As for the hand - you weren't the one that cut it off.*
I brought her there. They only went after you because I-

Saved my life?

Hanzo blinks, visibly caught off guard.

Y'forget already? Only reason I'm alive at all is because of you. You and your dragons kept me from certain death down in that Talon base - and that was back when you didn't owe me a damn thing, no less.

Hanzo shifts, uncomfortable. That was-

Maybe it was because you were warming to me, but it's kinda moot, ain't it? Sure, I lost an arm, and that- I don't like that. But I wouldn't have any opinion at all on it if I was dead. And I'm not. Maybe I never said it 'cause I thought you'd get squirrely about a life-debt, but it sounds like you need to hear it now. I owe you my life.

Hanzo squirms again. Do not say that.

You sure that Eri's the only one who didn't want to wake up?

Shock flashes across Hanzo's face, and McCree can pick out a hint of nervousness. There it is. No! If I am like this, I cannot protect you, I could not-

Talk to me? Face me if you thought I was gonna hold all this against you?

More silence. Hit the nail on the head, it seems. I'm here now. I'm telling you straight-up, that's not how I feel. It's not how I'm ever gonna feel. But if you feel bad about it-

How could I not? Hanzo asks miserably.

Then wake up. McCree lifts his left arm, waggling fingers that don't exist. You're right. This is gone. And I'm not dealing with that yet. Angela's been pushing for prosthetics, but I can't – I ain't ready. I'm waiting for you.

Hanzo's gaze softens. McCree...

I'm not casting blame. But I need your help, and if helping's gonna help lift some of your misplaced guilt, then whatever works for you. But you gotta wake up. This ain't fair to Genji either, you know that.

I know, Hanzo says in a quiet voice. I did not want to be apart from you. Either of you. Truly.

I believe you. And that's the thing, he does. McCree knows Hanzo gets wrapped up in his own head – he always does, and that's okay. McCree can handle that, because after he's got whatever's troubling off his chest, Hanzo's always willing to listen. Hey, McCree says softly. I'm gonna go talk to Eri.

Surprise crosses Hanzo's face. Is that wise, so soon?

Probably not. McCree leans over, brushing a kiss against Hanzo's cheek. Hanzo turns, as if to reciprocate with his lips – until McCree tilts his own head away.

Not yet. That's for the waking world only. When you're awake, I'll shower you with 'em, I promise.

Hanzo's gaze softens; a small sigh escapes his lips. Very well. There's a short pause. I would have
thought you would have favored this form.

A ghost?

No. Hanzo extends his hand, examining the unscathed pale flesh. A person.

Ah, a double-doubt conversation. That's fine too. This your round-about way of asking me if I like this non-dragony version of you better?

No, Hanzo says immediately, petulantly.

Liar. I don't mind either. I think your ears are awful cute as is-

Stop.

- but I know it's hard for you, being out in the world like that. So it's really up to you. If you want to try and get your dragon t'change you back, go for it. If he won't or you decide you want to stay as you are - that's fine too. I'm gonna love you either way.

Scalie, Hanzo mutters, one hand reaching up to cover his face in embarrassment again. Always a mild insult tossed out in these times, like he can hide behind it. Like McCree doesn't see right through it.

I regret Clara teaching you that word. McCree gets to his feet, brushing at the back of his legs; strangely, there's no trace of wetness despite laying on the water for some time. Huh. Spirit rules are weird. Gonna go chat with your dragon now. McCree crouches down, testing the give of the water's surface – it holds firm – before pushing off with the balls of his feet. McCree floats upward awkwardly, weightless and semi-aimless; he's got to flail his arms a little to keep himself upright. It's like being in zero gravity – kind of.

Spirit rules are fucking weird.

Eri uncurls slightly as McCree floats closer, long snout poking out from under his tail. The dragon says nothing, but McCree swears he can feel the absolute misery radiating off the beast. Hey.

Eri sniffs irritably.

I'm sorry Hanzo's been calling you a coward. Being scared is more than fair right now.

I am not frightened, Eri snaps. I am being prudent.

You said you've been with your sister since birth? McCree asks instead.

Eri grows quiet for a moment. Since my creation. I have never existed... like this.

Alone?

Yes.

McCree folds his legs to sit criss-cross in midair. He's sort of tilting to the right, but that's fine. Not an issue. It's not easy to lose a guiding force in your life. Especially if you were close to 'em.

Eri snorts. Are you attempting to lecture me, mortal?

Hey now, thought I was a mate. But no, I ain't. I wouldn't dream of lecturing a big ol' spirit like you. You already know what I'm gonna say.
Do I, now?

Whoo. For a moment, the dragon'd sounded exactly like Hanzo, down to the amused lilt of his voice. Spooky. Uh, yeah. You already know what you gotta do. You already know that you're gonna let me and Hanzo go, 'cause you know that you gotta keep going. You were lucky enough to have someone to show you through the world, but that doesn't mean you're helpless without 'em. You're like me and Reyes. Y'ain't sure of yourself yet, but you know that you learned, and you grew. You can keep Hanzo safe your own way; a way that doesn't make him miserable like before. You don't have to be so on-guard for the moment as is; Talon's not coming after us anymore.

Eri ripples in surprise; McCree briefly glances down to see Hanzo mirroring the dragon's expression. What?

Yeah, I would have explained sooner, but you sorta ripped my soul out.

Another huff; this one seems amused. I had to stop you from leaving.

Well, I do gotta go. Out of this. Gotta head back to my body, and so do you. We're here to help – me, Genji, Zen and the rest. Just try it, at least. For me. Your mate.

Eri's eyes lid slightly. You enjoy that word. My host detests it. Is it not apt?

Apt as hell, my good Almighty Spirit Dragon. McCree can hear Hanzo making strangled noises from below but he doesn't risk looking down.

Eri uncurls further, lifting his heavy head up and over until his face is hovering in front of McCree's again. Very well. I will send you back.

And?

And Hanzo as well. But you must swear fealty to me, little mate. I will protect him within his skin; you will watch for danger. But you cannot abandon him. You must protect him, always. That is the price.

It's one I can pay. McCree extends his hand – left hand, might be the last chance he gets – towards the dragon, splaying his fingers for a handshake. Deal?

Eri cranes his neck forward, brushing his snout against McCree's palm.

Deal.

There's a hell of a lot of shouting going on. Mostly in – shit, what is that? Yiddish, his brain unhelpfully supplies. Nah, nah, that ain't it. It's a different dialect, crisper and – course. Japanese, shouting in Japanese. Where the hell had Yiddish come from?

McCree's faintly aware that he's lying on the floor. It's not the spirit pool, not by a long shot, because it's hard and uncomfortable and he's pretty sure there's a couple splinters digging into his bicep. Vision's too fuzzy to really pick out more than the general color of the ceiling; head feels like he'd tried to outdrink Clara again.
There's a heavy, uncomfortable feeling of something warm and large atop his chest; his front hurts, like whatever's draped over him had dropped on top of him like a sack of potatoes.

Pretty sure an elbow's jabbed into his pec. Not a sack of potatoes, then.

Fingers are tugging on his collar, and McCree can feel warm, exaggerated breath on his neck.

“You promised,” comes the raspy voice.

And then there's lips on McCree's own, insistent and demanding and enough to pull a chuckle from McCree's throat. He lifts his hand, the only one he's got left and places it on the back of Hanzo's skull, deepening the kiss as he hears a sob hiccup in the back of Hanzo's throat.


"I promised.”
The air smells like cinnamon.

It's a delicate scent, not sharp or overpowering; there's a sweetness about it that has Hanzo inhaling through his mouth, almost tasting it on his tongue.

Cinnamon rolls. But Genji only bakes those when-

Ah, that's right.

Hanzo cracks open an eye, yawning blearily as his brain starts to wake. His room's slowly coming into focus as his eyes blink away their sleepy glaze; his body stretches, then curls to protest the idea of coming out from the nest of heavy blankets keeping him toasty and warm. The pitter-patter of rain can be heard on the roof, and that tiny, rebellious part of him groans. Cold. It'll be cold out today.

With a muffled sigh, Hanzo tosses all four of the blankets off himself and swings his legs over the side of the bed. He's got a choice; his wheelchair and prosthetics are lined up neatly on his side of the bed, both within easy reach. On one hand, he needs to keep up his strength. A month of bed rest, even unwilling, had dulled his muscles for weeks and forced him to repeat his strength training all over again; it's not an experience Hanzo wants to endure a third time. On the other hand, metal prosthetics are miserably cold in the mornings here.

Hanzo settles on the chair.

The bathroom's counter has been lowered on Hanzo's side for just that choice; McCree had spent half a week reworking parts of the house to make it more accessible. The gesture had been kind and thoughtful; Hanzo appreciates it almost as much as the carefully preserved memory of the man working, shirt tied around his waist and muscles slicked with sweat and bulging. Hanzo was usually picky about just how long his men could go without a shower; that week, he'd dragged McCree to bed before the man could even wipe his brow.

Of course, that inclination isn't within Hanzo at the moment; he's busy taking his own shower in the walk-in-sit-down tub, rubbing out the grease from his hair and smearing exfoliation cream over his nose. The detangling shampoo Genji had bought for him works wonders, but it's still a bit of a pain to work the entirety of the goo over his long strands of hair.

Maybe he should get a haircut. It's not like he has the horns to worry about anymore.

It's still an unfamiliar feeling, to rub the towel over his head and to feel nothing there. Hanzo keeps expecting to have his arm bump into the protrusions, flinching away at nothing in the expectation of getting scraped. It's hard to wrap his head around the fact that his antlers have been reduced to barely-noticeable, flattened little nubs. It'd been startling, downright terrifying to have one come off one passion-filled night after an unremarkable bump against the headboard. Anxiety, stammers and McCree's unremitting apologies had killed the mood beyond repair, and the other horn had simply fallen off the next night sometime during Hanzo's slumber.

Is this not what you wanted?
Eri's unremorseful attitude towards the lack of warning aside, Hanzo had been... pleased. He still is, now; at least, he thinks so.

Hanzo finishes drying off, balling up the towel and tossing it into the laundry bin. As he gets re-situated into his chair, Hanzo glances at the fogged-up mirror on his side of the counter. He rolls over and leans, rubbing his palm over the mirror to clear the view. Once enough moisture's been wiped away, Hanzo tilts his head forward, this way and that as he inspects his reflection in the mirror.

Hmph. His skin is still red and irritated where his scales had lain; there's a few spots that look shiny and scarred. When his scales had first begun to flake off they had itched, damnably and incessantly. And true, McCree and Genji and Zenyatta and common sense all told him not to scratch at them - but they had itched. Some scales came off what Hanzo guesses as prematurely, based on the pinpricks of blood and their reluctance to leave his face; these are the areas that look the most ready to scar permanently. They damn well better not; Hanzo will have words with his spirit once this healing's finished.

At least, he reasons as he picks up a Q-tip, his ears are easier to clean now. It's much nicer to not have them flinch away from contact – even if he knows McCree quietly mourns them. Those, at least, he knows are not gone forever; an especially loud noise, like the crack of thunder last week can send his ears shifting back, pricking up and swiveling like a startled deer. Now, however, his gifts are like Genji's; once the 'danger' has passed to the dragon's satisfaction, the changes fade.

Hanzo wonders if someday he'll be able to control the shift. It may be more useful and convincing than a pretty-please to don his twitchy ears to get McCree to bend to his desires. The man is so terribly weak for them.

Then again, Hanzo is terribly weak for him, so it's a bit of a fair trade.

After a quick glass of water to swallow his pills, Hanzo rolls out of the bathroom towards his dresser and begins sorting through what's clean – and what he's shoved back in for a second use. His hands – hands, hands with perfectly manicured nails that he tends to like a doting mother, nails that don't catch and pull on threads anymore – stop on a bundle of black cloth. He pulls out the garment, holding it up for inspection. Yes, this will do. It's clean, it's familiar; perhaps more importantly, McCree likes it.

Hanzo's lack of horns might not hold the sewn-on bunny ears up anymore, but that's a price he's willing to pay. He'll just leave the hood down.

After dressing his his hoodie and a pair of navy-blue shorts, Hanzo wheels across the room to open the door out into the hallway. It'll be a short trip to the kitchen; the house isn't that big, really, and his travel time's been cut in half now that Zenyatta'd gotten rid of all the damn shag rugs.

Genji's baking, as Hanzo had expected. There's fresh cinnamon rolls on two metal trays, spread out across the stove with the first batch already heavily layered in icing. Genji had always had a ravenous sweet tooth, even as a child. There's usually a bit too much sugar in his treats for Hanzo's tastes, but he snatches a roll to give it a subtle wipe with a napkin, making it infinitely more palatable.

"I saw that," Genji says, half-turned away and bent over the oven. "Don't be wasteful."

Not subtle enough, apparently. "You know I enjoy your cooking," Hanzo replies mildly, balling up the napkin in his fist. "We simply have different tastes."
“McCree likes them,” Genji counters, donning a pair of oven mitts as he picks up a tray of unbaked dough.

“McCree like overly sweet things.” Hanzo takes a bite of the roll; it's curious, adjusting his chewing to not be as mindful of his canines. “That is why he likes me.”

Genji snorts, loud and unapologetic as he slips the third tray into the oven. “Brother, you are many things, but-”

“If you compare me to salt again, I shall throw this napkin at you.”

Genji laughs as he discards the oven mitts and dusts off his hands. “What a salty response.”

Hanzo tosses the balled-up napkin; Genji side-steps it easily. He hadn't been trying to hit him, not really – their relationship has only strengthened after Hanzo had awoken. Genji had been furious, naturally, when Hanzo had rasped his explanation of Eri's imprisonment. Hanzo had gotten another first-hand glimpse at his brother with draconic features twisted in rage. But, like everything in time, Genji had settled. He'd calmed, dedicated himself to Hanzo's recovery and remained devoted – without ever dipping into uncomfortable doting territory. Genji is still, after all, his brother. Hanzo is not rid of his sibling's self-proclaimed 'duty' of teasing him so easily.

“Where is Zenyatta?” Hanzo asks, licking a dollop of frosting off his fingers.

“In the garden, making sure the soil's not getting too flooded. But that's not what you really wanted to ask, is it?”

“Fine,” Hanzo sighs. “Have you heard from him?”

Genji nods as he picks up the icing container, leaning over to begin applying it to the second batch. “I have. He left a message around six this morning, said the flight was slightly delayed from bad weather.”

“It is Washington,” Hanzo says sourly. “When is it not bad weather?”

“I've heard good things about July.” Genji squints, adding another dollop to the top of a roll. “Be patient.”

“I am,” Hanzo protests. “Eri is the one who is impatient. It was difficult enough to get him to agree to this trip.”

“Yes, I am sure it is all your dragon who is in no way affected by your own moods,” Genji replies mildly. “But I meant to be patient in regards to the weather. McCree should be arriving within the hour.”

“What?” Hanzo sits upright in his chair; it's the closest he can get to jumping to his feet in surprise. “Really? How do you-?”

“He called at six, but Clara called an hour ago. She said he'd arrived safely and was driving away in the car last she saw him. In the rain, I'd say he'd be due-”

There's a knock on the door.

“Oh, apparently now,” Genji remarks in amusement. Hanzo can barely hear him – he's already wheeling straight for the entryway.
In the short time it takes Hanzo to arrive, the door's already been opened. Zenyatta's over by the coat-rack, drying his plates off with a towel and next to him is-

McCree.

The man's drenched, from his soggy, smushed hat to his soaked-through jeans. There's a sheepish grin on his face, broad palm brushing away the damp strands of hair from his eyes. He sniffs once, nose sounding stuffed before wiping at it with his index finger. “Forgot my umbrella,” he says with a guilty grin. “Might've caught a cold.”

“Fool,” Hanzo mumbles as he rolls closer, eyes never leaving McCree for a second. He knows his expression is fond, unbearably so; especially since Zenyatta quickly clears out of the room after giving the pair of them a polite nod.

“Aw.” McCree leans down, brushing a kiss to the top of Hanzo's head. “Y'don't mean that, sweet pea.”

“I do not,” Hanzo murmurs back, leaning into the touch. “Fools do not get colds.”

A callused palm is stroking Hanzo's cheek. “Really?”

“My brother never did.”

“I heard that,” Genji calls from the other room.

McCree chuckles; Hanzo reaches up, tugging on the man's drenched shirt until McCree gets the hint and crouches down to Hanzo's eye level. Good. Easier access. Hanzo cards his fingers through McCree's wet-down locks; honestly, the hat hadn't done a thing to save them. “How did it go?”

“Good.” McCree tilts his head, rubbing his skull against Hanzo's fingers like a cat. “It was good to see everyone again, especially Reyes. He seemed to be in a pretty good mood, even though he was getting off a call with Morrison when I showed up.”

“The commanders are still getting along?”

“For now.” Something strange crosses over McCree's face; in an instant, it's gone, and Hanzo's not sure it was ever there in the first place. “Either way, high spirits all around. Missions have been going well. Alex got a new beau, gabbed my ear off about it. Wanted to know if you needed any new clothes.”

“Did you mention how I don't have-?”

“Nah.” McCree shakes his head. “Strictly speaking, I can't, y'know, talk about you. Alex just kind of hinted in a round-about way and I said I'd get back to 'em. Do you want new clothes?”

“Not if it's a bother, but I do enjoy their handiwork.”

“I can tell.” McCree plucks gently at Hanzo's hoodie. “I told 'em you wear it all the time. Seemed pretty pleased.”

Hanzo huffs fondly. “And Clara?”

“Tried to get me on the training range cause she knew I was out of practice. I know she just wanted to knock me off the dueling high score, so I didn't take the bait. I'm still rusty with... y'know.”

McCree extends his left arm; he'd been keeping it at his side. McCree doesn't really touch Hanzo
with his new prosthetic. It's got metal joints in the fingers and he claims it can get caught in Hanzo's hair. Hanzo knows, deep down, that that's not the full story – but McCree is still adjusting, and the time to push the issue in full isn't now.

Still, Hanzo can help bridge the gap. He reaches out, taking McCree's metal hand in his own before the man can pull away. There's a slight tug, like McCree just tried, but Hanzo holds firm. “I understand,” he says gently. “It took me much time before I felt comfortable with my own. You are learning. You can take as long as you need.”

McCree sighs, low and wistful. “Alright. I know, I know.” There's a tiny squeeze from the metallic hand; Hanzo reciprocates before letting the man fully pull away. “I'll take it slow. I know she wasn't trying to be rude-”

“People will be thoughtless. They do not mean to be hurtful, but that does not mean you cannot be irritated about it.”

McCree's lips quirk into a smile. “When did you get so wise?”

“I had scales, horns, and no legs,” Hanzo says dryly. “I am well-versed in people being thoughtless.”

“Did I ever-?”

Hanzo shakes his head. “Do not worry. Whatever serious qualms I have ever held with you, I have brought them up. The only grudge I hold is towards my brother, for eavesdropping!”

“I heard th- oh.” There's a shuffling sound from the kitchen, like Genji is moving out of range.

McCree chuckles again. “Yer cute.”

“Are you testing if he is still listening, or just saying that?”

“The latter. I'd say it a million times in front of him, I don't give a shit.” McCree leans over, nuzzling his nose against Hanzo's. “What do I got to be embarrassed about? I'm your ma-”

“Do not.”

“Aw.” McCree's all toothy smile, giving Hanzo a wink and a kiss atop the nose. “Eri can say it, why can't I?”

“He cannot say it,” Hanzo mutters, tilting his head to nip at McCree's chin. “I forbid it.”

“All it means is that you love me,” McCree purrs; his hands are gently kneading Hanzo's thighs, one more firmly than the other. “Nothing to be shy about.”

“You already know that. It is the word-”

“What?” McCree's expression is one of sly, feigned confusion. “What do I know?”

Hanzo resists the urge to roll his eyes, even fondly. “You know that I love you.” He places his hands atop McCree's. “More than anything in this world. You have done so, so much for me; you have treated me with kindness and caring and you have loved me through everything I have suffered and suffered unto you. No matter what happens, I will always love you. That is what you know.”

McCree's ears are turning a lovely shade of red; Hanzo can guess the same about the man's cheeks,
but it's hard to say as McCree has promptly buried his face in Hanzo's lap. A strangled, muffled groan follows shortly after the end of the speech and Hanzo feels a twinge of satisfaction. Good. “Sweet pea, that's embarrassing – that's so much, you-

“Oh, please. You have said the same in so many words and your actions.” Hanzo's fighting down the start of his own blush, struggling to keep his composure. “It is high time I voiced my own feelings as such.”

“Han...”

“Stop.” Hanzo knows he's blushing now. “Come up here and kiss me properly.”

And just like that McCree's head is lifting, craning up to press a hungry, desperate kiss against Hanzo's lips. A soft hand is reaching, cupping Hanzo's cheek to tilt it, deepening the kiss as Hanzo lets out a pleased little sigh. His own hands come up to rest in McCree's damp locks, fingers curling in contentment as McCree kisses him and he kisses back, over and over – it's perfect. It's a feeling of utter completion. Hanzo's heart feels like it's swelling, threatening to burst inside his chest.

*Drip.*

What?

*Drip. Drip. Drip.*

Hanzo reaches up, touching his face where the feeling of droplets had been. At first he assumes it is the remnants of rain coming down off McCree's hair – but this water is warm beneath his fingertips. New.

When McCree pulls away slightly, Hanzo realizes the water had been the man's tears. “Mc-”

“Heh.” McCree smiles, wiping at his nose with the back of his palm. “Looks like I ain't the only one.”

Hanzo's fingers slide upward; he's shocked to find wetness beneath his own eyes. When had he-?

“S okay.” McCree gently takes Hanzo's hands in his own, pressing a kiss to the back of his palm. “It's okay, really. Kinda natural, ain't it? Lot of emotion coming out.”

“You – you are alright?” Hanzo rasps, and ah, his voice has gone hoarse again.

“Han, I'm happier than I've ever been. Ain't you?”

“Han, I'm happier than I've ever been. Ain't you?”

“Yes.” The reply is automatic, before Hanzo can even register the words leaving his mouth. But it's the truth, isn't it? “I am happy. I am-” Hanzo inhales a shaky breath, trying to steady himself as he frees one hand to wipe at his face. “Very happy. With you.”

“Geez, Brother. I wanted to tease you, but this is too cute.”

Hanzo whirls around, grasping at air for something to throw as Genji's cheeky grin ducks back into the kitchen. “GENJI!”

McCree chuckles, throaty and low; he wipes at his own face before straightening up out of his crouch. “Gods. Genji, c'mon. Little privacy?”
“I only wanted to tell you to come eat,” Genji replies from behind the door, voice almost petulant. “It is not my fault you did not get a room.”

“Eat?” McCree inquires.

“He made you cinnamon rolls,” Hanzo replies murderously. “The last thing he will ever bake before I gut him.”

McCree merely laughs, readjusting the hat on his head. “Damn. I'm gettin' spoiled all over today.”

Hanzo huffs, glancing at McCree before shooting another glare at the door, as if Genji would dare show his face again. “You should change, first. You will soak the chair.”

“True.” McCree plucks at his shirt. “Y’gonna come help me out of my clothes?” The man's voice turns sly, as if Hanzo hadn't expected the quip from the start.

“Yes,” Hanzo sighs fondly, pushing at his chair's wheels to begin rolling down the hall. “If you will warm up my prosthetics. They're so-”

“Damn cold in the morning? I know, same here,” McCree finishes. “Yeah, I'll help. Gotta put your feet on so I can sweep you off them.”

“Do you ever stop?” Hanzo asks in amusement.

“Never, 'cause I'm never gonna stop loving you.”

“Cheesy.”

“Oh, like you're one to talk after-!”

“I love you too,” Hanzo cuts in, rolling his eyes with a smile. “Now that we have declared it a hundred times before breakfast – let us change, and actually have breakfast.”

“Fine and dandy by me,” McCree jams his right hand into his pocket, following after Hanzo before stopping in front of their bedroom door. “Though, there is one thing you should know.”

Hanzo looks up at him, one hand already reaching for the door handle. “What's that?”

“Did you know that I love you?”

“McCree-!”

Chapter End Notes

And that's the end! It's been such a treat writing this fic - I even got a little teary myself writing the epilogue! Thank you so much for all your wonderful comments and shows of support for CoH; I read every one of them and loved them all! It's amazing how much love this work received, shooting to the #5 Kudos spot of all McHanzo fics in just under 4 months! All of your support means the world, and I'm so happy to have taken this ride with you.

As to the future of CoH? I'm unsure! This world is always open for your own
interpretation, and I don't have any CURRENT plans to keep going in favor of finishing up the semester. If I decide to continue in it, it will be quite a long while before chapters come up (you know me, I like to pre-write 70% of the fic before posting!). For now though, thank you again for all your kind words and I'm so glad you enjoyed!

End Notes

Crown of Horns fanart blog!

Feel free to message about any art you make - for some reason, some art doesn't show up in the tags on tumblr!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!