Something About Us

by MorbidBirdy

Summary

Five Years after Operation Meteor the fragile peace between Earth and the colonies is once again threatened when a beloved prominent political figure is assassinated. The former Gundam pilots come together again for a new mission, which forces unexplored feelings to arise between Heero and Trowa.
Chapter 1

Heero never thought that keeping a ‘brave face’ would be so difficult. He had never had to do it before. His entire life up until this point he had always been sure of himself. His goals. His missions, but now he was utterly lost. How could he have felt so comfortable in the midst of war, and yet during a time of Total Pacifism feel so absolutely unhinged?

It never occurred to him that he had put all of his faith into one person before. All of his hopes for the future relied on one person to carry them for him, and now that person was gone. Erased from existence. ‘Taken from our world too soon,’ the priest at the funeral had said.

So now he was alone. The subject of his personal mission, removed. Who was he supposed to protect now? Who was going to take the helm and continue to steer the world in the direction of unity, cooperation and peace? Could anyone else be trusted with this task? There were already subtle signs all around him that things were beginning to slip back into their old ways. Conversations on the shuttle he had hailed from Earth to the Lunar Spaceport indicated that people were scared. Riots had already broken out on L2 and L3 with colonists demanding justice.

Heero wanted justice. It was what motivated him to answer the hasty call he had received from Preventer. Normally he avoided their calls, unless he was bored enough to take on a small mission here or there. When they asked for his help he didn’t hesitate to give it. He had immediately boarded the next flight from Europe to outer space, prepared to do anything and everything he could to help.

Twenty-two hours later he had yet to sleep, unable to make himself comfortable on the commercial space shuttle with a seven-year old kid kicking the back of his seat for hours on end, or the deep, rumbling snores and nasal popping from the man seated in front of him. If there was one thing Heero missed most about the war, it was having his own private mode of trans-atmospheric transportation.

After a rough landing, the usual shoving and jostling that accompanied disembarking any crowded vehicle, and being urgently rustled through narrow customs lines like anxious cattle, he had finally made it out to the Lunar Spaceport meet-and-greet platform. He was greeted by the familiar sight of lines of escorts with various names held up on placards, held high as they searched for their clients. He didn’t expect to see anyone with his name held aloft. Nobody had ever made a big deal about his arrival at a spaceport, only ever escorting others of more importance to their destinations. He was used to living in someone else’s shadow. There was something comfortable and secure about not being noticed or expected. However now, without anyone else’s shadow to stand in, he felt uneasy. Exposed.

He slipped past the sign-holders, shrugged his simple black carry-on up his shoulder and made his way down a curved-ceilinged walkway, his black and white Adidas scuffing the floor as he wearily trudged across the bright, white tiles. It was hot. He recalled the Lunar Spaceport always being stuffy and uncomfortably warm. He unzipped his waist length navy blue jacket, exposing the crisp white tank top underneath. He felt gross. He glanced down at his denim clad legs and noticed a few smudgy stains from when the flight attendant had dropped another passenger’s coffee on his leg at the halfway point of the trip. He wanted a shower. Maybe a nap? He checked his watch and sighed. He was due at Preventer in two hours, and he doubted there would be any time for him to do either of those things.
As he reached the end of the walkway he spotted the train station, a platform lined with glass walls and topped with an L.E.D. ticker displaying when the next train would be arriving. The one to Lunar Quadrant 3 wasn’t due for another seven minutes. As he got closer he spotted a familiar figure standing on the platform, leaning against a nearby support column. It was Trowa Barton, former pilot of Heavyarms Gundam. He was already wearing his Preventer uniform, complete with collared shirt and perfectly straight tie beneath a half-zipped uniform jacket. He was leaning against a poster advertisement with pink and red hearts, surrounding an artist’s rendering of Mars that read for ‘Quality Lover’s Retreats to Exotic Planet Mars’ while reading a paperback novel. He glanced up as Heero approached.

Trowa Barton looked exactly the same as he had 4 years ago at the end of the Eve War. It suddenly occurred to Heero that he couldn’t remember the last time he had seen him. Was it for Quatre’s surprise birthday party Duo had thrown him on L4? Heero had been with Relena for a nearby convention when they had stopped in to deliver Quatre’s gift. They had only stayed for an hour before Relena had to return to her work, and Heero had gone with her, feeling obligated to keep her company during her mind-numbing political reviews. That had been over a year ago, and yet the pilot who stood before him appeared to be essentially unchanged.

“You didn’t have to come all this way to meet me,” Heero said, stopping in front of him. He forced a weary half-smile to greet him. “Unless you thought I would get lost.” It was a small running joke that they had kept going between them during Operation Meteor. Heero had made ONE wrong coordinate input, and they had ended up nearly 500 miles off course during one of their joint operations.

Trowa folded the corner of the page he was on and closed his book, tucking it under his arm. “It has happened before.” He offered a warm smile, happy to see his old friend. “You look… exhausted. Didn’t sleep on the flight over?” It was pretty obvious. Trowa could understand, though. After what had happened Heero was probably a mess mentally, too. He was reluctant to bring the assassination up, knowing that if Heero wanted to talk about it he’d be the first to initiate the conversation.

“No sleep. I can’t even blame the kid behind me for most of it,” Heero grumbled as he ran his fingers through what he knew probably looked like a greasy, disheveled mop of hair. It was amazing how ‘soft’ he’d gotten. When he was a teenager he could go nearly a week without a shower, and now he was pushing on two days and felt thoroughly disgusted with himself. I must look like shit, he thought with a frown. Suddenly he felt very self-conscious about his appearance—about the stain on his leg, his wrinkled jacket and greasy hair. He groped around in his pocket for a stick of gum but found none. Normally he didn’t care what he looked like, but seeing Trowa pressed and neat made him really take his own body into account. It didn’t help that he personally held Trowa’s opinion above anyone else’s. “I must look terrible,” he murmured as he attempted to smooth out his messy hair again.

“You look fine for having gone a day without sleep.” Trowa pulled his phone out of his pocket to check the time. They had a few more minutes before the train would arrive. He pushed off the beam he’d been leaning on and tucked the phone away. “Did you eat?” The sound of crinkling plastic came from his pocket and reminded him that he had taken a chocolate chip cookie from Preventer’s break room earlier. He pulled the wrapped treat out and offered it to the other agent. Aside from the odd protein bar here and there Heero hadn’t eaten. The promise of a short burst of sugar high prompted him to take the cookie with a nod. He unwrapped it and took a bite, pausing for a moment to savor the simplicity of the cookie. It tasted familiar.

“These are Noin’s cookies,” he said between bites. He would recognize the signature perfect
crispiness at the edges, the slight chewy center and the evenly distributed dark chocolate chunks anywhere. Noin always sent all of the pilots a tin with various goodies every year for Christmas. Heero would have never pegged the former soldier as being such an accomplished baker.

The cookie didn’t last long and soon he was left with only the plastic wrapper and the faintly sweet memory of the cookie remaining on his lips. He ran his tongue along his bottom lip, sighed and tossed the plastic into a nearby waste bin.

“Thanks, I guess I hadn’t realized how hungry I was…” he reached into his pocket with the intention of grabbing his phone to check it, but then decided against it. He didn’t want to deal with what he knew would be on it right now. He had been answering frantic calls and text messages from well-meaning friends and acquaintances for days. He was tired, exhausted from all of the emotional exchanges.

“How long have you been here? You’re already in uniform…” Heero pointed out, letting his eyes blatantly scan Trowa’s long, elegant frame. “What’s with the tie?”

“I got in last night and have been at headquarters all day.” The loudspeaker alerted them that the train to Lunar Quadrant 3 was approaching. As they started walking in its direction, Trowa took Heero’s bag without asking and slung it over his shoulder. Heero looked like a walking zombie, like he was about to drop any moment. “It’s ‘Tie Tuesday’. Obviously you didn’t get the memo. You don’t like it?”

“No, I didn’t get that memo…” Heero replied, raising an eyebrow as the taller agent took his bag for him. He wasn’t going to protest, he was exhausted and was grateful for the help. The train slid to a stop and the twin glass doors slid aside to let the passengers disembark. As soon as the doorway was clear Heero slipped inside and took the nearest window seat. He waited until Trowa slid his bag under the seat and took the seat to his left before giving him a small smile.

“You look good. You always do…” he said casually as he leaned back against the seat, crossing his arms over his chest. “Headquarters busy?”

Trowa crossed his legs, setting his book on his lap. “Very busy.” It was to be expected considering what had happened…

He felt like Preventer’s Lunar Headquarters was at full capacity, agents being called in from all over the Earth and the colonies. It was times like these when he realized just how well staffed the organization was. Trowa barely recognized anyone, not that he was a regular, 40-hour a week agent. He was only called upon for specialty cases maybe once or twice a year, which he usually preferred. It allowed him to continue working with the circus.

The train jerked as it started to move forward on the tracks. Trowa glanced sideways at Heero. “You should get some sleep. We have about an hour until we reach Headquarters.” He was worried about Heero’s well-being, but wasn’t going to voice his concern. Heero was a grown adult and could take care of himself.

“Yeah,” Heero replied. The lull of the maglev train humming down the track, along with the drab grey of the tunnel rushing past just beyond the window was mesmerizing. For the first time since he’d left the planet he felt relaxed, comfortable. He gave a small nod, his eyelids drooping slowly. As a teenager he had grown accustomed to sleeping anywhere, as long as he was with someone he trusted. As long as he felt secure. Seated beside Trowa, he finally felt that he could do so. He let his eyes slide closed, and within moments the faint whirring of the train forced him into a deep, satisfying sleep.
“They’ve passed through the vacuum locks. It should be pressurized now,” Noin said over her shoulder to Sally, who was studying a monitor at a control panel nearby.

“Luckily he didn’t seem to do any damage to the colony with Wing Zero. We can thank Quatre for that,” Sally replied as she went over Sandrock’s incoming flight data.

Heero sighed and pushed himself up from his seat at the console beside Noin and wordlessly left the bridge en route to the mobile suit docking hangar.

He hadn’t been surprised to hear that the Heavyarms pilot had taken his mobile suit. When the news feed had shown the nearby colony was being attacked by OZ forces it appeared as if Trowa had recognized someone in the crowd. Shortly after Howard had called up to the bridge that Trowa had taken his mobile suit out. He was headed for the colony on the news. Heero had easily put two and two together. Trowa’s suit was under repair and out of service, it was only logical that he would take another suit.

What surprised Heero was that he had taken Wing Zero, when Deathscythe and Sandrock were perfectly viable options. Had Trowa remembered piloting Wing? Was that what had drawn him to it?

Trowa had offered Heero the use of his Gundam when he had fought Zechs in Antarctica, and during that fight had taken to the cockpit of Wing. Heero wondered if Trowa had recalled any of it.

He floated up to the mobile suit hangar. The green light above the hatch-like door was lit, indicating that breathable atmosphere now filled the docking bay. He wouldn’t need a helmet. He pushed through the door, twisted in the air and braced himself on a nearby railing as he kicked the door closed behind himself. Despite the thermal layering beneath his black flight suit he still could feel the crisp, biting chill of space. His breath hung like a ghostly spectre in front of his face, failing to spread and dissipate in the microgravity environment. He pushed through his own suspended breath, spotted Wing Zero docked at the far end of the rear wall of the hangar, mounted himself upon the topmost catwalk railing and kicked off, propelling himself in the direction of his Gundam.

Wing Zero’s eyes still glowed with an eerie viridescent light as the systems remained activated. He saw Deathscythe, parked beside it, darken before it’s cockpit hissed open.

“Hey, man, go easy on Trowa. He’s had a rough afternoon- you’re Gundam’s fine, don’t worry about it!” Duo hollered from inside his suit, waving his arms at him to get his attention. Heero ignored him. Let them think I’m mad, he thought with a frown as he glided through the air, aimed at Wing’s chest.

He wasn’t angry. Far from it. Hope that Trowa remembered something- anything- from the past fueled him as he made his way to his mobile suit. He had to remember something, Heero was convinced. He took my suit...

As Heero reached Wing’s cockpit the door slid aside, revealing the darkened chamber within. He grabbed the top edge of the opened doorway and braced himself. He could just barely make out the faint outline of the Heavyarms pilot seated inside, his long black-clad legs stretched out in front of him, his five-point harnesses unstrapped, floating up in the air at his shoulders. He leaned forward, occluding the opening with his body as he peered inside.

“Heero,” Trowa’s voice rang through the darkness. It took Heero a moment to make out the other
pilot’s face, to distinguish the soft curving line of his one visible cheek. “... I’m sorry. ‘Normally we wouldn’t let others touch our own mobile suits...’ ”

Heero’s eyes widened. “You remember.” Trowa had quoted the same sentiment he had made when borrowing his Heavyarms. He could see the tall, normally stoic Heavyarms pilot smile in the dark.

“Yeah, I remember. I remember everything. ZERO showed me everything important to me. Reminded me of something I need to do,” Trowa replied.

“I’m glad,” Heero said, letting himself smile back. He was relieved and satisfied that ZERO had helped his friend. “What did it tell you?”

“It reminded me that I need to live. That I have people I need to protect,” Trowa explained, leaning forward in the pilot seat. “It also reminded me of something someone once told me. That if I want to live a good life, I should act on my emotions.” A long, lean arm reached out to grab the front of Heero’s flight suit to tug him further inside. Heero released his grasp on the outer edge of the cockpit and allowed himself to be dragged deeper in. Soon he found himself floating in front of Trowa, their faces almost touching.

“Those are good words to live by,” Heero murmured, tilting his head to let his nose softly brush against Trowa’s. He pressed his palm against the Heavyarms pilot’s shoulder to brace himself.

“What are your emotions telling you right now?”

Trowa leaned forward to greet Heero’s lips with his own.

An announcement that the train would be arriving in Lunar Quadrant 3 roused Heero from his much-needed nap. His eyes reluctantly fluttered open, straining to focus under the harsh fluorescent lights. The couple in the seat in front of him were rustling paperwork and grabbing their things from the baskets over their seat. He swallowed dryly and tried to take stock of his weary body. His right hand was numb, still asleep, crossed and tucked against his chest. He looked down and saw his knee pressed against someone else’s. With a stunned blink he realized he had fallen asleep and somehow shifted to the left. He was leaning on Trowa. No, he was practically lying against him.

He tilted his head up and immediately caught sight of the former Heavyarms pilot’s face a couple of centimeters from his own. The dream he had— a replay of a memory from so many years ago— still echoed in his disoriented mind. He found himself studying the slight, amused curve of Trowa’s lips. Embarrassed, he lifted a hand to rub the side of his head as he attempted to gather his thoughts.

“Sorry,” he muttered awkwardly. However, he hesitated to move. A long moment passed before he forced himself to full sit, freeing the shoulder of the other agent from his weight.

“It’s alright.” Trowa uncrossed his legs and rubbed his knees. He looked at the display monitor on the back of the seat in front of him and saw that they would be arriving in less than 10 minutes. “It looked like you were having a good dream, so I didn’t bother waking you.”

Heero’s bag was still slung over Trowa’s shoulder as the two agents got off the elevator on the 3rd floor. “We have some time before the meeting starts if you want to freshen up.” They were headed in the direction of the men’s locker room. Trowa agilely wove through the bodies that littered the busy hallway, leading Heero to the opposite side of the floor. “Your jacket is in your locker.” He informed him, stopping outside the door and finally handing the bag back to its owner.
Heero hefted his bag over his shoulder and nodded. “Alright. Thanks, Trowa.” He definitely was appreciative, but he wasn’t sure how to express it. He hadn’t expected any help, and normally he wouldn’t accept it, but he was feeling particularly fragile lately. It was nice to be around an old friend again, in an environment he felt comfortable in. He ducked inside the locker room, dove into the shower and quickly scrubbed all of the travel grime from his body before he donned his uniform. Once his teeth and hair were brushed to satisfaction he made his way out of the locker room. Trowa was gone. The hall was littered with fresh-faced agents, whispering excitedly to one another as he passed them on his way to the board rooms. He glanced down at his ID card clipped to the front of his jacket, wondering if wearing it on the outside was too conspicuous. He tucked it into his pocket, feeling uncomfortable with the looks and quiet mutterings.

He found his fellow pilots assembled in board room two. Une, seated at the head of the table, greeting him with a curt nod, her face more somber than usual. Noin and Sally sat on either side of her. Wufei was standing beside the projection screen against the far wall. Duo, Quatre and Trowa were seated together opposite of the Chinese agent. Duo grinned at him as he entered.

“About time you showed up,” Duo said with a smile. He hopped up from his seat and met him halfway across the room, grabbing him into a tight, friendly bear hug. “Trowa said you haven’t eaten, so I scored us some pizza. You like pineapple pizza, right?” The American agent had grabbed his wrist and pulled him over to the table. Within moments Heero was forced into a seat, a steaming slice of ham and pineapple pizza slid in front of him.

“Thanks…” Heero muttered, blinking down at the food offering. Why did everyone think he liked pineapple? And who puts pineapple on pizza?

“Good, now that we’re all here,” Wufei announced loudly. The room dimmed and the projector mounted to the ceiling illuminated the wall behind him. Heero’s stomach growled, demanding sustenance. He sighed and began casually picking the pineapple and ham from his pizza.

All eyes in the room turned to look at Heero, silently studying his disposition. The man picking at his pizza hadn’t been returning his phone calls or text messages, leaving everyone to wonder how he was coping with the recent news.

The air of the room was somber and melancholy, despite Duo’s efforts to lighten the mood. Quatre rest his elbow on the table, laying his chin in his upturned hand as his eyes moved from the projection back to Heero. While he was excited that all five ex-Gundam pilots were back together again, he wished the circumstances were better. His heart ached relentlessly over what had happened: the assassination of a selfless leader, an advocate of positive change, and a dear friend. Quatre felt like it was all some cruel dream, a nightmare that he couldn’t wake up from. Everyone was trapped with him. They had to find a way out.

Poor Heero...

“Let’s begin with what we know,” Wufei announced as he clicked to the first slide of his presentation. A map of Europe illuminated the wall behind him with a red indicator on Paris, France. “On June 12th, at 1243 Relena Peacecraft was shot while stepping out of her limousine in front of the Four Seasons Hotel George V in Paris, France. She sustained a single bullet wound to the right occipital lobe, and was pronounced dead at the scene at 1501.” The slide shifted behind him to display crime scene photos of the rifle round casing, as well as a photograph of a nearby high-rise building.

Heero looked away, his eyes narrowed, staring down at the unappealing pizza in front of him. All of these details he already knew- he had been obsessing over them for two weeks now. His mind automatically blocked out Wufei’s voice as he ran over the coroner’s report, the forensic lab results
on the casing, all of the little minute details of the case. He didn’t want to hear it anymore. He couldn’t hear it anymore.

During the entire trip from Earth to the Preventer Lunar Base he had forced himself into a dull, protective, numb casing. He had tried his best not to obsess over it, to dwell on his loss. However, it was his loss. He knew that all of the other pilots cared about Relena, but nobody was as close to her as he was.

I should have been there…

The thought nagged at him again, for the millionth time, dominating his thoughts. The tight, painful and constrictive stranglehold of guilt took hold of his throat and made each breath labored and exhausting to take.

He knew it was illogical to think that way. Nothing he could have done would have stopped that bullet that afternoon. He felt guilty because he wasn’t there with her. He let her die alone.

They’re looking at me…

He could feel the sympathetic gazes settle upon him. What were they looking for? A reaction? Did they expect him to throw himself on the table and cry? Or were they expecting to see him like he was now, fists clenched beneath the table, staring down, avoiding looking them?

His ‘brave face’ was slipping. To his own horror he felt his eyes burning, his emotions materializing into tears, threatening to slip down his cheeks.

He hadn’t cried over Relena yet. The act was foreign to him, almost terrifying. He hadn’t felt this intensely sad at the funeral, or when he had first seen the news that Relena was gone. Somehow, being in a room with his old friends, he had become more fragile. Vulnerable. Hearing Wufei speak of her death so scientifically and coldly was bothering him, stabbing at his heart, forcing him to look his loss of Relena in the face once more.

“Excuse me,” he said weakly, forcing himself to a stand and averting his face. It took everything in him not to break into a run as he exited the meeting. He found himself standing in a moderately crowded hallway, the agents around him laughing and joking with one another as they made their ways down to the cafeteria for lunch.

He realized as he stood in the center of the hallway, curious gazes falling upon him, that he didn’t know where to go. He had nowhere to go. Barely able to see through the collection of tears flooding his eyes he shoved his hands into his jacket pockets and rushed down the hallway in a random direction, bumping and jostling passing agents who shot him angry, judgemental looks as he passed. He glared at the floor and bit his lower lip, hoping the physical pain would distract him from the storm of emotion churning in his chest. He spotted a few office doors ahead. Quickening his pace, he grabbed the first door and tried to open it. Locked. He tried the second, also locked. Frustrated, he tried the last door, and luckily it swung open. Nobody was inside. He ducked through the door, slammed it shut behind himself and pressed his palms to his face, fingers desperately trying to press it all back, to hold his broken pieces together.

He couldn’t remember the last time in his life he had ever cried, though he knew that at some point he must have. A choked sob escaped his throat as he leaned against the wall, his legs bending to drop his weary body to a sit against it. He knew it was normal to express emotions this way, but another part of him was terrified to let himself. To lose control. He sucked in a shaken breath as the flats of his palms became damp with the tears he refused to allow himself to freely shed.
“Shit, great job, Wufei.” Duo blurted once Heero had vanished through the doorway. The Chinese agent’s scowling face was illuminated by the power point presentation.

“Why blame me?” Wufei snarled under his breath and pointed to the door. “It’s just as I said, he is too emotionally compromised to handle the details of this case.”

“Now, boys…” Noin reprimanded gently from the end of the table. “Let’s not fight about this-”

“Whatever, man. I like how you act as if you weren’t absolutely fucked in the head after losing someone you cared about,” Duo hissed as he pushed himself up from the table. He grabbed a cold bottle of water from the center and marched towards the door. “Have a little fuckin’ sympathy, huh?”

The American agent darted out of the room just in time to spot Heero stumble through a door at the far end of the hall. He smiled and gave a little wave to a cluster of new agents as he passed through them in pursuit of his old friend. He listened at the door for a moment, pressing his ear against it, but couldn’t hear anything. He gave it a faint knock and waited for a response. After receiving none he hesitantly opened the door, peering into the dimly lit office with a faint smile.

“Hey, man… you okay?” As he slipped inside he saw Heero sitting on the floor beside the door, his head in his hands. He looked terrible. “Uh… here, I brought you a water. You’re sick, right?” Duo attempted to appease him, nudging his arm with the chilled bottle. “Dehydrated from your flight, am I right?”

Heero’s hands slowly fell from his face, but his face was still downcast, shielded by his messy hair. “Yeah.” He took the bottle of water and held it in hand but made no move to open it.

“Ah, yeah, okay. I figured. Everyone’s worried about ya, just wanted to check up on ya and everythin’…” He shrugged his shoulders and bit his lower lip, trying to think of what else to say. “Anyway, drink that, maybe you’ll feel better.”

“Yeah… thanks.”

“Welp, alright then. I’m gonna go, but you still got my number, right? Got your phone on you? We’ve been tryin’ to call you and shit all week.”

Heero sighed but otherwise made no attempt to reply.

“Okay man,” Duo said as he pushed himself up to a stand. “Take as long as ya need. I’m sure Une won’t mind you hidin’ out in her office,” he said with a chuckle. He hesitated, gave Heero another awkward pat on the shoulder and then slipped out into the hallway. He let the door click shut behind him before he released a loud, frustrated sigh. “Shit,” he whispered.

They wrapped up the meeting and still Heero hadn’t returned, his half eaten piece of pizza gone cold on his plate. Trowa was worried. Duo informed him that the missing agent was hiding out in
Une’s office, so Trowa made his way down the hall until he stood with his hand raised, ready to knock on the door. He hesitated, uncertain if this was the right call. Heero liked his space when he was feeling vulnerable, but it had been almost an hour and Trowa was reluctant to leave without checking in on him.

He worried his lower lip nervously as his knuckles made contact with the door, knocking twice. When there was no answer he hesitated again before gripping the doorknob and pushing it open slightly to peek into the office. “Heero?”

Heero’s head jerked up at the knock on the door. When the door opened he palmed the moisture from his eyes and sniffed. He was surprised to see Trowa standing there, having assumed that it would be Duo back to check on him.

“Hey,” was all Heero managed to say before clearing his throat and trying to regain his composure.

“The meeting is over. You didn’t miss much.” Trowa slid into the room and quietly shut the door behind him. He walked over to Heero and crouched down to sit next to him. The wetness on his friend’s cheeks and the puffiness around his eyes were clear indicators that he’d been crying. It was the first time Trowa had ever seen the other get this emotional. He tore his gaze off Heero, aware that staring at him would make him feel uncomfortable.

“It’s ok if you don’t feel like talking to me.” He took a seat beside him and stretched his legs out before bending one to draped his arm over the knee, looking at the wall across from them. Une’s office was highly organized and sparse in decor. The room almost had a sterile feeling. His eyes focused on a vase with brightly colored flowers sitting atop the desk. He could almost smell their fragrance. “…But I know what it’s like to suffer alone. And I want you to know that you don’t have to do this on your own…”

Heero nodded but didn’t say anything. He didn’t trust himself to. Not yet. He swallowed heavily, took a deep breath and lifted a hand to rub at one side of his face. His eyes burned, still stinging from tears they were unaccustomed to producing. After a couple of long, silent minutes he sighed, licked his lower lip and spoke.

“I still feel guilty. I know that I shouldn’t… but I do. I was supposed to be with her in Paris that weekend,” he murmured, his voice barely audible. “But I decided to go out on my own instead. To do some travel by myself. She had asked me to come… but I told her ‘no’.”

Suddenly it felt easy to vocalize what he was thinking. There was something about Trowa’s calm, reflective, nonjudgmental demeanor that always made him easy to talk to. “I keep thinking that if I had been there, maybe they wouldn’t have gotten as good of a shot. That they may have missed… or only injured her.” He had replayed the scenario over and over in his head. He always walked on her right side when he escorted her places. He would have helped her out of the limousine. He could have been in the way. Part of him wished he had been. Maybe they would have shot him instead...

Trowa turned his green eyes back as his friend spoke, watching him silently. When there was a long pause he took the opportunity to speak his mind. “Life’s too short to waste time ruminating on the ‘could haves’ and ‘should haves’.”

The situation was what it was, and I didn’t matter what he said. He wouldn’t be able to take the pain away from Heero. These feelings, these emotions, were something Heero needed to experience. He needed to grieve in order to move on, had to let it all out of his system. “What happened was not your fault. If you continue focusing on things that are out of your control, you’ll drive yourself crazy. Relena wouldn’t want that…”
“You’re right,” Heero replied, his voice breathy, shaken. “I just… it’s been a long time since I’ve had to feel these kinds of feelings. I don’t know how to handle them. I … didn’t know how to handle them back then, either.” He dropped his hands limply into his lap, resting against his crossed legs. “Last time… the person I was mourning came back.” He looked up at Trowa through his messy bangs, his lips pursed tightly, expression meaningful.

Trowa knew what Heero was referring to. That time, years ago, when he’d been blown out of his mobile suit and the dark, unforgiving void of space had claimed his unconscious body. He reached out to push Heero’s bangs away from his face so he could see those deep blue eyes better. They sucked him in instantly and he was lost amongst the waves of a turbulent ocean, the sadness he saw deep within made his heart constrict in his chest.

“Heero…”

“I’m sorry for bringing that up,” apologized Heero, sincerely. “But this feels similar to how I felt then. Lost… I’m not used to being in situations where I can’t control the outcome. Where I can’t influence fate’s verdict. I can’t eat… I can’t sleep… how long is this supposed to last?” He was desperate to make the hurt stop. He hadn’t realized how physically taxing these types of emotions could be on a person. He tilted his head so he could study Trowa’s face, his own expression weary. Was this how Quatre felt when he lost his sister? Was this the anguish that Sylvia Noventa went through after he had killed her grandfather? When Relena had lost her father?

“How do I make it stop…?”

“You can’t make it stop. The feelings have to ride themselves out. Only time will heal the wounds…” Trowa hated seeing Heero this upset. He wished he could take the hurt away, absorb it so the other man didn’t have to deal with it. He would take the burden for him, he would do anything to ease his pain. Anything.

Still lost in those morose blue eyes, Trowa did the only thing he could think of to comfort the other. He wrapped his strong arms around Heero’s smaller frame and pulled him in, hugging him tightly as if his body could shield him from the pain. His fingers fanned out over Heero’s back, digging into his jacket protectively. He tucked Heero’s head under his chin and closed his eyes, letting the soft brown hair tickle his nose as he inhaled the familiar scent. “It will go away.. Eventually…”

Heero could count on one hand how many times he had been held. The oldest, faintest memory had been by his mother. Odin Lowe had held him once as a child while he was fitful with a fever, and he had woken in Relena’s arms after passing out from exhaustion from blowing through Mariemaia’s bunker.

Feeling someone he considered his peer try to hold him together provided a different type of comfort. He knew that Trowa had cared for him before, had possibly even carried him at one point when settling him at the circus, but he had no recollection of it. This was different. Every interaction with Trowa lately had felt different.

The last time before that day that he had been so physically close to Trowa he had kissed him, and now, so many years later, his body was finding it’s way back to the other former pilot’s. On the train, and now here, on the floor of Une’s office. The realization didn’t bother him. He felt natural here. Comfortable, knowing that he didn’t have to SAY anything unless he wanted to. ACT unless he wanted to. Despite Trowa grabbing him and holding him, he didn’t feel like the other man expected anything from him. There was never any pressure with Trowa, he was just always there, open, willing to listen. Willing to help him. He’d always been there for him, and in the past Heero
had taken advantage of it.

Now he was taking advantage of Trowa’s kindness again. He didn’t feel guilty about it. He needed it. He needed this, and Trowa knew it, otherwise he wouldn’t have touched him.

His shoulders involuntarily shuddered, the thin wall of his self-control shattering as the tall agent’s body pushed through his defenses, pressing soothingly against his own. He buried his face against Trowa’s chest, his cheek resting against the silky knot of the other man’s tie, body leaning heavily against his. “Thank you,” Heero murmured against his shirt. “For coming to find me.”

“Of course.” It was the least Trowa could do. He felt Heero’s body relax against his own and made no move to hurry him out of the embrace. Une had headed off to another meeting so they would be fine if they sought a few more minutes of privacy in her office. Trowa was glad he was able to comfort Heero in some way.

This new mission was going to be rough on everyone, most of all Relena’s former crush.
Chapter 2

Two days had passed and Heero hadn’t seen Trowa at all. He wasn’t avoiding him, they just never managed to be in the same place at the same time. The past two days were spent getting familiar with the facilities and becoming situated in the agent dormitory, a separate building attached to the main complex by a narrow, underground walkway. The barracks were constructed to allow long-term members to live in closer proximity to headquarters, rather than have to make the commute from the nearby residential block which was a thirty minute train ride away. Heero had never considered staying in them before - most missions he had taken were off-site and didn’t require him to stay at the lunar headquarters very long.

His new dorm room was utilitarian at best; a small, windowless room with a simple twin-sized bed, a desk, and a narrow cabinet to hang his uniforms in. After unpacking what little belongings he had it didn’t look any cozier. Over time he had invested in an ultra-compact tablet P.C. which put an end to having to carry around his old, bulky beat-up laptop. His new, glossy black tablet had been left on his desk, along with the embossed Relena’s funeral program he had folded and left in his jacket pocket.

He never carried much with him when he traveled, but even at home he wasn’t one to collect anything to acquire clutter. He looked over his dorm room one last time, deciding that this would be his new ‘home’ until Relena’s case was solved. He tugged on his uniform jacket, clipped his ID to the outside, slipped his service pistol into his vest holster underneath and zipped the front halfway. He slid his shoes on and ducked out into the hallway. Noin had texted him and asked him to come to her office.

As he strode down the narrow walkway that connected the dorms to the main complex he spotted Trowa and Quatre walking side by side ahead of him. Not wanting to interrupt their conversation, he held back and just watched them from a distance.

Two days before Trowa had comforted him, had held him while he tried to pull himself together. He had never felt so overwhelmed before. After a couple of days rest he realized that it had been a combination of things that had led him to break down like that. The two weeks after Relena’s murder he hadn’t taken care of himself, too distracted by his own grief to perform basic functions like eating and sleeping. That, along with travel weariness and the building stress of not being able to solve the case on his own, had left him emotionally turbulent and absolutely drained of energy.

The day before Une had insisted that he go see one of the facility therapists and psychologists. The man had pointed out that he had been ‘depressed’ and possibly would continue to be until he had accepted what happened. The statement had irritated him. How could he suggest that he hadn’t accepted it? He was there, wasn’t he? He was ready to solve the case- he’d do anything to find out who killed her. How was that ‘not accepting’ her death?

Eventually he caught up with them at the elevator. Trowa and Quatre had loaded inside the full elevator car and had turned around to face the doors. Heero paused mid-step, having decided that he would catch the next one or take the stairs when he heard Quatre’s voice call out to him.

“Heero!”

Trowa’s arm shot out to catch the door before it could close.

“Come in, there’s plenty of room,” Quatre said cheerily, sidestepping a centimeter to the left to make room for him in the crowded car. Trowa was smirking, his one visible eyebrow quirked with
amusement.

Heero couldn’t say ‘no’. He would look like an asshole. With a reluctant sigh he slid inside, occupied the small space Quatre had made for him between them and blinked as the elevator door closed right in front of his nose. Now shoulder-to-shoulder with his colleagues, he shifted uncomfortably and glanced up at Trowa before averting his eyes to the shiny, stainless steel door in front of him.

“How do you like the dorms?” Quatre asked conversationally.

“They’re okay,” Heero replied plainly. He felt a hand push into the small of his back. His body stiffened and he glanced at Trowa, who gave him a questioning look. Is he…

“I think they’re rather nice, but of course, It was my contracting company who designed and built them, so…” Quatre replied. The hand slid up the center of Heero’s back to reveal itself against his shoulder. It was Quatre’s hand. “Where are you headed?”

“Noin’s office,” Heero replied. The door in front of them opened, revealing one of the lower floors. A couple of other riders shuffled out, only to be replaced by new ones.

“Oh? Trowa got called in to see her, too. Right, Trowa?” said Quatre, beaming. It was clear that he enjoyed being in the Preventer atmosphere, as opposed to being cooped up in his office all day.

Trowa nodded, somehow not surprised that they were being called in together. “Maybe they are partnering us up?” He figured it was an option, although he wondered why Noin was giving them their assignments in private. Duo, Wufei and Quatre had already received theirs the day before. Curiosity was getting the better of him.

As the elevator stopped on the next floor, he carefully pushed through the crowded space to exit into the hallway, watching Heero follow.

Heero mutely tailed the taller agent as he led the way to Une’s office and stopped just behind him as he knocked on the door. A muffled voice inside beckoned them inside. Agent Lucrezia Noin was seated at her desk, half hidden behind a giant stack of paperwork. In the right corner of the room Agent Sally Po lounged in a finely upholstered chair, sipping from her thermos of coffee. Both women looked up as the young men entered.

“Come in, have a seat,” Noin greeted them with a smile, gesturing to the chairs on the opposite side of her desk. Heero took the one to her right, casting a questioning glance at Trowa as he did so.

“Thank you for coming, boys,” she said with a frown, her eyebrows raising. “Though I guess you’re no longer ‘boys’, but ‘gentlemen’ seems too stuffy, don’t you think?”

“Guys,” Sally suggested from behind them.

“Yes,” Noin said with a grin. “Agents. Guys. I’m sure you’re wondering why you haven’t received your assignments yet. You may have guessed that we intend on pairing you off as a team.” She grabbed two sealed manila envelopes from her desk. Both had a red “CONFIDENTIAL” stamp on the front. “This is a special assignment… one that we have been working on for some time now.” She stood and walked around to the front of her desk. She handed each pilot an envelope and then crossed her arms over her chest.

“In light of recent events we’ve decided to activate this new, secret unit. You both have been chosen for your specific skills, as well as your ability in the past to cooperate seamlessly…” she
paused and glanced over their shoulders at Sally before continuing. “This program is controversial. You’re not obligated to agree to it.”

The stiff envelope crinkled under Trowa’s firm grip. He looked down at it, fingers sliding to the little metal clasp that held the flap closed, keeping the inside contents secure and confidential. *Controversial? Huh…* Whatever that meant, he would soon find out.

Trowa opened the envelope and slid out the documents, scanning over the mission report quickly. He flipped the pages until a small colored photograph caught his attention, freezing his gaze and stilling his fingers. The immediate realization of what it was caused a bitter taste to form on his tongue. His head snapped up, eyes locking with Noin’s in an intense exchange of nonverbal communication.

“You built Gundams. Why?”

Heero found himself staring down into an image that was eerily similar to the mobile suit he had destroyed years ago over Mariemaia’s bunker. *How is this possible?* His mind began to race with possibilities, many of which centered around how utterly illegal this program was.

“This is against the Absolute Disarmament Treaty signed at the armistice of the Eve War,” Heero muttered as he flipped through the schematics of Preventer’s new gundanium mobile suit.

Noin nodded, a small frown turning down her mouth. “I know. We’ve received approval from the council that oversees Preventer. Our donors. They all agreed that this program was necessary if war were to ever break out again. I know there isn’t a war now… but—”

“Civil unrest caused by Relena’s death had grown rapidly over the past few weeks. The colonists are angry. They feel betrayed, set up. The only voices that had ever spoken in their favor have been silenced. Heero Yuy… now Relena,” Sally said as she walked around them to stand beside Noin, her expression grim. “We are supposed to be an unbiased organization, but at this time, we have to focus on the safety of the people in space. They have brought up some legitimate concerns…”

Noin nodded and shrugged a shoulder. “There have been no laws broken here. All of the parts you see have been salvaged from various outlets. Trowa, your suit has primarily been constructed with parts seized from the Barton Foundation during the Earth-Sphere investigations after Operation Meteor. And Heero, your suit has components taken from the Colony Liberation Organization during our disarmament movement. The cockpit you see there is from the Proto Wing Gundam. Everything in these suits is recycled. We have not manufactured anything new or have developed any new stores of gundanium, which would have been against our new laws.”

“So, what will it be, *guys*?” Sally asked, her lips pursed tightly. “We know it is a lot to ask of you, but after analyzing your records we have all agreed that you both are well suited to working with one another, and your piloting performance stats are two of the best. Will you take this assignment?”

Well suited for one another? Trowa looked down at the documents again, flipping the page to scan the new Gundam’s stats. *Long range, beam gatling…* The Gundam they had assigned him, Prometheus, closely resembled Heavyarms. Only it had major upgrades and modifications. Sleek wings protruded from its metal back giving the mobile suit more maneuverability and the option to transform into bird mode.

Strange… It’s like they designed this with my skills in mind. Like this suit was specifically made for me. Have they been thinking about Heero and I this entire time?
He glanced to his side, waiting to hear Heero’s response before he gave his own. Would he agree to this?

Relena wouldn’t want this... would she? Heero found himself wondering, his jaw set tightly as he stared down at the image in his hands. Despite all of the talk of peace that Relena had touted after the wars, she had always supported him using the resources he had available to stop the fighting during Operation Meteor. During the Eve War. She had stood with her hand clutched to her chest, watching him, waiting for him to act. I can’t NOT act. I can’t stand idly by, he decided with conviction.

“I’m in,” Heero replied plainly. He slid the paperwork back into the envelope and held it out to Sally, who took it with a satisfied smile. “I’ll do it.”

If Heero was in then Trowa was in. He trusted the other’s decisions, having admired his actions since Operation Meteor. And he couldn’t sit back with the threat of a potential war on the horizon. It would feel like everything they had done back then would have been for nothing. All the sacrifices they had made, all the pain they had endured, all the lives they had taken. All of it for a fragile peace that was now dangling from a delicate thread. Trowa didn’t know Relena personally, but he was willing to help in whatever way he could. They needed to find whoever was responsible for her death and bring them to justice.

“I’m in as well.” Trowa answered with a firm nod.

The internal monitors within the cockpit of Heero’s new suit, the Argo, dimmed as the simulation program deactivated, plunging him into total darkness. The red, dull glow of the ambient cockpit lights illuminated the controls. Blindly he reached out and with a well-practiced flick opened the check hatch of the Argo’s cockpit. The bright, white artificial lights from the mobile suit hangar spilled inside, illuminating the exact replica of the former Wing Zero’s cockpit.

He tugged his helmet off and mopped the thin sheen of sweat from beneath his damp bangs with the back of his flight suit-clad arm. The cockpit temperature controls still needed some adjustment, but overall the suit’s systems appeared adequate and operational. He had spent the better part of the day running simulations through the ZERO system battle system, connected to Trowa’s suit, Prometheus. Together they had performed a series of virtual exercises that allowed them to experiment with their new mobile suit’s abilities.

Heero found that Argo, unlike Wing Zero, was outfitted with more close range and melee weapons. The twin adjustable sonic blades, along with sleek, triangular wings that held upgraded boosters, allowed him to fly in close to the enemy or targets to take them out in close proximity. Trowa’s suit, on the other hand, was developed to have long-range attacks in mind, supporting him from a distance. It’s ability to slip seamlessly in and out of bird mode gave it exceptional speed, and allowed it to dart in close or change positions at a distance quickly. Prometheus was very much like Heavyarms had been, only now it was outfitted with a gatling beam rifle that had a more precise targeting system, interchangeable specialized rounds and built-in cooling technology that allowed it to rain down more beam shots without overheating within Earth’s atmosphere.

Heero was impressed with the improvements made on the old concepts applied to the new suits. Despite the fact that he was once again sitting in a weapon - and by consenting to do so had made HIMSELF into a weapon - he felt a strange sense of satisfaction. A warped sense of comfort had enveloped him. He wondered if this was how other people felt when they went to back to their hometowns, or visited their childhood homes.
He set the helmet down on the control panel and lifted himself up and over the round, orb-like center console where the faintly pulsating spherical interface of the ZERO system was installed and hopped out onto the flat platform of the open hatch. He could see Noin and Une standing on a nearby catwalk discussing something with one of the mobile suit engineers Preventer had acquired to assemble and maintain the suits. Heero wondered where they found these people. Were they former members of the various enemy organizations from Operation Meteor? Or had they been specifically trained to work in this new, secret division?

He stepped to the edge of the open platform and hopped onto the open end of the catwalk that had been erected at cockpit level to the Argo. He took a few steps, unzipped the high, restrictive collar of his black and green flight suit before turning to regard his new mobile suit. It’s head was eerily similar to Wing. Two triangular flares flanked a traditional Gundam masked face. Either side of the head housed vulcan guns, and high within the center crest atop its head was the large vertical, rectangular structure that housed the various sonar, radar and scanning equipment. The ocular lenses that provided the cockpit with external visuals were set deep beneath the darkened, deactivated eyes. In the center of the chest, like Wing Zero, held the ‘seeing eye’ lense, which allowed the ZERO system and other various battlefield scanners to collect massive amounts of data to be dumped directly into the system’s computer.

He looked to his right where Prometheus stood and saw that Trowa’s suit, unlike the former Heavyarms, held a ‘seeing eye’ in the center of its chest as well. Prometheus was equipped with a full ZERO system battle interface in its cockpit as well- another improvement made by Preventer.

Prometheus deactivated and it’s cockpit hatch hissed open to reveal the tall, lithe figure of its pilot. He saw Trowa take his helmet off to brush his damp hair away from his eyes.

“So, what do you guys think?” Noin asked from the center of the catwalk. Heero approached her, eyeing the man who stood with them as he did. The mechanical engineer looked young, almost his age.

“Good enough,” Heero replied plainly. He stopped in front of them and crossed his arms over his chest.

Noin chuckled. The engineer appeared annoyed. “Oh, Heero, this is Albert Lemkin. He’s one of the men who helped to salvage and repurpose the weapon systems.”

Heero extended a hand out to the man and greeted him with a firm handshake. “Heero Yuy,” he introduced himself.

“Yeah, I know you,” Albert said with a grin. “At least it feels like I know you. When they asked us to work on this project they gave me all of your mission notes so I could study your mission patterns, flight data and all of the maintenance you reported while on Operation Meteor. It’s good to finally meet you.”

Heero was taken aback. He had no idea that Preventer had access to all of that information. He had assumed it was all lost when he had detonated Wing Gundam, or when he had destroyed Wing Zero trying to save Relena.

“Oh… yeah,” he said awkwardly as he snatched his hand back to cross his arms over his chest once more.

“So what do you really think about Argo? I mainly worked on the weapons system, but I helped a little with the new boosting wings, also… “ Albert offered, watching Heero with a hopeful expression.
Heero didn’t know what to say. “It’s good…” he said awkwardly. “Very… maneuverable…”

Albert’s face fell. It wasn’t the enthusiastic approval he had been seeking. Heero backpedaled and added weakly, “… just like Wing Zero used to be.”

“Wow, really? Thank you,” Albert chirped, obviously pleased with the comparison. “Wing Zero was a legend, I’m glad you think it’s as good as that.”

Heero blinked and cast a confused glance at Noin, who simply smiled at him, finding amusement at his discomfort. Une, however, appeared impatient. She waited for Trowa to approach before speaking.

“These suits are Top Secret,” she explained, her expression serious. “There will be no discussion of these mobile suits outside of our office, or this hangar. You are also not at liberty to speak at any length about this to your fellow pilots, is that understood?”

Heero frowned and simply nodded his head to give her a mute affirmative.

“Well.” Trowa said excitedly, holding his hand out to meet the second pilot. “How did you like Prometheus?” He started bombarding the taller man with the same questions he’d just asked Heero, curiosity dripping from each word.

“You must be Trowa.” Albert said excitedly, holding his hand out to meet the second pilot. “How did you like Prometheus?” He started bombarding the taller man with the same questions he’d just asked Heero, curiosity dripping from each word.

“You’ll have time for questions later.” Une interrupted before Trowa could open his mouth to answer. “The locker rooms are that way.” She tilted her head towards the right side of the hangar before giving Albert a look, which in turn made him nod and get back to work.

“How do you even take this thing off?” Trowa put one foot up on the locker room bench while he grabbed at the sleeve of the uncomfortably tight, form fitting flight suit. He gave a sharp yank but the fabric wouldn’t release his arm. It was like a second skin, refusing to part from his body. The new material was foreign to him.

Heero smirked from the opposite side of the bench as he watched the other pilot struggle with his flight suit. When they were kids they were able to slip in and out of various types of suits easily. Many standard sizes were for adults, so it was simply a matter of rolling legs and sleeves to make a secure fit. These suits, however, were made of some new polyurethane-coated synthetic weave that was somehow stiff and superbly flexible at the same time. That, mixed with a sheen of sweat on their skin, made tearing it from their limbs a major feat.

Heero had already shed the top half of the one-piece suit off, the arms and torso portion hanging loose around his waist. He reached over the bench and grabbed the loosened collar of Trowa’s suit, his fingertips tucking beneath the tight fabric.

“Here, let me help you…” he murmured as he pulled roughly, forcing the suit to roll over Trowa’s damp biceps, helping to free one of his arms from the constrictive fabric.

“Thanks.” Trowa grasped the front zipper and pulled it further down, then managed to get his left arm out of the other sleeve. He took his foot off the bench and straightened up, using both hands to roll the suit down his abdomen and hips, turning so that his back faced Heero as the fabric slowly inched lower. Soon his lower half was free of the tight constraints and he started working on his legs. “I want to know who designed these suits.” They were a pain in the ass, and shockingly
harder to get off then his skintight circus costumes.

Heero found himself blatantly gawking at Trowa’s backside as it was slowly revealed to him. He blinked and tried to look away, but found he couldn’t. He decided that if they did manage to find out who had designed their suits he would thank them personally.

“They’re… supposed to be better for preventing blackout during high g-force maneuvers,” Heero muttered distractedly. It suddenly occurred to Heero that he had never seen Trowa naked before. He had seen him in his shirtless performance costume at the circus, and he had seen his legs exposed in those ridiculous yet somehow strangely attractive Mariemaia uniform shorts, but never fully exposed. He finally forced himself to look away from the absolutely perfect, slightly muscular ass in front of him to focus his attention on shedding his own suit. He turned his back to the other pilot and began to shimmy and tug his own flight suit off.

“How do you like your new mobile suit?” Heero asked casually. He took a seat on the bench so he could better reach the fabric on his legs, peeling it off with some difficulty. They were instructed not to wear underwear beneath the suits. They had been given ten each, and were told that they would be thoroughly laundered after each use. “… and don’t think that your winning in the versus simulation is any indication that you’re better than me,” he added with a sigh, teasingly.

Trowa looked over his bare shoulder, an amused smirk playing on his lips. “I won’t let it get to my head.” He had finished peeling the suit from his legs and was folding it up to place on the bench. When Heero wasn’t looking directly at him, Trowa let his eyes linger on his attractive naked form.

This wasn’t the first time he’d allowed himself to take in the sight, but a lot had changed since he’d been a teenager, cleaning and bandaging Heero’s broken body after his attempt to self destruct. Now he was looking at the statuesque physique of a young adult, the lines and curves having perfected over time. Heero was like a work of art, his ass resembling that of the statue David by Michelangelo.

Not wanting to take advantage of the other’s privacy, Trowa politely averted his gaze. “Prometheus is definitely an upgrade from Heavyarms. It’s just… I find it strange that it’s so customized to fit my style of fighting. So similar to Heavyarms. Isn’t that too much of a coincidence? They could have modeled the new Gundams after any number of the other builds, and yet they picked ours. And they asked us to pilot them.”

Finally free of his unusually tight flight suit, Heero tossed the now inside out black fabric onto the bench beside him. He stretched his legs out in front of himself, his expression flat, lost in thought.

“They probably assumed that we wouldn’t be able to say no…” Heero replied quietly, his eyes narrowing. “Noin said something about our ability to work together. Honestly, not many people would know about that except her… she was the only one present when we had joint missions.” He ran his fingers through his hair, his expression thoughtful, before standing up and grabbing a towel from inside his locker. “And the engineer in the hangar mentioned that he studied my flight data, and personal mission notes… why me specifically?” He paused, draped the towel over his shoulder rather than wrap it around his waist, and walked past Trowa towards the showers.

“All of that talk about the past has got me on edge,” he confided over his shoulder.

*Same.* Trowa stared down at the floor for a minute while lost in thought. Something didn’t seem right. He shook his head and grabbed a towel from his locker before following in Heero’s footsteps.

The locker room was empty except for the two pilots. Trowa was thankful for the privacy and the
chance to ruminate on the day’s events. He was pretty impressed with the new mobile suits, despite being disturbed by how similar they were to Heavyarms and Wing. He had to admit that being inside a cockpit again felt natural. It had momentarily erased the sense of dépaysement he’d been feeling ever since leaving the life of a soldier.

Trowa occupied the shower next to Heero, grabbing the dials and turning the water on. He waited until it was at his preferred temperature before stepping under and getting his hair wet, pushing his wet bangs from his face.

Heero was obsessed with hot showers. Having been denied them most of his life due to “survival training” once he had the luxury of a hot shower at a whim he always took advantage of it. He had turned the water on full blast, as hot as he could stand it and stood with his back against the high-pressure stream, letting the scalding water blast the stress from his shoulderblades and wash away all of the salty sweat that had covered his body. After a few minutes of standing still he finally got to work lathering his body up with the liquid soap provided from the dispenser mounted on the wall.

It was strange how relaxed he felt. The idea of having a challenge - a mobile suit challenge- was comforting. He felt guilty for it, but he hadn’t thought of Relena at all while he was working on the simulator. Now, without the stimulation and distraction of prospective battle, he was slowly drifting back to his previous dark thoughts. His disjointed and uncomfortable conversation with the therapist the day before…

He was frustrated that he couldn’t recreate the same easy conversation he had had with Trowa in Une’s office a couple of days before. He couldn’t even talk to Duo, who was one of his closest friends. Every time the former Deathscythe pilot tried to approach him about it he felt himself pull into his shell- worried he would be judged, or that Duo would consider him weak for not being able to handle his feelings. He knew it was ridiculous. Duo was open and understanding enough, but he also had been known to compare him (jokingly) to super heroes. Evel Knievel. Larger than life people. To be so weak in front of him felt like a disappointment.

_I don’t feel that way when I talk to Trowa_, Heero realized. He turned around to let the stream of water smash into his chest and rinse off the faintly herbal scented soap before speaking just loud enough to be heard over the water.

“Thank you for the other day… for helping me to calm down.”

Trowa looked over at Heero, moving so that the spray of water hit his back and shoulders. “No problem. It’s what friends do.” His eyes studied the other pilot’s wet hair, which was slicked back with a few random strands hanging down over his ears. He watched a bead of water trickle down Heero’s exposed forehead, trailing over his brow, down the bridge of his nose, and over his parted lips before descending to his chin. His breath caught in his lungs and he had to look hastily look away before his body continued to react.

Heero frowned. He didn’t think that Trowa quite understood what he meant. Trowa didn’t realize how important that had been to him. He sighed as he ran his hands across his own sides, up his chest, to the back of his neck. Maybe it was just what friends did. Trowa was often in the company of Quatre, and the blonde was known for his compassionate gestures. Despite being friends, Heero couldn’t imagine himself openly hugging anyone. It would have never occurred to him to do it.

He made quick work of lathering and rinsing his hair before shutting the water off. After rubbing his hair dry with the towel he slid it around his waist and looked over at Trowa across the partition. _Maybe I’m just reading too much into this…_ he thought. He wondered if Trowa even remembered the kiss he had given him so many years ago. Heero hadn’t been able to stop thinking about it ever
since it had first cropped back up in his mind on the train. Was he just desperate for attention from Trowa now that he was feeling so low? He found himself hyper-aware of the other pilot whenever he was around. In the elevator he had assumed it was Trowa who had touched him… was he hoping that he had touched him?

The truth was he didn’t know the first thing about Trowa, now. What had he been doing since the end of the Eve War? Was he even seeing anyone? All of their exchanges the past few days had been simple, platonic ones. Just like Trowa had said… things, friends do.

*I’m being such an idiot,* Heero thought with a sigh. He slipped out of the shower stall and made his way back to his locker, tugging his Preventer uniform out irritably.
Chapter 3

“I really don’t think this is necessary… and I don’t see the point, to be honest with you,” said Wufei from across the table. His arms were crossed over his chest, and his face bore it’s usual displeased scowl. “Whose idea was this, anyway?”

“Mine,” Sally said from beside him, an amuse smile playing across her lips. Wufei had never crossed Sally Po in the past, and he wasn’t going to start now. He resisted the urge to roll his eyes and sighed in defeat.

“I’ve done some of these before during team building exercises at various corporations I’ve invested in,” Quatre said brightly from his seat beside Trowa. “They really do help.”

Heero sighed and gripped the bottle of water in his lap with both hands. “So what… kind of training is this, exactly?”

“Well, considering you’ve all been putting in long hours lately, and morale seemed a bit low, Sally came up with this idea of having a day just to unwind as a group. Work on trust, cooperation, teamwork.” Noin grinned at them, obviously excited. She pushed a large tin of her cookies happily across the table.

Duo dove into them, grabbing one in each hand. “Sounds like my kind of training,” he said happily before taking a giant bite out of the one in his right hand. “I mean, I’m sure it’s not as exciting as the super secret agent training you and Trowa have been up to lately…” he added with a mopey frown. He had been grilling Heero and Trowa all week for any hint of whatever their secret assignment was, but neither man would give him a clue. It was driving him insane. He knew that whatever it was they were doing was confidential, and Heero had been adamant that their assignment wasn’t his business- and it probably wasn’t- but he hated secrets, and he just had to know. Maybe there was a hint of jealousy deep down in there somewhere, too.

Duo was confident he had a solution to his dilemma. A few nights before at a party in the dorms someone had given him a little tablet he had thought was an upper, but it turned out to be some new-fad synthetic. While it had made him relax and feel lighter than air, it also made him talk a mile a minute. He had slipped up and told a few of them that he had once been a “freedom fighter” during the wars, and Quatre had dragged him out of the party before he could divulge anything else.

He was determined to get Heero or Trowa to take it… perhaps unknowingly. Then they would have to tell him what they were up to.

He pat his pocket with a smile with his now empty hand before reaching over to grab another cookie.

Trowa was reaching for a cookie at the same time and swatted at Duo’s hand so he could grab the one he’d been eying. He quickly secured it in between his long fingers and removed it from the threat of Duo’s clutches.

“Kids. Fighting over cookies.” Wufei was not amused. What was everyone’s obsession with Noin’s cookies, anyway? They weren’t extraordinary tasting. Just normal chocolate chip.

“I wanted this cookie specifically. No other will do.” Trowa broke off a piece and popped it into his mouth, triumphantly eyeing Duo as he chewed on his prize.
"You’re a dick." Duo stated loudly, doing his best mock-Heero-Yuy glare at the taller pilot.

Noin smirked before interrupting them. “You will all perform a series of tasks with your partners, and then as a team. The first one will be the ‘trust fall’. This is where you’ll be put in a blindfold and then forced to fall backwards into the arms of your fellow teammate. Then we shall do it as a group,” she informed them, standing up and pointing to Duo and Wufei. “You two first.”

Duo stood up, ready for action. Wufei groaned and pushed himself out of his chair reluctantly. He hadn’t been too terribly thrilled about being partnered with Duo Maxwell this past week. Originally what had started out as Duo helping him organize and process paperwork had turned into a grueling daily task which included keeping the American from tampering with the xerox machine, and checking his desk hourly for any items that didn’t belong. Namely inappropriate items, such as banana flavored condoms, mouse traps and fake grenades.

Duo grinned as Noin slid the black blindfold over his head. He held his arms out as far as they would go to either side of himself and smiled as Wufei took his position behind him.

“Alright, now, just fall back and let Wufei catch you,” Noin explained.

“Okay…” Duo appeared to hesitate before dropping heavily backwards, his body stiff. “Catch me, loverboy!”

“Maxwell!” Wufei hissed, embarrassed, but caught the American pilot anyway, hooking his arms beneath Duo’s. “Damn you…”

Trowa wasn’t sure about these ‘team building’ exercises. He already trusted his partner with his life, and even though it was generally hard to earn his trust, Trowa could say he felt that way about everyone in the room. So were these games really necessary? He folded his arms across his chest, reluctant to participate at first. The look Sally gave him melted whatever unwillingness he had, and he sighed, defeated.

“Alright, now Wufei, you fall for Duo,” Sally instructed, obviously enjoying herself.

“Fall for me? Too late for that,” Duo said as he stepped behind Wufei and held his arms to prepare to catch him. “He already has…”

“Spare me.” Wufei replied. His eyebrow twitched uncontrollably before it vanished beneath the blindfold. He crossed his arms over his chest, clicked his heels together and hesitated. “Maxwell, if you drop me I’ll-”

“C’mon, man. When have I ever let you down?”

“Are we talking about the lifetime of disappointments, or just within the last twenty-four hours?”

“Ha ha, yeah, right. Hurry up already!”

Wufei’s back stiffened and he fell backwards. Duo caught him easily by the shoulders.

“I’m not gonna lie, I thought you weren’t going to even try it,” Duo said as he helped Wufei upright. The Chinese agent sighed.

“I take my work very seriously…” Wufei replied sourly. “Even if the exercises are redundant and ridiculous.”

Heero watched silently from the opposite side of the table as Quatre and his current partner, Sally,
performed the exercises with ease. All of the laughter and jokes did nothing to lighten his mood. *This is just a waste of time*… he thought angrily as he watched Sally catch Quatre in her arms. *Relena’s killer is out there and we’re in here, goofing off. I need to be training, or aiding the investigation.*

The reality was that over the past week everyone in that room had been diligently working on the murder case, and no new leads had emerged. Everyone was burnt out, pulling long hours. Heero had been invited out for drinks by Duo a few times, but he had turned him down. He wasn’t feeling very sociable. He didn’t want to have *fun*. He wanted to work.

When it was his and Trowa’s turn he stood with a frown before trudging around the table. Duo was smirking, his hands propped on his hips.

“Not sure what kind of challenge this could be for a guy who’s reckless as they come, and another dude who goes out onto the battlefield with limited ammo and a death wish, but ‘eh.” Duo chuckled and watched as Heero reluctantly took his position in front of Trowa, turned around, and waited for Noin to slide the blindfold over his eyes while his arms hang limply at his sides. He wasted no time tipping himself over, backward into Trowa.

Trowa quickly put his arms out, but instead of hooking them under Heero’s he wrapped them around his waist and easily pulled his smaller frame up so that Heero’s back was pressed flat against his chest. The hair at the back of his partner’s head tickled his chin and he let his arms linger for a moment before it became too obvious that he was enjoying their closeness.

With the flick of his wrists, Trowa spun Heero around carefully so that they were facing each other and reached up to untie the blindfold, letting the silky black fabric slide down until their gazes locked.

Heero caught the blindfold before it fell to the floor. As he clutched it in hand he stared up at Trowa. The sudden closeness of their bodies wasn’t lost on him. Being blindfolded had brought the falling experience to a level Heero hadn’t anticipated. Being momentarily without his vision, he had noticed things he hadn’t noticed before: this partner’s surprised, hitched breath as he fell, the firmness of Trowa’s forearms through his uniform jacket. The leftover scent of orange peel on his hands from breakfast...

Heero stared at him for a long moment, perplexed, before lifting the blindfold up with both hands to tuck it under his hair and slip it over Trowa’s eyes.

The room went dark. Trowa wasn’t a fan of losing his sight. He turned around and took a few steps forward before dropping his hands at his side. *This is ridiculous...* With a sigh, he rolled onto the back of his heels and let himself start to fall.

Heero hadn’t realized how painfully tall Trowa was until he came crashing down at him. He caught Trowa around his chest, surprised at how easy and natural it was to hold him up, before helping him to a stand. He saw Trowa rip the blindfold from his eyes, his movements abrupt, his body language revealing clearly that he was as irritated with this as he was.

“Alright, now group falls,” Noin announced, her voice stirring up annoyed groans in the room. After some bullying Noin and Sally managed to get all of the pilots to fall backwards from a chair into the arms of their fellow ex-pilots. After each pilot performed the feat they moved on to another activity that involved one agent calling out commands to their blindfolded comrade, while the other wove through an obstacle course in a hallway made of chairs and various office furniture. Despite the grumbling and groaning between them, Duo and Wufei did rather well. Heero and Trowa excelled in communicating to one another in short, concise commands. Quatre and Sally
were having too much fun with the entire thing.

After a full afternoon of competitive ‘bonding’ the agents were released early for the day. Wufei had vanished as soon as they had been released. Duo had asked the rest of the group to grab food with him. Quatre had agreed, but Heero was done being social with his colleagues for the day. As he exited the meeting room they had been using as a game arena he spotted Trowa standing at the end of the hall looking down at his phone. He checked his own watch. It was only one o’clock. His stomach, surprisingly demanding the past few days, suggested that he go find food to appease it. He thought for a moment about heading down to the cafeteria where Duo and Quatre were headed, but then decided against it. It was Thursday, and a group of young, out of tune and off-key agents who had formed their own band always serenaded the cafeteria with their poorly practiced Green Day cover songs on Thursdays.

Heero wanted quiet, but he didn’t necessarily want to be alone.

“Hey,” Heero stepped up beside Trowa and averted his eyes from the phone in his hands in an attempt to give him his privacy. “Do you want to grab some lunch with me? … away from here?”

Trowa had been texting his sister. All throughout their team building meeting his phone had been buzzing as Catherine filled his inbox with frantic messages about her blind date from the night before. Apparently the guy had shown up late, talked about his pretentious job the entire time, spilt his wine on her dress, and then expected her to pay for both their dinners. She was swearing off OkCupid for the foreseeable future and advised her brother to stay off Grinder and look for more meaningful relationships in person. Trowa rolled his eyes.

He shoved the phone into his back pocket and nodded, looking over at Heero. “Sure.”

Preventer headquarters was an hour train ride away from the more populated Lunar Mall and entertainment district, however thirty minutes in the opposite direction within one of the lunar craters was a residential complex where many of the agents and their families lived. It functioned as an isolated suburb, with schools, local police and all the bells and whistles of any small community. The residential area was surrounded by various small entertainment hubs. Movie theaters, restaurants and various locally owned shops supported the residents there. Ever since first arriving at the Preventer headquarters Heero hadn’t left the main complex. Despite his previous fervor for his work and training on his new mobile suit, it was refreshing to have a change of scenery and get out of the workplace.

The train dropped them off at a massive bio-dome built on the lunar surface filled with a quaint little park littered with short trees surrounding a manmade pond. Kids were playing at a play structure on the opposite side. People were throwing frisbees across the plush, rich green grass. The air inside the dome was humid, stuffy, as many of the lunar facilities were. Heero shrugged his uniform jacket off of his shoulders, hooked a finger into the collar and draped it over his shoulder as he strolled along beside Trowa. A warm breeze blew through his white tank top. He became momentarily lost in the summery atmosphere, forgetting that he was on the lunar surface until he looked up to see the inky vast blackness of space peering down at him through the thick, protective layer of the dome.

The distinct clinking of silverware and glasses alerted him to a nearby open-air cafe boasting an Italian theme. The earthy smell of roasted coffee wafted across the grass to greet them. With wordless agreement they both drifted in the cafe’s direction. After being seated and handed menus and drinks Heero finally relaxed in his seat and began to study the downturned face of his partner across the table. They hadn’t spoken much the ride out there and he suspected that if he didn’t
initiate conversation, Trowa would be content to just be there. Heero wasn’t usually one for small talk, but he had some questions, and with all of their busy work and activities he hadn’t really had a chance to ask them until now.

“You’ve been busy after the war?”

With a shrug of the shoulders, Trowa looked over at Heero. “Just traveling around with the circus like usual and taking Preventer cases here and there. I would think that you have been busier than me.” He slipped his jacket off and hung it on the back of his chair. It wasn’t ‘Tie Tuesday’ so he was wearing a white v-neck t-shirt underneath.

“You were working for Relena this entire time?” It’s what everyone assumed. They also assumed Heero had been romantically involved with the recently deceased world leader. No one knew for sure. Heero’s life had always been private and he rarely opened up about it.

“In a sense, I worked for her, yes.” Heero replied. The server came to take their orders. As soon as the man was out of hearing range Heero spoke again. “I had just started traveling myself, when…” he paused, his mouth suddenly feeling dry. He took a long gulp of the water in front of him before shrugging a shoulder. “Other than that, nothing very eventful. How is your sister?”

“She’s currently deleting her accounts on a bunch of dating websites.” Trowa smirked at the thought of Catherine’s bad luck. “I guess they are full of ‘creepos in disguise’. Her words, not mine.” His phone was still buzzing in his pocket, alerting him that more text messages were coming through. All probably from Catherine. He loved her, but she could be overly dramatic sometimes.

“Hm, I can imagine,” Heero replied, his eyes studying the soft curve of Trowa’s amused mouth. “I’ve never used a dating website,” he confided. “Honestly… I’ve never dated.” He never had to.

“What about you? Do you use dating websites?”

“No. They make me uncomfortable.” Trowa picked his glass of water up and took a sip, feeling the cold condensation on his fingertips. Dating in general made him uncomfortable. He suddenly became awkward, never knowing what to say, where to go, what to do. Every time Catherine tried pushing him into going on a date with one of her friends it ended disastrously.

Heero nodded in agreement. “If you don’t mind me asking, do you have any experience with serious relationships?” Heero wasn’t sure if the strange arrangement he and Relena had shared was a serious relationship or not. The only other form of relationship Heero ever dabbled in was with a coworker. He wouldn’t call that a serious relationship, either, more like a friends with benefits arrangement.

“No. Why do you ask?” That seemed like a random question to ask, although Trowa didn’t show any judgment on his face. “Were you and Relena…?”

“No. At least… I don’t think it was,” Heero scrunched his nose at the question. “We didn’t connect in that way.” Was he even making sense? By all accounts he was in a relationship with Relena. He went with her everywhere, checked in with her when he was gone, practically lived with her. It wasn’t until a few months before she was killed that he started trying to find himself, something that was now put on hold until her killer was brought to justice. “It was unusual. I’m not… attracted to women in that way.”

“So you weren’t in a long term romantic relationship.” Trowa offered. The realization made him happier than it should have. This entire time, all these years he’d thought Heero had a thing for Relena. Everyone did. So he hadn’t pursued the other past that one impulsive kiss, and now he had
confirmation that Heero was into men. Unless he wasn’t into women or men in that way… That possibility made him suddenly nervous.

“Yeah… I guess you could put it that way,” Heero replied. That sounded right. “I guess I just felt needed with her. That she needed me.” He ran a hand through his hair and sighed. “She tried to make it more than that. I think she hoped that over time I would be more comfortable with her in that way… sexually. I just couldn’t do it. It felt wrong.” He paused as the server returned with a focaccia bread covered in goat cheese, fresh garlic and tomatoes. He nodded to the man and waited until he was gone before speaking once more. “It took some time, but I finally realized my preferences. I may not have had many partners, but I know what I like.”

He casually pushed the plate across the table to Trowa, offering him a piece. “What about you? Duo is convinced that you’re an expert.”

“Why is he convinced? What makes him think that?” Trowa’s left eyebrow arched in amusement. There was something absolutely alluring about Trowa’s amused facial expressions. Heero didn’t know why. Perhaps because the other pilot was always so serious and stoic like himself. Whenever Trowa smiled, or his sleek eyebrows curved to accentuate the end of a sentence he found himself staring, intrigued. He suddenly wanted to try and keep that expression on Trowa’s face.

“I don’t know,” Heero replied, the corner of his mouth perking slightly. “You tell me.” He pushed a piece of basil around the plate with his fork.

“Define ‘expert’ in this situation. Then maybe I’ll answer.” Trowa reached for a piece of bread and set it on the plate in front of him, his eyes never leaving Heero. He just wanted to hear Heero say it, straight up ask him if he had an active sexual life.

“He says nobody as hot as you could not have a very active sex life,” Heero said slowly, catching Trowa’s eyes with his own. “I tend to agree with his logic.”

Heat rose in Trowa’s cheeks but he refused to back down. He continued to hold Heero’s gaze. “Yet you just admitted to me that you’ve had limited experience in that area. How can that be? You’re very attractive, too.” Surely Heero realized that.

“Nobody likes short Asian guys,” Heero replied, his expression serious. Suddenly his guise broke and he chuckled, breaking the tension. He lifted a piece of bread and bit into it with a smile. So he thinks I’m attractive? He was satisfied with that. He chewed for a moment, swallowed and then looked down at his food to pick at it. “I made you blush.” It was cute.

Trowa shook his head. “It’s hot in here.” The excuse floated past his lips as he looked down at his food, picking his fork up. “Yes… I’ve had sex before. Multiple times…” He finally answered the other’s question honestly.

Heero smirked and looked up from his bread at him. He decided he found a new hobby in making Trowa blush. How someone so strong, stoic and intimidating could be so fucking adorable he didn’t understand. “I hope you’re not offended that Duo and I were talking about you. He’s made a game of guessing people’s personal facts. He’s got Wufei pegged as a perpetually frustrated bisexual man who would rather garden than interact with other humans, and he’s convinced that Quatre is really a woman. Something about his pre-pubescent girl voice…” Heero added in a nonchalant voice. “He also claims that I am asexual mecha-kin, whatever that means.”

The comment brought a full smile to Trowa’s lips and he quickly tried to hide it behind his bangs. “Seems accurate about Wufei, but Quatre’s not a woman. I can assure you.” He took a bite of his
food and swallowed before adding. “And what does Duo think about himself?”

“He thinks he’s God’s gift to man and womankind, of course,” Heero replied with a frown, though the sight of Trowa smiling forced him to suppress a smile of his own. “I personally think he’s obnoxious… but he has a good heart. I just wish he would stop asking me about my ...endowments.”

He took another piece of bread into his mouth, chewed it and grumbled. “Have you ever received a late-night dick pic from him?” Insinuating that he had. Many times. Duo Maxwell, ever the notorious prankster.

“I think we all have.” Trowa had tried to block that memory out. He remembered disabling photo messages from the braided pilot at one point. Sometimes Duo’s fascination, or rather, obsession with their personal lives came off as borderline creepy.

“Sometimes I wonder if he would be the same, or different, if we didn’t have the pasts that we do. He seems… normal. I guess, what I perceive as normal.” Heero tilted his head to the side, gesturing to a group of college-age kids who were wrestling with each other in the grass nearby. “He seems like he would fit in with people like that. I can’t imagine ever being like that, though. Even if I was somebody else.” He sighed, realizing that the conversation shifted to a rather sad thread. He turned his attention back to Trowa.

“You said there are no more animals in your circus acts. What sort of act do you do? I never got to see you perform before… I’m sorry I never made the time to stop by.” Heero had spent plenty of time at the circus with Trowa after his self-destruction, but he had been cooped up in the trailer most of the time. He had never witnessed the clown in action.

“I started performing aerialist acts. With silks and the hoop.” Trowa wasn’t sure if Heero had ever seen an aerialist perform before, so he decided to fish his phone out and pull up a video of him and Catherine practicing. He slid the iphone across the wood table so Heero had a better view.

Heero watched the video with interest, his chin in hand, eyes fixated on the two bodies as they twisted and posed in seemingly effortless positions in the air. Heero had recently seen Trowa’s body naked at work, but it seemed like a completely different frame suspended high in the air, wrapped in silk, clad in tight colorful tights. Triceps, biceps, taut abdominal muscles coiling and expanding elegantly, wrapped in silken fabrics. The performance was borderline sexual, alluring and strangely emotional. It wasn’t what Heero had expected Trowa to be doing.

After the video ended Heero looked up and studied Trowa’s face, stunned, as if he were seeing someone completely different. “That was beautiful,” he said. You were beautiful… “You’re not going to stop performing, are you?”

“No.” Trowa pocketed the phone again. “Do you finally want to come watch me now?” He asked, holding no hard feelings against the other for not stopping by the circus sooner. “Catherine would love to see you again. Especially now that you’re fully healed and won’t be throwing up her soup on my sheets.” The tease was as close to flirting as Trowa got.

Heero smiled. “Of course I’ll come.” He couldn’t even imagine what that performance would be like to witness in person. “And honestly, Trowa. Do you really blame me for throwing THAT soup up…” He leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms over his chest, a smile teasing his lips. “I do owe her new sheets…” Heero made a mental note that he could definitely make the time to visit. Catherine had spent a lot of time with her brother helping him when he was at his worst. He owed her a visit at least.
“I think it’s nice that you two found each other, and that you’re so close. How is she taking your absence?”

“She’s used to it.” Trowa said honestly. “I come and go from the circus as I please… You said you were starting to travel before Relena… Where were you going?”

“Russia,” Heero replied. “I had just landed when I saw the news…” He rolled his shoulders and tried to shift the conversation before his guilt began gnawing away at him again. “I started having some slight medical issues a couple of years ago. Nothing major… some muscle spasms, things like that. To rule out congenital diseases they did a genetic screening on my DNA and in the process I found out that I have Russian and Japanese heritage. I knew about the Japanese…” He ran his hand through his hair with a sigh. “I didn’t know about the Russian. I wanted to explore that part of myself. To be honest, I know very little about that culture.”

He sipped his water again, studying Trowa across the table. It’s so easy to talk to you... He hadn’t spoken to anyone THIS much in such a long time. “Have you ever been there?”

“Neskol’ko raz…” Trowa said. It meant ‘a few times’ in Russian. He’d always found Heero’s half Japanese ethnicity alluring. But those striking blue eyes were not Japanese. “Interesting mix, Russian and Japanese.” He liked it. It suited him.

Heero sighed. “My father, from what I remember… what little I remember, wasn’t a good man. I’ve always wondered about myself, wondered what parts of me are from my genetics; what is just innate rather than trained. I thought if I went there I could get an idea of what the people were like, maybe see whatever it was in my biological father that drew my mother to him. All I know is that he was a soldier, and now that he was Russian.”

“What about you? Do you know anything about where your parents were from?”

“Not really. Catherine suspects we’re mutts, a mix of French and Eastern European. Our family has always been nomadic.” Trowa had no memories of his parents. He’d gone his entire life not knowing where he’d come from. A few years ago he and Catherine had taken a blood test to find out if they were indeed biological siblings. The results came back positive. How he had found his sister after 15 years of separation, he’d never know. But he was thankful fate had brought them back together again. It was all he had of his former self, his only link to the past. He was a Bloom.

“From what Catherine remembers, our parents were good people. I’m sorry that your father was not.”

Heero nodded. “It’s alright. I only carry his blood, not his name or legacy. I think I’ve redeemed myself, his contribution to me. And, according to the woman I met on the plane on my way to Russia, I have the ‘Russian intensity’ about me. Whatever that is.” He smiled. “I always wondered why I was so tolerant to vodka.” He pushed his glass aside as the server brought their lunches and ate quietly for a few minutes before adding, “would you come out and have a drink with me sometime?”

Is he asking me on a date? Trowa smiled, feeling an unfamiliar flutter in his chest. “Yea. I’d love that. I’ve always wondered how much liquor you could keep down.” He added with a quirk at the corner of his lips.

“Don’t let my small stature mislead you. I’m not as much of a lightweight as I appear…” Heero replied, satisfied that Trowa had agreed. “Is next Saturday good for you?” He was feeling more confident by the minute.
Trowa nodded. “It’s a date.”
“How the other half lives, am I right?” Duo whispered as they walked past a gilded door flanked by stiff, suited butlers. They were being lead across a vast, white marble foyer to a sitting room where they were to meet one of their suspects in Relena’s murder case. As they passed a tall, glossy pillar topped with what was obviously an expensive, antique vase overflowing with white lilies and various exotic flowers. “Holy shit, where did they find that many fresh flowers on a colony,” the stunned American whispered over his shoulder at his two companions as they passed it. “I bet they’re imported.”

Heero was oddly amused by Duo’s excitement over things he had, over his time with Relena, grown accustomed to seeing. Sometimes he forgot about Duo’s humble upbringing, and how shocking the ostentatious lifestyle of the elite class could be to others. He personally didn’t care for the wasteful over-the-top luxury, either.

They had arrived in the L1 Colony Cluster the night before, set on having their interview with the suspect the following afternoon. That morning they had breakfast at the hotel and had laid low before being picked up by one of their host’s gaudy golden stretch limos. Now they were finally there, ready to collect any information they could that would help with their investigation.

As they entered the sitting room Dorothy Catalonia stood from her fine, floral upholstered couch, tossed the political commentary magazine she had been reading aside and held her hands up in greeting.

“Gentlemen! You’re late.” She gestured to the couch across from her. “Hurry, sit, before the tea gets cold.”

“We are 3 minutes late.” Trowa answered flatly as he went to take a seat on the couch. “Because someone had a confrontation on the street.” He looked over at Duo, eyes narrowed. They couldn’t take him anywhere without the other causing a scene.

“Listen, the guy was selling fake Gucci watches for REAL Gucci prices. SOMEONE had to say SOMETHING, alright?” Duo defended himself, flopping down onto the couch beside Trowa. Heero lowered himself slowly at the end of the couch opposite of Duo and regarded Dorothy with a frown.

“Sorry we’re late,” Heero said blandly. “Thank you for seeing us.” He wasted no time pulling his file out, flipping it open. He pulled forth a pen from his pocket and clicked it. “Where were you on the night of-”

Dorothy started laughing, interrupting Heero’s prompt line of questioning. “It’s nice to see you, too, Heero!” Her borderline cackle filled the room. She crossed her legs tightly and rested her hands on her raised knee. She was wearing a form fitted black dress, with short black gloves, obviously still in mourning. “Business, business, business. That’s all you ever were. I don’t know what Relena ever saw in you,” she teased with a sly smile. “Other than your six pack abs, and smouldering eyes, of course…”

Duo chortled before laughing uncontrollably.

“We should try and keep this conversation professional.” Trowa cut through Duo’s loud laughter, leaning back against the cushions. “For the record, this discussion is being recorded.” He pointed to the small device clipped onto his shirt collar.
“But of course,” Dorothy replied, her expression relaxed. “Trowa’s your name, right? Such a serious face. I remember that face the night I sparred with your little blonde friend.” She waved a hand dismissively. “But those things are in the past. Now we have a glorious future ahead of us… except poor Relena.” She paused, her expression appearing genuinely saddened. “It’s a shame. A damn shame, really. Such a bright spot in our world, sullied, taken from us.” She reached into the front of her dress and tugged a white kerchief from her bosom and dabbed at the corner of her eye. “Excuse me… I’m still in shock about it, I guess. Unlike some people, I’ve yet to get over it.”

Heero visibly tensed at her statement but said nothing for a long, suspended moment before speaking in a cold voice, “where were you the night before Relena’s murder?”

Long legs crossed and arms folded against his chest as Trowa watched the blonde woman with an expressionless face. He was not amused by her barbs and not a fan of Dorothy Catalonia in general. His only real interactions with her had been just after she’d skewered Quatre through the abdomen. Trowa wouldn’t forgive her for that.

“I was with some cousins, having dinner at such a wonderful restaurant in Norway. Maaemo. You’ve ever heard of it?”

Heero sighed and wrote that down. “Who specifically accompanied you?”

“Oh, this little song and dance is so dull, Heero. I already answered these questions when the Paris inspectors came by. I submitted all of this information to Preventer already. Why must I be cross-examined so many times? My story hasn’t ever changed. I was visiting family in Norway. Oslo. I went to dinner with some cousins that night, and then went to a small bar beside the hotel, had a drink with a handsome Norwegian man, then retired for the night. I spoke to Relena on the phone that morning, we made up. We were fighting over the dumbest thing, and we finally made our peace before-” She paused, her lip trembling, “before she was murdered.” Her voice suddenly became cold, hateful. “I was at her funeral. I was at her home after the funeral. I spoke to her the morning she died. Where were you, Heero Yuy?”

Duo gawked, looking back and forth between Dorothy and Heero like a spectator at a tennis match.

Heero’s shoulders squared, his expression darkened. “I don’t like your implication,” he said in an icy voice.

Dorothy batted her eyelashes, her lips curling into a smirk. “Oh? Has nobody else thought of this yet? Our infamous HERO, Heero, couldn’t possibly have killed the woman he had been giving the cold shoulder to as of late? He had nothing but half of her estate to gain from her death-”

“I claimed nothing.” Heero glared across her antique, carved coffee table at her.

“But she left it to you. ALL of it. Where were you the night before she died? Certainly not with her in Paris. Where were you when a trained SNIPER took her life? Funny how that description fits a certain someone, doesn’t it?” Dorothy caught his gaze with her own, holding it confidently.

“Enough.” Trowa’s voice was firm as he cut her off. “We’re the ones asking questions, not you.” Preventer already had proof that Heero was in Russia during Relena’s assassination. He wasn’t going to sit back and let Dorothy turn the tables on his partner. However, he hadn’t known that Relena had left so much in Heero’s name. It wasn’t his business, but now he was wondering why. Especially if they hadn’t had a romantic relationship…

Dorothy rolled her eyes but fell silent.
“You’re a real piece of work, you know that?” Duo blurted, shocked at what he had just seen. How the hell did this woman manage to flip the script on them so effortlessly?

“You’re a real piece of work, you know that?” Duo blurted, shocked at what he had just seen. How the hell did this woman manage to flip the script on them so effortlessly?

“Why thank you. What a compliment,” Dorothy replied, flicking a lock of her trademark platinum blonde hair over her shoulder. “Don’t get me wrong. I fully intend on cooperating with the authorities. Surely you must know it wasn’t me. Relena was my dearest friend. I cherished her above everyone else. What could I possibly have gained by her death? When have I ever failed to support her? When did I ever betray her? I was always there. Her loss struck me deeply, and it frustrates me that they’ve sent -presumably- three of their BEST agents to one of my homes to investigate ME, her best friend, when the true killer and mastermind is out there on the loose.”

“This is just procedure,” Heero said softly, his eyes shifting from his paperwork to Dorothy once more. “The faster you answer our questions, the sooner we can leave you alone.”

“Very well,” Dorothy conceded, folding her arms over her chest. “Ask away, but first, tea.”

Duo grinned, his hand reaching out to snatch a biscuit off of a round silver platter. “Don’t mind if I do!”

“That’s a LOT of money, man. You didn’t keep any of it?” Duo was obviously stricken with disbelief. He didn’t know that Heero and Relena were so serious that she would have left him with such a sizeable sum of cash.

“No,” Heero replied, obviously irritated. He peered past Trowa, who was seated in the center of the back seat of the limousine Dorothy had ordered to drop them off at their hotel. Duo, seated on the opposite side of Trowa, crossed his arms over his chest and sighed loudly, his expression dreamy.

“The things I could do with money like that…” Duo mumbled. “Why didn’t you keep it?”

“I don’t need money,” Heero said plainly, shrugging his shoulders. “I donated some, and just left the rest to the estate. Zechs…” he paused before correcting himself, “Milliardo absorbed the rest of it.”

“THAT guy,” Duo snorted, “I’m honestly surprised he and Dorothy didn’t hook up after the war.”

Heero crossed his arms tightly over his chest and leaned back into his seat, his eyes locked onto his lap. A long silence passed between the three of them before Duo broke it with a chuckle.

“That interview with Dorothy was painful. She’s a quick one, slick as they come. I can’t believe it. For a minute there she had me thinkin’ you were the murderer, Heero.”

“Her thought process was logical,” Heero replied softly, his voice uncharacteristically weak. “I don’t blame her for accusing me.”

“You would never do such a thing,” Trowa spoke up, appalled anyone would even think of him as a possible suspect. He looked over at the other agent with a frown. “Don’t let her words get to you. She was purposely trying to spew poison at you.”

Heero nodded. “I know. I’ve spent many years having that poison directed at me. She isn’t all bad, she has her moments…” he shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. “But she’s manipulative, and you can never know her true intentions.”
“I mean, why would she want Relena dead if they were best friends?” Duo asked as he toyed with the end of his braid.

“They had been fighting,” Heero explained, his eyes still studying his own lap, arms tightening over his chest. “I never found out what about, and even now, Dorothy won’t say. I can only imagine her wanting Relena dead if it served a higher purpose. I don’t think she would have wanted her killed over something personal. With all of the civil unrest that followed Relena’s death… and continues to follow… maybe she wanted things to go back to the way things were?” After Operation Meteor and the political dealings involved in the Eve War, Heero wouldn’t put anything past Earth’s aristocracy.

Trowa was studying Heero’s face as he spoke. He could tell the encounter with Dorothy had left him raw, but he was hiding it well. He’s hurting...

Suddenly through the window behind Heero a shiny black SUV made its way into the outskirts of Trowa’s peripheral vision. It was coming straight at them at an alarming speed, with no sign of stopping.

“Yea, because she is bat shit cra-“ Duo never got to finish the sentence.

In a matter of seconds Trowa’s reflexes activated. He pulled Heero’s body against his own, wrapping his arms around the smaller frame and leaning over to act as shield, his hands covering the back of Heero’s skull protectively. His eyes closed tight as he braced himself for impact.

The impact of the black SUV slamming at high speed against the rear passenger door caused it to crumple inwards, the tempered glass shattering and flying into the main cabin. The SUV had shoved the long limousine onto its right wheels. It rolled, landing roof side down and slid forty feet before slamming into the corner of a nearby building, coming to an abrupt stop. The sound of tires squealing loudly from beyond the now blown out windows signified that their assailant was attempting to make his or her escape.

“Ughhh… what the… fuck?!” Duo was curled against the roof of the car. As he unfurled he winced and cradled his right arm with his left hand, muttering incoherent curses.

Heero was stunned, shielded by his partner’s body, he sustained minimal damages. He unfolded himself from Trowa, who had somehow managed to create a complete barrier around him against the roof of the car. He pulled away just far enough to take stock of the taller agent, his hands on his shoulders. Trowa’s face was cut, blood slipping freely down his forehead to his cheek and neck. He stared into his eyes for a long moment as his brain tried to register what had just happened. At the sound of the tires squealing away he broke away, darted through the broken window and jumped to his feet, his service pistol seemingly materializing in his hand, and began to run full tilt after the SUV, which had already gained a sizeable lead away from him.

Trowa quickly pulled himself from the wreck, ignoring the stabs of pain from the cuts on his hands and face. He stood up and hissed, jaw clenching as his head screamed in discomfort. “Fuck…” He didn’t have time for this. Heero’s retreating form was getting smaller by the second. Trowa wiped the blood from his face before he set off in a sprint to catch up with Heero.

Eventually the car outran him, and Heero reluctantly slowed to a stop, his adrenaline high quickly wearing off. His shoulders were trembling, every muscle rock hard and tense. “They… got away,” he panted, feeling surprisingly drained. He heard running footsteps approaching behind him. He holstered his gun and turned around to see Trowa, bloodied. He jogged up to meet him, his hands immediately grabbing onto Trowa’s waist as he stopped in front of him. Heero began assessing him quickly. “You’re injured…” he reached up to wipe the blood from his face with the palm of his
hand, smearing it across Trowa’s cheekbone. “I got the license plate number,” he said breathlessly. “Call it in.” Trowa panted softly, dizziness suddenly taking over. “…just some cuts… I’m fine…” He could bandage himself up at the hotel. He leaned against Heero for support and closed his eyes, trying to focus on slowing his breathing. “Call the number in…”

Heero encouraged Trowa to rest his forehead against his shoulder, his arm slipping around his waist to steady him while the other slid into his pocket to make the call. Once connected to the local L1 police department and gave them the number, make and model of the car. As he did Duo padded up, still favoring one of his arms.

“You guys just up and left me and that poor driver!” He exclaimed, though he didn’t appeared genuinely offended. “Did you get the number?”

“Yes,” Heero replied plainly. He shove his phone back into his pocket and eyed Duo closely. “Broke your arm?”

“Feels that way,” the American agent said with a frown, gingerly poking the break and wincing before shrugging casually. “Trowa, you okay?”

Heero shook his head. “He’s got a concussion. We should get you both to a hospital,” he said firmly. He wouldn’t take no for an answer.

Trowa immediately shook his head. “… I’m ok…” He lift his forehead from Heero’s shoulder and stumbled slightly, bringing his hand up to his aching head. During the roll his head had slammed against the roof of the car. Heero was right, he probably had a concussion.

It was obvious that Trowa was NOT as okay as he claimed to be. The police soon arrived, as well as an ambulance. The EMTs focused on the driver, who had sustained small cuts and scrapes. The agents caught a ride with one of the officers and his deputy who took their report while giving them a ride to the nearby hospital. A few hours later Duo was treated with a red fiberglass cast to immobilize his broken wrist. Heero had only suffered a few minor bumps and scrapes. Trowa had his cuts cleaned and was assessed for any serious brain injury. Once he was cleared with only a mild concussion they were all free to return to their hotel. The taxi ride back was filled with tense silence. Heero was frustrated, angry that whoever had attacked them had gotten away. Rampant thoughts began to fill his head. Who was in that black SUV? Were they being followed? Who knew they were seeing Dorothy? Had SHE set them up? Had she tried to kill them? His friends were injured, and their attacker had gotten away. The person behind the wheel had been the key to this case. If he could have only managed to catch up to that car…

By the time they had returned to the hotel it was late. Duo had ordered Lebanese take out and had crashed in his hotel room while watching reruns of Law And Order. Heero had left him to return to his own room to take a shower, change into his nightclothes which consisted of a plain blue t-shirt and black basketball shorts with ankle socks. He finished a full bottle of water while he paced back and forth at the edge of his bed, his mind overstimulated, active, running frantically through various potential scenarios.

The encounter with Dorothy had bothered him. She had pretended to be cooperative, but overall she had spent the majority of the interview avoiding his questions, redirecting or turning them against him. Why? What did she have to hide? Did she really have such sour feelings for him? Her personal attacks on him had been a surprise, but they weren’t unwarranted. He had been gone. He hadn’t returned Relena’s affections. Had Relena confided those things in Dorothy? Surely she had-
Dorothy was her best friend, her confidante. How much did Dorothy really know?

Facing the reality of his and Relena’s unusual relationship was difficult for Heero to do. The entire encounter with Dorothy had left him feeling more guilty than he had before. Relena was gone. There was no way he could fix what had happened between them. She had died alone, on the sidewalk, thinking that he didn’t love her.

Did he love her? He tossed the empty water bottle into the trash can beside the desk and slumped down to a sit on the foot of the bed. *Why is this such a hard question to answer?* He felt foolish. childish. What was ‘love’ supposed to mean? He cared about Relena. He killed for her, and wouldn’t have hesitated to do so again. He wanted her to succeed. He respected what she stood for, wanted to encourage her to continue her work. He admired her conviction, even when they were kids. *But did I love her?*

He thought that he may have once. He had never said it to her, though she often confided that she loved him. She claimed it was ‘love at first sight’. During Operation Meteor he hadn’t explored any of these strange feelings for her. Every day was filled with violence and the struggles of war, he had no time to reflect on his girl crush. He had thought of her often, and found himself anxious to see her. Had that been love? Or was he just worried about her safety?

How could he not have loved her? What was *not* to love? She was smart, strong, brave, a powerful force in her own right. She fought with words, not weapons. She commanded respect when she entered a room, and yet she could win over the hardest of hearts with her gentle, sympathetic words. She was openly loving, forgiving, and generous. She was beautiful, statuesque and yet somehow delicate and demure at the same time. She was perfect. *What was wrong with me that I couldn’t appreciate her when she was alive?*

The thought made him sick to his stomach and his head began to throb with a relentless tension headache. He had lost Relena. He had FAILED Relena, and now he was failing at finding her killer.

He groaned into his hands, dropped them from his face and flopped backwards against the mattress, closed his eyes, and hoped sleep was soon claim him to put him out of his misery.

The return back to Preventer was uneventful. Duo slept the majority of the shuttle flight to the moon, and Heero and Trowa sat in a strange, uncomfortable silence through most of it. Heero couldn’t pinpoint why it was uncomfortable, or what had changed exactly, but there were things the two agents needed to discuss when they finally had some time alone. Namely the accident, and how thankful Heero was that Trowa had -once again- taken care of him when he needed him.

By the time they returned to headquarters first shift was on release, being replaced by the second shift of agents. The halls were bustling with excited workers on their way home who passed the lumbering, coffee-sipping bleary-eyed workers who were on their way to start their own long day.

As Heero headed for the dorm with Duo and Trowa he checked his phone and saw that he had received a message from one of the situation and risk analysts on the fourth floor. He broke away wordlessly from his companions and stepped onto the nearest elevator.

The situation and risk analysis office was practically empty, save for a couple of late-hour workers who were hunched over their computers tediously working on organizing and processing their intelligence.
“What took you so long? My shift was over an hour ago.”

“Nice to see you too, Fara.” Heero replied plainly, crossing his arms over his chest and glaring across the desk at the pretty, petite blonde man seated primly in front of his computer. “Sorry, they wouldn’t let me hijack the shuttle to make it go any faster.”

He and Faramond Maurel had a complicated relationship, or rather ‘arrangement’, that had started with a one night stand after an agency mixer, and had eventually turned into regular evening visits anytime Heero happened to return to Preventer. What had drawn Heero to the blonde was his feisty attitude, lovely and somewhat androgynous features, and his sensual, alluring French accent. He waited impatiently for the analyst to explain why he had called him into his office, and not to his bed.

“I was told to debrief you on what happened on L1. You know, the accident?” Fara quickly looked Heero over to make sure there wasn’t any apparent physical damage. “We need to document what happened for your files, and I was told that this couldn’t wait until tomorrow.” He pushed silky blonde locks from his shoulder and reached over to the cubicle next to his, grabbing the spare chair and pulling it into his area. “Sit.”

“I submitted my report digitally,” Heero explained as he reluctantly took a seat across from the blonde, his eyes narrowed with irritation. “Black SUV, hit the limo, flipped it, the guy got away. I’m alive.” He was tired. The last thing he wanted right now was to be in an office talking about this for the hundredth time. “Agent Maxwell sustained a fractured right wrist, Agent Barton was mildly injured and sustained a concussion.”

He watched as Fara tapped something out on his keyboard with a frown. “And you were worried about me, and wanted to know why I didn’t call you…” Heero added with a smirk.

“Actually no. I wondered why you came out of the crash without so much as a scratch, while the other two agents sustained injuries.” Fara finished typing and looked back over at the other. “Also, you know we don’t accept vague, hurried answers in our office. If you want to get out of here sooner, don’t waste my time.”

Heero sighed, defeated. He crossed his arms over his chest, closed his eyes and tilted his head back in an attempt to alleviate the tension in the back of his neck. The persistent, deep headache he had experienced at the hotel had never really resolved, and all he wanted to do was lie down.

“Fine. At approximately 1410 Saturday, we left Miss Dorothy Catalonia’s L1 home VIA one of her gaudy Mercedes gold stretch limousines. Would you like the license plate of the limo? It was DC-1291.” He was being a smart-ass. “We were ¾ of the way to the hotel when a black Ford Expedition hit the rearmost left passenger door. The door I was seated beside, going approximately fifty-five miles per hour.” He lifted a hand to his temple and rubbed at it with his fingers. “The rest was… Trowa grabbed me.” He frowned and dropped his hands to his lap, his dark, weary eyes opening slowly to stare up at the ceiling as the accident replayed in his mind. “Agent Barton, my partner, shielded me with his body during the crash. The limousine was knocked onto its side, flipped onto the roof…” He didn’t even hesitate to help me. His body - he sacrificed it for me.

Fara’s fingers flew over the keyboard with lightning speed, filling in the blank spaces of information Heero had neglected to include in his digital report. “And then you got out of the car, like an idiot, and ran after the Expedition?” His hazel eyes glanced in Heero’s direction, fingers still resting on the keyboard. “The three of you are lucky to be alive. It’s obvious this was a planned attack and not some random hit-and-run. Although, I don’t understand why they’d go through all the trouble to ram the limousine, but not get out and finish the job.”
“Exactly. I was expecting a shoot-out, but it never happened. It ran. License plate 562-O121. Turns out it was licensed to a security company, but had been reported stolen four days before.” Heero shook his head, his lips pursed tightly. Whoever had rammed their limo was lucky to have gotten away. In the moment he had been ready for anything, his training having taken over, however he was fueled by the sight of Duo lying on his side clutching his arm, and Trowa’s bloodied face.

“This attack is probably related to your current case. It’s no coincidence that someone would go after Preventer agents, knowing they had taken over the investigation from the local Parisian police. I’m meeting with Agent Barton and Maxwell tomorrow…” Fara removed his fingers from the computer and pushed his chair back from the desk, swiveling to face Heero.

“You promise me that you’re ok?” The other had a real talent for hiding things.

“I’ll live,” Heero replied tersely. “Look into Dorothy Catalonia. I wouldn’t put it past her to have staged an ‘accident’ for us on our way to the hotel. She was also rather evasive during her questioning…” He ran a hand through his hair slowly, his eyes locking onto the computer monitor. “I don’t have any new information on that. Her alibi is sound, but I wouldn’t put it past her to hire a hitman.”

“I already listened to Agent Barton’s recording of your conversation with her. What a… charming woman.” Fara smirked and took his glasses off, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “Alright. I think I’ve got what I need from you. At least… for now.” He gave the attractive agent a knowing look, tease hinting in his voice.

“You’ve no idea how much I need you right now,” Heero replied. “And your talents.” It had been a stressful weekend, and he could think of no better way to destress than with the gorgeous blonde seated in front of the computer.

“You’re right. I have no idea. Maybe you should show me some time, mister ‘disappears for a few days and doesn’t text’ Yuy.” Fara turned back to his computer and started to wrap up the report so he could shut everything down. He grabbed his bag from under the desk and slipped his glasses inside.

The corner of Heero’s lips perked with amusement. “I knew you’d be mad…” he reached out to catch his pale, thin wrist and tugged it so that Fara’s chair turned around to face him once more. “Let me show you,” he said softly. Normally he didn’t mess around with Fara in public. Nobody knew about their casual relationship, not even the other pilots. However, nobody seemed to be left in the office and he couldn’t wait the thirty-minute train ride to Fara’s apartment before touching him. He pulled him closer by his wrist, his eyes locking with the blonde’s cat-like hazel eyes. “Tonight I’ll show you.”

The mattress squeaked in protest under the erratic movements and Fara’s hair spread out over the pillow as his head tilt back with a throaty moan. Fingers dug into the white sheets, tugging at the threads while the pressure for release built. Heero was on his knees, back straight and head bent while he held the blonde’s hips high up off the bed, thrusting into him at a merciless speed. Fara’s legs dangled at either side of the strong body, the tips of his toes tickling the covers with each jerk forward.

“Merde! You really must have missed me…” He panted, opening his eyes to look up at Heero. His gaze traveled down his defined chest and abdomen, stopping at the junction where their bodies met and became one. The sight of Heero moving in and out of him sent shivers up his spine and caused the muscles in his thighs to tremble.
Heero was uncomfortably close to release, his entire body wound as tight as it would go. The sensation of his lover’s thighs trembling against his thighs only spurred him forward. He was determined to claim him. Fill him. He had needed this kind of raw, carnal release for days now. He felt more frustrated than usual, and he couldn’t pinpoint the exact source of his frustrations. It wasn’t the case, or the challenges he had faced following Relena’s death. It was a frustration born from the hot, needy core inside him. The part of him that wanted to be touched, and that yearned to touch someone else.

He bit his lower lip as he tried to hold his climax back as long as he could. The body clutched in his hands was gorgeous, almost ethereal. When he had first met Faramond he never thought the other man would consider sleeping with him. He had assumed he was out of his league. Even after two years of messing around he still found himself stricken by Fara lying beneath him, shocked that the witty, stunning man would even look at him.

Unhinging a hand from Fara’s hip, he leaned forward over him and propped it against the mattress beside his head so that their faces were parallel. His other hand slid down Fara’s hip, across the milky flesh of his thigh and encouraged him to hook his calves around his waist. He pushed forward, bending and curling the petite man’s body beneath him. His free hand gently grasped Fara’s firm arousal and gave the sensitive, flushed skin a slow caress.

“What’s not to miss?” He asked, his voice akin to a low growl, before he lunged forward to claim the blonde’s tender, soft lips with his own. He pushed his hips down, rocking them roughly against his willing body, catching the gasps and elegant sighs from his lover with his lips.

That was the last push Fara needed to send him over the edge. He reached a hand up to grasp the back of Heero’s neck, holding him still as he moaned desperately into his mouth. The muscles in his abdomen started to tighten, the feeling like a rubber band being stretched too far. He was going to lose it. He wanted to lose it, knowing Heero was being polite and waiting for him to cum first. Fara pulled his face away, jerking his head to the side as he cried out and finally let himself release.

As Fara came his body clenched, forcing rippling spasms across Heero’s arousal. Heero’s back stiffened. He rolled his hips forward to press as deeply into his lover’s body as he could before finding his own climax. He shuddered and moaned as he coated his lover’s lithe, pale body with a week’s worth of pent-up release, struggling to hold his weight up and off of him.

After the initial shock wave that accompanied his release passed over him he carefully pulled himself free from his lover’s trembling body and slowly lowered his weight against him until he was lying on top of him, not caring about the sticky puddle of Fara’s cum pressed between their stomachs. He buried his face into his lover’s neck and breathed a sigh of relief.

Fara closed his eye and let his body melt against the cool sheets. He ran a hand lazily down Heero’s sweaty back and chuckled breathlessly. “You need a boyfriend, clearly.” The other was insatiable.

“Mmn, I don’t have time for that,” Heero muttered against Fara’s neck. He rocked his hips playfully against the body beneath him. “What if I got a boyfriend? What would you do?”

“Ask if your new stud was into polyamorous relationships. If not, I guess I would have to let you go…” Fara didn’t want end whatever it was they had between them, but he felt that a stable relationship would be beneficial to the other’s mental health. Especially since Heero only saw Faramond a handful of times each year.

“Hm, I don’t think I’m suited for relationships. I’m … too selfish.” Heero replied. He pushed himself up and rolled off of him to lay on his back beside him, running his hands through his hair
to push his bangs from his face. He was selfish, wasn’t he? He had been avoiding Relena for so long, only to please himself. Hiding this from her, because it was what he wanted. He had been too cowardly to tell her what he really was.

“Please…” Fara snorted and turned to lay on his side. “You are one of the most selfless people I know, and besides, you need sex to release your stress… what do you do without me, most of the year? Are you fucking someone else?”

“No…” Heero replied softly, his eyes staring up at Fara’s white bedroom ceiling. His thoughts began to drift to the conversation he had with Trowa a few days prior about sex. He hadn’t divulged much to his partner about his activities, or had even mentioned Fara to him at all. What would Trowa think about this kind of relationship? Heero had told him that he hadn’t been in any serious relationships. What was this considered? “I hope … you don’t feel like I’m just using you, Fara.”

“But you are.” The answer wasn’t accusing, just soft and accepting. They had a mutual understanding, and Fara had agreed to it. “Maybe I’m using you too. The sex is good. Besides, I knew from the start that we’d never be committed. I don’t do long distance relationships.”

Heero rolled onto his side and propped his head up with his hand, studied Fara’s face for a long, quiet moment before replying, “what if things were different? Would I be someone worth dating?”

“Absolutely.” Fara reached out to trace Heero’s jawline with his fingertip. “Not only are you attractive and good in bed, but you’re a sweetheart underneath that brooding exterior. I think whoever you end up dating will be a lucky man.” He poked the other’s nose and smiled fondly at him. “Now if only you lived here… Then maybe things would be different.”

Heero smirked, caught Fara’s finger and pulled it down to his lips. He kissed the tip of it softly. “I hope you find someone worthy of you,” he said softly. “And I hope he’ll never be as good in bed as me.”

“You are selfish!” Fara teased and started to laugh, wrapping his arms around the other.
Chapter 5

It had been a week since their ‘accident’ on L1, and all of the agents had worked diligently on Relena’s murder case. Unfortunately no new headway had been made and no new leads reported. The majority of the week Heero had spent in the simulator with Trowa working on honing their skills with the new mobile suits. Finally the weekend came and everyone in headquarters had left to various parts of the moon to enjoy their well-earned time off.

Heero checked his watch and leaned against the wall outside of the Mare Nubium bar as he waited for his friend to arrive.

The moment Heero lowered his wrist, eyes darting away from the watch, Trowa’s tall figure came into view, long legs moving him along the sidewalk with cat-like strides. “Hello, Partner.” he said, hands casually shoved into his pockets as he walked up and stopped in front of Heero.

“Hey,” Heero replied, a small smile on his lips. “You’re early.” He pushed off of the wall and slid up to the front door, opening it and then standing aside to allow Trowa to enter first. The sound of music and happy conversation drifted through the door and out onto the street.

“Habit.” Trowa lead the way over to a small table in the corner. He sat down across from Heero and set the drink menu down so they could both look it over. “What is your drink of choice? Something with vodka in it, I presume?”

“Depends on the occasion.” Heero glanced over the menu before setting it aside. “If you plan on trying to drink me under the table, then yes. Vodka. Otherwise, bourbon. What about you?” He rested his forearms on the table and eyed Trowa with amusement.

“Whisky.” Trowa caught Heero’s gaze. “But if this is meant to be a drinking contest, then I’d go with some sugary rum concoction.”

“Is this a contest?” Heero asked, quirking an eyebrow at him. “Don’t feel obligated to answer that with a ‘yes’. It’s okay if you want to back down… I won’t hold it against you,” he added, suppressing a grin.

“It might not be wise to challenge a Russian to a drinking match.” Trowa was smiling, entertaining the idea in his head. He’d never seen Heero drunk before, and now the desire to do so was almost overwhelming. But part of him was afraid he would do or say something he’d regret if he accepted this challenge, knowing they’d both end up piss drunk by the end of the night.

“Half Russian,” Heero corrected him casually. “So you’d have a fifty-fifty chance of winning.” He sighed and crossed his arms over his chest, his eyes scanning the growing crowd in the bar. “You spoke Russian the other day. How do you say, ‘Yes, Heero, I know I would lose to you and your superior genetics’ in Russian?”

Trowa snorted and shook his head. “I’m afraid my Russian is not that advanced. What do I win if I beat you at this contest?” They were both competitive men, finding it hard to back out of a challenge. Trowa’s interest was piqued.

“The satisfaction of beating me,” said Heero with amusement, his eyes returning to study Trowa’s face with interest. “Unless there’s something else you want.” He narrowed his eyes at him challengingly.

“Maybe. I guess I’ll have to win to find out.” Trowa looked over to the bar and stood up.
Heero chuckled and stood as well, stepped around Trowa and led him to the bar where he leaned on it and waited for the bartender to come fill his order. “Let’s even the playing ground and both do whiskey. Fair?”

With a firm nod, Trowa agreed. “Fair.”

Heero nodded as well, his expression shifting to his ‘mission mode’ seriousness. He ordered six shots of top shelf whiskey and pushed three over to Trowa, lifted the first one, held it aloft and waited for his partner to do the same before throwing it back without so much as a grimace. He tossed the second back, and then the third before slamming the shot glass down with accomplishment and turned to Trowa. “If I win, you calibrate my weapons systems for a whole month.” He openly smiled, his seriousness fading. Weapons calibration took nearly an hour every morning. “And align my sights.”

“But you won’t win.” Trowa took his first shot in had, bringing the glass to his lips before tilting his head back and downing it. The familiar liquid burned down his throat. He set the empty glass down and picked up the second.

“While I think confidence is an attractive trait, your confidence is misplaced,” Heero replied. He gestured for the bartender to set up another trio of shots for each of them. “You’re taking your time. Worried?” He watched as Trowa’s long fingers cradled his second shot.

“You know me better than that.” The second shot went down smoothly, followed by the third. Trowa reached for the new round of shots and paused. “Ladies first.” He nodded in Heero’s direction.

Heero was just beginning to feel the tingling warmth of the whiskey taking its effect. He shrugged his uniform jacket off and draped it over the back of the high bar stool he was standing beside. Luckily he had thought to leave his service pistol at home, which left his green tank top unencumbered by its usual vest holster. He rolled his shoulders and picked up his fourth shot, this time waiting for Trowa to do the same. “Hm… are you even into ladies?” Heero teased.

“Yes. And men.” Trowa grew tired of waiting for Heero to down his fourth shot, so he downed his instead, sliding the empty glass across the countertop.

Heero tossed back his fourth. Then his fifth and sixth in time with Trowa. Just as he was about to order another round a familiar voice chirped up behind them.

“Here they are. Hi, Trowa. Heero.”

Heero peered over his shoulder and immediately matched the voice to the happy, friendly face of the blonde Winner heir. “Quatre. Hi.” He pursed his lips and saw Wufei and Duo shuffle through the bar’s entrance. They spotted Quatre and approached. Duo grinned and draped his casted arm over Trowa’s shoulder. He had spotted the twelve empty shot glasses in front of them.

“Wooo, looks like the party has already started!” He exclaimed, his voice carrying across the bar. “Damn, you two waste no time.”

Wufei nodded to them in greeting before flitting off to order something for himself.

Trowa frowned at the sight of their friends. “What are you doing here?” The whisky was starting to hit him hard and he had to place his hand on the countertop to steady himself.

“We were just out on the town and we saw that you checked in here at this bar,” Quatre explained.
Heero raised an eyebrow, glanced at Trowa and shook his head. “I didn’t ‘check-in’ anywhere.”

“Sure ya did,” Duo said with a smile. He reached in his pocket with his good hand and pulled out his cell phone and opened an app that showed a little green smiley face with “YUY” written over top of it, GPS positioned at the bar. A little “DUO” smiley was beside it, along with a “WINNER” one as well. Heero’s eyes widened.

“What is that?”

“It’s the new ‘MyFriends’ app, man. C’mon, you’re usin’ it.”

“I’m not.”

“Pshh, let me see your phone.” Duo practically dug into Heero’s pocket and took out his new cell phone. He made Heero unlock the screen before thumbing through it. “See, here. Says you set up a permission to let it follow you and automatically check in with your friends.”

Heero was mortified. “I...I never did that.” His drunken mind began to race with paranoid ideas. Was he being tracked by an enemy? Who was following him? He started peering suspiciously around the bar.

“Wait a min, did you JUST get this phone?”

“Yeah… it’s new. A couple of days ago,” Heero explained. His legs felt heavy and he was feeling suddenly very weary. The whiskey was kicking in.

“Ya big dummy, it comes standard with this phone. You gotta turn it off. Seriously, for a guy who touts he’s such a fuckin’ amazing hacker you sure don’t know anything about technology!”

Trowa put his head in his hands, irritated. He propped his elbows on the counter and felt the heat rush through his body. He was used to drinking whisky, but not that many shots in such a short amount of time. His body was not happy.

Quatre noticed Trowa’s shift in body language and immediately sidled over to his side. He rested his hand gently on the taller pilot’s shoulder and leaned down to speak quietly to him. “Trowa, are you okay? You don’t look so good.”

Heero scowled and snatched his phone from Duo and immediately deleted the app. He wondered if there were any more apps he needed to get rid of, and made a mental note that he would look into sterilizing his new phone later. He turned to Duo, his eyes narrow, annoyed. “I’m sorry but you’re interrupting something.”

Duo smiled. “Huh? Interrupting what?” He looked over at Trowa, and Quatre stroking his back worriedly. “You tryin’ to give poor Trowa alcohol poisoning?”

“I am fine.” Trowa growled, looking over his shoulder at Duo with narrowed eyes. “I can hold my alcohol…” But even as he said it his voice started to waver.

Duo lifted a finger and opened his mouth to speak, but was mute. He turned to Heero and raised an eyebrow before laughing. “Wait a minute, you guys were having a contest?” Suddenly all of the empty shot glasses on the table made sense. “Trowa, man, you’re already drunk as a skunk!” He waved a hand in front of Trowa’s scowling face for emphasis.

“Maybe you should drink some water…” Quatre offered, obviously concerned. He reached across the bar for a bowl of pretzels and pushed them at Trowa. The gesture was intercepted by Heero,
who slid them away.

“No. Not until he concedes.” Heero was drunk as hell, but he was somehow able to stand upright and keep a brave face. However, his hand was clutching the edge of the bar so tightly his knuckles were white. “Concede defeat?”

“Never.” Trowa waved at the bartender and asked for another round of shots. He wasn’t giving up. He wouldn’t give Heero that satisfaction.

The bartender placed 4 more shots down in front of them, two each. Trowa picked one up and quickly downed it, the taste lingering too long in his mouth. His tongue was numb. He wiped his mouth with the back of his sleeve and glared at Heero. “Drink.”

Determined, Heero took his next shot, only this time he visibly grimaced. His stomach was protesting with angry, acidic churns. His mind was fuzzy, and the only thing he could think of at the moment was how ridiculously hot Trowa was when he was stubborn, and how he wished he would glare at him again.

Duo stifled a laugh as the two idiots threw down even more booze. Wufei walked up, sipping something fizzy and clear through a cocktail straw. He watched the goings on from the sidelines.

“Trowa… you’re not proving anything by damaging your liver,” Quatre protested, thinking that the two were being ridiculous.

“You know I can’t back down, Quatre…” Trowa took his next shot in between trembling fingers. And then he got an idea. “Let’s take the last one together.” He waited for Heero to pick the tiny glass up, and then reached his own out to press against his partner’s lips. “Allow me?”

Heero sighed. If Trowa had asked him to blow the planet up with a massive killer death ray with that face he would have done it. “Alright,” he replied. He lifted his shot glass to Trowa’s firm, serious mouth and tipped its contents in, while Trowa did the same. The liquor in his mouth made him want to gag, but he steeled himself against the reflex and swallowed hard. A few errant drops slid from the tiny glass and down the side of Trowa’s palm to his wrist. Despite being fucked in the head two ways from Sunday Heero reached out and grabbed Trowa’s arm, pulled it towards his face and ran his tongue up the side of his partner’s, lapping up the bitter liquid with one long, slow lick.

Duo howled with laughter. Quatre’s eyes were wide and Wufei’s eyebrows lifted high enough to reach his hairline.

Trowa suddenly felt very constrained by his pants as all his blood ran south. He had his free hand over his mouth, forcing himself to swallow the terrible tasting liquid. Once it was gone, he groaned and nearly dropped the empty shot glass in his haste to get rid of it. It fell on its side, discarded on the counter.

“Fuck… me…” He reached out and grabbed Heero by the back of his head and pulled him in for a heated, needy, sloppy kiss.

All Heero knew was that he was grabbed and his mouth was suddenly covered by a warm, wet, whiskey-flavored mouth. Stunned, he stared wide-eyed at the blurry yet somehow inconceivably gorgeous face of his partner so close to his own. It took his drunken brain a long, suspended moment to kick start into action. *Trowa’s kissing me.* That realization was all he needed. His hands shot up and grabbed the sides of Trowa’s face, pinning the already forceful mouth harder against his own.
“Ho-ly Shit!” Duo said between chuckles. “Well, there went all the inhibitions. Trowa’s got beer goggles for Heero!”

Quatre knew better. Trowa would never have acted so forward unless he meant it, drunk or not. The issue was, did Trowa really mean to kiss Heero here, in public, in front of them? He quickly pressed his hands into Trowa’s shoulders and began to tug at him worriedly. “Alright, guys. Haha, I guess nobody won, right?”

Wufei just watched the goings on with amusement, his straw slurping faintly at the bottom of his glass.

“No….no…I won…” Trowa murmured against Heero’s lips, reluctant to let go of him. He wrapped his arms around his midsection and as Quatre tried pulling him back, he tugged Heero back with him. “Quat… I’ve got this. I’m fine. Let me kiss him. He wants it, I can tell…” His voice was low and sexy, despite being slightly slurred from the whisky.

Duo was content to just let the dopes make out, but the look Quatre was giving him was desperate and pleading. He sighed and reached out to grab Heero by the shoulder. “Nah, Trowa, Heero’s asexual. He doesn’t like kisses, am I right, Heero?”

Heero shook his head, his eyes half-lidded. He leaned against Trowa in response. “Trowa’s … right, I wa-ant it.”

“Oh, Jesus, you fuckin’ lushes. Come on, break it up. Get a room, huh?” Duo said with a laugh as he tugged Heero out of Trowa’s arms and replaced the scowling half-Japanese man with the bowl of pretzels instead. “Here, you need some carbs, otherwise you’re gonna be a hurtin’ unit tomorrow morning.”

“Duo. Stand. Down.” Trowa narrowed his eyes at the shorter man. He held the bowl out to the side and turned it over, letting the pretzels fall to the floor. He then proceeded to place the bowl on Duo’s head, his free hand reaching out to grasp at the distant Heero, needing him back again. “Heero…c’mere…”

Trowa was gone. The whisky was now in charge.

This was the funniest shit Duo had ever seen in his life. He couldn’t even be mad at them. He chuckled as Trowa put the bowl on his head, however the bartender was NOT amused. Heero had looked up from picking at a bowl of maraschino cherries he had stolen from behind the bar and had decided to make a snack of. When Trowa beckoned him he stumbled forward with a handful, chewing one.

“Wait, wait a minute-” Quatre was trying to get Trowa up and away from the bar, tugging at his arm, hoping to keep some distance between the two. No such luck. Trowa’s arms were long, and he managed to snatch Heero again.

Wufei’s face was red as he tried his best to hold in his laughter.

“Heero, I need to protect you.” Trowa wrapped the other in his arms, a worried look on his drunken face. “You’re safe…. you need…i..you…need me…” He crushed their lips together again as the room started to spin, hands moving up Heero’s sides, shoulders, and neck, resting there as they kissed. He shoved his tongue into Heero’s mouth, tasting the cherries.

“Stop!” Quatre was starting to get desperate. Trowa would never live this down come the morning. If he even remembered any of it.
“No, Quat. You had your turn.” Trowa had broken the kiss to look at the blonde. “I already did you. Now it’s Heero’s turn. Don’t be so... greedy. You can’t hog me…all the time.”

Oh damn. The look on Quatre’s face made Duo cringe. Trowa was going to regret that one in the morning. “Oooohhhhhkkay, time to go, come on you two. Break it up, before we have to get the hose out.” He nodded to Quatre, grabbed Trowa’s arms and pried them off of Heero.

Together they managed to get both drunken men out of the bar, leaving a trail of maraschino cherries behind them. Wufei ended up paying their tab, which he swore he would have docked from their pay come monday.

For being absolutely wasted, Heero was surprisingly agile. His body moved as if he weren’t drunk at all, but it was clear by his vapid expression and half-lidded eyes that he was absolutely fucked up. They loaded the two on the train back to Preventer headquarters, making sure to pick two separate cars. Heero simply nodded off in his seat, as usual, slumping over against Wufei and then Duo.

Quatre was pissed. He sat beside drunken Trowa the entire train ride back in silence. There was no point in trying to talk to him now, he was out of his mind, but he would be sure to give him an earful when he was sober.

It took every ounce of manpower they had to corral the two into the dorms. Exhausted, Duo simply dumped Heero onto the floor of his room and was about to leave to help Quatre and Wufei get Trowa to his when he had an idea.

“Wait up, you guys. Bring Trowa back here…”

“Why?” Quatre asked, irritated. He didn’t have to drag Trowa in the other’s direction, as he acted of his own free will and walked into the door room, eager to find Heero. Once he spotted him on the floor he sat down next to him, slumping over against his back.

Wufei leaned in the doorway of Heero’s room, his arms crossed over his chest, waiting for Duo to speak his mind.

“I think we should get in a little payback for havin’ to tote these two dorks all the way across the moon, don’cha think?” Duo said with a devious grin.

Wufei smiled and for the first time since they had arrived at the bar he spoke, “yes. Let’s.”

The sound of a steady heartbeat stirred him out of his deep sleep. Eyes opened slowly, unable to focus right away as they looked straight ahead at the blurry wall. He could feel warmth radiating from below and the pressure of something draped around his back.

Trowa lift his head and then quickly groaned in pain, bringing his hand to his sweaty forehead. “What the…” He composed himself and looked down. Heero was asleep below him, his limbs tangled with his own. Trowa blinked and clenched his jaw to still the throbbing in his head.

Confusion took over as he looked around the unfamiliar surroundings. Where am I? There was dried puke on the floor next to the bed, and pieces of clothes haphazardly thrown across the room. And were those used condoms littering the sheets? He tried sitting up but fell back against the narrow mattress, his body giving out under him. Trowa couldn’t remember anything from the night
before…

As the mattress shifted Heero’s eyes shot open and his reflexes dictated that he turn in the
direction the weight had fallen. He immediately regretting moving his head. His hand shot up to
press against his forehead and he closed his eyes tightly against the dim, yellow light overhead.
“Tr...owa?” He tried to force his eyes open, despite the stabbing pain in his hungover head. He felt
nauseous, queasy. He swallowed dryly, his mouth tasting sour. “What…”

He was in his room. He recognized the folded funeral program on his desk. He turned his face to
Trowa, his nose scrunched as his vision slipped in and out of double. “What happened…” As his
eyes adjusted he saw through Trowa’s sweaty hair that something had been drawn on his forehead.
He squinted before saying in a hoarse voice, “there’s a dick on your face.”

“….what?” Trowa put his hand to his forehead again, not feeling anything unusual. Why was he in
Heero’s bed? Did they….? He looked down to see if they were naked.

The overhead light was irritating to Heero’s eyes. He groaned and draped his forearm across his
face to shield them and took mental stock of his body. He wasn’t wearing a shirt, but he was
wearing his boxer briefs. Other than feeling hungover and like a truck had run over his head he
wasn’t in pain, didn’t feel any discomfort. He had never bottomed before, so if he had last night he
was certain he would notice. “If… we fucked, my ass doesn’t hurt, so I must have fucked you…”
Heero offered, his voice barely audible.

“I…” Trowa noticed he was in his boxer briefs as well and nothing else. His stomach sank at first,
afraid he had done something extremely intimate with Heero and didn’t remember any of it. He
looked down over the edge of the bed at all the presumably used condoms littering the floor.

The realisation suddenly sank in and the worry erased from his brow. No way had they had sex last
night. If they had, he would be raw and sore, and right now he was not. “We must have drank too
much, blacked out, and… someone staged all of this.”

Heero didn’t have to guess to know whose idea it was to stage this. He dropped his arm from his
eyes and let it flop to his side. “That’s too bad,” he murmured. He pushed himself up to lean
against his elbows in a half-sit and studied the room. Their clothes had been tossed around on the
floor and indeed there were open, unrolled condoms strewn across the bed. Heero raised an
eyebrow at that. “Yeah…” he grabbed one of the condoms and eyed it. It didn’t appear sticky and
had the faint scent of banana. “These are flavored. Not mine. I don’t like using condoms anyway.”

“Good to know.” Trowa said before lying back against the sheets again, his head pounding as if it
were about to split open. “Fuck…” He wondered who’d been the one to puke on the floor last
night. Him or Heero? His mouth tasted stale, the faint hint of whisky and regret lingered on his
tongue. He rubbed at his forehead, wondering if he could remove whatever was drawn on his skin.
His eyes wandered over to Heero’s bare back, traveling down further until he spotted another work
of art. “I think they left you something as well…” He could see black ink peeking from Heero’s
boxer briefs.

Heero’s shoulders stiffened at the statement. He peered over his shoulder questioningly before
slowly inching off of the bed, biting back a groan as his stomach threatened to eject its contents. He
ran his hand down his own hip and tugged the waistband of his boxer briefs down and tried to turn
his body to peer at it. He could see something black written there but he couldn’t make out what it
was. “What does it say…?”

“It says…” Trowa reached his hand out to hook a finger on the waistband, pulling them lower to
expose Heero’s ass and all of the black ink. “Trowa was here…” He groaned at how childish this
was, Duo.

He let go of the boxer briefs and sat up quickly, putting his hands to his mouth as his stomach lurched. Trowa sprinted from the bed and made a straight line for the bathroom.

Heero sighed and watched Trowa dart into his bathroom before taking a seat on the foot of his bed. As his eyes tilted down to the floor he saw his toenails were painted the brightest, glitteriest pink he had ever seen. He had to give Duo credit. He had been thorough. He grabbed his tablet from the desk and activated it. It was almost noon, and luckily it was Sunday so he had the entire day to recover and clean. After unlocking the screen he was greeted to his normally plain wallpaper having been changed to a picture of him and Trowa in a rather compromising position, passed out on one another. He shook his head, regretted the movement and immediately deleted the image. He had wondered once whether Duo would fit in with “normal” college students. Now, more than ever, he was sure that he would.

Trowa emptied the contents of his stomach out into the toilet, flushed, and then managed to push himself up off the ground. He needed to lay down. The thought of walking back to his dorm in this state was unbearable.

He made his way back to the bed and slumped down, hiding his face in one of Heero’s pillows. If only he could remember what had happened last night… But then again, maybe it was a good thing he didn’t. What if he had done something stupid? Did he and Heero do anything? Fooling around in a drunken splendor was not how he had planned on showing his affection to his partner. Trowa was embarrassed for whatever alcohol-induced shenanigans he had gotten into.

Heero watched Trowa flop face first onto his bed, and for a moment sat there taking in the sight of his partner’s long, lean muscles sprawled across his sheets. It’s too bad we didn’t do anything last night… he thought with a sigh. He pushed himself to his feet, went into the bathroom, brushed the awful taste from his mouth, washed his face and tried to scrub the permanent marker from his ass. He finally resurfaced wrapped in a towel, went to his cabinet and pulled forth a couple pouches of water he had stashed away in there and came back to the bed. He slid onto it beside his prone partner popped a water open and sucked tentatively at the attached straw. “Last night may have been a bust…” he began, popping open a second pouch and holding it out to offer it to Trowa, “but at least I won.” He crossed his prettily painted feet at the ankles.

Won? Trowa lifted his face from the pillow and gratefully took the water. The fleeting remains of a memory from the night before rushed back, accompanied by a wave of shame. The drinking contest.

He groaned and looked away. “You did not.” Honestly he couldn’t remember who had won, but he wasn’t going to just hand it over to Heero without proof. Trowa was stubborn. He sucked down half the pouch and then returned his face to the pillow, hiding from the other once again. I feel and look like shit… He can’t see me like this. But he couldn’t make himself get out of the bed.

“Hm. Trust me, I definitely won.” Heero crossed his arms over his chest, slipped down to lie on his back and yawned, his eyes closing. “I’ve got you in my bed, haven’t I?”

Trowa’s voice was muffled by the pillow. “Fair…”

Heero smiled, his eyes still closed. Luckily neither of them had any training that day and he fully intended on using it to sleep off this wicked hangover. He couldn’t recall anything that happened from the night before after they had initiated their drinking contest, but he was still glad he had done it. Any amount of future teasing or taunting from Duo or the others was worth enduring as
long as Trowa would continue to lie next to him half naked for the rest of the afternoon.
Quatre was avoiding him, Trowa noted as the blonde bypassed the empty chair to his right and went over to sit with Wufei. He looked down at the table and tried to think of why the other would be upset with him. He came up empty. Unless… Had he said or done something while drunk Saturday night? He’d never forgive himself if that were the case.

Trowa looked up questioningly, eyes seeking Quatre’s, but his friend wouldn’t even look at him. His fingernails dug into his palms in his lap and he resumed his staring contest with the table, waiting for their meeting to start.

“Well, look who is finally blessing us with his presence. Pretty in Pink,” Duo said with a chuckle as Heero finally entered the meeting room. Heero didn’t dignify the comment with a reply, and instead took the empty seat beside Trowa, his arms crossed over his chest. He was immediately aware that Quatre was seated on the opposite side of the table but he made no comment.

“Alright, let’s start this meeting. We’re going to give a rundown of all of the facts of this case as of this point, which hasn’t changed much, but… well, maybe something new will crop up in your minds. Feel free to interject at any time,” Sally said as she prepared her powerpoint presentation. Une walked in as the room dimmed and took her usual seat at the head of the table, cradling her favorite chai tea between her hands. The spicy smell wafted to Heero’s nose. Still somewhat sensitive to smells after his binge drinking from Saturday night he frowned and tried to busy himself with black coffee poured from a thermos in the center of the desk.

As Sally started her presentation, ticking off facts that they all had known for weeks now, Duo leaned over and smirked at Trowa. “So, what did you two get UP to yesterday? Huh, dickface?” He propped his cast on the top of the table. Trowa’s scrawl in black paint pen was apparent, even in the dim light. He had written ‘hey, dickface’ on Duo’s cast shortly after he had gotten it, and Duo was now reveling in his sweet, appropriate revenge.

“More action then you’ve seen in years.” Trowa shot back, voice low and barely audible. His staring match with the table continued, eyes half lidded and arms folded across his chest.

That was a lie. All that had happened between Heero and Trowa yesterday was some innocent cuddling while they were passed out, sleeping most of the day away. Trowa had awoken around 3pm and noticed their shoes were missing. He’d made the walk of shame back to his dorm barefoot, showing off the lovely purple nail polish on his toes. The rest of the night had been spent nursing his lingering hangover by himself in his quiet room while trying to get Quatre to answer his text messages.

“Oh yeah? I bet.” Duo replied with a grin. “You seemed pretty eager to get all up on that when you were drunk,” he whispered, his devious grin still fixed on his face.

Trowa’s eyes narrowed and he finally slid his gaze to Duo’s grinning face. “What?”

Duo’s grin widened. He stifled a laugh and tilted his head in Heero’s direction. Heero’s eyes were locked onto the projector, he didn’t appear to be listening to them. “You were kissin’ up all over him, pal. Grabbin and shit, it was hilarious. What were you guys even doin’, anyway? You on a date or somethin’?” He reached out to pat Trowa’s shoulder reassuringly. “Don’t worry, pal. You’re not the only guy here who wants a piece of good ‘ole Heero Yuy. No need to be embarrassed.”
Kissing? Trowa’s cheeks turned a light shade of pink as he turned away from Duo once again. He wasn’t embarrassed by his feelings for Heero, he just preferred to show them while sober and under control. And he wasn’t even sure what his partner thought about him.

“What did I do to Quatre?” He asked suddenly, afraid of what the answer would be but needing to know anyway. *I am such an idiot…*

Duo blinked, his smirk wiping from his face. “Yeah, so about that…” he whispered, leaning in closer. “You may have uh… called him out, mentioned that you fucked him and … well you should probably talk to him about it, yeah?”

*Oh god…* Trowa braced his elbows on the table and let his heated face drop to his hands. He shook his head, mortified. No wonder the blonde was avoiding him. He was going to swear off drinking for a while. *I am horrible. The worst... Quatre, please forgive me…*

Heero glanced to his right and saw Trowa hiding his face, Duo’s worried expression and Quatre avoiding looking at any of them. He raised an eyebrow and wondered what was going on, but his thoughts were interrupted by the door to the meeting room opening to reveal one of Une’s interns. The woman muttered an apology and ducked over to whisper something in Une’s ear. Their leader sat straight in her chair and nodded, dismissing the woman, and gestured for Sally to pause in her presentation so she could address the room.

“It seems there has been a significant incident on Earth,” Une stated, standing at the end of the table. “A bomb has gone off at Notre Dame Cathedral, and has leveled it. Casualties are unreported at this time.” She gestured for Noin and Sally to follow her as she made her way to the door of the meeting room. “Agents, please wait on standby until I have further information. Prepare for the possibility of deployment.”

Sally brought the lights up in the room and ducked out after Une, with Noin in tow. Heero blinked and dug into his pocket for his cell phone and pulled up his news ticker. Sure enough the cathedral had been the target of an attack, it’s smouldering remains the top header of the news site.

Wufei had taken his phone out as well, and hissed angrily under his breath. “This is the second culturally significant attack this week,” he grumbled. “What cowards would bomb tourist spots, and destroy such precious and irreplaceable monuments?”

Getting to any location VIA mobile suit was a much faster, more viable option compared to the slower Preventer shuttles. Une had returned from discussing the situation and had given the word for Trowa and Heero to take their suits and descend to the planet for observation only. One of the benefits to Argo and Prometheus was that their suits had been equipped with rudimentary jammers taken from the CLO’s operations on L2, which allowed them to avoid heat signature and radar detection while surveying the area. The only problem was that they couldn’t share visual communications between mobile suits while using the jamming technology. Not that there was much to see in the cockpits aside from their partner’s helmeted face anyway.

It had been almost three hours since they had arrived in the airspace over Paris. Heero’s suit hummed loudly as it’s ultra-compact fusion reactor provided the energy necessary to hover in the mesosphere just above the bomb site. He had spent the better part of the first hour collecting images and taking scans of the area and its surroundings. He had transmitted the data to headquarters and was now awaiting further orders. Noin had suggested that they go to the ground to see if they could collect any further information, and possibly ask the locals and police if there was any suspicious activity before the bombing. For now, they could do nothing but wait.
He hadn’t said anything over the com in a while. Their connection was private and secure. Now, with nothing work-related to do, Heero decided to inquire as to what had gotten to Trowa earlier before their deployment.

“Are you okay? Still sick?” asked Heero across the com.

“I’m fine.” Trowa responded to the sound of Heero’s voice in his ear. “But I have decided to give up drinking for the foreseeable future.” His body was still exhausted, trying to recuperate from the debauchery of Saturday night. But for the most part, he wasn’t feeling ill.

“How’s that too bad.” Heero sighed, staring at the unchanging visuals of the scene below them. “Are you giving up going back out with me, too?” He knew their night out had been a bust, but he was hoping he’d have a second chance.

“No.” A smile spread across Trowa’s lips for the first time in the last 48 hours. “But you don’t need to challenge me to a drinking contest to get me bed.” There, he’d said it. By now it should be obvious he had feelings for his partner, and that he wanted to explore whatever was between them while sober.

Heero laughed. “Well that’s good. My liver wasn’t going to be able to take another night of that,” he replied, amused. “Next time, when we have our do-over, it’s virgin daiquiris for you.” Now, Heero really wanted to know what happened the night he had blacked out. He wondered if Trowa remembered anything.

As if reading his partner’s mind, Trowa spoke up. “Apparently you and I couldn’t keep our hands off each other. Also, you didn’t win the drinking contest. We tied.” He wasn’t sure if Duo planned on telling Heero about the details of their sloppy date, but he felt like he deserved to know. His mind jumped to thoughts of Quatre, of what he had done. He hadn’t been able to talk to the other before leaving the moon. The upcoming inevitable confrontation made his stomach flip.

“A tie?” How lame. Heero didn’t believe in ties. The mention of not being able to keep off of each other made him smirk. “Are you surprised that I wanted to touch you, though?” He wished he had visuals of Trowa’s face right now. He wondered if he was blushing. “I did ask you to hang out…”

“I’m not surprised. It’s just not how I had wanted it to go… To kiss you again after so many years and not be able to remember any of it…” Trowa felt cheated out of the experience, out of a moment that was supposed to be special, at least for him.

“Yeah.” Heero paused, his tongue sliding over his lower lip in thought. “I didn’t think you remembered that… kissing me back then.”

“I initiated the kiss. How could I forget?” So they were having this discussion now, and over com? Trowa wasn’t sure if now was an appropriate time, but the discussion needed to happen.

“…we all assumed you had feelings for Relena. Kissing you was my own selfish act of wanting to experience something I knew I couldn’t have…”

Heero frowned. He had always assumed that Trowa had simply taken care of him out of a sense of duty for the mission. When he kissed him he had gotten his hopes up, but then things got crazy and the idea of pursuing Trowa further after the war slipped through the cracks. He had convinced himself that Trowa was busy with Quatre, and that the kiss had simply been a spur of the moment thing, possibly a joke, or some side effect of Trowa’s residual memory loss. “It wasn’t that obvious to me, that you liked me. I hadn’t realized…”
The idea of anyone being ‘into’ Heero simply for himself was farfetched to him. He always thought that people had ulterior motives for liking him. For his status as a pilot, for his abilities or the things they could gain by befriending him. For someone who was so proficient in so many things, he didn’t have much of a sense of self-worth. “I had assumed you were with Quatre.”

“Quatre and I are friends. Nothing more.” That was if Quatre forgave him after the crap he said the other night. Trowa closed his eyes for a second, letting them rest. “Seems like there have been several misunderstandings over the last 5 years.” They were all understandable, easy assumptions to make. “I don’t want this to complicate our partnership.” He said honestly, unsure of where these newly admitted feelings would go.

Heero nodded, though his partner couldn’t see it. “Of course it won’t.” He was about to suggest that they change the subject, then, to keep personal topics out of their work for now when he received a transmission from Noin that ordered them to land and pursue a casual undercover investigation of the bomb scene below. “Looks like we’re landing,” he said calmly. “I hope you can speak French.”

“Oui.” Was all Trowa said.

After landing the Gundams at the edges of a couronne périurbaine, a near-suburb ring outside of the 4th arrondissement of Paris the two pilots shed their clingy flight suit uniforms in exchange for street clothes that they had been instructed to leave in their cockpits for occasions such as these. After walking to the street they stopped at a nearby corner shop and hailed a cab to the location of the bombing. When they arrived in the city proper the isle that housed the cathedral had been closed off to traffic and secured from the general population. Smoke still drifted into the air in the distance, presumably from the remains left over after the attack. Heero paid the cab with his work credit and slid out of the car, waited for Trowa and then fell into step beside him as they walked the crowded sidewalk in the direction of the nearest barricade.

“I can’t help but think about how much planning and munitions would be needed to level a structure that massive. There was no way it was just a simple car bomb,” he said quietly with a frown as he lengthened his stride to match his partner’s. “Unlike an office building, this thing was made of stone.”

“Such a shame that they went after a piece of antiquity.” What was the reasoning behind that? Simply because it was a tourist attraction or? Trowa shook his head and shoved his hands into his jean pockets.

“And in France… Paris, again. What’s the connection?” Heero asked and tilted his head knowingly at Trowa before stopping before they reached the barricade where the French authorities had gathered, smoking cigarettes and discussing the case in quiet voices. In the distance the braying cry of the ambulances coming and going with the injured echoed through the air. He paused at the corner across from them and turned to Trowa, his expression serious.

“We’re supposed to lie low, and yet somehow they want us to collect information. You’re the expert at this… what should we do?” He frowned for a moment and ran his hand through his hair. “And I hope your French is better than mine. I’ve got a … limited grasp.” Meaning basically anything Fara cried out during sex was the limit of his expertise.

“I’m fluent.” Trowa looked over at where the cops stood, wondering if they could get closer to eavesdrop. He noticed that if they walked to the right side of the barricade they would be within hearing distance, so he started to walk in that direction casually, pretending to be a concerned
There happened to be a small crowd gathered, talking amongst themselves about what had happened. Trowa started to listen as he drew close, head bent and eyes on the ground.

Heero gave Trowa his space, standing back to lean on the brick of the corner across from the barricade to give the other man a chance to do what he did best. It was interesting watching Trowa work. He seemed well adapted to blending in, despite the fact that he was statuesque and handsome. Heero crossed his arms over his chest and studied him as he moved around casually, listening to the locals, engaging in an officer who was on his phone beside the barricade. He wondered what Trowa sounded like in French, and a part of him wished he had gone with him to hear it.

Heero’s dark blue eyes shifted from his partner to the surrounding buildings, searching for anything off or unusual. He didn’t really know this city, so it was difficult to determine what belonged and what didn’t. Nothing stood out. He wasn’t sure what Preventer hoped to accomplish by having them on the ground undercover. Heero figured that they would have gotten a lot more accomplished in uniform, waving their badges around. At least then they wouldn’t need to sneak around when it came to the local PD.

“I couldn’t gather anything we haven’t already heard.” Trowa approached Heero and spoke in English. “The crowd is angry and thinks the colonists are behind this attack.” He shrugged and pulled his hands from his pockets, letting them fall to his sides. “The police are pretty tight lipped. They aren’t saying much… Mostly everyone is in shock over the loss of such an iconic landmark.”

“Makes sense,” Heero replied. He sighed and looked over the crowd before shaking his head. “The colonists wouldn’t do this. What would they gain by pissing off Earth? Now that there are open borders, they would want to visit this place- it’s their roots. Not destroy it…” None of this made any sense. He checked his phone for any new orders but found none. “I guess we just wait here until further notice?” He smiled a little and tilted his head, peering up at Trowa through his thick bangs. “Too bad you swore off drinking, I heard the French are known for their wine.”

“Since when are you such a fan of drinking?” The two started to walk away from the disaster scene, taking the busy sidewalks back in the direction they had come. Trowa observed the city, taking in it’s sights, smells, and noises. It wasn’t his first time visiting France. He’d been several times with the circus. Ever since Catherine had mentioned they were part French, he’d become dedicated in getting to learn more about the country.

“Ever since I found out it makes you want to kiss me,” Heero said with a chuckle, teasing him. He slid his hands into his jacket pockets and paced him, his eyes darting around curiously, taking in the strange mood of the people in the city. Despite the bombing there were crowds, out searching for answers just like they were.

Trowa smiled, looking off in the distance where he saw some café’s the next block down. He started to lead them in that direction thinking a light dinner would be nice, or a snack.

Despite all of the stress from the case, the fact they were in a city Heero had avoided - and Relena had ultimately perished in - and a serious bombing had occurred, Heero couldn’t help but marvel at his partner. Trowa. There was something intensely distracting about him. When they worked on their mobile suits Heero felt comfortable around him, he forgot about everything else. He had felt the same way Saturday night at the bar, though that had ultimately led to both of them not remembering much. He couldn’t quite put his finger on it, whatever it was that the tall and serious pilot possessed. Some magic quality that made everything slow down. Made time tick just a fraction of a second slower.
Heero dropped his hand and without looking managed to grab Trowa’s. He stopped walking and anchored his partner by the hand to stop him as well. “Would you consider us on or off the clock right now?”

Surprisingly Trowa didn’t flinch or jerk away when Heero’s hand reached for his own. He looked down at the other, eyebrow arched curiously. “Off.” They weren’t surveying the disaster scene and they had received no other instructions from Preventer.

Prerequisites for Heero to act on his emotions included 1. Not being on the clock, and 2. This time both agents were sober. He smiled at Trowa’s answer, nodded and pressed his palm into his, burying his fingers into Trowa’s and squeezed his hand. “Let me make amends for our failed outing. Have dinner with me? This time, no competitions.”

“I was already planning on eating with you tonight, but if you want to turn this into a ‘date’ and insist on paying for my meal, I won’t say no.” Trowa teased. The warmth from Heero’s hand spread to his, running up his arm and across his shoulders, settling down into his chest. The little intimate gesture was a pleasant surprise.

“Hm… you wouldn’t have said no, even if I made you pay,” Heero replied with a smirk.

He picked a random cafe from the long row ahead of them and led him to it. After being seated and giving their orders he leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms over his chest, determined to not talk about work or make this any different than a real date would be. “If Duo manages to find us and interrupts this time, I’ll kill him.”

“He can be rather annoying.” Trowa said honestly, although he considered the braided man a close friend and would do anything for him. The candle in the center of their table flickered in the light breeze as they sat outside on the café’s patio. The evening weather was nice and the sun hadn’t quite retired for the night. Trowa was thankful for the fresh air and the sound of the native language wafting by as people passed on the sidewalks nearby.

“He’s different. I didn’t know what to think about him when I first met him,” Heero admitted. “To be honest, I tried avoiding him as much as possible… until he needed my help. He helped me a lot when I first came to the planet, I owed him.” He shrugged a shoulder casually and took a long sip of his ice water before continuing. “I had interesting first impressions of everyone, and most of them turned out to be far from what they were really like. I thought that Wufei, out of all of us, had his shit the most together. That impression still stands.” He paused, studying Trowa’s face illuminated by the candle and the setting sun. “Who did you meet first? Back then…?”

“Quatre. He was rather generous and allowed me to stay at one of his bases while I repaired and replenished Heavyarms.” Trowa remembered the encounter fondly. “He was very trusting for having just met me…” He held his finger out and ran the tip of it along the smooth edge of his glass, watching the condensation gather until it beaded up and flowed over the side.

“Did you trust him when you first met him? When you met any of us?” Heero hadn’t put his trust in anyone, until he met Trowa.

“I trust no one until they prove themselves…” Which was why Trowa had been on edge almost the entire stay with Quatre and hadn’t even given him his name until the day he’d left. Out of the other Gundam pilots, Heero and Quatre had earned his trust the quickest.

Heero nodded, agreeing with the sentiment. “Duo said he didn’t know there were other pilots…” Heero sighed and ran his hand through his hair. “I had a feeling there might be, but I didn’t think you would all be the same age as me. I expected older pilots, former aged veterans or something.
You all weren’t what I expected.

“Nothing was as I expected back then, either.” Trowa was vague with his choice of words, knowing they were out in the open and anyone could be eavesdropping on their conversation. He brought the glass to his lips and downed half of its contents. When he set it back down again his lips were moist, tiny droplets of water clinging to them.

Heero watched Trowa’s movements closely, studying his body language, his careful gestures. His mouth, always serious, so much like his own. Without thinking he reached across the table to caress his fingertips against Trowa’s cheek, his thumb slowly pressing across his lower lip, wiping the wetness from the water away.

This was a date. He could do as he pleased. “What did you think of me?”

Heero’s recent advances were catching Trowa off guard, having not expected any of them. He wasn’t used to this type of apparent affection, these little caring gestures. His instincts told him to lean into the touch, but he was hesitant. Once the hand fell from his face he spoke.

“Honestly? I was moved by what you did…when you self-destructed.” Trowa held Heero’s gaze over the candlelight. “I admired your ability to act on your emotions.” He remembered being anxious for the other to regain consciousness, wanting to learn more about him. Whether he had meant to or not, Trowa had bonded with the broken body that lay in his bed for a month, caring for it every day and monitoring his health. At the time he knew nothing about Heero, not even his name. All he knew was that he was another Gundam pilot, close to his own age, possibly with a similar background. Back then he had know Heero’s body almost as well as his own.

Heero sighed. He thought he was crazy back then, and he didn’t think anyone admired him for anything he had done. This was news to him. “Knowing what I know now about the world, I don’t know if I would do what I did again. I appreciate you helping me. The last thing I had expected was to wake up from that at all, let alone to see you. It took me a long time to accept that I hadn’t accomplished that goal. That I had failed to self-destruct properly… but now I’m glad I didn’t. If it wasn’t for you, I wouldn’t have had a second chance in that situation.” The truth was Heero was reliant on many of the other pilots for help during that time. Duo had saved him. Trowa had saved and rehabilitated him, as well as accompanied him for a time afterward. Quatre had nursed him back to health at one point as well. If it wasn’t for his fellow pilots, he would have never made it to the end of that mission.

“We all did stupid things back then. We were kids.” Trowa smiled knowingly. His gaze lowered and he finished his water just as the waiter brought their food.

They ate dinner with light, casual conversation before Heero paid the tab and they exited out onto the darkened street. The local authorities hadn’t enacted a curfew and despite the bombing the streets were filled with tourists and locals enjoying the cool night air. Heero checked his phone again, and still there was no new order from Preventer to leave, or stay. He sighed, frustrated, and shoved the phone back into his pocket, deciding that he would wait it out for another hour or so before calling them to demand that they make a decision.

As they walked down the sidewalk and through what was clearly a historic area, he tried to force himself to relax. *There’s nothing else I can do right now, he tried to reassure himself. I’m doing my best… it didn’t seem like his best was enough lately. He tried not to think about how frustrated he was with the case, with not having a single clue as to who had killed Relena. The thought of the former Princess of Cinq being gunned down somewhere here in this city weighed heavily on him. He still felt like he had failed to protect her, that now he was still failing her by wasting time when her killer was out there somewhere.*
Preoccupied with his thoughts, he looked down at the sidewalk as it passed beneath his feet, his eyes narrowed with frustration.

Conversation between them had ceased as the two agents walked quietly, headed in no specific direction. Slowly, the mood changed and Trowa could tell Heero was ruminating about the case, about Relena. He stole a glance here and there, noting the dip of his partner’s brows, the frown on his lips. There wasn’t really anything he could say to lift his partner’s mood, so Trowa decided to try something else. He reached out and gently took Heero’s hand, entwining their fingers and giving his palm a squeeze.

Heero was taken by surprise as Trowa’s hand coupled with his own. He had done the same gesture to his partner earlier on a whim, but he hadn’t expected him to return it. Was this going to be a normal thing between them? Again, Trowa was working his magic. Time was dragging, moving slowly, hesitantly ticking. Heero’s eyes were drawn to his face and the soft, relaxed expression the other man had as he walked beside him. Details began to fill his overcrowded thoughts, pushing out his worries, replacing those spaces with admiration. Small things he suddenly came to notice. The way Trowa’s shoulders rose and fell when he walked, the faint roughness of a mechanic’s fingertips in contrast to the smooth, soft warmth of his palm against his own. The way Trowa’s auburn bangs slid across his jawline and rested against his cheek. Soon he couldn’t even think of why he was frustrated or stressed out only minutes before.

Recalling a vow he had made to himself, he tugged Trowa’s hand and led him to a quieter street, stopping within the pooling yellow light of a streetlight. Facing him, he reached up to slide his finger against Trowa’s hair, pushing it gently to the side. “I didn’t tell you this before, but when I first saw you walk into the trailer after you saved me, I couldn’t believe that someone this stunning could be a pilot.”

“Heero…” It had never been easy for Trowa to accept compliments like this, not that he was used to men wooing him. He wasn’t. The feeling of butterflies in his stomach, his constant companions whenever he was around Heero, overtook his senses. Trowa bit his lip and watched him silently, green eyes seeking blue ones, staring into them deeply. He wondered if anyone else got to witness this side of Heero Yuy. Selfishly, he hoped not.

“No! Embrasse-moi. J’ai besoin de toi…” Kiss me. I need you…"

Heero may not have understood the exact translation of Trowa’s statement, but his partner’s expression and tone of voice was enough to prompt him into action. He wanted to kiss him, to encourage him with his mouth and show him that there was nothing for him to be hesitant about. Not anymore. Now Heero knew. He knew how Trowa felt, and he knew how he was beginning to feel for him. This was becoming more than just respect or admiration. This was something deeper than just attraction and sexual desire. He didn’t know what to label it, but he was willing to nurture these feelings until they matured, and he couldn’t wait to see the end result.

Carefully he reached up to cradle Trowa’s face with both hands and guided his lips down, prepared to bring them in for tentative contact with his own. The contact never came.

Heero never heard the gunshot, but he did hear the whizzing of the bullet slicing through the air, followed by a faint thud as it slammed into and buried itself within Trowa’s shoulder. His partner’s face shifted from its half-lidded, relaxed expression to that of surprise and pain. Trowa’s hand shot up to grab his shoulder where the bullet had bitten into him.

Years of training suddenly kicked in. Heero’s eyes narrowed and he grabbed Trowa around the shoulders with one arm, slipped his other into the holster at his ankle beneath his jeans and wielded his service pistol while urgently dragging Trowa away from the open sidewalk to the
nearest street corner. He pushed his taller partner against the wall, pinning him there with his body and carefully peered around the corner, looking for their assailant. A bullet smashed into the brick beside his head, sending a hail of debris against his face. He snarled, pulled his head back and looked at Trowa.

“Are you okay?” Heero looked over his partner’s body, searching for any more bullet wounds, assessing him.

The adrenaline was rushing through his veins and the pain was subdued for now, but Trowa could feel the sticky, hot liquid leaking from the wound on his shoulder. He kept his hand pressed tightly against it and nodded. “I’m okay…”

There was some movement on the rooftop just behind Heero’s head. Trowa looked up and saw their assailant lurking. “Watch out!” He wrapped his arms around his partner and rolled them to the side just in time to miss the bullet that flew past, hitting the brick wall where Trowa had been leaning seconds before.

*Is there two of them?* Heero’s mind began to race. As Trowa slid them out of the way he saw the shadow on the roof, propped his arm against Trowa’s injured shoulder and fired at it. He heard a faint ‘oof’ and then saw the black shadow on the roof pull back into the darkness. *We may be surrounded… how many of them are there?* Heero’s trained mind began to scatter with scenarios. He knew one thing, they had to get out of there, and fast. Grabbing Trowa’s uninjured arm, he ran away from the street where his partner had first been shot, deeper down the side road they had used.

The mile run seemed like it took an eternity. Panting, Heero tugged Trowa beneath a stone bridge that connected the street to one of the small islands that flanked the city. He stood in the darkness, gasping for his breath, his gun still in hand.

His reflexive mode of action was now suspended, leaving him able to react and reflect on what had just happened. *Someone’s after us… someone shot Trowa…* he looked up at his partner, his expression worried. “We need to get you medical attention.”

Trowa shook his head. “You’re going to have to pull the bullet out and stitch me up, later.” They had emergency kits in their Gundams. He didn’t want to risk going to a hospital. They had no idea who was after them, how many were after them, and if they were still being followed. He ran his hand down to his ankle and pulled out his own service gun, unlocking the safety mode while his green eyes darted around them.

Heero frowned, his expression darkening as the sound of boots pounding the empty street above them echoed through the darkness. Someone yelled something in French, and what had sounded like a single set of boots parted and split into two. They were coming around from both sides of the tunnel. Heero grabbed Trowa by the shoulder and twisted him so that they were standing shoulder to shoulder, facing opposite directions.

His fingers curled around his gun and he held it up as steadily as he could despite the pain in his shoulder. Trowa stood with bated breath, eyes unblinking as he scanned the opening of the tunnel. He heard the footsteps approaching, saw the figure appear, and wasted no time. His blood coated finger pulled the trigger and he watched as the assailant dodged. He cursed and aimed again, this time hitting the target. The man went down.

The attacker coming in from Heero’s side ducked out of the way, took a few shots at them, but missed. Heero tried taking his shot, but missed himself. His ears were pounding, buzzing and ringing from the echo of their own shots being made from beneath the curved ceiling of the bridge
above them. His breathing began to sharpen. He shot again, but missed. Why can’t I hit him?!

Trowa turned around to stand next to Heero, gun pointed straight ahead. They needed to disarm the last shooter, not kill him. If they disarmed him and injured him enough that he couldn’t run, they could interrogate him for information. He wanted to know who was behind these assaults and why, and if they were linked to the Relena case.

“Shoot at his knees.” Trowa murmured to his partner while he took aim at the assailant’s hands, his grip on the gun loosening as his shoulder protested. Biting his lip, he suppressed a groan and ghosted his finger over the trigger.

Heero had been so caught up in trying to get away, and angry that they had hurt his friend, he hadn’t considered keeping one of the men for questioning. He nodded and braced himself. He took a deep breath, his eyes closing for a moment, gathering his senses, forcing his muscles to relax. Finally his eyes snapped open, he steadied his arms, took aim at the region where the assailant’s leg would be and waited until the other man jumped out to take a shot at them. He squeezed the trigger. POP. A single bullet slammed into the man’s leg just over his knee. Startled, the target dropped his gun and grabbed at his wound and doubled over onto the ground with a loud, echoing cry.

Heero was angry. Having his own life threatened was one thing, but harming his friend- his partner. That was something else. He broke out into a run, closed the distance between them and the man on the ground with record speed and punched the writhing man in the back of his head, knocking him unconscious. He dropped to his knees beside the now prone, motionless body, yanked his belt off of his waist and slid it around the man’s wrists to bind them behind his back. Once he was satisfied that he was immobilized he picked up the assailant’s pistol, dropped the magazine and emptied it’s bullets out onto the ground beside the unconscious man’s head before returning the now empty magazine to it’s pistol. He slid it into the waistband of his jeans and turned to face Trowa, his expression filled with concern.

Heero was no stranger to bullet wounds or battle injuries, but he had never had to treat someone else before. He studied the round rip in the shoulder of his jacket, as well as the splotch of fresh blood that was slowly expanding around it. With a sigh he pulled his own jacket off and slid his white t-shirt off from over his head and began to fold it carefully until it formed a white square. He reached up under Trowa’s jacket, tugged the hem of his shirt open and slid his hand up inside it to apply pressure to the wound directly with his makeshift gauze. “We should turn him in, let the police interrogate him for now. We’ll come back… after I fix this.”

“No. We should see if we can get anything out of him before we turn him in… This is Preventer’s case now.” Trowa was stubborn and worried about losing this opportunity. He wasn’t ready to leave the scene yet, despite the bullet embedded in his burning flesh.

A cool breeze blasted through the tunnel beneath the bridge, bringing with it all of Heero’s anger and frustration. As it shifted his hair his expression transformed as well from its former look of soft, sincere concern to that he had used to possess so many years ago in his youth. During the time when he was ruthless, cold, uncaring- an assassin.

The reality of the situation was that someone had tried to kill him tonight. Someone tried to kill Trowa. The same someone was more than likely responsible for Relena’s death, and perhaps even the death of the people at the cathedral. Perhaps this was Preventer’s case now, but deep down it had inevitably become Heero’s.

Wordlessly Heero pushed away from Trowa, still shirtless, and grabbed the man lying on his face on the ground by the back of his short sandy brown head and pulled him up to a sit. The man
groaned, a pool of his blood having collected beneath him from his leg wound.

“Who do you work for?” Heero snarled into his face, impatient. He wasn’t going to let this draw out forever, not with Trowa injured. The man whimpered, but then steeled himself against him and spit in his face. Heero reached around behind the man and with a loud crack snapped one of his fingers. The man’s face contorted with pain and his yell boomed against the curved, darkened ceiling above them. “Tell me…”

“No.”

Trowa watched as the man struggled in Heero’s grip. He took a few steps forward and stood over them, hand shaking as it held the gun at his side. “Why are you after us?” If the man wouldn’t answer Heero, perhaps he would answer him. Trowa’s voice was cold, hard like steel as he spoke.

The man laughed, his voice bitter and heavy with a French accent. “Why else?”

“Enough games,” Heero said flatly, his voice almost emotionless. CRACK! Another finger broken. The man screamed and tried to pull away. “Un. Deux.” CRACK! “Trois.” He paused and grabbed the man’s now red, sweaty face and held him close to his own. “Unluckily for you, I can count to twenty in French.”

“Who do you work for? Who killed Relena Darlian?” Trowa tried again, this time in fluent French. He took another step forward until he was practically standing over the man. “Why are you after us? If you do not answer us, we will kill you. Answer us, and we will turn you over to the authorities and you’ll live.” He crouched down to search the man’s pockets for any forms of identification while Heero kept a tight grip on him.

The man laughed, his voice bitter and heavy with a French accent. “Relena Darlian was of no importance-” but he couldn’t finish his statement before another loud CRACK echoed around them. “You are weak! You play -” CRACK!

“Quatre. Cinq.” Heero said coldly. The man was panting now, his entire body trembling. “That was one hand. Let’s move on to the next.” Heero grabbed the man’s thumb, prepared to continue snapping away when the man finally shook his head and gasped.

“Stop. STOP! Just stop-”

“Talk.” Heero seethed.

“I was paid to kill you. I do not know of any Relena Darlian, or more… more of who she killed,” the man’s English was wavering, his eyes watered and he could barely hold his head up. He lapsed into his native tongue, rambling. “The man who hired me, he was a businessman, but in this line of work, we don’t deal in names. I do not know who he was, only that he wanted us to target you men. YOUR men. Preventer…”

Heero snarled, unsatisfied. He lifted the man up so that he had to stand on his toes. “What did this man look like.”

“I-I-I saw him not,” their assailant panted, his English broken. “A limo, he was in. I saw… I didn’t see his face. It … I don’t… know.”

“He’s telling the truth…” Trowa stood back up. “We won’t get anything else out of him. We should turn him over to the police.” He managed to keep his composure despite the lightheadedness that was setting. His hand slipped over his shoulder and pressed against the white shirt Heero had folded as a makeshift bandage. It had already turned crimson. The bullet needed to come out and he...
needed stitches. If too much blood was lost he would go into hypovolemic shock.

Heero dropped the man onto his face and pulled out his cell phone, called the local authorities and told them where they would find the man. He slid the assailant’s gun out of his own waistband and back into the other man’s before dragging him out from beneath the bridge and to the street above. A few minutes later he flashed his badge at the officers and handed the man over, promising to send them a detailed report.

Once the squad car had left he grabbed Trowa by the waist, hailed a cab and helped him sit inside before giving the address to where the field was where their mobile suits were hidden. As the car drove on he reached over to slide his hand up Trowa’s shirt, pressing the now saturated t-shirt firmly against his partner’s shoulder. “Keep your eyes open,” he murmured into his ear.

His eyes were already starting to droop, his mind starting to slow, but Trowa gave a firm nod in response. He was too stubborn to give up. Under the hood of his eyelids he glanced out the window and watched the city lights pass them by, trying to focus on something, anything, to keep from giving into the darkness the called. All his body wanted to do was sleep and then shut itself down. He couldn’t allow that to happen.

Trowa’s chest rose slowly under Heero’s hand. 15 minutes into the ride, he leaned his forehead against the cool glass of the window and fought to keep his eyes open, but eventually the exhaustion won and his eyes slipped shut.

Shit…

Heero frowned and leaned in closer, attempting to shake Trowa awake. The driver of the cab was watching him in the rearview mirror. They had said that they were drunk and on their way home from the city center so as not to alarm the man or draw any attention to themselves. Heero cursed himself for not insisting that they go to the hospital. He personally couldn’t stand those places, but it would have been a better option compared to the long drive out to the countryside. It was too little too late now.

Frantic he forced the cloth harder against Trowa’s wound and leaned up to speak in Trowa’s ear. “Wake up… you need to open your eyes.” When Trowa didn’t respond he glanced over at the driver, whose eyes were locked onto him curiously, sighed and turned back towards his partner. He slid his free hand around his waist and in an attempt to make it seem like he was just kissing on his drunken friend, Heero buried his face against Trowa’s neck and gave the skin there a firm bite.

An incoherent mumble escaped Trowa’s lips and he opened his eyes in confusion before gasping, “ow…”

The driver finally pulled up on the street corner Heero had requested. He briskly paid the man and then helped drag Trowa out of the cab. Once the car vanished into the distance he urgently dragged his partner through the treeline and across the field to where they had left their mobile suits, parked and still activated with the jammers and cloak running to hide them. He pressed a button on his watch as he neared the spot and the jammer and cloaking device from Argo deactivated, revealing the suit crouching low to the ground. Prometheus appeared as well, in bird mode, parked beside it. Heero lowered Trowa to a sit at the foot of his own mobile suit before jumping up to the cockpit. He opened it and climbed inside, frantically digging for his first aid kit and supplies. Once he found what he needed he tucked it all under his arms and practically slid down Argo’s leg, landing heavily in front of Trowa. He began laying out everything he would need on a flat edge of the Gundam’s foot, stepped back, then began to tug and pull at Trowa’s clothes. “Get this off. All of it…”

Long fingers worked clumsily over jacket and shirt, stripping his torso of clothes. Trowa had to lie back on the cool steel, dizziness taking over and making it impossible to stay seated. “So eager to
get my clothes off… after only one successful date.” He teased, keeping his eyes open as he looked up at the star-filled sky.

“Just what I like…” Heero said with a smirk as he fumbled to unfold a foil, silver emergency thermal blanket. He slid the blanket around Trowa’s back and tucked it over his uninjured shoulder in an attempt to warm him and keep his body from going into shock. “Shirtless, bloody and covered in bullet wounds.” He slid on a pair of sterile gloves and grabbed a pair of tweezers and approached him carefully. “I’m sorry, I don’t have any morphine…” his other hand held a bottle of solution that would somewhat numb the open hole but mostly was used to sterilize it. He poured the liquid slowly inside Trowa’s shoulder and watched as it bubbled slightly.

“….Fuck!” The curse broke out into the open air, carried off by the light breeze. The solution burned his open wound and Trowa fought to control his body, trying not to jerk up into a sitting position. He bit his lower lip to keep from crying out again and continued looking up at the stars, tired eyes searching for something specific to focus on. A constellation, maybe. He spotted the big dipper and glared at it as his shoulder burned.

Heero dug through the items he had collected from his suit and found a tongue depressor. He rolled it in some cloth and carefully offered it to Trowa as something to bite down on and brace himself against. Finally he sat on the other pilot’s hips, straddling him with both legs to keep him from moving. “Hang on to me,” he said softly before plunging the tweezers into the swollen wound with precision, using only the bright moonlight as a guide.

Trowa’s hands shot out to find the narrow hips sitting atop him. He dug his fingers in and bit down onto the makeshift gag as the tweezers poked around inside like a knife digging into flesh and muscle. He could feel the spread of warm, sticky blood as it left the wound and made its way across his bare shoulder and chest.

As his partner bent over him he blocked out the view of the night sky. Trowa decided to focus on Heero’s moonlit face while his teeth continued to grind into the gag. Green eyes looked up through sweaty bangs, traveling across Heero’s taunt, determined jawline. Next he zeroed in on those lips—the lips he wished to kiss so badly, that had haunted him for 5 years. The groan that filtered through the cloth inside his mouth was a mix of half pain, half desire. The tweezers poked and prodded in the most intimate way, seeking the foreign object lodged deep within. Each jolt of pain was made more tolerable as Trowa continued to stare at Heero’s lips, imagining them on his own fevered, sweaty ones.

Heero bit his lower lip as he managed to get the bullet between the pincers of the tweezers. He twisted his wrist slowly, working as diligently and carefully as possible. He slid the bullet out from Trowa’s shoulder and discarded it onto a piece of gauze beside his head. He tossed the tweezers aside and with bloody gloved hands he began cleaning out the wound and the skin that surrounded it. He applied a numbing agent to Trowa’s surface flesh and then grabbed a clean set of tweezers and began the arduous task of applying the stitches. With a steady, practiced hand he formed the knot, looped and tucked the thread and pierced the skin, draw it tight across the hole and then pulled, forcing the skin to meet together. Finally, ten even stitches later he finished it off and started applying ointment and gauze over the top, taping the bandage carefully around his shoulder.

“You lost a lot of blood,” Heero said quietly, noting how pale Trowa’s skin appeared, even beneath the silvery moonlight. “I know you’re going to argue with me, but I think it’s best if we camp out here tonight. You’re not fit to pilot in this condition.” Finished he snapped off the dirty gloves and grabbed the corners of the thermal blanket to pull them tightly across Trowa’s shoulders.
Trowa took the gag out of his mouth and set it aside, hand dropping back down ungracefully. “I won’t argue with you. You’re right... Thanks for stitching me up.” His voice sounded raw and he frowned. “Are you going to let me close my eyes now?” his gaze returned to the stars.

“Soon. Let me set up camp first.”

Heero stood up slowly and gathered all of the medical supplies, disposing of them in a compartment in his cockpit. Under his seat were emergency items in the event he was stranded somewhere, including a small pop tent that could sleep one, possibly two, if needed. He gathered all of these things, climbed into Trowa’s Gundam and gathered some similar supplies before returning with two backpacks full of camping items, as well as spare shirts and emergency rations.

“Come on, we should camp away from the suits. Over there in the trees,” he suggested as he offered Trowa a hand to help him stand. As they walked away from their mobile suits he activated the cloaking devices again, which made them all but vanish from view. Once they got to the treeline he made quick work of setting up the tent, laying out his sleeping bag as well as the one he had grabbed from Trowa’s suit and shoved them into the single tent before returning to where he had left Trowa sitting against a tree. He helped him slide on his spare shirt, being careful not to irritate his newly bandaged wound, and then tugged his own white shirt over his head and offered him a pouch of water with electrolytes. “Drink this. You’ll need fluids and minerals to help with the blood loss,” he said, finally settling to a sit beside him.

Trowa brought the straw to his lips and drank slowly, the cool liquid feeling amazing against his parched tongue. He drank his fill before pulling the pouch away, draping his arm over his knee as he looked out at the dark countryside. After a few minutes of silence he spoke.

“Have you thought about being a doctor?”

Heero hadn’t. “No.” He shrugged. “I don’t think people would care for my bedside manner.” Or lack thereof. He ran his hand through his hair and sighed. “I learned these things out of necessity. Until I arrived at the naval hospital on Earth- the one Duo broke me out of… I had never received proper medical care before. Even during training they made me work on myself.” He sipped his own water thoughtfully before pulling open a protein bar and handing it to Trowa. “What are… your long-term plans?”

“I’m not sure. Sticking around with the circus until I get bored, I guess. I don’t really see myself settling down anywhere. I like moving around. But who knows what the future holds...” After Operation Meteor a world of possibilities had opened up, but Trowa found himself staying with his then newly formed family, falling into a familiar, easy routine.

If Trowa was honest with himself, he felt lost. Directionless. Even after all these years he was still struggling to fit into the life of a civilian. Preventer had offered him more work if he wanted to take it, but he wasn’t sure that was his right path, either. He kept waiting for that moment when something would happen and it would click-what he was supposed to do with the rest of his life would magically appear before him. Until then, he wandered the Earth and colonies, trying new things, learning about different cultures, waiting to for something to call him.

“I feel the same,” Heero replied softly. He had assumed that all of the other pilots had their lives figured out, but now it seemed at least Trowa shared the same unknowns for his future, too. “I think that was why I was just content to do whatever Relena needed of me... but now that she’s gone, I don’t know what to do. Preventer seemed like the only logical place for me to be.” Heero finished eating and tossed the wrappers into his bag before turning back to his partner. “If I didn’t have Preventer, I would be aimless.”
“If you have any performance skills, I could always get you a job at the circus.” Trowa was teasing. He leaned his head back against the tree and closed his eyes, cradling the half-empty water pouch in both hands. He understood Heero’s feelings of aimlessness. Understood them all too well. If he didn’t have the circus, he’d be without a purpose. A discarded soldier no longer needed, like an old toy a child had forgotten about.

“Come lie down. I’ll check in with Preventer,” said Heero, standing and offering Trowa a hand up. Trowa politely refused the hand, tired of feeling so weak and incompetent. He stood up and followed Heero to the small tent, ducking as he crawled inside to lay down. He finished off his water and set the empty pouch aside, finally able to close his eyes without disruption.

Heero smirked at the refusal of his hand. It was something he would have done. He stood outside of the tent and called in to Preventer, speaking to Une and Noin on a conference call and let them know what had happened, and that they had turned in their assailant. He also informed them that Trowa was too weak to pilot his suit back, but that they would set out in the morning. Once he was finished reporting in he checked the surrounding area, checked on their mobile suits and then pulled his pistol from his ankle holster and slipped into the tent.

It was a tight fit. He pulled the zipper closed behind him, closing the hatch to the cool night air and crawled up behind Trowa. After tucking his pistol into the fold of the tent over his head so that he could take it in hand if needed he curled up on his side, aware of Trowa’s back only centimeters in front of him, lying on his side off of his injured shoulder. Without thinking he reached out to touch Trowa’s arm, noting that he felt clammy and cool to the touch. Shifting around in the uncomfortably tight quarters he pulled the zipper of his own sleeping bag until it was completely open and kicked it around until it made a blanket. After spreading it flat he rested on his side again and tentatively snaked his arm around Trowa’s waist, tugging the taller pilot against himself to hug him from behind while yanking the sleeping bag up over himself and the other pilot.

He did this without saying a word.

“Did you spoon your previous partners?” Trowa’s eyes were still closed as he spoke. He felt Heero’s body mold against his back, felt the warmth spread to his chilled limbs. The embrace was much appreciated.

“No. I didn’t date, drunk kiss, snuggle and pay for dinner for any of my other partners, either,” replied Heero with a smirk.

“I feel so special.” His tone was flat, but Trowa couldn’t control the upturn of his lips.

“You should,” Heero replied plainly, though he pulled Trowa’s body deeper into his for emphasis. He buried his face against the nape of Trowa’s neck, breathing in the other pilot’s scent, selfishly using this moment to record minute details about him. “You are special. You’re the only Gundam pilot I have never threatened to kill…”

“And you’re the only Gundam pilot I let spoon me.” Trowa draped his arm over Heero’s, his body relaxing as they spoke, the dull thud in his shoulder subsiding. Heero was one of the few he had opened up to, who really knew him on a deeper level. “So I guess that makes you special, too.”

Heero sighed against the back of his neck and snorted with amusement. It was interesting spooning someone taller than him. Fara was a couple of inches shorter than he was, so this experience with the lithe, long pilot was different. A good kind of different. He liked it. He closed his eyes and nuzzled the back of Trowa’s neck, content. “I’m pilot 01, of course I’m special.” He could be such a jackass.
“Of course, ‘perfect soldier’…” They both knew Heero hated that nickname, and that he wasn’t even close to being a perfect soldier. And yet people still called him that, anyway. “You’re really into nuzzling.” Trowa was a little jealous that all he had to nuzzle was the pillow.

Heero grit his teeth at the mention of ‘perfect soldier’, a moniker lovingly given to him by Relena when they were only teenagers. At the time she hadn’t known all of his missteps during his missions. It made the nickname extremely ironic. At the mention of nuzzling Heero paused and spoke, his lips brushing the soft, short hairs at the base of Trowa’s neck. “You’re not into it? Tell me to stop…

“Yes, I’m into it.” Trowa didn’t want Heero to stop. “I just wish I had laid on the other side of the tent, so we could face each other…” He wanted to reciprocate, wanted to touch Heero’s warm body, tangle their legs together, feel his chest pressed against his own.

Heero smirked. “You’re so needy lately,” he taunted before wriggling around and releasing Trowa from his grasp. He slid backwards, unzipped the tent and waited for Trowa to inch backwards to make room for him so he could enter the tent again, crawling carefully in front of him to lie on his side facing him. He couldn’t make out anything about Trowa in the dark. “There. Better? For the sake of your shoulder, I will concede to your demands to make you as comfortable as possible. Don’t let it get to your head,” Heero replied plainly.

Trowa ran his arm around Heero’s waist and leaned his face in, running the tip of his nose up his partner’s cheek. “Much better… for the sake of my shoulder, of course.” He then nuzzled gently against his nose, his breath warm on Heero’s lips. Normally Trowa wasn’t this forward with others, had never been this forward with anybody before, but it was obvious they both liked each other and he was starting to get tired of holding back. And if Heero was allowed to nuzzle the hell out of him, then it was within his right to return the affection.

It was slowly coming into focus for Heero that his feelings for Trowa were beginning to evolve at an exponential rate. What he knew had once been camaraderie and fellowship was now something more intimate, more personal. He felt like he could do anything around Trowa. He never felt judged, or uncomfortable or nervous. He was beginning to see patterns in his own behavior whenever the other pilot was around, always finding himself trying to get him to smile, or blush, or laugh. He hadn’t tried that hard with anyone before, not even Fara.

What was it about him? About Trowa?

*He’s just like me*, Heero realized. Everything matched between them, perfectly aligned. Their histories, their past mistakes, their motivations. Trowa was his equal in so many things—fighting, piloting, shooting. He could endure excruciating pain, had essentially walked off a bullet wound tonight. Some people thought the ability to dance or sing was alluring. Heero thought Trowa’s shot and ability to take a hit was practically irresistible.

Heero sighed as Trowa nuzzled his cheek, feeling his soft gestures against his face in the darkness. He leaned in closer, nudging his knee against his until he could slip his leg through Trowa’s, grabbed the front of his shirt and pulled him forward until he was against his own body. He could feel the rise and fall of the other pilot’s chest beneath his hands. Smell the iodine from the skin around Trowa’s bullet wound. “This time there isn’t a bullet to stop me,” he said softly in the darkness before tilting his head, and leaning forward to blindly take Trowa’s lips with his own.

*Finally.* Trowa knotted his fingers into the soft fabric of Heero’s shirt and tugged while moving his lips against the others. He kissed Heero with need, and then he kissed him again, and again, and again, deepening the gesture by opening his mouth to invite his partner’s tongue in.
Heero eagerly accepted his invitation, lapping and tasting Trowa’s warm mouth and exploring his lips with his own in the near pitch-blackness of the tent. Each inhalation his partner made was matched by his own soft gasps and sighs as he explored and reveled in Trowa’s willing kisses. His chest ached with urgency. He wasn’t always the best at communicating his thoughts—never thinking to say what he meant until it was too late. Now he wanted his partner to know how he felt. He wanted to show him how important he was, how much he trusted him, how deeply he cared about him. Each kiss fluctuated, changed and shifted with each emotion. A soft, gentle press of his lips against the corner of Trowa’s mouth. *I cherish you.* A firmer, deeper kiss, with hands clutched tightly against his shirt. *I desire you...* 

*I need you...* The tip of Trowa’s tongue grazed the bottom of Heero’s lower lip before sliding fully in. Cool fingers snuck under the white shirt, moving up the smooth expanse of muscled back until they fanned out, pressed flat against his partner’s shoulder blade. By now he had lost count of how many kisses they’d shared, each one blending in with the last, their breath becoming one. *I burn for you...*

Heero used this moment and his partner’s inevitable closeness as an opportunity to fulfill gestures and actions he had desired to do ever since their first date. His hands slid up the front of Trowa’s chest, across his neck and up to his hair. One hand glided up through the other man’s hair, fingers burying into his long, silken locks, pushing them back and out of the way. He couldn’t see Trowa’s completely exposed face, but he could feel it. Thumbs of both hands slid across his cheeks as they kiss, over his closed eyelids, across his sleek eyebrows, touching. Smoothing. Caressing. There was no need for restraint, for hesitation. Heero judged Trowa’s reactions by his reciprocations and movements. Blind to his facial expressions, he only had Trowa’s gasping breaths, eager lips and urgent touches to go by. He didn’t think he could ever be satiated. He intended on using every last ounce of his energy, every last heated breath before sleep to kiss him.

Trowa’s breath was becoming more and more labored, his body responding to Heero’s gentle touches, his hot kisses. Soon he wouldn’t be able to control himself. He reluctantly pulled back, panting softly. “If you plan on getting any sleep tonight, we should stop.” Those words had been hard to say, but Trowa knew his body needed rest and that he shouldn’t exert himself. Not if they were going to leave in the morning.

As much as Heero didn’t want to admit it, Trowa was right. He needed rest. It was becoming too easy to lose control around him. Heero nodded into the darkness and reluctantly let his hands drop from his partner’s face, stealing soft touches as he slid them back down his neck and to his chest. He folded one arm up and rested his head against his own bicep with a sigh. “Goodnight, Trowa...” he said quietly, his hand still lingering against the taller pilot’s torso.

“Goodnight, nuzzler.” Trowa tucked his head under Heero’s chin and closed his eyes to let sleep wash over him.
Chapter 7

“So you had just finished dinner and were aimlessly walking the streets of the Ile de la Cité neighborhood when you were shot? How romantic.” Fara turned from his computer and gave the two agents a judgmental look. His hand instinctively rose, making its way up to push his glasses from the slim bridge of his nose, but then he remembered he wasn’t wearing them that day, and quickly let his hand fall back to the keyboard.

“Let me see how you were standing the moment of impact.” The bandages peeking out from Agent Barton’s v-neck collar line showed that the bullet wound was on the left side of his shoulder. Heero had mentioned earlier that he thought the assault was meant for him, but Trowa had been in the way.

Trowa stood in front of Heero, grabbing his arms and pulling him into position. He didn’t think it was any of the risk analysts business to know that they had been leaning in for a kiss when the bullet struck, so he just stared down at Heero without tilting his face towards him.

Fara got up from the chair and started circling around them. “The bullet came from this direction, whizzing past Agent Yuy’s right ear…” He brought his finger up and moved it just past Heero’s face, following the invisible trail of the bullet. “And struck Agent Barton’s left shoulder right here.” The tip of his finger stopped a few centimeters in front of the sore wound. “Curious.” Fara put his finger on his chin as he stood there, working the scenario out in his head.

 “…The two of you were about to kiss, weren’t you? Perhaps the atmosphere set the mood? The ‘city of love’ is full of surprises…” The position of their bodies, the angle at which the bullet had entered Trowa’s flesh, the proximity of Heero’s head gave it away. Hazel eyes sought out Prussian blue ones with a questioning look. Why else would they be standing that close?

“I’ll be sure to add that to the report. Une loves juicy details, and Noin is an avid slash fiction reader. I’m sure this is right up her alley.”

Heero’s eyebrow twitched with his annoyance. He knew Fara was playing it up because he was irritated. He felt defensive, though he knew he shouldn’t be. What he and Trowa were or were not about to do was not Preventer business.

“I think it’s unprofessional of you to make such lewd assumptions about Agent Barton and myself,” Heero replied coldly, his dark gaze locking with Fara’s. “Your insinuation suggests that I would be unprofessional enough to become involved with a fellow Preventer.” His tone was challenging. The truth was that he had thoroughly explored Agent Barton’s mouth with his own the night before, AND he had absolutely worshipped every inch of Agent Maurel’s body in the past, but he wondered just how much of HIS OWN personal life Fara was willing to expose.

“Call it unprofessional if you like,” Fara sat back down at his desk and typed up a few notes, unphased by Heero’s threatening look. “I just call it doing my job. I won’t leave details out of the report. It would go against the responsibilities of my duties.” And Agent Yuy and Agent Barton had been leaning in for a kiss just before the assailant shot at them.

Frustrated, Heero decided that he and Fara would need to have a talk sometime soon. He wasn’t ashamed of having feelings for Trowa. After the night of their drinking contest it was no secret that they were attracted to one another, but he didn’t want it written on an official report. It wasn’t anyone else’s business. What was more- he wasn’t on the clock when it happened, so the details of what he and Trowa were about to do didn’t pertain to the mission. He cast a glance over his
shoulder at Trowa, his expression clearly reflecting his annoyance.

“Are we done here?” Heero asked, his voice flat and emotionless.

In Fara’s mind any detail that happened before or after Trowa had been shot was worth writing down, as was protocol. “I guess we are.” He wouldn’t look up from the computer as he dismissed the two agents.

With a wordless nod Heero turned on his heels and marched out of the analysis office with Trowa in tow. He was irritated. He pulled his phone out and pounded out a text message to Fara as they walked.

-WE NEED TO TALK.-

He shoved his phone back into his pocket and fell into step beside Trowa, headed down to the dorms for the remainder of the day. They were to pick up their mobile suit training once more the following morning.

As they made it to the basement floor that led to the underground pathway to the dorms Heero spotted Quatre walking their direction. The blonde was talking amiably with another agent, his expression its usual bright and cheery openness. When he looked up and spotted them coming off of the elevator the happiness melted away from his face, and he uncharacteristically averted his gaze.

“Quatre.” Trowa tried stopping the other before they passed. His text messages had gone unanswered since Sunday and he couldn’t stand having the other upset with him any longer. “Can we talk?”

Quatre paused, said goodbye to the agent he had been walking with. Heero continued to head to his dorm to give Quatre and Trowa some privacy. Once the other agent and Heero were gone, Quatre crossed his arms over his chest and looked reluctantly at Trowa. “In case you’re wondering… yes. I have been avoiding you.”

“I noticed.” Trowa saw the hurt expression on Quatre’s face and frowned, self loathing setting in. “I’m sorry. You have every right to be mad at me. What I did was… inappropriate. I betrayed your trust. I know an apology isn’t going to fix anything or take back what I said… But I’m sorry. I never want to hurt you like that…”

Quatre nodded, but his expression didn’t change. “I know you were drunk… but sometimes, when people drink, they lose their filter. They say what they really mean.” He hugged himself tighter and studied the ground at their feet, his eyes lost in thought. “So you may be sorry, but you can’t say you didn’t mean what you said. That you think I’m ‘hogging’ you, that you think I ‘had my chance’.”

Trowa was hearing these awful words for the first time. Duo hadn’t gone into detail. “Quatre…” He breathed, struggling to find his voice through the haze of disappointment. “I didn’t know what I was saying. I don’t mean any of that…” His fingers curled into fists at his side and he looked away, ashamed. What have I done? I’ve destroyed the trust with one of the most important people in my life…

Quatre shook his head and sighed. “I just need time, Trowa. Right now, when I look at you, I see the you from the other night. It was… shocking,” Quatre tried to find the right words. “I’m just hurt. I don’t know what else to say…or how you can fix it, aside from that I need to get over it, I guess.”
“Alright.” Trowa nodded knowing that all he could give the other was his space. He couldn’t blame Quatre for being unable to forgive him, if it came down to that. “Ok…” He shoved his hands in his pockets and continued to look down at the ground.

“So… see you later,” Quatre replied faintly before stepping around him and getting onto the elevator. He avoided looking at Trowa as the double doors slid closed in front of him.

Trowa leaned against the hallway wall and stood there in silence for a few minutes, just staring at the elevator while Quatre’s words echoed in his head. He’d never forgive himself for hurting the other. The self loathing that burned in his chest was unbearable and consuming. He sighed and pushed off the wall, heading down the deserted hallway to the dorms.

Heero didn’t know what he was going to say. He had spent the half an hour train ride to Fara’s apartment trying to formulate what he would do, or what he would say but had come up with nothing. He was still irritated about the blonde’s snarky attitude at the office. He wasn’t going to plead for him to take the details out of his report. He was thorough, he knew that in HIS head, Fara thought it was important. He wanted to tell him everything- privately. He wanted Fara to know the truth, though he wasn’t sure how he was going to handle it.

Faramond always acted cool and aloof, like he didn’t care whether Heero came or went, but he suspected that deep down it was different. Clearly the idea he had kissed Trowa bothered Fara, otherwise he wouldn’t have harped on those details so much.

He took the steps up to Fara’s apartment floor two at a time and knocked firmly upon the door.

It was a few minutes before there was a rustle on the other side of the door, the knob turning and the door cracking open. “Heero? Why didn’t you text?” An irritated voice pulled the door open even more so the visitor could come in.

Fara stood there with a grey towel wrapped around his pale skin, his blond hair wet and hanging to one side over his shoulder. It was obvious he had been in the shower when someone had knocked on his door, unannounced.

“Because I knew that if I did, you would have lied to me and told me not to come over, or that you were busy,” Heero replied. “I need to talk to you. May I come in?” He gave Fara a once over before crossing his arms over his chest.

“Has it ever occurred to you that maybe I am busy?” Fara rolled his eyes and let Heero in, shutting the door quickly before someone walked by and saw him in his towel. “Also, you have my spare key. You could have helped yourself in.” He waved his hand in the air dramatically and marched off to the bedroom to find some clothes.

Heero followed him inside and let the door click closed behind him. He walked into the living room and sat down on the couch, speaking loud enough for the other man to hear him in his bedroom. “I knocked on the off chance that you were busy… with something… or someone.” He sighed and crossed his arms over his chest, leaning into the backrest of the couch. “Unless you’re disappointed that I didn’t walk in and interrupt you…”

Fara had to admit that the sexiest times he’d spent with Heero were when he’d show up unannounced, slipping into his dark apartment in the early hours of the morning to wake him up with rough kisses on his heated skin followed by urgent, needy sex. But he wouldn’t voice that.
He slipped his navy blue silk robe on, combed through his tangled hair, and then headed into the living room with a bottle of lotion. Fara perched himself on the opposite end of the couch and started to apply the lotion to his legs. “What did you need to talk about?”

“You’re the brilliant risk analyst. I think you know why I’m here,” Heero replied plainly, his eyes studying the blonde’s long legs before reluctantly looking away to study the cover of an art book on the coffee table in front of him. “We need to talk about this afternoon.”

“Then talk. If you’re here to ask me to remove the part about you leaning in to kiss Trowa, I won’t.” Wet locks fell in front of his face as he leaned over his knee to run lotion around his ankle. “I can’t. It’s my job, Heero. The detail might be important to the case…”

“I understand. I wouldn’t ask you to modify your work…” Heero said with a sigh. “I guess I’d like to know what you really think about the whole thing…” He paused and bit at the inside of his lip. He knew this conversation had touchy topics, but he couldn’t think of anyone else to discuss this with. Fara already knew about what Trowa and Heero had been doing. That fact—that they were about to kiss—was much more complicated than just two agents exchanging something intimate on the job. He wanted to know what Faramond thought about Trowa, and what his feelings were on the matter. Despite their casual arrangement, Heero was worried about what the blonde frenchman would say. He wanted to know where they stood, and possibly what needed to change.

“What I think about what? The fact that you seem to have a crush on Trowa?” Fara peeked out from his hair, pushing it behind his ear so it no longer hung in his face. He straightened up and started to work the lotion up his leg and to his thighs. “I don’t really know Trowa very well. Haven’t worked with him on a case before. But you have history with him, don’t you?”

Heero didn’t know if ‘crush’ was a term he would use. Mutual admiration, perhaps. Utmost respect, yes. Extreme sexual attraction—definitely.

“He and I go back quite a bit,” he admitted. “He was one of the first pilots I spent quite a considerable amount of time with. He helped me a lot during Operation Meteor.” Faramond was an analyst, and being such, was privy to all of the agent’s background information. Very few people at Preventer knew about the Gundam pilots, and it was the other man’s most intimate knowledge of him that made connecting with Fara so easy for Heero. He didn’t have to hide anything.

“He saved my life—twice.” Heero lifted a hand to his hair and raked his fingers through it in a speculative gesture.

“Sounds like a real knight in shining armor.” Fara waited for Heero to continue talking.

“He was—… he is.” Heero frowned and shook his head. “Shit is moving too fast. I don’t know what I’m doing. All I know is what feelings I used to have for him have magnified exponentially in the last few weeks, and I’m worried about it.” What if he was just rebounding because Relena was gone and he was hurting? Was that why he acted the way he had? Why he was being so forward lately? “I’m no good at this kind of thing.

Moving so fast how? Have you fucked yet?” Fara put the bottle of lotion down and turned to face Heero, folding his legs underneath him.

Heero’s eyes widened at the statement. “What? No…” though he had thought they had the other day after they woke up covered in condoms and nailpolish. He decided to leave that part out. “I’m worried about taking it too far—what if this is inappropriate? What if I’m distracted by the loss of Relena, and using my feelings for him to distract myself? I don’t want Trowa to get hurt.”
“When did you start having feelings for him? Back during Operation Meteor or just recently?”

“I’ve always *liked* him. More than the other pilots…” Heero sighed again, his lips pursed for a moment in thought. “But we never had a chance to really sit down and get to know each other then. There were so many pressing issues at hand. And we were just kids…” *Atypical, soldier kids, but still just children*, he thought sadly.

“It sounds to me like you need to fuck him, Romeo.” Fara reached over and ran the tip of his finger along Heero’s arm, watching the little hairs stand up as he shivered. “You have sexual feelings for him, right?”

Heero grimaced. Why did it sound so lewd when Fara said it like that? “What if it’s just the chase I’m after?” Heero had never been *into* anyone like this before. It felt different than he had felt about Relena. It was similar to how he was attracted to Fara, but it seemed deeper than just laying him down and fucking him. Though, he was almost certain that if Trowa hadn’t put a stop to their kissing the other night that things would have quickly escalated to that. “What if, after we do it, he decides I’m not what he wants- or vice versa?” Was this what other people felt like when they dated? Were these normal feelings? Heero had no idea.

“There’s only way to find out. That’s the answer to all of your questions.” Fara slid onto Heero’s lap, resting his knees on either side of the other’s thighs. He looked down at him. “You are thinking too much. Use your heart, not your brain.” He tapped Heero’s chest for emphasis. “What is your heart telling you?”

It was times like these that Heero wished he had a ZERO system for real life. Something that could predict all of the outcomes of his actions so he could make the best choice. “I want to give him a try,” he replied honestly. “I feel like he’s the person I need right now.” He propped his hands up on Fara’s hips and looked up at him with a frown. “It’s what I want.”

_Give him a try..._ So Heero wanted someone else. Even though he was trying to be supportive those weren’t the words Fara wanted to hear. He searched Heero’s eyes quietly, letting the realization set in.

Fara had told the other to find a boyfriend, some sort of steady relationship, but didn’t expect it to happen so soon. And deep down he had hoped Heero would take up Preventer full time, especially with Relena out of the picture, so they could form some sort of solid relationship. It was just casual sex right now, but Fara had developed feelings for Heero somewhere along the line, which was why he’d been so sharp earlier during their meeting. _I’m not sure I’m ready to let him go..._ But he couldn’t just come out and tell the other that he wanted to be with him. Not know that he knew Heero had feelings for someone else. Established feelings.

“Does this mean we can’t fool around anymore?”

Fara’s body above his was too tempting. Heero urged the blonde’s hips down to sit full against his lap, his deep Prussian blue eyes locking with the alluring swirl of Fara’s hazel. “Possibly…” he muttered. “It’s probably best that we stop.” Despite his statement he rocked his hips up into the petite man, his thickening arousal apparent through his slacks.

“What if I don’t want to stop? I told you to find a boyfriend, but I wanted him to be polyamorous. Or you could just move to the moon and be in a relationship with *me* …” Fara said seriously before leaning in to nip at Heero’s ear, taking the lobe in between his soft lips. He knew it drove the other crazy.

_Damn him_, Heero thought with a groan as his ear was efficiently assaulted. After two years, Fara
was an expert at getting him going. He began wondering if Trowa would even be interested in Fara, and then thought better of it. He wasn’t sure he could handle two men- he could barely handle one. “I’m not sure Trowa would be your type,” Heero replied with a small smile. “And I’m selfish. I want my lover’s full attention, or none at all.”

“Why wouldn’t he be my type? He’s gorgeous… and knows how to use a gun.” Lips moved down Heero’s neck. Fara snuck a hand up under the other’s shirt.

“Then everyone at Preventer must be your type,” Heero said with a smirk as he nudged his hips up against the blonde’s body again. The truth was Trowa was gorgeous. He had always thought so. He closed his eyes as he felt the blonde’s lips against his neck, trying his best to restrain himself, even though he knew it wasn’t necessary. He and Trowa weren’t in any committed relationship at the moment- but he had only come to Fara’s apartment to talk, though it was becoming quite clear that his lover was done with their conversation.

“Oh please, you know that isn’t true.” Fara sat back so he could clearly study Heero’s face. It seemed he wasn’t going to be able to persuade Heero into keeping him around as well as Trowa. There was only room for one.

He suddenly frowned. “You’ve thought about him while fucking me, haven’t you? Fantasized about what it would be like…”

“No.” Heero hadn’t even considered it, but now that the seed was planted... He bit his lower lip and shook his head. “It’s hard to think about anything but you when you’re around…” Which was true. Even at work whenever the exotic, gorgeous man walked into a room all eyes were on him. It was something Heero found pleasure in- having everyone want the blonde, but secretly knowing that he was able to have him.

“I’m going to miss having sex with you…” With a defeated sigh, Fara started to climb off Heero’s lap.

Heero tightened his grip on his hips to keep him from leaving. He slid one arm around the other man’s waist and stood, lifting him up with himself and effortlessly made his way across the apartment, sidestepping the furniture on the familiar path to Fara’s bedroom.

“One last time,” he said with a smile as he dropped the blonde down to the bed onto his back. He climbed over him, resting the length of his body against him. “As payment for your encouragement and advice…”
“He was really concerned about refilling the munitions for his Gundam. He said he had to do it for you…” Noin explained in a quiet voice as they watched the Heavyarms pilot from a distance. The tall, lithe boy was doubled over in a passenger seat on the cargo plane while they were headed for their rendezvous with Zechs Merquise. Trowa had intervened on a OZ assignment- had taken his Gundam out and ‘finished the job’ for them. Heero hadn’t stopped him. He saw the look of disgust in Trowa’s eyes as the soldiers blatantly disobeyed their orders. He appeared determined to set things right. Heero was in no position to argue or intervene.

And so Heavyarms fell from the cargo jet, activated and made quick work of destroying the man in the mobile suit on the ground below in a way that Heero had never seen before. Unlike the usual long-ranged attacks that Trowa tended to utilize, this time Heavyarms swooped in and with a corkscrew spin had completely shredded the enemy suit with his knife. It had been brutal, quick and efficient.

So when Heero saw the other by crouched in the snow clutching his right arm with his head hung low he had been surprised. Now Noin was trying to fill him in on the details, on what Trowa had said after he had practically fallen out of his suit.

“I’m not sure what happened to your friend, but for a minute he seemed like someone else. He was distant- detached.”

Heero nodded but said nothing. He wasn’t going to speculate on anything about his comrade’s mental state with an OZ Officer. Instead he gave her a cold look over his shoulder, an eyebrow raised questioningly.

“When do we arrive at the base?”

“In about an hour,” Noin answered promptly.

Heero sighed and nodded again. “I’ll take care of this.”

The female OZ officer seemed sincere enough, but Heero didn’t trust anyone. He waited until the woman left to the front of the plane to check on her men before he stepped carefully to the rear of the cargo area to check on his own.

Trowa was staring down at the floor, his hand still clutching his right wrist though his expression was vapid. Flat, without any hint of emotion or discomfort. His lips were pale and his nose and cheeks were bright pink from his direct exposure to the harsh antarctic cold.

The Heavyarms pilot didn’t even look up as Heero neared him.

“We’ll be there in an hour,” Heero explained as he took a seat beside him. Trowa nodded, emotionless.

“Alright.”

Heero crossed his arms over his chest and stretched his legs out in front of him. He wasn’t sure what to say, or how to approach this. It wasn’t his place to pry. Trowa had never pried upon his business. Who was he to do so to him?
He decided he wouldn’t ask. If Trowa wanted him to know, he would tell him.

Heero glanced over and saw Trowa’s shoulders shaking, his lips so pale they were practically white. After Trowa’s fall into the snow he and Noin had wrapped him in a thick coat and brought him into the plane. Heero had piloted Heavyarms onto the slider and laid it down for transport. They were to refill the suit’s explosive rounds when they reached the base. Trowa had sat in the seat he was now in, and hadn’t said much or moved from that spot since.

_He’s still cold…_ Heero thought with a frown. _And something is still wrong with his hand._

The OZ officer had offered medical attention for Trowa, who had refused. Heero couldn’t blame him. He wouldn’t let the enemy touch him, either. He wouldn’t have accepted help from anyone. He suspected that Trowa was much like himself. Self-sufficient and self-reliant.

However, Heero felt a strong obligation to the other boy. Not because he was another Gundam pilot like himself, but because Trowa had spent so much of his own time nursing him back to health. It was something Heero hadn’t asked for, but had been grateful of. Now he wanted to do something to repay him. He wanted to help him, but he knew that if he said it outright the other boy would refuse, or possibly just ignore him.

He had to make it a situation Trowa couldn’t refuse.

“When I moved your suit… I think the balance calibration was off. The left arm wasn’t very responsive, and the internal balance gyro seemed a little off sync.” The bait.

Trowa looked up from his staring match with the floor. “That’s not possible.”

Heero shrugged. “Maybe not, but I’m just telling you what I experienced. How am I supposed to fight Zechs with the suit like that…?”

Raw determination filled Trowa’s face. He nodded and for the first time since he had gotten on the plane he stood up and slowly made his way over to the supine mobile suit. He climbed up the side of its chest and dropped himself carefully inside the cockpit to occupy the pilot seat, still cradling his arm. Heero heard a few buttons inside activate and saw Heavyarms twist and move its hand over slowly as Trowa assessed the situation. Heero climbed up onto the suit’s chest and peered down at the other boy, who was fully distracted by diagnosing the supposed issue in the suit’s mechanics. Heero shrugged his own puffy coat off and looked over at the doorway to the main flight deck of the ship where two OZ soldiers stood guard of them. Their backs were turned.

_Idiots, Heero thought darkly. Underestimating us because we’re kids…_

It it wasn’t for their appointment with Colonel Zechs Merquise they could have just taken Heavyarms and killed everyone on the plane. For a moment Heero planned the entire thing out in his head before shaking the idea off. _Not today._

With the OZ soldiers looking away, Heero dropped down into the cockpit. He landed with his knees straddling either side of Trowa’s waist. It was a tight fit, and his sudden closeness had startled Trowa, whose fist was raised and centimeters from Heero’s jaw.

“What are you doing?” Trowa asked, his shock apparent.

“Be quiet,” Heero snarled. He wasn’t going to answer any questions. He didn’t want to debate this. He was going to help Trowa, and the other boy was going to just have to accept it. Just as HE had had to accept Trowa’s ability to bring him back from the dead.
As Trowa dropped his fist away from his face, Heero grabbed the other boy by the front of his jacket, hastily unzipped it and dropped himself forward so that his chest was pressed firmly into the taller boy’s. His arms plunged beneath the jacket so that his arms slipped around Trowa’s thin, cold body so he could hug him against himself.

“Heero…?”

Heero buried his face against the fuzzy lining of the jacket’s collar before tilting it to the side as he spoke. “When I was young I had hypothermia from being on watch overnight during a recon mission… I was seven years old.” He took a deep breath and closed his eyes, resting his cheek against the shoulder of Trowa’s open coat. He could feel the Heavyarms pilot’s tense abdomen against his. He could feel his hesitation and trepidation. “When my commander found me they had no blankets. No warm water. Only bodies. My commander hugged me until my body temperature came up.” And my anxiety came down...

Heero wasn’t going to ask him what happened. He wasn’t going to question him about his seemingly injured hand. He was just going to hold him and share the body heat. Share his confidence, and his appreciation for what Trowa had done for HIM.

You saved me, Heero reasoned resolutely. Now I’m going to save you.

As each minute passed, Trowa’s body became softer, more relaxed. Finally he had gone limp against the pilot seat beneath them, his head lolled to the side, his eyes closed and breathing light. The Heavyarms pilot lifted a hand to touch Heero’s side, before dropping it limply against the back of the seat.

It was a silent gesture, but Heero knew exactly what it meant.

You’re welcome, he thought.

AC 200 September | Thermosphere-Earth

“Are you sure you can handle another few hours? We can always put a long-range observation scanner on this quadrant if you want to come in and take a break,” Noin’s voice asked over the audio communications connection, her concern obvious. Heero shifted in Gundam Argo’s pilot seat and shrugged the tension out of his stiff shoulders. He had been cooped up in his mobile suit for nearly ten hours, but it wasn’t something he hadn’t done before. During Operation Meteor he had hung in stasis waiting for the enemy to cross his path for hours on end, or resting at the bottom of the ocean avoiding OZ radar for days at a time. The only difference now was that he was larger and older than he had used to be. He didn’t remember being so stiff and sore from just sitting when he was a teenager.

“It’s fine,” he replied flatly across the com. “I would rather be here myself, in case this area gets any activity.”

“Alright. I’ll be back here if you need anything.”

“Understood,” Heero replied before ending his outgoing audio transmissions. With his suit’s cloaking and jamming abilities still activated, Heero continued to check his scanners and radar for any changes to the satellites. As before, there was still no new activity. The satellites and probes continued to remain untouched. Heero was beginning to wonder whether his current mission was a waste of time, however, he was happy to be in the field and out of the office so he was hesitant to
complain.

It had been two months since he had been at Preventer headquarters. Shortly after a few ESUN satellites began to disappear from Earth’s orbit. There were no signs of malfunction and after the third vanished from its position the ESUN began to suspect foul play. The primary function for the missing satellites was to aid in the Earth-Sphere and Colony defense initiative- a program developed by all charter member countries that provided information and observation services through satellite imagery and GPS tracking of sensitive materials in transit. When highly valuable ores or radiative materials passed through the atmosphere on their way to and from the colonies the probes and satellites tracked the cargo’s position. Without the appropriate tracking and positioning technology in space, the cargo couldn’t be monitored. All shipping of sensitive materials soon stopped between Earth and the colonies, which upset the colonists- who required Earth specific minerals and ores for crucial manufacturing. Economies were being affected. The people were becoming suspicious. The colonists were beginning to accuse the terrans of sabotage- intentionally downing their own satellites so they wouldn’t have to share resources with the people of space, while the terrans believed the colonists were downing their satellites in preparation for an attack on Earth.

Either way it was a cluster fuck, and it left Preventer scattered throughout the Earth and colonies trying to pick up the pieces. Relena’s murder investigation was still pending and open, but Heero could no longer sit back and wait at headquarters for answers. The man who had attacked him and Trowa in Paris had been apprehended by the parisian police had been identified but ultimately was arrested for other charges along with his assault on the Preventer agents. No new information had been gathered about him- and the case of the bombing at Notre Dame Cathedral remained unsolved with no organization or enemy having claimed their work.

It seemed that everything was spiraling out of control. Ever since Relena’s death chaos began to fester in all corners of space and Earth- accusations were being wildly flung in every direction, and violence had begun to break out on both Earth and the colonies. Several smaller bombings at malls and theme parks on Earth sparked outrage amongst the terrans, leading to temporary bans on any colonists attempting to travel to the planet outside of business.

It was frustrating. In the past there was an enemy- an organization with a face to fight against. Countries to wage war upon. People to blame for the hardship of others. The problem with the current conflict was that there was no defined enemy, just faceless forces moving about in the shadows manipulating the Earth and colonies. Heero found it difficult to combat an enemy such as that- especially with a mobile suit. He didn’t know who his enemy was, or what their motivation could be. It made him feel hopeless and aimless in his work. No matter what he did, he felt like he was wasting time.

It had also been a month since he had seen Trowa. His partner’s assignment included continued work on Relena’s murder investigation- more specifically dealing with potential suspects, continued interrogations and assisting Quatre in working the inner circles of the elite looking for any loose ends they may have missed pertaining to possible motives. Quatre was hosting a trade summit on L4 Colony Cluster and Trowa had gone with him to continue his work there amongst the potential suspects who would be attending- namely Dorothy Catalonia, who had become one of the key players in the Earth-Sphere economy.

Heero sighed and for a moment minimized his visuals of the satellite field in front of him to open another pane. He maximized it on his main viewscreen and activated a video he had taken shortly before he had left for this policing mission.

The familiar image of the mobile suit hangar at the Preventer Lunar Base appeared on screen, with
an even familiar figure standing in a pair of olive green mechanic’s coveralls at the center of it. Trowa stood in the center of the catwalk in front of Gundam Argo’s forward external camera with a rectangular black toolbox in hand. Smudges of grease and lubricant lined his arms and legs. His cheek had a dark grey smudge across the jawline. He was looking down at something below the catwalk before he looked up at the Gundam.

Heero had recorded this video just at the end of an afternoon of mobile suit maintenance. He had self-indulgently watched the recording every day since he had left. He didn’t need to turn on the volume to know what was being said, but he turned it up anyway- wanting to hear the former Heavyarms pilot’s voice.

“-bring it back to baseline,” he heard his own voice say from inside his suit’s cockpit. Trowa shrugged a shoulder on screen.

“You can try making a manual adjustment to the ballast, but I’m not sure what good that will do you.” The taller pilot set the toolbox down and approached the catwalk railing, his eyes trained in the direction of Argo’s cockpit where Heero had been sitting.

“I’m not sure I know how to do that,” he could hear himself admit.

Trowa smiled. “Are you asking me for help? If so, just say it.”

“I never said that-”

“Well, then figure it out on your own.” Trowa shoved his hands into his coverall pockets and began to walk away. Suddenly the camera shifted and Gundam Argo’s hand lifted to hover over the section of catwalk Trowa had been headed for. His partner stopped and turned around again, his expression amused.

“Do you mind? I have work to do…”

He heard himself sigh through the audio. “Trowa. Please, help me.”

“Because?”

“Because you’re a superior mechanic…” he had admitted.

“And?”

“And… I need you.”

Trowa tugged his hands from his pockets and smiled. “Alright. I guess I can help you, when you put it that way…”

The video cut out as the lithe mobile suit mechanic came in closer, headed for Gundam Argo’s cockpit. Heero frowned as the viewscreen filled with the image of the satellites and probes hanging in the faint glow beneath Earth’s thermosphere. Again he was plunged into dull boredom, left to his books. He dug beneath his seat and pulled out his worn copy of “Long Walk To Freedom” by Nelson Mandela and began to thumb through it’s bent pages. He knew he could use the tablet to read anything he wanted from the universal internet library, but he always found that reading paper text was a much more intimate experience. He leaned back in his seat and tried to let his mind sink into the text.

Despite himself, he couldn’t help but wonder how Trowa’s mission was progressing.
United Arab Emirates

The pink and orange glow from the setting sun illuminated the tops of the rolling sand dunes that surrounded the U.A.E.’s central satellite relay station set in the heart of the Arabian Desert. Dark shadows began to split the dunes apart, flooding the shallow ravines and windswept cut-outs as quickly as a Biblical flood. With the coming of night came a cold, biting breeze- a stark contrast compared to the broiling hot wind of the desert sun. The chilled air announced itself with a strangled howl as it blasted through the support beams of the three enormous satellite dishes that were positioned at three triangular points around the squat, beige and unremarkable relay station building. Three sand-colored jeeps were parked out front, their canvas tops flapping wildly in the wind.

Through the thick, black blanket of night came a pair of orange headlights bobbing and swaying along the now silvery-colored sand. Overhead the moon was gibbous, shining it’s fat yellow face upon the seemingly endless expanse of sand below it. The two headlights gradually crawled their way to the building, where their attached small armored truck slid to a stop in front of the building’s main door. A small, cloaked figure slipped out of the passenger seat, followed by its hulking, mountainous companion. They hurried across the sand as the night air beat against the loose fabric around their shoulders. The larger figure pounded hard upon the door.

“We’re being sandblasted out here!!” A bellowing voice yelled through the door.

Abdul jumped up from the desk he had been napping on and scrambled across the stark, utilitarian room filled with server racks and various monitoring computers. He fumbled with the many locks on the door before letting it fly open. The small, cloaked figure hurried inside, followed by the larger who tugged his cloak from his head and yanked his goggles from his face. Sand was clinging to his angular, dark brown beard. He raised a hand to dust it from his face and hair.

“You were sleeping,” Rashid accused the other Maganac with a dark frown.

The smaller figure tugged his cloak from his head, revealing a goggled face and wavy blonde hair. Quatre yanked his goggles down to rest around his neck before looking up at Abdul with a smile. He held up a canvas bag he had been hiding beneath his cloak. “Here, distribute this as you see fit.” His bright blue eyes flit around the room. “Where’s Trowa?”

“He’s up top, on the roof scouting,” Abdul said as he took the bag and rummaged around in its contents. “Oh, bless you, Master Quatre. Coffee! We’d just run out!”

“Could you make some?” Quatre asked. “Please?” Ever so polite.

“Coming right up!” Abdul said cheerily as he retreated to the far corner of the room where a hot plate and hot water kettle had been set up. Rashid shrugged his cloak off and hung it on a peg beside the door before holding his hand out to take Quatre’s. The blonde refused.

“Actually, I’m going to go up for a minute. I’ll be back,” he said with a nod before tugging his hood up over his head again and hopping easily up the stairs that led to the roof. He pushed the door open with some difficulty, the wind buffeting the opposite side. Sand began to sweep across the floor, littering the stairs behind him. He spotted two prone figures lying on the roof, both facing opposite directions, covered in tarps. He could see the muzzle of a rifle poking from each one. He couldn’t help but smile. It was easy to tell which outline was Trowa’s. He poked his head out of the door and called out loudly over the howling wind.
“Trowa! Over here!”

The familiar voice drew him out of his wandering thoughts and his gaze waivered on the sandy horizon. Trowa lowered his rifle from its stand and pushed the tarp aside, peeking out. Through his goggled vision he spotted blonde hair floating about an androgy nous face and the sun’s retreating rays illuminating a thin frame, making the figure look almost angelic. Quatre. Trowa crawled out from under the tarp and walked over to greet him.

“I wasn’t expecting you.”

Quatre waited until Trowa was safely inside the door before forcing it shut to cut the howling wind off. He smiled at the sight of the Preventer agent’s hair and shoulders covered in sand. He reached up to wipe his hand across Trowa’s hair to casually brush some of it away.

“Our meetings were rather quick this time around so we finished early, so Rashid and I came out to bring you guys some more provisions.” Quatre propped his hands on his hips and sighed. “Unfortunately this sandstorm followed us in. I guess we’re stuck here until it dies down.”

The smell of turkish coffee wafted up the stairs. He gestured down them with a hand. “Have a coffee with me? Take a break for a while?”

Trowa gave a nod. The smell of coffee made his stomach growl. He slipped the goggles off and combed his bangs back into place then followed Quatre down the stairs quietly. Were they talking again? Their relationship had been heavily strained ever since the incident at the bar almost two months ago. He barely saw his once close friend anymore.

As they made their way down the stairs Quatre spotted Abdul preparing to pour a few cups of the thick, hot liquid. He waited patiently while he did before he grabbed two and handed Trowa one of the mugs and led him to the far corner of the room so they could have their privacy. Rashid was sitting on the opposite side of them by the door working on a laptop, while Abdul and Auda laughed with one another and gratefully sipped their coffee.

Quatre sat down on a metal chair beside a low, wooden table and took an experimental sip of the coffee, reveling in the strong flavor of cardamom as it tingled his tongue. As Trowa sat across from him he spoke quietly, his voice barely audible over the sound of the howling wind battering the walls from outside.

“I got a message from Noin this morning. She said she was trying to relay this information to you guys, but because of the strange weather here lately they couldn’t get a direct connection and secure broadcast to you. Another satellite in Heero’s sector was taken yesterday, mid-day UTC. Somehow they took it without the Argo’s scanners even picking it up.” Quatre gave Trowa a worried look. “It was one of the satellites assigned to this station. One of the new ones they had just sent up last week…”

Trowa lowered the steaming hot mug from his face, staring down at the dark contents that rippled when the ceramic hit the wooden surface. “So there is a chance for attack on the relay station here.” Just like what had happened in South America. He frowned. What advanced technology had been used to get past the Argo’s scanners?

“Possibly. That’s also why I came, to let you know that security needs to be heightened and that you guys should be extra diligent. We’re sending more Maganacs to come in support, and Preventer is looking into sending more units here as well. Une is going to call in tomorrow morning. Unfortunately, until this storm lets up, there isn’t much we can do.” Quatre frowned down into his coffee mug. “I’m not sure what’s happening right now with the others. Wufei
checked in with Preventer sometime yesterday and said the Asian relay center is okay and that he and Duo were fine, but that was some time ago…”

“Anyway, that’s all I know for the moment,” Quatre added with a shrug. “How are things here? Not too dull I hope?”

“I’m out in the middle of a desert.” There was a sparkle in Trowa’s green eyes as he reminded Quatre. He glanced back down at his coffee again and thought about how ‘exciting’ this area of the U.A.E really was. It wasn’t like the thriving city of Dubai, with it’s sprawling cityscape and entertaining nightlife. It was a desert. A wasteland. The only buildings within the 50-mile radius were the Middle Eastern satellite relay station, and the Maganac’s base. Not exactly party central.

When he wasn’t monitoring the area for unusual activity, he was staring off into the distant sun-drenched landscape, perhaps catching a mirage here or there. Or he was reading. Or he was trapped within his lonely mind, ruminating about things. Often Trowa found his thoughts were focused on his partner. He missed Heero…

Quatre nodded in understanding and sighed. “I know, it’s a challenge to try and keep your sanity out here. Hopefully this will get sorted out soon. We can’t keep at this- just policing random places hoping things won’t happen. I hope Preventer gets more proactive about fighting… well, whoever is doing this.” He took a long sip of his coffee, his expression thoughtful. “Do you miss the circus? How is Cathy?”

“I miss aspects of the circus. But I enjoy working for Preventer.” Trowa looked back at Quatre and shrugged. “Cathy is doing well. I haven’t been speaking with her much since being stationed out here. Reception is horrible.” He took a sip of the coffee, his thumb running along the white ceramic handle.

Texts back and forth with Heero had also been sparse. To his surprise, he found that he desperately wanted to hear the other’s voice. They’d been inseparable while training on the moon and were still in the fledgling stages of their relationship, or whatever it currently was. There wasn’t a label. They hadn’t defined it or discussed it, but whatever had been lying dormant between them all these years was starting to grow, budding slowly into something Trowa had never experienced. Every night before sleep took over he would think about those lips pressed against his own, his flesh would ache and tingle, yearning for Heero’s touch. The scene in the tent in France would play over and over again in his mind like a movie reel on a never-ending loop. Trowa wondered if Heero felt the same way, if he missed him, too…

“I’m sorry that I haven’t been around as much lately. I should have stopped by sooner…” Quatre said with a frown, noting the distant expression on Trowa’s face as the conversation lulled. “I feel like things are still a little… tense between us? Am I wrong to think this?” Ever since Trowa and Heero’s drink fest happened things had been weird. It was obvious that Trowa was into Heero- he had always known this- but the fact that they were exploring their feelings for one another was uncomfortable for Quatre. He had never expected Heero to reciprocate any of Trowa’s feelings. Now that he seemed to be Quatre was happy for Trowa, but these new revelations were beginning to bring some unresolved issues in his and Trowa’s friendship to light.

“Things are tense. You’ve been avoiding me… You said you wanted your distance, remember?” It came out sounding more pointed than Trowa would have liked. Quatre had been holding him at arm’s length, putting stress on their friendship. Not having the opportunity to talk it out up until now had caused him to bottle up his frustrations.

“Yes, you’re right. I have… I just needed some time to let it go,” Quatre admitted with a frown. “And, honestly, it was hard to even face you when Heero was around all the time.” Which was the
truth. The former Wing pilot’s gaze seemed to admit that he knew what Quatre was thinking, and the blonde couldn't help but feel ill-at-ease around him. “Don’t interpret that as I am not happy for you, it’s just … harder than I thought it was going to be. Seeing you with someone else, I mean.” He sipped his coffee to keep himself from rambling any further.

“I’m not… Heero and I aren’t in a relationship.” The words tumbled from his lips ungracefully. Trowa didn’t know what he and Heero were, couldn’t define what was happening between them. “I don’t understand.”

Quatre’s eyebrows both raised at Trowa’s words. “Don’t understand what?” He dropped his coffee mug to rest in front of him on the table and gave Trowa a worried look.

“What you are saying… I thought you were upset with me because of what I said at the bar. What does this have to do with Heero?”

“The things you said at the bar were directly about us, but also about Heero… “ Quatre tried to reason his feelings aloud. “So whenever I see him, I feel like he’s judging me for the things you said about me.” He ran his hand through his hair and sighed. “I don’t know. This is a mess. Maybe I’m just being oversensitive.”

Trowa shook his head and said calmly, “Heero doesn’t know what I said to you at the bar. He doesn’t remember any of it.”

“Oh,” Quatre rubbed the side of his head for a moment before dropping both hands into his lap. “So … well, that’s good. I had just assumed that you two were dating. I suppose I got that impression from Duo and the others.” Quatre forced a small smile. “That’s silly, I guess.”

“We’ve gone on a few dates…” Trowa sighed and looked away. “I don’t know what’s going on between Heero and myself. We’re still trying to figure it out.” This was an awkward discussion to be having with Quatre.

“You two seem to get along pretty well. I always thought he was with Relena, though. I had no idea he swung that way.” Quatre finished off his coffee and rolled the cup around in his hands, looking down at the thick, black tar-like residue left in the bottom of the cup. “I think it’s good that you two are seeing each other after work.” He genuinely meant it. “You definitely have a lot in common. When was the last time you spoke to him?”

5 days, 4 hours and 3 minutes ago. “A few days.” Trowa peered over at Quatre through his long bangs. “The storm isn’t helping with the reception issues. And when Heero is out monitoring the satellites, he doesn’t get clear service either.”

“That’s terrible,” Quatre replied with a frown. He looked up at the ceiling with a thoughtful expression before leveling his eyes on Trowa once more. “Maybe after this storm passes you could ride back to the Maganac headquarters with me? Within the next day or two? They have a pretty decent GPS and cellular receiver nearby. You could try giving him a call from there?” Despite Quatre’s personal feelings, he would do anything to help his friends.

Trowa wondered how desperate looked. Would Heero think it was weird that he had gone out of his way to call him? Another gulp and his coffee was gone, leaving the stained interior of the mug behind. He set it down and mulled the offer over. “Do you think that seems a little desperate?” He honestly didn’t know.

“It seems really sweet to me,” Quatre replied with a smile. He would have loved to have someone go out of their way just to call him. “But it’s up to you. My offer stands. I’m sure he’s bored stiff
Quatre had a point. “Alright, yeah. Thank you for helping me…” Trowa accepted the offer. He felt like a lovesick school girl anxious to Skype her crush.

Heero wondered if he stared at something long enough would he be able to force it to move through telekinesis? During his training with the CLO as a young boy he often spent time just sitting in a room with nothing but a glass of water and a metal table to accompany him. Despite the seriousness of his life up until that point he was still just a kid, and being such had wild daydreams and fantasies as any normal child would have. He began to imagine that the CLO had modified his genetics, perhaps hid his true abilities from him. He used to daydream that he was really a mutant soldier, and that he had unlocked secret potentials that would awaken within him at any moment.

_I was such an idiot_, Heero mused with a sigh as he stared on at the newly installed middle eastern relay defense satellite. Back when I was a kid, and things weren’t concrete yet. _I used to think I could make a difference back then. That I alone could bring peace to outer space._ That had been a childish, foolhardy dream that he had chased most of his adolescent life. He knew better now. Peace could be gained, but it was impermanent. Fleeting. People forgot what peace costed, and were easily influenced back into a state of fear for their safety. Wasn’t it happening now? There was no enemy - no face for an enemy - no war. There was no conflict and yet the people of Earth and space were convinced they needed protection. All of the news outlets were running headlines about the “TERROR OF FRANCE” and the “THREAT” of this or that.

Had people forgotten what the face of real war looked like already?

Heero was snapped out of his thoughts by the flickering of his com screen on his control panel below. He was receiving an incoming call from the planet. Its direct source was unknown, but it had given the access code for Preventer’s secure line, so it had to be an ally. He flicked a control that directed the com feed up onto the main viewing screen of his cockpit and answered it. To his surprise Trowa’s face illuminated the screen.

“Trowa?” How did he-

“Ah, okay, good! It worked. I’ll be waiting outside,” Quatre’s voice said across the com, though Heero couldn’t see him in the flickering, grainy image. Heero reflexively ran his hand through his hair and peered into the monitor.

“This transmission is either really pixelated, or you’re covered in sand,” Heero said with a smirk.

“Probably the latter. I have sand in places it shouldn’t be.” The desert wasn’t Trowa’s preferred biome and he’d be thankful to leave once his duties there were done. “Hey…” He took a deep breath and let it out steadily, looking at Heero over the small screen. The handsome smirk on those familiar lips made his heartbeat accelerate. “Keeping busy up there?”

“If by ‘busy’ you mean staring into nothingness for a ghost or an alien to come steal this satellite, then yes. I’ve been insanely busy,” Heero replied sourly. “I’m sure you heard I let one of the satellites slip past me… inexplicably.”

“I heard. You must be getting old... It’s not like you to let something slip past.” Trowa teased. “I’d rather be up there, bored out of my mind, then be down here, bored out of my mind. I don’t know how the Maguanacs do it.”
“I feel old,” Heero replied with a sigh. “I’m stiff from just sitting here. I don’t remember it being this difficult being cooped up in a cockpit when I was fifteen.” He rolled his shoulders for emphasis as he attempted to loosen the tight knot between his shoulderblades. “I’m hoping we figure this mystery out soon. I don’t know how much longer I can take this. I’ve gotten soft.” He paused and leaned in closer to try and make Trowa out better through the com’s crappy link. Despite the crappy feed it was still nice to see Trowa’s face- a sight he hadn’t seen in some time.

“So nothing exciting? No scorpions in your boots? Sand spiders in your bed?” I wish I was in your bed.

“None. I sleep with my boots on and I’ve yet to see any insects out here. It’s so barren…” Trowa’s eyes followed the curve of Heero’s tight flight suit. He bit the inside of his cheek.

“Boots on? Not trying to show off your toe nail polish anymore?” Heero teased. “I never did borrow any remover from Noin… it was too much of a hassle.” Which meant he still had a scant amount of bright pink on the edges of his own toes. “Purple is definitely your color.”

“Why thank you, although I’m not sure pink is yours.” Trowa chuckled. His laugh… Heero was convinced that Trowa smiling was the most charming thing he’d ever seen. “I’m afraid there doesn’t seem to be any end in sight for these assignments,” he began with a sigh. “But, maybe next time I see you would you like to grab a movie with me or something?” He knew it was bold, and somewhat cheesy to ask him out like this, but he needed to think about something else other than the mind-numbing dullness of this mission for a while. He wanted to feel normal, outside of this, even if for a minute or two.

“A movie would be nice, but now I’m curious about the ‘or something’.” Trowa raised a brow curiously. Heero was asking him on another date. It seemed so surreal. Dating, in general, seemed so surreal to the introverted pilot.

Heero smirked. “… dinner? Laser tag? What is that thing Duo is always saying?” He frowned and ran his hand through his hair again. “Netflix and chill?” He chewed his lower lip thoughtfully before adding, “or something…” he added in a mock-cryptic tone.

“How about Netflix and chill, AND something.” Although any of those ideas would be fun, Trowa thought.

“I’ll make a short list of shows and movies that may pertain to our interests,” Heero informed him, his expression matching the seriousness of his sentiments. He raised an eyebrow and blinked. “Except I have no idea what you like. Preferences?” This was now his new personal mission.

Trowa actually didn’t watch a lot of TV or movies, so he had to think hard on this one. “Hmm… action is always good. And I like period pieces.” Nerd. He bit his bottom lip. “And mystery?” He really didn’t care, he’d watch anything Heero threw on. If he was being honest, he probably wouldn’t be paying the TV much attention. His eyes would be on his partner the entire evening. So it didn’t matter what was playing.

Heero nodded into the camera at each statement, mentally logging them all. He would use some of his spare time here looking up appropriate movies from each genre to watch. “Duo kept calling me ‘Terminator’ during the war so finally I broke down and looked it up. Next thing I knew I couldn’t stop watching old AD 1980’s and 90’s action sci-fi films,” he admitted with a small smile. “I think Total Recall and Blade Runner are two of my favorite movies now.”

“I haven’t watched those… Have you seen Lost Boys?” Now that was a ridiculous movie from that
time period. Catherine loved it. Trowa found it cheesy but entertaining, especially the opening scene with that oily, overly muscular guy playing the saxophone. What was that? Ridiculous.

“Hm, no. I’ll have to add that to my list,” Heero replied. He would look that one up later. The broadcast for the incoming feed flickered again and for a moment Trowa’s image froze in place for a few seconds before coming to life again. It was clear they were losing a good connection the further the position Trowa was on Earth rotated away from where Heero was suspended in orbit. “I’m losing you,” Heero said reluctantly, his expression matching his disappointment. “Thanks for calling me. It’s been really nice talking to you.”

“You too. See you later.” Trowa took one last look at his partner before reaching over to end their connection. The screen went dark and he sighed, staring at it for a few minutes while he gathered his thoughts. How many more days until he could return to Preventer headquarters?

The late evening light was hot, causing thick waves of distortion to rise from the sand to warp and mirage the landscape beyond. Auda steered the truck carefully across the dunes, attempting to stay aligned with the packed earth of the makeshift road between massive swells of sand as they headed back to the relay station. The sweltering heat was a direct combatant to the straining air conditioning inside the cabin of the truck, which blasted lukewarm air at its sweaty passengers.

Quatre turned in his seat on the front passenger side to smile at Trowa while he wiped his forehead with the back of his arm. “How was Heero doing?”

“He’s bored out of his mind. Other than that, he’s ok. Thanks again for helping me make that call.” The brief conversation with Heero had lifted Trowa’s spirits. Now he had something to look forward to… a ‘Netflix and Chill’ date.

“Of course,” replied Quatre with a bright smile. It was nice to see the tension fall off of Trowa. He was glad he had helped him. “Hopefully you guys will be able to hang out soon.”

Auda peered through the dusty windshield at something moving in the distance. He frowned and looked over his shoulder at Quatre, his expression grim. “Master Quatre, I don’t want to alarm you, but there seems to be another vehicle out here… and it isn’t one of ours.”

Quatre frowned and squinted out at the vast expanse of desert beyond. “I wonder what anyone would be doing so far out from the village…” He glanced worriedly at Auda. “They’re headed this way.”

“Yes, please sirs, buckle your seatbelts. I think they’re about to try and give chase-”

The distinct sound of bullets pinging off of the armored hood of the car rang through the air and echoed inside the cabin. Quatre flinched and dropped down to buckle himself in before rummaging around the center compartment for something to arm himself with. He found a large revolver but frowned. “Is this all there is?”

“No, there is an AR-15 in the back…”

Quatre’s frown deepened. “Those are illegal, Auda…”

The Arab man nodded sadly as he punched the gas. “Will you refuse for us to use it to protect ourselves, Master Quatre, out of legality?”

Quatre hesitated but then flinched and ducked as another hail of bullets slammed into the car. One
struck the windshield, sending a series of spiderweb-like cracks across it.

“Trowa, grab the AR,” Quatre suggested hesitantly.

Without hesitation Trowa turned in his seat and dug around in the back until his hands landed on the cool metal of the large gun. He wrapped his fingers over it, checking to see if there was a cartridge loaded into the magazine. There was. Flipping the safety off, he rolled his dusty window down and looked out to spot the vehicle that was chasing them. It was gaining distance.

Trowa positioned the rifle and took aim, watching the wheels on the assailant’s vehicle spin in the sand. Auda was swerving, attempting to make it harder for the assailants to hit them. It was also making it harder for Trowa to aim. He narrowed his vision and clenched his jaw, focusing in on the target. His finger hovered over the trigger, waiting for the right moment to press down. He fired.

Quatre was fumbling with the radio on the dash when the shot was fired. He looked over his shoulder and saw the enemy vehicle sag to one side as a tire was blown out. Its front fender dipped low and buried itself into the sand, tipping over and rolling slowly across the sand dune.

“Good shot!” He called back to Trowa before clicking on the radio. He urgently called forward to the relay station that they were on their way in, and possibly that they would have more followers. Rashid replied from the other side that they would be waiting for them, and that more Maganacs would be deployed from their base to assist from behind them. Just as he ended his transmission another dark speck appeared on the horizon. It split into three separate vehicles, all headed towards the relay station. They would have to race them in. Auda straightened the wheels and punched the gas, sending their vehicle flying across the sand and towards the massive satellite dishes two miles ahead of them.

They had enough of an advantage on distance that the three vehicles behind them were out of shooting range. Trowa straightened in his seat but left his window down. He looked up at the rear view mirror and watched the black specs as they sped towards the relay station. “We should have known they’d attack this place after the satellite went missing…” It was no shock.

“Preventer suspected that whoever was responsible eventually would,” Quatre said over his shoulder as he bounced around in his seat, the revolver still clutched in his hand. “Hopefully we can defend it from them, and perhaps find out who is responsible for all of this…”

Auda slid their truck to a stop and jumped out to help Quatre and Trowa inside. The relay station’s roof was covered with muzzles of rifles pointed in the direction of their incoming assailants. As Quatre ducked inside he was greeted by Rashid, dressed in full tactical gear.

“They will not take this station,” Rashid said calmly, his eyes narrowed with confidence. “We will defend it with our lives.”

Quatre frowned and glanced over at Trowa. “I hope it doesn’t come to that,” he said softly. Abdul materialized beside Trowa and eyed the rifle in his hand.

“Ah, so you found… uh… the goodies?” Abdul said weakly.

Quatre sighed. “We’ll talk about that later,” he said firmly.

Abdul grinned, obviously not worried, and reached into his pockets to grab two full rifle magazines and handed them to Trowa. “You’re gonna need these…”

The sound of gunfire popping off from the roof seeped through the ceiling, along with the faint
thumping of bullets embedding in the sides of the building.

“Tear gas!” A voice from the roof yelled. Rashid snarled, annoyed, and grabbed a few sandbags from beside the door and began lining the bottom of it with them, hefting each one as if it weighed nothing more than a few ounces.

Quatre slid the revolver into his waistband and gestured for Trowa to go to the roof. “I guess that’s the only place to go, this building doesn’t have any windows…”

“Take these,” Rashid said suddenly. He grabbed a small duffel bag from a table and handed it to Quatre. “Use them as you will.”

Quatre looked down into the bag and saw that it was filled with grenades. “Okay, after this is all over, we really need to have a serious talk about this…” He sighed and shouldered the bag anyway before bounding up the stairs to the roof.

On top six men were lying against the floor, poking their heads over the shallow lip and edge of the roof to take hurried shots at the three jeeps who were circling the building, lobbing gas canisters and spraying bullets haphazardly in their direction. Quatre frowned, dropped to his stomach, grabbed a grenade and looked over at Trowa with a worried expression.

Trowa was already on his stomach, rifle mounted and pointed. He gave Quatre a reassuring, calm look before reaching behind himself to grab a bandana from his back pocket, pulling it up and wrapping it around the bottom half of his face so that his nose and mouth were covered. His attention refocused on the jeeps below and he positioned himself.

The best thing he could do until the attackers got out of the vehicles was to disable them. With accurate precision, Trowa started to shoot at the tires and windshields.

Quatre was hesitant to just throw grenades out blindly. He was worried someone else from their group would be in the way, or that the enemy could pick one up and toss it back on the roof before it detonated. He dropped to the ground and crawled out onto the roof with grenade in hand, the handle clutched down, his finger looped through the pin prepared to pull. One of the jeeps was struck by a bullet, presumably Trowa’s, and its tire dragged helplessly in the sand, slowing it down. Four men jumped out from it, firing wildly, their faces covered in gas masks as they stormed the door. The Maganacs along with Trowa all managed to keep the men from the building. Two of their jeeps were decommissioned, and the gas was unable to reach the height of the roof as the wind blew the yellowish smoke away from the building and across the barren sand around them.

The enemy made no progress and soon they found themselves injured and at a stalemate. They began hauling their wounded into the remaining jeep in an attempt to escape.

That seemed far too easy, Trowa thought as he watched the retreating forms. Not all of them could fit into the remaining jeep, so a few of the assailants had to grip the outside rungs and hold on as it started to move in reverse across the compact sand.

“We didn't capture anyone for interrogation.” He murmured, looking over at Quatre to make sure he was alright. “Unless…,” Trowa’s focus was suddenly back on the jeep. If he could knock one of the men off the side, injured but not killed, then they could rush down and grab him. He pointed his rifle carefully and pulled the trigger, letting the bullet fly.

The bullet hit, causing one of the men on the right side of the jeep to fall off and launch into the sand. The rest of the assailants didn’t stop to pick him up, instead swerving the car around and
slamming on the gas peddle to get out of there.

Trowa quickly stood up, took a few steps back, and then ran for the edge of the roof, propelling his body off and into a tight spin before he landed on the sand below. He rose from his knees and ran towards the injured assailant.

The man who fell from the retreating jeep was still wearing his gas mask and had doubled over on his knees in the sand. His wounded side was seeping with bright red blood, which had splattered and pooled in the white sand below him. He reached up to snatch the gas mask off, gasping loudly as he attempted to suck in the hot, desert air, and turned his sweaty face up at the figure that approached him. He wasn’t a young man, nearing forty years old, and his bore evidence of a hard, violent life. His bright blue eyes seemed to glow as they pierced through his dingy, sweat drenched face, seeking out the man who he knew was coming to end him.

“N… No-name?” He said in a hoarse, dry voice. His expression shifted from pained to shocked recognition. “It can’t be…”

“Marcus.” Trowa recognized the mercenary right away. He hadn’t seen the other in over a decade, not since he’d left the group of mercenaries to pursue another opportunity with the Barton Foundation. “What are you doing here?” He asked impassively, pulling the bandana from his face.

Marcus laughed. The action forced him to clutch at his injured side. “Attacking the relay station of course, what does it look like, boy?” He coughed and hung his head for a moment. “This bullet was yours, wasn’t it?”

“Who are you working for?” Trowa ignored the question, standing over Marcus and blocking the burning sun out of his face. “Who sent you?”

Another low chuckle followed by a wince. “You know I can’t tell you… “ Marcus looked up from inspecting the rorschach test made of his blood in the sand and forced a smile at him. “Look at you all grown… what are you doing all the way out here in this hellhole? Last I heard you were in space.”

“Work brought me earth side for a while.” He crouched down on his knees. “Are you working for the colonies?” He asked, trying a different angle since Marcus wouldn’t outright tell him. There was no warmth in his voice.

“You and I…” he twitched and pushed harder against the wound at his side in an attempt to stop the bleeding- even though he knew it was pointless. His group had abandoned him and he was gravely injured. He knew he would perish here, but at least he had the company of someone familiar while he did. “Both… we both know that the money’s here on this godforsaken rock.”

So it wasn’t the colonies behind the attacks. Trowa reached out to press the bandana against Marcus's side, helping stop the flow of blood. He leaned in closer. “Tell me who you work for. Who is ordering the attacks on the relay stations?”

“I wish I could kid… “ he shrugged a shoulder and flinched at Trowa’s hand against his wound. “But you know how it works… the money comes, we do the job. I didn’t ask questions…” Marcus frowned and closed his eyes, blocking out the now adult face of the child he had once known so many years ago. “I don’t know about no other stations, only this one. The money came in a fancy envelope. No return address, no names attached.”

Trowa believed him. Marcus wouldn’t lie. This was all the information he’d get out of him. “Come on… let’s get you inside and treat your wound.” He couldn’t promise the older man would survive,
but he was reluctant to leave him out in the sand to die.

“You know I can’t let ya do that…” Marcus replied with a frown. “This wound is grave… I wouldn’t last the night. I don’t need that kind of charity.” He reached up to clap the younger man on the shoulder. When he coughed again a small trickle of blood appeared at the corner of his mouth. “It would be…” Cough. “An honor to have someone from the old unit to - to send me off…” He reached into his waistband and unholstered a small caliber Glock. He held it out with a trembling hand.

The silver, intricately engraved siding on the otherwise dull looking Glock flashed in the bright sunlight. Trowa knew this gun well. The older mercenary carried it around wherever he went, claiming it was his lucky shot. He’d had it since before Trowa was born.

“Marcus…” He reached out and took the gun with a firm grip.

“No-name? Would you do… me the honor?” He coughed again, this time covering his mouth. When he pulled his hand away his palm was slimy with blood. “What is your name now … have you finally made one for yourself?”

“It’s Trowa…” His fingers slid around the worn grip on the handle of the gun. He held it aside, watching Marcus struggle for breath. Had he known it was him the entire time, he wouldn’t have shot him. But it was too late now, and Trowa couldn’t deny Marcus his last request. Without any emotion displayed on his face he gently placed the barrel of the gun against the mercenaries temple. “Trowa Barton.”

“Hm…” Marcus closed his eyes and hung his head again, blood pouring steadily from his mouth. “Trowa… take care of that gun for me.” His body trembled as shock began to settle from the blood loss.

“I will. Like you took care of me… Goodbye, Marcus.”

A single shot rang out over the desolate expanse, piercing the thick and humid air with a loud pop. Trowa sat still for a moment, head bent and eyes closed. They would have to find a place to bury the body before sundown. He carefully wiped the blood off the gun and clipped it to his side before standing up and returning to the relay station.

Quatre watched as the body fell limp to the ground at Trowa’s feet. He couldn’t believe what he had seen. Did Trowa just murder someone? It appeared to him that the former Heavyarms pilot had demanded the man’s gun and then just shot him in the head with it. He felt bile swell into the back of his throat. It couldn’t be true. Trowa wouldn’t do something like that, would he?

He pushed himself to his feet and ran down the stairs to the main door of the relay station. He began hauling the sand bags out of the way. Rashid came to help and soon the door was swung open and Quatre was sprinting across the sand to meet his friend halfway.

“Trowa-” Quatre said between pants. “Are you okay?”

“I am fine. The only thing I could get out of him was that the colonies are not behind this… Do we have a shovel?”

Quatre blinked at the new information before nodding and returning inside with him to procure two shovels from inside the building. He handed one to Trowa before clutching the other one with determination. “I’ll help you.”
Chapter 9

It felt strange being back in artificial gravity after hanging suspended in microgravity for over a month. Every time Heero came back from any change in gravity it always took him a few days to adjust. Having only arrived the afternoon prior, he was still rather heavy-footed and clumsy, though he attempted to hide it as best he could. He walked the halls at a snail’s pace, and sat down every chance he could. His workout hour came and went- there was no way he would be able to survive any time on a treadmill in his current state.

He hadn’t seen much of the others since his arrival. His mobile suit was undergoing maintenance after it’s extensive recent use, so he was excused from any mobile suit training for the time being. He had popped in to see Une, reported to Noin and Sally and passed Duo in the cafeteria that morning. Otherwise he hadn’t seen anyone.

Heero glanced down at his watch and then fumbled around his uniform pocket for his phone. He had received a message from Trowa earlier that morning that he had just arrived back at the lunar base from his recon and police mission on Earth, and that he would he held up in meetings for the majority of the afternoon as he filled out reports on some ‘new findings’, which he promised he would give him the details on that evening when they had their ‘Netflix and chill’ date in Heero’s dorm room.

It was nearly six o’clock and Heero was feeling uncharacteristically anxious. He had asked Duo at breakfast what normally constituted a ‘Netflix and chill’ hang-out, and the American agent had simply smiled knowingly at him and said he better have lots of snacks, because he was going to need as much energy as he could manage once ‘Trowa got a hold of him’.

So Heero had managed to scrounge up more snacks than he and Trowa could possibly consume from the convenience shop on the first floor. He also had to install the Netflix app on his tablet and registered a new account - he had never used Netflix before.

He looked over his sparse room and eyed the snacks for the thousandth time, wondering if Trowa even liked chocolate popcorn when there was a knock on the door. He spun around and snatched it open quickly, then cursed himself for seeming too eager and tried to put on his most serious expression.

He had expected to see Trowa. Instead it was Wufei. Heero frowned and jammed his hands into his uniform pockets, annoyed. Shit, I’m still in uniform… he knew he was forgetting something.

“Yuy,” Wufei said with a sigh. Suddenly Heero’s chest was full of envelopes and paperwork. He grabbed them from Wufei’s hands and looked down at the massive brick of work he had been given.

“What’s this?”

“Your extra safety training course tests, continuing education program modules and a copy of your progress report,” Wufei said plainly before waving a hand dismissively at him. “Don’t worry, they’re not due until next week.”

“Great…” Heero muttered, his irritation obvious.
“Welcome back,” Wufei said with a smile before walking off with an amused chuckle.

Heero scowled down at the paperwork and turned to plop it down on the desk beside his massive snack collection. When he turned around another, taller, more elegant figure was standing in the doorway.

“Trowa?” Heero blurted, his surprise blatant.

“Am I too early?” Trowa leaned against the doorway, his jacket pulled off and slung over his shoulder. “I saw Wufei down the hall.” His eyes darted to the stack of papers on the table. “Do we need to reschedule?”

Heero followed Trowa’s gaze to the paperwork. He shook his head and immediately brought his attention back to the other pilot in the doorway. “No. You’re on time-as usual.” He approached the door and found his body automatically drifting to Trowa’s, his eyes taking every inch of him in. He looked like he had been doing okay. He was practically unchanged from the last time he’d seen him. “Wufei thought it appropriate to bring me a welcome home gift,” Heero explained. “Come in.”

Heero couldn’t help but watch closely as Trowa entered his room, looking particularly attractive in a pair of tightly fitted jeans, an equally fitted black v-neck t-shirt and black and white sneakers. Once inside Heero gestured for Trowa’s jacket. “I’ll hang that for you…”

“Thanks.” Trowa handed the jean jacket to his partner and then looked around the room, which was starting to become more and more familiar each time he visited. He spotted the pile of snacks and smirked. “Good thing I didn’t eat dinner yet.”

Heero smiled and hooked a hanger through Trowa’s jacket to hang it in his cabinet. He shrugged his own off and hung it as well before toeing off his work shoes to tuck them in the bottom shelf of the cabinet and then rummaged through his dresser for more casual clothes.

“After so much time in space eating nothing but freeze dried rations and M.R.E.s I think my stomach got the best of me. I may have gotten a little carried away,” he explained as he fished out a pair of navy blue track pants and a white tank top. “You’re going to be taking at least half of that home with you,” he informed him as he began unbuttoning his work uniform sleeve cuffs. It had been Tie Tuesday. He yanked his tie from his neck and tossed it on top of the snack table.

“Alright. I’ve got dibs on the Cheetos.” Trowa turned his back politely while Heero changed, reaching over for the orange and blue bag of puffs. He ripped it open and then went to sit on the edge of the immaculately made bed. “What movie did you want to start with?”

“Depends on your mood,” Heero said as he tugged his clothes off and replaced them with his more comfortable ones. He grabbed a small bag of Takis from the massive snack hoard and snatched his tablet from the charger and approached the bed. “I looked up the best of each genre you told me you liked, calculated the average rating based on the critic rating and general user rating, and then tried to figure out which one was the most popular at its original date of release…” He slumped down onto the bed beside him and swiped the screen to activate it. “Which left me with these three.” He showed him the screen. The Hunt for Red October, The Labyrinth, and Star Wars movie posters were lined up on the queue. “Pick one.”

“When did you find time to do all of that?” The amount of research Heero had undergone for this date was impressive. Trowa glanced over the screen and smirked. “How did this one get on the list?” He pointed at The Labyrinth. It didn’t look like an action movie, a period piece, or a mystery.
“...” Heero popped open his bag and stuffed a Taki into his mouth and chewed for a moment before replying. “I just thought it looked interesting. I’ve never seen a movie that used puppets before.”

Then let’s watch it.” Trowa lay back on the bed, getting into a comfortable position with the Cheetos propped on his chest. He left room for Heero to lay next to him.

Heero nodded and climbed up onto the bed with him and activated the movie. He reached over the side of the bed and rummaged around under it blindly for a spare pillow, which he propped on his lap and then used to wedge the tablet PC up so they could both see it. While David Bowie’s voice accompanied the CGI owl in the opening credits he glanced over at Trowa and smirked. “You got a tan.”

“I used up 5 bottles of sunscreen and still got color.” Trowa’s shoulder pressed against Heero’s as they huddled close to share the tablet screen. “I still think I have sand embedded in my skin. I apologize if you find some in your sheets tomorrow.”

“Mmn, I think the color looks good on you,” Heero replied, his eyes still staring at the tablet. “You could be nearly translucent from space life like I am.” Which reminded him, he needed to hit the UVB tanning bed in the morning. He had been feeling sluggish, and the vitamin D capsules he had been taken didn’t seem to be helping. “Not a fan of sand, it sounds like.” He glanced over at him and sighed. “Or Arabia, from what I can gather.”

“I wouldn’t say that. Just not a fan of the area I was held up in for over a month. Other areas of Arabia are beautiful.” Trowa tilt his head to the side so he could look at Heero. As amusing as David Bowie’s crotch was in those tight spandex leggings, he could stare at his partner all day long. “Did you miss me?” He teased. “...I think you did.”

One of the puppet’s heads came off and it was standing on it just as Trowa made his last statement. Heero tore his eyes away from the strange production and studied Trowa’s face, now rather close to his own. “What makes you think that?” he taunted back.

“Intuition…” Was all Trowa said, playful green eyes looking down at Heero’s lips.

“It’s always good to trust your intuition,” Heero replied, his own gaze taking in Trowa’s face, noting that he was looking down at his mouth almost expectantly. He would never want to disappoint. He lifted a hand to rest against Trowa’s cheek and turned his face further towards his own and slowly leaned in to kiss the mouth he’d been thinking about his entire space mission.

The bag of Cheetos slid off his chest as Trowa turned his body to face Heero’s. He brought his hand to the back of his partner’s neck to hold him firmly in place. Now that he had those lips he wasn’t going to let them go so easily. He deepened the kiss, tasting an interesting mix of Cheeto and Taki on his tongue while it slid into the other’s mouth.

Heero decided the small bed was much too crowded. He lifted a leg and kicked the pillow and movie to the foot of the bed and tossed his bag of chips on the floor before leaning into Trowa’s body, his own tongue lapping and slipping softly against his partner’s. His hand slid down to slowly trace across the other young man’s shoulder and down to his chest where he grabbed a handful of his shirt and tugged him closer by it.

He hadn’t expected this to happen so quickly. He had hoped by the end of the night he would get a kiss or two from him, but the movie hadn’t even gotten ¼ of the way through the plot and they were already kissing. He decided that he wanted more this time. There was nothing holding him back- no bullet wounds, no cramped tent. As they kissed he pushed Trowa onto his back against his bed and gradually leaned over him, one of his hands planted firmly beside his head.
This was what Trowa had come over for, not the movie, although he would never admit it. He placed his hands on Heero’s shoulders, sliding them down over his exposed arms, taking in every dip and curve of well-defined muscle. His right hand moved further down, reaching between their bodies to grab the waistband of his partner’s sweatpants. He tugged, dipping his fingers inside. “Is this okay?” He whispered, seeking permission to continue. His heart was starting to pound in his chest.

The corner of Heero’s mouth perked with amusement. Was he really asking for permission? The little statement was incredibly endearing, and Heero couldn’t help but kiss him again. As he did his free hand slid down Trowa’s arm, grabbed the top of his hand and guided it past the waistband of his pants and down to his now very warm, very firm arousal. He pressed Trowa’s palm against it and nipped his lower lip softly before speaking. “Yes…”

Trowa held Heero’s gaze while his fingers curiously explored new territory. He watched his partner’s eyes start to haze over with lust, eyelids drooping ever so slightly. Next his gaze moved down to Heero’s lips which twitched and parted with shaky breaths whenever his fingers skillfully stroked along his desire. By now he was completely turned on, his own erection pressing against the tight confinement of his jeans. Trowa leaned up and captured Heero in another heated kiss, swallowing the sound of a moan muffled between their eager mouths.

Heero hadn’t seen Trowa in this capacity before. Suddenly the cool, calm, almost aloof pilot on his bed beneath him appeared incredibly seductive and seethed sexual confidence. The feeling of his partner’s long fingers slipping sensually across his now throbbing, burning hot arousal was mesmerizing. He was shocked at himself. His pathetic moaning was unexpected, and suddenly he became befuddled, unable to figure out what to do with his hands, too distracted by the other pilot’s expert touches. Finally he managed to pull himself together enough to let his free hand explore the body under him, his palms finding the smooth, firm skin of his abdomen beneath his t-shirt, gliding across each soft dip and curve as they kissed. Greedy, wanting to feel all of him, Heero’s hand slipped down Trowa’s abdomen and over the forming, hot mound of tension between his legs, caressing the outline of his partner’s very obvious arousal.

Pushing his hips up into the touch, Trowa let out a breath he hadn’t realized he was holding in. “Don’t be shy…” His erection begged for attention, wanting to be freed from his clothes so it could rub against Heero’s. “…I want to feel you against me.” Fingers stilled, stopping their ministrations. Urgently, they gripped the sweatpants and glided them down narrow hips, exposing Heero’s lower half to the cool air of the dorm room. His hands ran over powerful thighs, slid up and around to cup Heero’s firm ass and give it a squeeze. This delighted him.

Around Trowa, Heero was definitely not shy. He made quick work of kicking off the remainder of his own sweatpants before fingering the clasp and zipper of Trowa’s jeans. He peeled away the tight fabric to allow his partner’s erection and smoothly muscled body to be fully exposed to him. Trowa’s body was an intoxicating mixture of elegance and power, clad in firm, shapely muscle and soft, smooth skin. He couldn’t help but run his hands along Trowa’s legs and up over his hips as he crawled on top of him again, letting his own searing hot center of desire settle against Trowa’s. He gave him an experimental rock of his hips, grinding himself against him before dipping his face against the other pilot’s neck to lick and kiss the fine, tender flesh of his neck.

“I’ve been waiting for this…” Heero murmured against his skin. He had, for months, been thinking of this very body under him- the thought had been consuming.

Try waiting five years, Trowa thought as he spread his legs so Heero could fit between them better. His hips rose off the bed and he rubbed their lengths together with a delicious moan, unashamed by how bad he wanted this. The attractive figure hovering above him had haunted his dreams ever
since Operation Meteor. He’d never obsessed over someone like this before, and now his fantasies were becoming reality. Slowly and clumsily at first, their bodies moved together until they found a steady rhythm. Trowa tangled his fingers in the soft brown locks of hair at the back of Heero’s head, looking up at him with a dazed, needy expression.

_I’m going to fuck you_, Heero made a silent promise to the practically begging body beneath him. He devoured every inch of Trowa’s body his mouth could come in contact with, sampling every inch of the mellow, coppery taste of his new lover’s skin. Neck, jaw, collarbone, ear and then back to tease and nip at Trowa’s lips, feeling his warm, frustrated breaths blend into his own. He slid his hand down between their bodies, exploring every inch of Trowa’s undulating abdomen before carefully wrapping his hand around both of their rock hard arousals to give them an unanimous firm, smooth stroke. He was dripping with anticipation, his sticky precum coating his and Trowa’s eager erections as they slipped and grinded against each other.

There was something distinctly different about this exchange compared to his late night bouts with Faramond. This seemed more raw, more urgent. Almost more intimate. Trowa knew everything-every inch of his body, and every adolescent wartime experience Heero had endured. It made the former Heavyarms pilot beneath him more than just a body he wanted to pleasure. He wanted to _share_ this experience with him, the way he had shared so many other things with him in the past. He wanted him to know how grateful he was for his friendship, his partnership. He wanted him to feel wanted, respected and desired.

More than anything, this felt _right_. Trowa’s body was distinctly masculine, muscular, agile. Heero knew what it was capable of- he had seen Trowa’s brutality firsthand. It made him more desirable. He was dangerous, had the potential to be vicious and yet here he was moaning and writhing beneath him, his expression fragile- begging. Pleading.

Heero broke his mouth’s seal from Trowa’s lips and stared down at him, his breath airy and raspy as he studied his face. He knew Trowa didn’t take compliments well, but Heero never held back his thoughts. He always voiced his opinions.

“I’ve never wanted anyone as much as I want you, Trowa…” he admitted, his expression as serious as his tone. “Let me _have you_…” He pulled his hips back just enough to let the sticky tip of his arousal slide past Trowa’s thighs to nudge suggestively against his ass.

The revelation, that Heero wanted him more than anyone else, was something Trowa never thought he’d hear. Not even in his wildest dreams. The wind was knocked out of him and he was left breathless, words suddenly eluding him as he fought to find his voice and give his partner permission. When nothing came he reached up to grip the straps of his partner’s white tank top, pulling him down for a searing kiss. He bucked forward so that the very tip of Heero’s erection slid into his tight entrance, wordlessly giving Heero the green light. _Yes_…

_Fuck_… It took everything in Heero not to just push straight into him. There was no prep, he couldn’t reach the lube in his desk drawer, and he was just in the process of debating the pros and cons of barebacking his sexy pilot partner dry when a siren began to blare from a speaker in the hall just outside the door. The loud, high-pitched whine was the red alert siren.

“Fuck…” he groaned, aloud this time, and held perfectly still, waiting for the siren to silence. Maybe it was a false alarm, or a test. Nobody would notice that they were gone, right? His hips nudged forward, the tip of his still stiff cock pressed firmly against Trowa’s ass, prepared to delve into him when a loud bang struck the door to his dorm room.

“Shit, fire! Guys, you in there?!”
It was Duo’s voice, hollering urgently through the locked door. Heero hung his head, his shoulders trembling with frustration. “...” He made no move to get off of Trowa, his brain screaming with reluctance.

BANG BANG BANG

The doorknob shook. “Hey, Heero? Trowa? You guys in there?”

Trowa’s fingers dug into Heero’s shoulders and he looked at the door with a murderous glare. The illogical part of his mind told him to stay. He’d burn down with the dormitory if it meant dying in Heero’s arms, being fucked into the mattress. But there would be another chance at this, hopefully many more to follow. He groaned and made no attempt to push the other off his half-undressed body, although he knew they needed to get up.

“Yes.” His voice was sharp, cutting through the sound of the siren and penetrating the door. “We ARE in here…”

“Guys, oh shit, come on, the floor above us is like filled with smoke, we gotta go!” Duo yelled through the door. “Damn new recruit is tryin’ to burn the damn place down makin’ ramen in his room!”

Heero closed his eyes, irritated, and used every ounce of his own self control to pry his body away from Trowa’s. Muttering obscenities, he pulled his pants on, not bothering with underwear, and not caring that his cock was still rather hard and blatantly showing through his sweatpants. He jammed his feet into his sneakers without even grabbing socks and waited for Trowa to slip his clothes on before slamming his dorm room door open. Just as he did the overhead sprinklers in the hallway burst to life, showering the stunned American in the hallway with a torrential downpour of water. Duo cursed and covered his head with his hands.

“C’mon!” Duo wasted no time running through the water towards the emergency exit stairwell. Heero cast a frustrated glance at Trowa before following.

Trowa was having trouble zipping his jeans up, the strain from his erection making it near impossible. He cursed and shoved his hand down the front while he was drug out the door. Finally the zipper cooperated.

They were drenched by the time they ran down the halls and exited the dorms. Trowa pushed his bangs from his face and stood next to Heero as they shoved through crowds of onlookers. His face exuded calmness, but behind his impassive mask he was fuming, his mind still thinking about sex, still craving it. As soon as this fiasco was over with he fully intended on pulling Heero back into his room to fuck.

All of the staff of the building had gathered in front of the Preventer HQ in a massive, subterranean chamber beside the train station while the regional fire response team rushed in to block of the dorms and try to get the blaze under control. Noin and Wufei approached the group, weaving through the crowd.

“I’m surprised the fire got that out of control,” Noin said as she approached them. “The suppression system inside that building is the most sophisticated one on the market. It shouldn’t have spread any further than the room it had originated from…”

Wufei was frowning, his arms crossed tightly over his uniformed chest. “It could have malfunctioned.”
Noin shook her head. “Not likely. Quatre’s company installed them.”

Duo was shifting from foot to foot, his expression anxious. Heero raised an eyebrow at him.

“What’s wrong?”

“I left Basil in there. I couldn’t get through the doors, they automatically locked…”

“Who?”

“My rat.”

Heero blinked. “Rat?”

“Oh yeah, I forgot you’ve been gone a few months. I got a pet rat, and he’s in my room… fuck. Hopefully he doesn’t get hurt.” Duo was practically biting his nails with worry. “All because some idiot wanted some pork ramen noodles…”

Wufei shook his head and sighed. “You don’t know if that was the cause.”

“Sure I do!” Duo snapped irritably. “I could smell the damn things from down the hall…”

Heero glanced at Trowa, noting his irritation. He dropped his hand to his side and when nobody was looking gently hooked his pinky finger into the taller pilot’s palm, his fingertip gently caressing his hand.

The affectionate gesture relaxed Trowa. He closed his fingers around Heero’s and looked off in the distance while everyone gossiped about what had started the fire. His mind was still elsewhere, his body still attuned with his partner’s.

Wufei noticed the handholding but didn’t say anything.

After an hour of standing around the fire marshall came out to address the crowd. The dorms would be cordoned off for further investigation. In the meantime the occupants would all need to make alternative arrangements for the night. Everyone groaned and sighed in unison before many agents got on their phones to call in favors and book nearby hotel rooms. Heero frowned and listened in as Duo claimed the office. Wufei decided he was going to camp out in the lobby, and Une, Noin and Sally all had their own officers to bunker down in. Heero glanced over at Trowa, a hidden smile slightly curving his lips. “I don’t know about you, but I wouldn’t mind crashing in the mobile suit hangar,” he said quietly so only his partner could hear. “For old times sake… want to come?”

“I’ve got nowhere else to go.” Trowa let go of Heero’s hand and silently followed him out of the crowd and towards the back doors. As he walked his wet shirt and jeans clung to his body, hiding nothing. He was glad he had a spare change of clothes in his hangar locker.

Heero led the way to the hangar, picking his way through the chaotic crowd of irritated agents who now were scrambling for accommodation. After scanning his hand through a few secure doors they finally made it to the farthest end of the compound. As he entered the locker room he could hear the distinct, distant whirring of pneumatic wrenches from the nearby mobile suit hangar. It was clear that the maintenance team was still hard at work, despite the distant drama of the dorm building. He opened his locker and began rummaging around in his belongings. Luckily he had a spare pair of clean workout pants and a Preventer gym shirt and socks. He toed his wet shoes off and grabbed the dry items before tilting his head in the direction of the showers.

“You coming?” He asked as he stepped inside, his cold feet padding across the clean tile. The
showers were rarely used, only when the pilots needed a rinse after missions or training. Heero hoped Trowa would take a shower, too…

“Yea.” It seemed they were alone. For now. Trowa shoved his wet clothes into his locker, grabbed a spare shirt and pants, and then draped them over his arm along with a towel. Quietly his nude form made it’s way into the shower room, following his partner’s shadow across the tile.

Heero had more than just dirt on his skin to wash away. He fully intended of ridding himself of his dirty thoughts by finally acting on them. He peeled his wet clothes off just outside of the shower and ducked in to turn the water on. When Trowa neared the stall he occupied his hand shot out through the curtain to grab him by the arm to tug him inside his. He grabbed Trowa’s things from his arms, tossed them on the bench across from the shower and then grabbed the taller pilot by the shoulders and pinned him against the wall beside the spicket, his own body being drenched by the broiling hot stream.

“Water conservation,” he muttered before yanking Trowa away from the wall with a smile, forcing him under the high pressure stream as well.

“Smart.” The sexual tension hung thick in the air, mixing with the steam that rose up from the tile. Rivulets of water ran over Trowa’s shoulders and down his chest, caressing the overly sensitive nerves on the surface of his skin. He reached out to wrap his fingers around the back of Heero’s neck, pulling him in for a wet kiss while pressing their bodies together. He couldn’t accurately describe the feeling of Heero’s toned, firm body against his own. It was bliss. It was maddening. It left him aching for more contact.

It was clear by the reactions of their bodies that there was no need for excessive foreplay. That had been done in the dorm room, and both young men’s arousals activated as their lips pressed firmly together. Heero resumed what he had been doing before they were rudely interrupted- he let his body push and rub against the other, taller, more slender frame in front of him. He knew Trowa was frustrated. It had been written all over his face the hour they had spent waiting to go back to the dorm. He was frustrated, too, but he wanted nothing more than to devour Trowa’s frustrations and alleviate his partner’s irritation. Carefully he dropped to his knees and without any hesitation grasped the base of Trowa’s hard, flushed arousal and took him into his mouth. His other hand reached around to grab one of his firm ass cheeks and pulled his hips forward by it, encouraging him to fuck his mouth.

“Heero…” Trowa whispered, despite them being the only ones in there. Hesitantly, he rocked his hips forward, looking down at the sight of his length slipping in and out of his partner’s mouth. It was the most erotic thing he had ever seen, sending chills down his spine. Once he realized Heero was willing to let him move inside his mouth at his own pace, he started to speed up. The tip of his arousal hit the back of Heero’s throat and Trowa lost it, eyes rolling to the back of his head, hands reaching out to rest in the wet brown hair below.

With a release of his hand from Trowa’s now pumping arousal Heero grabbed both of Trowa’s finely muscled ass cheeks and egged him on, encouraging him to go deeper. Harder. His tongue raised in his mouth, lapping and rubbing against the underside of Trowa’s throbbing cock as it was fed deeply into his throat. He shifted one hand just enough so that his index finger teased Trowa’s tight hole, slipping just the tip of it where his own arousal had once been just an hour before.

All of the pent up sexual frustration was taking a toll on Trowa’s libido. He was so close. Fingers tugged in hair, teeth bit down on lip to keep from crying out, hips continued to jerk into the hot, welcoming mouth. It was all too much. “I’m going to… I’m… so close…”

Seeing Trowa, who was normally so in control and composed slipping into the chaos of release
was ridiculously hot. Heero smiled around his arousal before taking him in as deeply as he could tolerate, sucking hard, his lips forming a firm and tight seal around him. He prodded his ass hard, forcing him forward, encouraging him to come as he wished.

Heero wasn’t backing off, which meant he must be ok with what was about to happen. Trowa thrust a few more glorious times, his eyes on his lover. The muscles in his abdomen tightened and squeezed, feeling like a rubber band that had been stretched too far. His toes curled against the wet tiles, his lower lip slid from the grip of his teeth and he let himself go with a loud moan.

Heero felt the back of his throat become coated with hot, liquid release. He swallowed the initial spurt, but then allowed some to gather in his mouth before disengaging Trowa’s still semi-hard arousal from his lips. He slowly took a stand, spit Trowa’s cum into his own hand and casually slid his sticky, slick palm across his own throbbing, painful shaft. “Turn around…”

Trowa did as he was told, bracing his palms flat against the cool tiles of the shower wall. Spreading his legs, he looked over his shoulder. The spray of water from the showerhead separated their bodies like a sheer curtain. Droplets clung to his hair, falling down onto his back and slipping south on a wet trail towards his ass. He waited, holding his breath.

The body in front of him was exquisite. Heero couldn’t take his eyes off of Trowa. He took his position behind him and let his cum-slickened arousal rest against the soft cleft of his ass as he took in his narrow hips, long triangular back and taut, sinewy shoulders. He fully intended on making good use of Trowa’s natural abilities. Skills he knew the other pilot possessed.

He shifted his weight until his stiffened shaft began to push slowly into Trowa’s body. He stopped after just entering him and slid his hands up Trowa’s back, over his arms and to his wrists. He grabbed them firmly and urged the other body to stand up in front of him, guiding Trowa’s arms back so that they encircled his own neck. The former Heavyarms pilot’s spine curved and bent in front of him effortlessly, forming a perfect half moon stretch in front of him. Once Trowa’s hands were behind his own neck he hooked his left arm under Trowa’s left leg and forced it up as far as it would go, tilting the other young man until he stood on one leg, leaning back with his weight against him. Once he was in place he buried his mouth against Trowa’s shoulder and carefully eased his body upwards until his eager cock was completely nestled in the beautiful shape standing before him.

The unique position allowed Trowa’s head to fall back against Heero’s cheek. He felt the muscles stretch along his curved back and raised arms, felt the thick intrusion split him between his lower cheeks. Heero was inside him. All the way inside of him. The thought made his chest rise and fall with uneven labors of lust. In this position he was completely vulnerable, held firmly by his lover’s strong grip. It made him moan in undeniable yearning.

Trowa was incredibly tight in this position and Heero took a moment to simply stand there and adjust to his new lover’s tightness and the feeling of his weight in his hands. He held him up with his own chest, his arms and legs firm but not straining. He could handle holding him. Finally once Trowa’s body seemed to relax he carefully slid out of him, his arousal easily gliding with the lubrication Trowa had himself provided, and with easy aim he thrusted forward and up into the body clutched in his hands. He did it again, and again, and again. Each stroke even, firm and quick. He slowed his pace, moving painfully slow, enjoying every inch that slipped in and out of him, feeling his own release already pending. His own thighs trembled slightly with long-held anticipation.

The painfully slow pace was driving Trowa insane. He desperately wanted to ask the other to speed up, but it was Heero’s turn to take his pleasure, to do as he pleased with his body. He looked up at
the ceiling as he was fucked, focusing on the feeling of having the other inside of him and the intense intimacy they were sharing. His shoulders rubbed up against Heero’s chest with each thrust and his lips parted with soft moans. Letting go of control had been hard at first, but worth it. In his head, Trowa had thought he’d end up fighting for dominance if he and Heero ever fucked. So much for that. He’d practically spread his legs at the first signs of arousal. It was what he had unconsciously wanted- to be dominated by his partner.

Heero was close. His breath came in slight, sharp hitches as he settled himself deeply into Trowa’s body, only to slip slowly out and into him again. The pace he had set began to shift, becoming uneven, quicker and more urgent as his climax rushed upon him. Suddenly he found himself desperately rocking up into Trowa’s body, piercing him as deeply as possible, his own body trembling with the strain of holding back his release and supporting his lover’s weight. Finally he was at the cusp of his control, his grasp on holding back suddenly slipping.

“Trowa,” he groaned his lover’s name, the word slipping naturally from his tongue as if he had moaned it many times before. His own voice, along with the reminder that he was indeed making love to the one person he trusted and respected above anyone else, set him off. With one deeply set, hard thrust he filled his lover with his long anticipated release, his arm clutching Trowa against his torso, pinning him back against himself, his chest heaving and breath ragged.

Shuddering, Trowa slowly pulled himself from Heero’s body. He turned to face the other, the spray of water at his back as he wrapped his arms around his partner’s smaller frame, his forehead coming to rest on Heero’s shoulder. He closed his eyes and panted, body feeling pleasantly sore from their activities. When he was finally able to find his voice he said softly, “I’m going to want this every night now. So be prepared...” He chuckled and felt exhaustion take over.

Heero hugged the taller pilot against himself and kissed the side of his neck, satisfied with his admission. “I’m looking forward to it,” he murmured against Trowa’s skin.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

This chapter is basically a running joke between BHG and myself about the GW boy's playing Street Fighters. It pops up in a few of our series from time to time and was bound to pop up here, too.

Duo couldn’t stop laughing. He pressed his hands into his purple and yellow capris and doubled over, gasping, his braid flopping back and forth against his chest with each desperate heaving breath.

“You-you guys look ridiculous!” The American agent was dumbstruck. He had known that Heero and Trowa were dressing like corresponding characters with him, but he hadn’t really considered what the end result would look like. It was hilarious.

Heero crossed his arms over his chest and scowled. “No more ridiculous than you do,” he said sourly.

Duo straightened his back and adjusted the long, red sash tied around his waist as well as the golden bracelet cuffing his left biceps. “I know, I know. I just didn’t… I mean, you guys look great. I guess I wasn’t expecting so much… urm… accuracy.”

The plan for the team to dress like Street Fighter video game characters had been an impromptu one spawned from a random drunk tournament in Duo’s dorm room a couple of weeks prior. Duo had jokingly compared Heero to Ryu, his preferred character, and joked that Trowa would be able to rock a Chun Li costume like it was nothing. They had all agreed to wear their corresponding favorite character costumes to the Preventer dorm halloween bash, but he hadn’t really thought that Trowa and Heero would do it. He had spent a little time slapping his Vega costume together. It had been easy. He and the character had the same hair, and after a little foam, hot glue and duct tape he had managed to fabricate the character’s long, claw-like knuckle gloves and mask. Heero looked exactly like Ryu with his messy hair over top of a red head sash and white, sleeveless martial arts gi. He was standing barefoot in the middle of the hallway with the same intense, aggro scowl the character often wore. Heero wasn’t even the source of Duo’s mirth.

Trowa looked absolutely crazy, accurate and stunning all at the same time. Duo’s mind had been absolutely blown. The tall, leggy pilot was clad in a light blue, ornate and clingy cheongsam with high slits on either side, exposing his tightly muscled sheer tight-clad legs. He had made two enormous, rough spiked bracelets and had slicked his long bangs were tucked to the side with pins. Two fake white fabric buns with long, silky ribbons were pinned to either side of his head. He had on the craziest looking white, knee-high hooker boots Duo had ever seen and the entire costume was topped off with an impressively realistic padded bra.

“Hot damn,” Duo said proudly as he walked around Trowa, surveying his handiwork. “You circus guys go all out.”

“You said there was a costume competition. I plan on winning.” Trowa folded his arms over his chest, careful of the spikes around his wrists. He and Heero were extremely competitive and they didn’t half-ass anything. Not even Halloween costumes. “Where are Fei and Fara?” They were
missing their Dhalsim and Cammy.

“Said they’d meet us downstairs.” Duo said, chuckling at the seriousness of Trowa’s face despite the fact he had two adorable little buns on his head. “C’mon, let’s go legs.” Duo craned his neck back and eyed Trowa in the face. “Did you really need boots with heels? Like you weren’t tall enough as it is…”

Heero sighed and started down the hallway. “You would be surprised at how hard it is to find women’s boots with no heels…” he grumbled.

Duo’s barking laugh filled the elevator. “W-wait a minute. YOU picked these out?” He could barely breathe. “Damn, Heero. You sure your shoe fetish didn’t have something to do with your choice?”

Heero was known for treating himself to rather expensive, rare sneakers on occasion. He glared at the back of Duo’s head. “I don’t have a shoe fetish…” Though he had to admit those boots made Trowa’s legs look damn good.

“You’re infatuated with these shoes. Do you want to wear them when I’m done?” Trowa offered Duo, leaning back against the elevator wall as they went up. He was careful not to step on Heero’s bare feet. The American had a point, though. He was feeling awfully tall that evening, towering over his partner. Normally the height difference wasn’t a big deal.

“Nah, white’s not my color… now maybe if they were black.” Duo adjusted his long, pointed claws and tucked his mask under his arm before smashing the elevator button with his ungloved thumb. The party was being held in the massive lobby of the Preventer HQ building since it was after hours. Duo had gone up to help move the chairs and couches as well as to spike… or rather, help prepare the punch.

Heero waited for the elevator to finish its ascent. As he did he reached one of his red, fingerless glove clad hands out to secretly slide his palm into the slit of Trowa’s dress, sliding his fingers slowly up and across the sheer black tights to playfully pinch his ass.

“Is this going to be a thing all night?” There was a playful smirk on Trowa’s lips as he looked down at Heero. The elevator beeped, announcing that they were on the 5th floor. The stainless steel doors slid open and everyone got out. Trowa was surprisingly good at walking in heels, which he attributed to his superior balancing abilities. He followed behind Duo as they searched for the rest of their party, weav ing in between crowds of costumed Preventer agents.

It was obvious that people were stunned by Trowa’s presence. Not only did he tower above most of the other partygoers, but his two companions also made them stand out as a group. Preventer was known to hire the best of the best, smart and witty intelligence was key to critical thinking. Many of the agents had played the game, and they were familiar with the characters. There was a lot of gasps and fan squeals as they passed through.

Heero spotted Wufei in the far side of the room. It was hard to miss him as he stood in the crowd of vampires and zombies shirtless, in yellow shorts held up by a length of rope with practically nothing else on. A necklace made of three fake human skulls strung together with wire hung around his neck. He had hidden his hair beneath a skull cap that made him appear bald, painted with three parallel thick red stripes. His face was painted to match. Yellow fabric had been bound around his ankles and wrists, and two enormous silver rings made of foam were hanging loosely around his forearms.

As they approached it was obvious that Wufei was bodily blocking a smaller figure.
“Hey, Dhalism!” Duo yelled, his voice muffled by his white, nondescript mask.

Wufei turned to look at his friends, the frown on his face dissipating when he saw their costumes. “You guys pulled it off, after all.” A familiar face peeked over his shoulder, straw falling from plush lips.

Fara stepped out from behind Wufei and looked over the group’s costumes. He held his glass of punch to the side and put his free hand on his bare hip. The blonde was clad in a green spandex leotard, his arms, legs, thighs and ass completely exposed, hair done into two braids with a red beret on his head. He stood in black, heeled combat boots. “Nice job. I especially like the Chun Li.” He eyed Trowa.

Duo was ecstatic. “We are goin’ to fuckin’ WIN this contest, guys!” He gave Wufei a one-armed hug, his clawed hand upheld out of the way. “Look at this shit! You nailed it! And damn, Fara. You didn’t even bother with a body suit?” He eyed the blonde over once, quirking a brow as he leaned over to check out his green, camouflage painted backside. “If we don’t look good enough, Trowa and Fara will just have to carry the team.” He pushed his mask up to the top of his head and grinned.

Heero nodded that he agreed with that statement. Faramond looked exactly like the character he had set out to portray. He tried not to stare to hard.

Fara shrugged. “I had Wufei paint the camouflage on.” He had woven some blonde hair extensions in to make his braids longer since his real hair only touched just past his shoulders. “You guys look amazing, too. I think you’re just impressed with Trowa and I because we dressed in drag.”

“Well yeah, takes some balls to uh… tuck your balls…” Duo explained, trying not to laugh. Heero jabbed him hard in the side with his bare elbow.

“There is no way I would feel comfortable in any of that,” Wufei replied, gesturing to Trowa and Fara. “That is commitment.”

“It’s why we’re going to win. You’re half naked, too.” Trowa pointed out, looking over Wufei’s costume.

As if he hadn’t realized that fact until just then, Wufei shifted uncomfortably and looked down at himself, surveying his costume. Duo grinned and slapped a hand against the now self-conscious agent’s bare back. “It’s okay, pal, you’ve got the abs to pull it off, don’t worry about it! I’m glad you guys went all out with the cross dressin’. It gives us an advantage.”

Heero raised an eyebrow at that and looked across their group. Out of everyone, he and Trowa were actually the most covered. “Want a drink?” Heero asked, his eyes moving between Trowa and Fara. It was probably best that the two remained with the group considering their outfits. Heero wasn’t even sure how far Faramond could walk without something possibly slipping out of his leotard.

“Yes.” Fara and Trowa said in unison. The blonde held his empty glass out, wiggling it in front of Heero.

“Your boobs are bigger than mine…” Trowa observed, eyebrow twitching as he looked Fara over. The blonde agent just laughed. “It was the only bra size I could find.” He flicked a braid over his shoulder and returned his red-gloved hand to his hip, watching as Chun Li’s eyes raked over his exposed body. It was a good thing Quatre had backed out of the party last minute. He wouldn’t have been comfortable in that costume, Trowa mused, tearing his eyes away from the attractive
agent.

Heero didn’t know how he felt about leaving the two alone. He decided to wing it and hoped that nothing insane would happen before he got back. Wufei decided to leave with him to grab refreshments, leaving Fara, Trowa and Duo alone together.

Duo smirked and eyed both Fara and Trowa closely before declaring, “you guys should have a kick-off, see who can kick the highest?”

“He has longer legs.” Fara motioned towards Trowa with the tilt of his head. “Although I’m not sure who is more flexible...” That was the question.

Trowa shook his head. “I’m not doing a kick-off indoors.” It was crowded and the likelihood of kicking some unsuspecting partygoer was high. He could imagine kicking the drink out of someone’s hand, the sticky concoction flying through the air and slashing down over the crowd. Definitely not a good idea.

“Heh, I bet Heero could tell me how flexible Trowa is,” Duo taunted with a grin. He eyed Fara closely, wondering just how moldable his androgynous body was.

“I’m sure he could.” Fara said plainly, eyes shifting over to the taller agent as he crossed his arms over his chest, just underneath the fake breasts.

Trowa looked from Duo to Fara. “Why are you both looking at me like that?” Was it that obvious they were fucking? He frowned at the judgmental stares, feeling like the two were looking right through him.

Heero spotted Trowa’s frown as he approached. He eyed the three as he neared and then handed both Fara and Trowa their drinks before sipping his own and raising an eyebrow. Everyone was looking at him. “What?”

Duo started laughing as Wufei handed him a drink. “Nothin’, man. Just nothin’.”

“Duo want’s to know who’s more flexible. Chun Li or Cammy.” Fara smirked over the top of his glass, taking the straw in between his front teeth.

“I think they are about even.” Wufei added, unaware of what Duo was REALLY asking.

Trowa sighed. “I’m going to need more of these…” He sipped at the drink. He’d been sober the last few months after the incident at the bar, but tonight was Halloween and Quatre wasn’t here, so he decided he’d limit himself to maybe two or three drinks and that was it.

Heero didn’t say anything, but he knew for a fact who was more flexible. He eyed Trowa for a long moment, noticing the taller pilot had already finished his punch. He held his own out in offering.

Duo snickered and gestured at the far end of the room. “They’re gonna start some party games soon. Bobbin’ for apples and shit. Let’s represent our team, yeah?” He didn’t wait for them to answer. He immediately led the way to the game corner.

“I’m going to pass on bobbing for apples. I didn’t spend an hour on my makeup for nothing.” Fara fell into step next to Wufei and Duo, unaware of the two sets of eyes glued to his exposed ass as Trowa and Heero followed behind.

Heero wasn’t much in the mood for games, but he was trying his best to be sociable, and if it meant
competition then he couldn’t turn down the opportunity to represent their ‘team’. He sighed and glanced up at Trowa, forcing his eyes to tear away from the familiar sight of Fara’s shapely ass. “Why did we agree to do this again?”

“Because we wanted to win the costume competition. For bragging rights.” Trowa shrugged. They stopped behind a crowd of people in the game corner. “What are we playing first?” Wufei asked.

Duo pointed at a group of people preparing to play something with a deck of cards. As they approached the opposite team was forming a long line of players. When Duo asked what they were playing the leader of the group explained it was the “playing card pass” game, where each member of the team had to pass a playing card to the other down the line with only their mouths, typically by sucking one side of the card to keep it aloft.

“Count us in!” Duo exclaimed happily. He grabbed Wufei and yanked him towards the line.

“What? This game sounds like an excuse to kiss people.” Wufei frowned and pulled his arm away from the braided man’s grip.

“It doesn’t have to be if people actually take it seriously and suck on the card.” The competitiveness in him was going to come out tonight unless he dulled it with alcohol. Trowa took his spot in line and watched the current game play out while they waited. The agents playing now were obviously drunk and not taking the game seriously. Dracula let the card slip from his mouth so he could kiss the mermaid to his right, which caused the monsters across from them to giggle and cheer.

Heero narrowed his eyes at the other players. He was definitely confident that their team was going to make better time. He took the open spot between Trowa and Fara and waited until the other team was done goofing off. Finally the coordinator of the game came to their line and handed Trowa the card. Heero balanced his drink in one hand, his expression determined.

The card felt sticky from use. Trowa wiped both sides on his costume and then brought the thick paper up to his lips. He turned to his right sucked in so that the card stayed put, and leaned in to hand it off to Duo.

Duo grabbed Trowa’s face with both hands and smashed his own mouth into the opposite side of the card, forcing their faces to smoosh together uncomfortably. Once he gained control of the card he turned to quickly try to hand it off to Wufei, who hesitated with a scowl.

“Don’t you dare ki-” Wufei began but was suddenly smothered by the card fueled by Duo’s mouth. The American agent grabbed him by his bald head and forced his head to stay still while he rubbed the card against his mouth.

With narrowed eyes, Wufei sucked and pulled the card from the sloppy Vega. He carefully turned to face Fara, the card shuddering against his light suction. Shit, this is harder than it looks. Unlike Duo, Wufei didn’t bother grabbing hold of the blonde’s face to pass the card off. He simply leaned in and waited for Fara to press his mouth to the other side, expertly sucking it away.

Card secured, Fara turned to Heero and wiggled eyes eyebrow playfully.

Even though they had stopped their casual sexual relationship, Heero still enjoyed Fara’s company. He smirked at the eyebrow wiggle and carefully reached out to grasp the blonde’s chin to hold him still so he could tilt his own head and gain appropriate suction on the now disgusting moist card. He carefully took it away from Fara’s mouth and turned to Trowa, having to look up some and waited patiently for him to take it.
Aware of his extended height Trowa leaned down to meet Heero so the shorter man didn’t have to crane his neck all the way back. He closed his eyes and pressed his lips against the card, which by now was becoming a little slippery from all the mouths that had graced its surface. He felt the card stumble slightly and both of them quickly reacted to pin it in between their chins.

With the paper trapped once again between their faces, Trowa focused and started to suck. The card, however, decided not to cooperate, it’s wet surface unable to stick to Trowa’s lips. It slid, slowly at first, before falling towards the floor. Without warning his forehead smacked into Heero’s, their lips meeting.

“Ha! Heero, you sly dog!” Duo howled happily from his spot in the line. “And here you thought I would be the one to do that, Wufei!”

Heero was annoyed that they had lost the card, but definitely not upset that Trowa’s mouth had touched his. As the taller pilot attempted to pull away he grabbed him by the back of the neck and held him still while he gave him a soft, chaste kiss on the corner of his mouth. “You fucked up,” he murmured playfully, ignoring the catcalls from the gamer nerds nearby.

“I did… Someone slobbered all over the card and I couldn’t grip it.” Trowa wasn’t happy about it, but he wouldn’t let it ruin his mood. It was just a silly party game. He pulled away at the sound of the hollering and bent down to pick the card off the floor.

“Well we almost made it all the way around.” Fara said.

“S’okay, guys, we’ve got this next one…” Duo grabbed Wufei and Fara by the arms and yanked them towards the next station. It was the “mummy monster” game where one person was deemed “the monster” while the rest of the team wrapped as many rolls of toilet paper around them as possible in a 3 minute period. Before he could protest Wufei was deemed the monster. After running as much toilet paper as possible over his body they managed to win that event. During the break Heero decided these games were ridiculous and that he needed another drink. He downed his and was about to grab another one when Duo intervened.

“You stay here, protect the ladies,” Duo chirped happily, “I’ll get your drinks!”

Wufei was methodically tearing toilet paper from his neck, irritated. Heero eyed him, a small smile forming on his mouth. “White was always your color.”

“Fuck off, Yuy.”

“Here, let me help.” Fara reached over and started to tear the multiple layers of toilet paper from Wufei’s arms. They had managed to wrap 8 rolls total around the poor guy’s unwilling body. He moved his hands up to Wufei’s face next, carefully pulling the paper from his cheeks, fingers brushing gently against the flushed skin.

Heero noticed the furious blush form on Wufei’s cheeks and looked away to give Trowa an appraising look. “Feet hurt in those boots yet?”

“Not yet.” Trowa leaned against Heero anyway, pressing their sides together while they waited on more drinks. “Have you stepped on anything gross yet?” He asked, gesturing towards Heero’s bare feet.

“Something I hope was a smashed cupcake and not vomit…” Heero grumbled, wiggling his toes. He looked back at Wufei and Fara. The blushing Chinese man stood in the center of a massive pile of shredded toilet paper. “I think Wufei’s got a crush,” Heero mumbled so only Trowa could hear.
It didn’t bother him that Wufei would be interested in Fara. Faramond was stunning, who wouldn’t be?

“You think so?” Green eyes followed Heero’s gaze and watched as Fara laughed at something Wufei said. “You think Fara is his type? He likes men...pretty men?” Trowa didn’t know Faramond very well, so he couldn’t really judge.

“Maybe.” Heero knew he was into pretty men. He was suddenly face to face with a particularly pink cocktail. He blinked, his vision occluded by the upheld drink.

“Look, they’re makin’ zombies!” Duo exclaimed happily, his arm full of cups. Heero took the drink and sniffed it before giving it an experimental sip. Duo shoved another cup into Trowa’s hand before handing off Fara and Wufei’s to them. He made quite a show of giving Wufei his, saying that the Chinese agent’s was special. Wufei didn’t care what was in it at that point, he just needed something to calm his nerves. Being around Faramond was enjoyable but also made him self-conscious. Was it hot in here? His face paint was beginning to smudge with sweat.

“Shit, the next game is about to start, c’mon!”

Duo dragged Fara bodily to the table where the organizers were handing out slips of papers to teams of two. Having an odd number and not wanting to give Wufei an excuse to sit out, Duo snatched a strip and announced it would be his, Wufei’s and Fara’s. He handed another slip to Heero and Trowa and then waited for instructions.

The directions were simple. Each slip had a body part written on it, and the players were required to come together and keep the corresponding body part they had been assigned touching for as long as they could. If they broke their connection they would have to take a shot.

Heero nodded. It seemed easy enough. He carefully unfolded the slip and raised an eyebrow at the word written on it before handing it over to Trowa. “Not sure how this is going to work…” he looked down at his own open shirt, thinking.

“Nipples…” Trowa read out loud, rolling the piece of paper up into a crumpled ball. He was already taller than Heero by a few inches, plus add another 3 inches from the heeled boots. It would be uncomfortable to lean down for a long period of time…

“Heero, come here.” He set his plastic cup down on the ground and waited until the other was standing in front of him. “Don’t hate me for this.” Long arms wrapped around his partner’s waist and hauled him up against his body, pulling him up so their chests were parallel. “Wrap your legs around my hips.”

As Duo was trying to talk Wufei and Fara into pushing their ears against his he looked up and saw Trowa practically pick Heero up from the ground. The shorter pilot hesitated before slipping his arms around the high collar of Trowa’s Chun Li costume and obediently curled his legs around his waist. Duo couldn’t help but cackle at the sight of it. “Hey, what are you guys doin’?”

Heero looked over his shoulder, his expression grim. “We got nipples.”

Duo’s barking laugh filled the massive open space. Other party guests were hooking pinkies, laying on the floor to push their feet together, and here was serious ass Heero clinging to Trowa like a spider monkey. “We gotta take those two to more parties,” Duo said aloud to nobody in particular. For as serious as Trowa and Heero usually were, they were being awfully good sports about everything.
Heero sighed and eyed Trowa’s chest, curiously before pushing his own against it. It wasn’t necessarily accurate- the boobs weren’t actually Trowa’s, but it was good enough. “I don’t like you with breasts,” Heero mumbled.

“They get in the way, don’t they?” Trowa smirked, readjusting his arms so that his hands slid under Heero’s ass to hold him up. “I think this is the first time we’ve been at eye level while standing up.” In this position his partner’s face was close to his and he could whisper in his ear without others overhearing.

“-fine!” Wufei barked at Duo and stood still so he could be sandwiched between the braided man and the pretty blonde. They had no real problem pressing their ears together since they were of similar heights.

Heero felt peculiar. Lightheaded. He wondered if he had perhaps gone a little overboard on the drinks. With a sigh he nodded, agreeing with Trowa’s statements. “It’s nice to be able to see your face this clearly,” he said in his plain speaking voice, his eyes studying Trowa’s face before he raised an eyebrow, paused and then frowned. “Did I … just say that aloud?

“Did you?” Trowa waited for Heero to finish his sentence, leaning in to press their foreheads together. “…What?”

“Nothing.” Heero replied quickly. He was feeling queasy now, unsettled, as if something acrid was churning within his stomach. He didn’t want to tap out on this game. They hadn’t won the first one, Heero was determined to win this one. He glanced over at Wufei, Duo and Fara who were all standing together awkwardly. Duo was muttering jokes, making Fara laugh while Wufei tried to keep it together. When his gaze shifted back at Trowa he was suddenly very aware of his hands under his ass. “I’m heavy…” he said suddenly, his thoughts directly forming words on his lips. “Heavier than I look.” He tried to help hold himself up better with his arms and then said plainly. “I like this though. Maybe later you could try fucking me in this position…”

Heero’s eyes widened at his own words.

What?!” The overly forward comment caused Trowa to chuckle. “Sure. I’d like that…” He whispered against Heero’s ear, holding him close. “You’re not that heavy. Don’t fidget, though…” His hands tightened their grip.

While Heero was trying to figure out why he kept blurting stupid shit Duo was laughing, saying loudly, “are you tellin’ me he’s NOT pretty? I mean, look at him? C’mon, Wufei. You don’t like Fara, not even a little bit?”

Wufei, red-faced nestled between them snarled angrily, “I mean… Fara, you’re lovely, but Duo this is none of your concern!”

“I’m not sure Wufei’s Fara’s type,” Heero said suddenly, his thoughts echoing from his mouth. “I don’t think he can be aggressive enough.”

The sudden comment caused Fara’s head to jerk in Heero’s direction, almost breaking his contact with Wufei’s ear. “You don’t think anyone is my type, Heero.” The dark-haired man had made that apparent the night he broke things off with Fara, stating something along the lines of, ‘Trowa isn’t your type’.

Duo’s eyes widened. He had missed Heero’s comment but was obviously engaged by Fara’s. What the hell was going on?
Wufei frowned but said nothing.

Heero sighed and before he could stop himself replied, “I know that I was your type.” He twitched and bit his lower lip. What the hell was he saying?

Duo eyed the two of them curiously. “Uh… come again?” His eyes shifted to Fara. “You like Heero?”

Was Heero trying to embarrass him? Fara tried to stay calm but the words left his mouth like acid. “I liked Heero. Before he made it clear that he wanted something else.”

Wufei frowned and Duo gawked. Heero could hear the hurt in Fara’s even voice. What am I doing? He frowned and clutched harder at the back of Trowa’s neck as he tried to keep his thoughts from vocalizing.

Duo watched the pained look on Heero’s face. He looked like he was about to be sick. Suddenly he glanced over at Wufei and blinked. “How you feelin, Fei?”

Wufei snarled. “Annoyed.”


Duo frowned. Oh, shit. He raised his voice loudly and said, “Heero, you and Fara dated or somethin’?” Whether the statement was true or not, Heero would normally never oblige him with an answer. The guy just didn’t talk about his personal stuff in public.

“Fara and I used to have a casual sexual relationship,” Heero blurted. Suddenly his ears turned a bright pink, his jaw tightening.

Duo groaned. “… fuck.” He had fucked up royally this time.

“It’s nothing.” Fara snapped, trying to end the discussion. He had no idea why Heero was telling everyone about their sexual relationship. It wasn’t anyone’s damn business. “It was just once or twice…” He lied.

Trowa caught Heero’s blue gaze as his flushing partner tried hiding his face. He looked at him questioningly.

“Put me down,” Heero said suddenly, biting his tongue. “Please…”

Duo frowned and eyed Heero as he wriggled out of Trowa’s arms and retreated for the door. “Oh, shit…” Shit shit shit shit. What had been intended as a playful prank on Wufei had gone completely awry. He had intended on putting one of the pills he had swiped from a party a few months back into the Chinese man’s drink to get him to gush about Fara. He had hoped that maybe the blonde would notice Wufei liked him. It was his attempt to play matchmaker, except it seemed Heero got the drugged cocktail instead.

“Well, looks like they lost,” Wufei said sourly, crossing his arms over his chest.

“I’m going to get another drink.” Fara pulled away from his teammates and headed in the direction of the punch bowl, eager to get away from the tension that was growing.

Trowa stood quietly, tired arms at his sides. He wasn’t for sure what had just happened, but it was
clear Heero’s mood had changed, and Fara appeared to be irritated. *I liked Heero. Before he made it clear that he wanted something else.* The words rang in his head. *Fara and I used to have a casual sexual relationship...*

“Man… I fucked up…” Duo slapped his forehead and watched as Fara stalked away and Heero had all but vanished from the party. Wufei turned angrily and glared at him.

“What did you do?” The Chinese agent leveled his eyes on Duo accusingly.

Duo sighed and tossed his hands up. “Okay, listen, it was just supposed to be a joke…”

“Duo…”

“Maybe Heero’s… ya know, a little …. Drugged up.” Duo said weakly, wincing at his own words. Wufei huffed loudly.

“You what?”

“You put something in his drink?” Trowa asked, turning to face his friends. “What did you put in it?”

“Nothing major, man. I mean… it is just this pill that was goin’ around at parties in the dorms. Makes ya say anything that’s on your mind.” Duo frowned. “I meant to give it to Wufei.”

“You what?!” Wufei grabbed Duo by the shoulder and glowered at him.

“Why?” Trowa gripped Duo’s other shoulder just as Fara came back over to rejoin the group. “What the hell is going on?” The blonde asked.

“Was just a prank,” Duo grumbled, hanging his head. Wufei sighed and turned address to Fara.

“This idiot decided to try and drug me, only Heero got it instead. That’s why he’s been acting strange,” Wufei explained.

Fara frowned at that. “What was the point in drugging Wufei?” The question was directed towards the braided man. Why would a friend drug another friend? He sniffed his drink, slightly paranoid.

“I thought I could get him to admit he liked ya, okay?!” Duo blurted to Fara, ducking his head in case Wufei decided a slap on the back of his head was in order.

Fara lowered the punch. “Maybe you should let Wufei tell me he likes me on his own terms, without the influence of drugs?” His hazel gaze moved from the American to the Chinese man and he softened his expression. “If you want to go on a date, you just have to ask.” A playful smirk gathered at the corner of his lips. He was honestly flattered the other agent liked him.

Wufei mutely nodded and shifted uncomfortably, but logged that information away for later. Duo sighed and glanced up at Trowa. “Sorry… I thought it would be funny.”

“It’s clearly not funny to Heero.” Trowa said. He scanned the crowed but didn’t see the other. *Maybe he went back to his dorm room?* Shaking his head with a sigh, he looked back at the others. “Well now we’ve lost our Ryu.”

Duo frowned. He nodded and waved a hand in the direction of the door Heero had vanished through. “I guess I should tell him…” *He’s gonna fuckin’ kill me...*
“I’ll go.” Fara said, shoving his drink against Duo’s chest. His bare legs carried him out the door before Trowa could protest.

Heero hadn’t gone far, and he stood out like a sore thumb standing moping against the hallway that led to the elevator. He was rubbing his forehead, staring down at his bare feet, trying to sort out what had just happened. He didn’t think he had drunk that much.

The door closed quietly behind him. Faramond walked down the length of the hall and cautiously stood next to the other, pressing his back flat against the wall. He looked at the parallel wall as he spoke. “You’re probably thinking you’re crazy right now, or that you had too much to drink…” He paused and felt the silence settle between them for a few minutes before speaking again. “I was mad at you for what you said. I felt like you were flaunting your hot new boyfriend around all night and then when someone showed some interest in me, you told them off.” Fara turned his head to look at Heero. “Duo put a drug in your drink, on accident. It’s why you keep speaking your thoughts. He meant to give it to Wufei but his plan backfired.”

Heero looked up at the mention of the drug. His eyes widened, though they were bleary from the influence of the pill. “That explains a lot…” He sighed and dropped his hands to his sides. “I’m sorry if what I said hurt you. I don’t want any harsh feelings between us, Fara. You’re too important to me.”

But not important enough to date. Fara looked away again, palms pressing against the wall on either side of his body. “I hate the colors of these walls. I want to know who thought it was a brilliant idea to paint the halls avocado green.”

It was obvious that the blonde was trying to change the subject. He nodded and bit his lower lip, trying to think about the ugly green wall and not the feelings that were starting to swell up inside him. It was no use. “Wufei’s a good guy,” he blurted. “I didn’t mean that you shouldn’t date him… it wouldn’t bother me.” Not that it should, he didn’t own him. “I want you to be happy.”

“I know.” The fluorescent light above them flickered, a sign that it needed to be switched out soon. Fara continued to study the blank wall, suddenly hungry for an avocado. “Trowa’s pretty cute. Any guy who’s willing to dress in drag is a keeper in my book.”

Heero nodded. “He is amazing.” He raked his hand through his hair and sighed. “I don’t know if it is a good idea for me to return to that party. I’m not sure people want to know what I really think about them.”

“Are you heading back to your room, then? The night is still young...” Fara would be sad to see Heero go, but he understood.

Heero considered going back to his room. He was worried that he would only struggle with his loose lips for the rest of the night, but he had found relief in talking to Fara about the situation. He also felt guilty for leaving Trowa and the group. He finally sighed and nodded his consent. “Alright, let’s go back. We have a costume contest to win.”


Heero’s eyebrow raised at the demand and he hesitated before slipping his arms around the blonde’s smaller figure, his palms rested firmly against his lower back. “It’s taking everything in me not to touch your ass right now…” his drugged brain stupidly said. He visibly winced and
buried his head against Fara’s shoulder, irritated. It was going to be a LONG night, and he was definitely going to kill Duo.

The plastic cup clanked against the edge of the wastebasket before rolling inside. Trowa wasn’t sure how many punches he’d had that night, but he was going to guess that was the 4th. So much for only having a drink or two. He looked over his shoulder at Vega and Dhalsim, who were currently arguing.

“You should just ask him out. What’s the worst that could happen? He already told ya to ask him out!” Duo threw his hands up in the air, exasperated. He was careful not to stab anyone with his foam claws.

Wufei put his face in his hand, groaning. “Will you just drop it? He likes Heero. That’s the type of guy he’s obviously into. Do I look and act like Yuy? No.”

“Ya know, I always assumed you were a bad ass kung fu guy like Bruce Lee, but clearly you’re just a sad little softy…” Duo replied, attempting to agitate Wufei into action.

The Chinese agent’s spine stiffened and his arms crossed over his chest defiantly. “How can you possibly presume to know anything about me?”

Duo grinned, nonplussed. “Just callin’ it how I see it. You can go fight amazing battles all alone, but you can’t ask some pretty boy out on a simple date?”

Like an angry shark lunging at a chunk of chum, Wufei took the bait. “I have no fear of simple social interactions.”

“Alright, then.” Duo seemed to be attempting to damper his sense of accomplishment. “There he is, go get ‘em tiger.”

Heero was stalking across the room with his head down, avoiding looking at anyone as if by doing so he would unleash lasers from his eyes. Duo tried to busy himself by adjusting the long, red sash around his waist. He knew he was in trouble, but he hoped that Heero would drop it until after the party.

Faramond, AKA their Cammy, had entered the party close behind the sulky Ryu. All eyes were on him as he entered and crossed the room. Wufei scowled in Duo’s direction before bravely approaching the androgynous agent.

“Agent Maurel,” Wufei addressed him properly. “Would you kindly accompany me to dinner and a movie next weekend?”

Fara hadn’t realized this was the eighteen hundreds. “Why of course, Agent Chang.” The right corner of his mouth tugged up into an amused smirk. “I thought you’d never ask.”

Wufei, satisfied with Fara’s answer, nodded and pulled his cell phone out to give the blonde his number while Duo snickered under his breath: ‘what a fuckin’ nerd…’

Heero had walked past Duo and simply took a spot beside Trowa. Nearby a group of agents were playing beer pong on a door that had been taken off of its hinges and used to create an oblong playing field. He nudged Trowa’s elbow and tilted his head at the table an eyebrow quirked seeking his answer.
“You’re back,” Trowa hadn’t realized. He leaned in and pressed his nose against Heero’s cheek as a gesture of affection and relief. “You want to play beer pong?” The sound of the bouncing ping-pong ball caught his attention and he looked over curiously.

“Mn, yeah. But only if we make a wager…” Heero said, his previous seriousness vanishing with an amused smile. It was amazing how relaxed he felt around Trowa, even if the other pilot was towering over him with buns in his hair.

“Last time we made a bet it ended badly.”

“This won’t be anything serious,” Heero explained, his head feeling somewhat clearer. “If I win, you sleep with me in my bed tonight, if you win we sleep in yours…”

“That’s a win either way.” Trowa observed.

Heero smirked and reached up to caress Trowa’s jawline. “Yes.”

“All right. Mission accepted.” Trowa stood up with a smug look on his face. He loved stealing Heero’s line.

Heero smiled and led the way to the table. As they approached the other players were just finishing up. He began setting up his cups, filling them with water and eyeing the shots of vodka lining the corner of the table that the loser would be forced to take with each of their opponent’s direct hits. No longer did people use actual beer in the cups after what Duo called the ‘Great UCLA Herpes Outbreak of AD 2001’. Whatever that meant. Duo was always full of random, pop trivia references Heero never seemed to understand.

Once Trowa’s cups were all arranged in a triangular position he took his position behind them and waited for his partner to get situated.

“I think you should take a half step back,” Heero teased gesturing to Trowa’s position. “Your arms are longer than mine. You’ve got a distinct advantage.”

“Not my fault your growth spurt peaked at age 15. I’d still beat you, even with that half step.”

Trowa held the ball in his hand and eyed the red cups. He brought his arm up and with the flick of his wrist, tossed it into the cup farthest to the right.

Heero sighed, retrieved the ball and took the cup away from the ten cup line up before taking his shot. He narrowed his eyes at Trowa across the table, a smile gracing his vodka moistened lips. “You must have amnesia again, because you’re forgetting who you’re playing against…” he teased as he aimed and threw the ball AT Trowa. The ping pong ball bounced off of one of his fake breasts and landed in one of the center cups.

“Nice use of your surroundings.” The tactic made Trowa smile. He cleared the cup and then stood back to take another shot. This time the ball landed near the base of the triangle of cups, but it went in nonetheless. “Two out of two. Your turn, Iceman.

“You’re cute when you smile,” Heero said. He wasn’t sure if it was Duo’s drug or the alcohol that made him say it but he had no regrets about making such an admission. He lined up his next shot and let it fly. It landed on the edge of a center cup and bounced away from the table. A miss.

The ball dropped off the table and rolled along the floor towards Trowa’s white boots. “Not so perfect, are you?” He bent down to pick it up, then went over to grab a shot, holding it out for his partner. “Drink.”
“So we’re playing this game this way?” Heero murmured as he took the shot in hand and held it up to his lips. He wondered how much Trowa had to drink already. He hadn’t had much himself, but if he kept playing the game this way he would be well on his way to having a formidable hangover by morning. He tossed the vodka back and moved into position behind the cups Trowa was aiming for and decided to see if he could distract him. While standing behind the row he tugged at the front of his already open white costume gi and in doing so further exposed his abdomen, allowing the black belt tie to loosen. The size he had managed to procure from a colleague was a little big. He had to cut the legs to make them shorter, and the waistline was rather loose. It hung dangerously low on his hips and with the open front of his top the distinctive V-shape pelvic muscles over his hips were suddenly in plain view just at the level of the red dixie cups.

Trowa’s mouth started to hang open as he stared at the obvious view. He set the ball on the table and shook his head, the distraction working. “Okay, you win…” All he wanted to do now was find the nearest bed and pin Heero’s delicious body to it.

“Forfeit, already?” Heero’s expression was serious, his eyes narrowed. “Don’t tell me you’re that easy,” he teased. He grabbed a ping pong ball and tossed it at Duo, who was chatting with Fara and Wufei as well as another colleague nearby. It bounced off of the back of the American’s head. Duo turned around and searched the room frantically for his assailant. Heero stuffed his hands into his gi pockets and looked at Trowa, playing it off.

“Trowa, what gives?!” Duo shouted.

“It was him.” The man in a dress pointed at the man in the oversized gi. “Him and those naughty V-shape pelvic muscles…” Trowa had only one thing on his mind.

Heero raised an eyebrow at Trowa. His method of distraction against the taller pilot during the game definitely had its desired effect. He slid around the table and approached his partner while giving him an appraising look. “Looks like I won. Time for me to cash in on my winnings.” They’d played enough at being sociable for the night, hadn’t they?
Chapter 11

November | Colony L1

“So there are 4 rooms, but 5 of us. Who’s takin’ the couch?” Duo asked as the group of Preventer agents stumbled into the hotel suite. He looked around and grinned at the fancy digs, then quickly dashed off to the right to claim a room before they were all taken.

“I don’t mind taking the couch.” Trowa could fall asleep on just about anything.

Heero had already dropped his small, black duffle bag on the couch as if to claim it. “You’re too tall to sleep here,” he pointed out. The couch was more like a compact love seat and as much as Heero didn’t care to admit his short stature it was evident that he would fit there better.

Wufei sighed and picked a random room to toss his garment bag in and began sorting his things out in the small closet beside his bed. When he was done he poked his head out and spotted Fara in the room directly across from his. He padded past Heero, who was simply sitting on the couch checking his phone and stood in the doorway of the blonde’s room.

“I was wondering, since it is still kind of early, if you wanted to come downstairs with me to grab something to eat?” Wufei attempted as casually as he could.

Heero glanced up from checking his e-mails and smirked before turning his eyes back down to engage his phone again.

Fara looked over his shoulder curiously and smiled when he saw Wufei. “Sure.” It would be nice to get some decent food after the long flight from the moon to L1. He set his bag down on the bed, digging through it to find his wallet and phone before walking over to the door to stand in front of the other agent. “Ready when you are.”

Wufei politely offered an arm to his lovely companion and led him through the common area of their hotel suite to the front door. “Yuy, would you like us to bring anything back for you?”

Heero raised an eyebrow and shook his head. Clearly it was Wufei’s way of trying not to necessarily exclude him from going to dinner, but still making it obvious he didn’t want them to come. “No thanks.”

With a nod Wufei and Fara vanished from the hotel room leaving Trowa, Duo and Heero to get situated. Duo was already setting up his small laptop and tugging on his headphones. He had been obsessed with this new game, Overwatch, and had talked nonstop about wanting to get a game or two in while on the shuttle.

The ornate elevator doors slid open and the two men stepped out onto the polished marble floors of the hotel lobby. “On our way in it looked like there were several places to eat just down the street.” Fara said as he guided Wufei in the direction of the lobby doors.

They stepped outside into the stale colony air. The weather that day was sunny. Fara reached into his back pocket and fished out his over-sized sunglasses, perching them on the slim bridge of his nose. He was glad to stretch his legs after being cramped in the shuttle for 7 hours, trapped listening to Duo snore loudly in the seat to the left of him. “It’s been ages since I was last on L1… what kind of food are you in the mood for?”
“Anything but pizza,” Wufei admitted with a sigh. “Or ‘Chinese Take-Out’.” Which was just an abomination in itself. “You pick.” He wasn’t picky, except that … well, maybe he was, but he wanted to please Fara. He looked around casually and took in the eclectic buildings of L1. He was never a fan of the place, it was a gaudy fusion of Japanese and Russian culture that seemed to be trying too hard.

There was a little hole in the wall café up ahead. When they walked up to it, Fara looked at the menu that was mounted on the wall next to the entrance. “Salads, soups, sandwiches… Looks like a decent variety of options. How does that sound?” He looked over at Wufei, still holding on to his firm bicep.

Wufei studied the menu curiously and glanced over at Fara, conflicted. It seemed fine, but he had intended on taking him out and he thought he deserved something fancier than that. “If that’s what you want,” he conceded with a nod. “It’s fine.”

Fara could tell Wufei was in an indecisive mood, and the café was bustling with customers, which meant it had to be good. So he shrugged and pulled the other inside to find a seat near the windows.

Wufei flopped down into his seat and eyed the clientele with a sigh before turning his attention back to Fara who, as usual, was the prettiest person in the room. He couldn’t help but feel incredibly out of place with him sometimes. “You’ve been to L1 before?”

“It’s been probably 2 or 3 years since I was last here. I like this colony, but it’s not my favorite. I prefer L4. It’s bigger and there’s more to do there.” Fara slid his sunglasses off and set them aside so he could glance down at the menu. Originally from Earth, he had visited all of the colonies over the last few years either for school or work. The blonde, a couple years older than Wufei, had graduated college at an accelerated pace and joined Preventer right after.

“It sounds like you’re well traveled.” Wufei pointed the fact out with a smile. “If it weren’t for my… interesting childhood, I don’t think I would have been able to travel as much as I had. Life on my old colony was rather secluded.” He wondered what it would have been like to bring someone like Fara to L5. The colony was almost exclusively Chinese and having the lanky, gorgeous blonde show up would have most certainly given the elders heart palpitations. He was almost certain Meilan would have hated him, too. She wasn’t one for flashy people.

“My brother was in the military… I traveled a lot to see him.” Fara danced carefully around the topic, glancing up from the menu. Interesting childhood? He didn’t press. Since he was the Senior Risk Analyst, he had access to agent files and had scanned bits and pieces of Wufei’s before for previous cases. He knew the other had been a Gundam pilot, that he was from L5.

“I didn’t know you had a brother. Any other siblings?” Wufei paused in conversation to order a sandwich and waited for Fara to finish ordering before continuing. “I never had any.”

“I had a twin. No other siblings.” The waiter set down some glasses of water and walked away. Fara reached over for his, fingers sliding against the wet surface as he studied the slow melting ice. “He died in the war 5 years ago. I was… always against him joining the military from the start. I didn’t want him to go to war.”

Wufei frowned. He knew it was a sensitive topic. “I’m sorry to hear that.” He couldn’t even say that the soldier’s fight was for the better good. He didn’t know WHAT side he was fighting on, but he didn’t want to ask. It wasn’t important now. They were a unified world. “That must have been hard.” An awkward silence passed over them. Wufei wasn’t the best at comforting others. He always found himself becoming heavy handed whenever he tried. “We all lost so much back then,
which is why the work you do NOW is so important- to prevent others from ever having to LOSE the people closest to them over such things."

“And that is exactly why I joined Preventer.” That was why they had all joined Preventer, even the former Gundam Pilots. “I don’t really talk about my brother, Louie, anymore…” Fara wasn’t sure why it was so easy to talk to Wufei about this, he hadn’t even told Heero about his twin, but the words continued to leak from his mouth, as if they’d been waiting years to re-surface.

“I was the black sheep in my family. Never really fit in. It was clear to me that my parents favored Louie, but I couldn’t hold that against him. He was more masculine… went off to fight the war to defend the Earth. They were so proud of him. I was a bookworm and very much against war.” His fingers pinched the plastic straw in his water and he casually stirred it around, watching the ice cubes swirl.

“Are you still in contact with your family?” Wufei asked, studying Fara’s fingers as they twirled the straw.

“Yes. They still live in France, but I don’t see them often. Things haven’t been the same since Louie died. And they weren’t happy when I ‘ran off to space’ after college.”

The server arrived with their food. Wufei nibbled at his for a little bit before replying, “They’re missing out by not talking to you. You’re lovely, you shouldn’t feel ashamed about anything.”

“Do you think I am ashamed?” Fara asked curiously, picking up his fork and poking at the lettuce on his plate.

“I suppose not,” Wufei said with a shrug. “I wouldn’t be.” He wasn’t ashamed of any decisions in his life.

The confident response earned a soft laugh from the blonde man.

Heero had been dozing on the couch when Wufei and Fara returned quite a while later. He heard the door open and kept his eyes closed as the two murmured something to one another before two separate doors clicked shut. He reached over his head and grabbed his cell phone to check the time. It was nearly midnight. He pushed himself up to a sit and peered over the back of the couch into Duo’s room. The American agent was still at his game, clicking and tapping his laptop keys with his oversized gaming headphones on. Trowa’s door appeared closed but upon further inspection it had been left slightly ajar. Heero slipped quietly off of the couch and crept through the darkness of the common room and slowly slid Trowa’s door open just enough to come through it before letting it click to a shut behind him. He could see Trowa’s form curled up beneath the blankets on its side in the dark. Using his innate assassin skills he slipped up to the bed, tugged the blanket back and slipped under the covers behind him. There was NO way Trowa, a Gundam pilot and trained mercenary, DIDN’T hear him as he entered. Heero wasn’t worried about startling him so he reached around with one hand to snap his palm over Trowa’s mouth and leaned into his back, his lips playfully accosting the taller pilot’s long, smooth neck.

Eyes slid open and adjusted to the darkness veiling the room. Trowa felt the hand around his mouth, the kisses trailing along sensitive skin. Of course he knew who had intruded, their warm body pressed up against his own. Heero’s body was quickly becoming familiar again. Under the hazy spell of sleep, he lay still as his partner gripped his wrists, pulling his arms carefully behind his back and pinning them there, the other hand still around his mouth.
Heero smirked against the side of Trowa’s neck as the other pilot became pliable in his hands and failed to resist him. Holding Trowa’s hands firmly against his bare lower back he slowly worked his mouth down the side of his neck, over his bare shoulder nipping the raised edge of the blade as he moved his way down his spine. The hand holding Trowa’s mouth slipped down the front of his torso and slowly pressed his palm against his lower abdomen, his fingertips teasing the softness below his belly button.

The gentle kisses and closeness of his partner were starting to have an effect on Trowa’s drowsy body. His dick hung against his thigh, semi erect and fully focused, and he let out a soft groan, pushing back against Heero’s frame. He had no idea what time it was, only that his crush had awoken him from sleep in the most desirable way possible.

Heero decided the push back into him was a passive enough way of giving permission. That’s all he needed. He gently pushed Trowa onto his back and slipped under the blankets and decided to give him some attention while he could. He smiled as he took his lover’s rousing cock into his mouth and gave it a gentle suck, his hands grabbing the other pilot’s ass with both hands and lifted his hips up towards his mouth. There was nothing more adorable than groggy, disoriented but willing Trowa in Heero’s opinion.

“Shit,” Trowa gasped softly, fingers finding Heero’s soft hair. “…this isn’t a dream, is it?” His arousal came to life inside his partner’s inviting mouth and his abdomen muscles clenched.

Heero continued lavishing attention on Trowa’s body, hidden beneath the blanket, fingers massaging his tightening ass and tongue sliding slowly across the underside of his arousal. He broke the seal of his mouth for a moment to murmur, “just a dream…” before continuing his personal mission of pleasuring the handsome body beneath him.

Trowa nodded and closed his eyes, letting his senses take over. When it was over and he came inside Heero’s mouth, he let his arms drop to his sides and panted softly, body shivering as the last waves of pleasure crashed over him.

After swallowing everything his lover had offered him, Heero crawled up the length of Trowa’s trembling body and settled into the bed beside him, wrapping his arms firmly around the taller pilot in an attempt to hold him together while he rode his wave of pleasure.

“I’m sorry, you were too close for me not to come in here…” Heero admitted with a sigh. “You left the door open.”

“No need to apologize.” Trowa turned so he could face the other, their heads sharing the same pillow. “I’m glad you came in… I was hoping you would.”

A heavy silence filled the room, as if the residual negative energy from Heero’s previous ponderings earlier that night had followed him into the room to see Trowa. He had hoped being with his lover would clear his mind and allow him a chance to release the personal tension that surrounded this this trip. Unfortunately he was still plagued by his own lingering thoughts.

“I’m not a big fan of L1,” Heero murmured finally, voicing his thoughts.

“Why’s that?” Trowa wrapped his arms around his partner, sensing something was off.

“It’s where I’m from,” Heero admitted with a sigh. “Where I was trained for Operation Meteor. Underground, here… and hidden on the back of this colony’s corresponding resource satellite.” Any time Heero came back to L1 he felt on edge, and despite his wish to just delve into his work and simply keep himself too busy to think on it, L1 always served as a harsh reminder of the
extreme training he had endured through the Colony Liberation Organization. “I was deployed directly from here with Wing.”

That had always been assumed. Trowa reached up to run a hand through Heero’s hair, pulling it back and away from his face. He found that he was addicted to the feeling of those soft locks rubbing against his fingertips, tickling his knuckles. He repeated the motion over and over again. “You were trained differently than the rest of us.” It wasn’t a question.

“More like brainwashed,” Heero replied, his voice faint. “I was taught that I had no other purpose. That my only function in life was to perform my duties, to fulfill my missions, and then I was instructed to dispose of myself…” He had never told anyone this, not even Relena. He tilted his head to the side into Trowa’s hand, his scalp tingling as his hair was shifted around gently. “That was why I did it... Why I self-detonated. The order wasn’t to kill myself and to destroy the Gundam, simply that my mission was over and to destroy Wing before OZ could get it.” He paused, his expression blank. “I chose to go with it, because I no longer had a purpose. I had no mission to accomplish. It was over.”

Trowa understood. He had felt that way several times during Operation Meteor. It wasn’t until he found Catherine and the circus that he felt like he had a purpose in life, one that went beyond being a soldier. But it was still a constant internal struggle of his, finding meaning in life after the war is over, when soldiers were no longer needed.

“…Do you feel like you have no purpose now that Relena is gone?” Hands stilled in Heero’s hair.

“I feel like my purpose is to find her killer… but I am failing at that.” He sighed and closed his eyes, the thought had been nagging him for a while. It had been making it difficult to sleep. “I can’t stop thinking about it.”

“And then what. After you find the killer, what will happen? What will your purpose be?”

“I don’t know,” Heero admitted. “I guess just continuing the work she had, protecting the peace we all fought to establish…” The fact that he had no direction and no wants and goals of his own making was depressing, but he couldn’t fathom what his future would be. He didn’t know what he wanted. He was just floating helplessly adrift, flitting here and there searching for a fight to win. It was all he knew how to do. “I don’t know.”

“Why do you feel you need to follow her footsteps? What about what you want? Why not live for yourself…” Trowa’s hand traveled down from Heero’s hair to his neck.

Opening his confused Prussian blue eyes, Heero’s expression slackened, his confusion obvious. “I don’t know, Trowa.” The truth was he didn’t know how to make decisions for himself. He had been trained to follow the lead of a political figure, to bring the ghost of Heero Yuy’s dreams to reality. Now that was done, he found himself clinging to the next best thing. Relena. Now she was gone. “I don’t know how else to live.”

“I understand.” Trowa didn’t push any further. It was a sensitive topic, a hard one to talk about, and he knew it first hand. In their own ways, all 5 of the ex-Gundam pilots were struggling with what to do with their lives. Having been the only true soldiers, Heero and Trowa struggled most of all. Neither thought they would even survive the war, so they had neglected to plan for their futures. Now here they were, five years later, trying to fit in with other civilians. At least he had his sister and the circus, a home and someone to return too. Heero still lacked that, and it made Trowa’s heart ache.

Heero shut his eyes in an attempt to shut out all of the forceful, painful memories that kept flooding
into his brain. “I’ll just be glad to get out of here after that gala,” he said plainly, wrapping his arms
tighter around the taller pilot, seeking out his body’s comforting warmth.

Trowa pulled the covers over both their bodies and tucked Heero’s head under his chin, his hand at
the base of his partner’s skull. He closed his eyes. “Sleep. You’re not returning to the couch
tonight…”

Heero had arrived at the gala a few hours before it began to run security from the inside,
monitoring the vendors who had been hired to set up the party at the L1 Colony Museum Of
Modern Art. He hadn’t announced that he was working security. The assignment required that he
move about in plain clothes and keep an eye out for any suspicious activities. Earth’s recent
bombings had required that every large event or social gathering have a boosted police presence as
well as extra security. This event, the Annual Preventer Donor Gala, would be chocked full of
dignitaries, politicians and business leaders who had contributed in some form or fashion to the
establishment of Preventer as an organization.

Heero had been to this event every year since the end of the Eve War. It used to be customary that
the Cinq Kingdom host the event, but since Relena’s passing the committee that ran the function
decided to have it here on L1 so as not to put any extra strain on Milliardo and his family estate in
their time of mourning.

It was the first year Heero was in attendance without Relena, and what was worse a small memorial
had been established at the far end of the massive open lobby area in her honor. A massive painting
of Relena in her Cinq Kingdom dress had been hung on the wall, surrounded by candid pictures of
her smiling and laughing, news clippings celebrating her accomplishments and enormous vases
filled with her favorite flower- white and orange tiger lilies.

Every time Heero walked by it his stomach ached. He kept finding himself becoming distracted,
staring at Relena’s placid and calm portrait, the images of her autopsy photos flashing through his
thoughts.

He turned his back to the memorial wall and checked his watch. Guests were arriving, immediately
gathering around the food tables and bar. He glanced around, searching for his fellow agents.

On the opposite end of the room Trowa stood with Quatre attached to his arm. He was working
security that night as well, specifically ordered to stay close to the Winner heir throughout the
evening. They were talking with Duo, Wufei, and Fara and everyone was dressed up in their nicest
suits. He felt Quatre’s fingers tightened around his bicep. He could tell the other was feeling
uncharacteristically nervous that evening, so he did his best to stay by his side and exude calmness.

Heero spotted his companions standing together beside the newly donated statue that had been
given to the museum in honor of Preventer’s work maintaining world peace. It was a massive
circular structure that supposedly depicted the cycle of war and peace with a chunk missing out of
the side. A white marble chunk was lying on the ground beside the massive carved black granite,
symbolizing the ‘peace’ in which they lived. Heero had heard the artist explain his work to a few
of the organizers earlier that afternoon.

He tucked his hands in his pockets as he stepped through the growing crowd to join his colleagues.
He nodded to everyone in greeting before approaching Trowa and leaning in to speak to him
quietly, his fingers slipping out of his pocket to gently caress the top of the former Heavyarms
pilot’s free hand.
“Did you bring it?” Heero asked, quirking an eyebrow at his partner.

Trowa gave a silent nod and gently pulled his arm from Quatre’s grip. He slid his hand to the inside of his jacket, gripping the spare magazine. “It’s not like you to forget things.” He murmured, discreetly handing it to his partner.

Heero deftly took the extra magazine and slid it beneath his dark, navy blue suit jacket in a hidden pocket he had sewn there himself. His side arm was nestled firmly against his left side, flush with his body and well hidden beneath his tailored suit. He buttoned the top button of his jacket before tilting his head towards the refreshment table as if to silently say ‘I need to talk to you for a minute’ before looking over at Duo, Wufei and Fara who were all debating on whether a nearby modern black and white colorblock painting was a HAPPY painting or a SAD one.

“Can I get you a drink?” Heero asked the group in general. Wufei blinked, pausing in the middle of his explanation and nodded. Fara as well. Duo shook his head and grinned.

“Nah, you know I don’t go anywhere without my own to wet my whistle,” the American said with a smile as he pat the blatant outline of a flask tucked beneath his black suit.

Trowa took the hint and followed Heero to grab the refreshments. Once they were standing over the row of flutes filled with pink champagne, he turned to the other and said, “Is something on your mind?”

“I was approached by a police officer earlier this afternoon when I first arrived,” Heero said as he began gathering two glasses for Wufei and Fara. “And they pulled me outside to question me about Relena and Paris.” He sighed and turned around to face Trowa, his expression placid but his lips were pressed together, an obvious sign of his concern. “It’s been months. Why here? Why now, after my alibi had already been cleared?”

The case had been turned over to Preventer months ago. Why were the police still involved at the interrogation level? It didn’t make sense. Trowa frowned, picking up a flute for Quatre. “You’ve been cleared by Preventer, who now owns the case. The police don’t really have a right to question you.”

“I know, but I didn’t want to fight them. Not here. It didn’t seem like an appropriate time…” Heero sighed and slowly began making his way back towards their friends. “Don’t let the others know yet. I’m going to tell Noin once we’re back at the lunar base. I just… I needed to tell someone.”

Trowa stood in front of Heero, stopping him from walking any further. He looked down with a serious expression, voice hushed. “If you think you’re in some kind of trouble, you’d tell me.” Right? Something was off and they could both feel it. Trowa was loath to let his partner out of his sight the rest of the evening, unrest pitted in his stomach.

“If I knew, I would tell you…” said Heero with a sigh. “I don’t know what to think.” Despite having a drink clutched in each hand he reached up to press both of his wrists against Trowa’s shoulders reassuringly. “I suppose I should be happy, they’re at least actively trying to solve it… I just am not sure why I was revisited.”

Although he didn’t show it, Trowa was uncomfortable with the idea that anyone could think Heero would have had anything to do with Relena’s murder. His protective instincts were starting to kick in, unique feelings for the other that had grown out of spending over a month nurturing his broken body back to health after the failed attempt at self destruction. A protective lioness watching out for her cub, always on alert.
As they stood there, paused for a moment in a sea of patrons, Trowa searched his partner’s handsome face. Their gaze locked and he watched his piercing blue eyes, looking for any signs that Heero wasn’t telling him the entire story, that something was wrong, that he needed his help. He found nothing.

Heero’s expression shifted from deep thought to surprise, the tension in his mouth dissipated as he stared up at Trowa as if he had just realized something. His hands, still clutching the champagne flutes, dropped from Trowa’s shoulders and a somewhat amused expression shimmered across his dark eyes.

It had just occurred to Heero that Trowa looked absolutely stunning just now in his deep, jewel-tone purple tightly fitted suit, his expression protective and tense. He had been caught off guard by that frowning, serious yet handsome face.

“If we weren’t on active assignment right now, I would kiss you…” Heero murmured only loud enough for his partner to hear.

“You would do more than just kiss me.” Trowa murmured, looking at his partner knowingly. His eyes raked over Heero’s body, taking in the tailored, dark blue suit that complimented his brown hair. He reached out and ran his hand along the side of the expensive jacket, pressing it over the outline of the gun that he knew was there, able to identify the make and model as his fingers traced the lines.

Trowa was right, Heero would do more than just kiss him. The taller, lithe pilot was like a magnet for his hands. Whenever he was around all he wanted to do was touch him, press his hands against him as if to verify that he was real. It was hard to process how someone could be so elegant and absolutely deadly at the same time. Not to mention the fact that Trowa was interested in him , a fact that he couldn’t seem to fathom either. He didn’t feel like he deserved him sometimes.

Heero was jolted out of his sudden swarm of thoughts by someone walking by and accidently bumping his shoulder. He blinked, licked his lower lip and sighed.

“Stop looking so sexy in that suit, you’re distracting me,” Heero grumbled in mock annoyance before forcing himself to walk in the direction of his companions.

“Same goes for you.” Trowa said before they rejoined the group. He handed the champagne to Quatre and let the blonde attach himself to his arm once again.

“I was wondering if ya got lost,” Duo teased once the two had returned. He eyed Trowa closely before glancing at Heero with a knowing smirk. He pulled his flask from his pocket and stole a swig before holding it out in offering to the others. “It’s 99 Bananas. Tastes like Laffy Taffy. Wanna try?”

Heero glanced around the room after hearing the distinct sound of a familiar laugh echo across the room. His shoulders tensed as he recognized the pitch and tone immediately and spotted the long curtain of platinum blonde hair sliding through the crowd on a warpath in their direction.

Fara shook his head at Duo when the flask was shoved in his face. “That sounds like cheap liquor. I don’t waste my time with the cheap stuff.” Not to mention it would make your gut rot. Wufei, Trowa and Quatre politely declined as well, deciding to stick to the pink champagne.

The sound of Dorothy’s voice carried and Quatre froze as her loud laugh echoed. Maybe if I don’t turn and look, she won’t come over here... Already suffering from a headache that evening, he was afraid her presence would make it worse. His fingers gave Trowa’s bicep a light squeeze as the
sound of high heels clicking against the marbled floors approached.

“Ah there they are! Boys!” Dorothy practically dragged her tall, blonde companion with her as she waved a black gloved hand in their direction to flag them down. “You must meet them, they’re absolutely charming! Quatre! I know you can hear me!”

Heero watched as Dorothy approached with a man in a crisp, white suit snared in her arm. It was hard to miss him, attached at the hip with the gregarious blonde woman clad in the sparkliest red dress Heero had ever seen. Knowing Dorothy it was more than likely couture, and limited edition.

“Ah, Heero. Lovely to see you,” she said as she came into their group, offering the top of her hand for him to kiss. He grasped it gently and gave it a small shake, which only made her laugh. “Quatre, and your tall clown friend.” Dorothy had seen one of their ‘quaint’ little circus performances with Relena, who had made a point of stopping in with Quatre the last time the blonde and the former Princess of Cinq were on L4. Dorothy had tagged along. She probably would never go again. The smell of sawdust and sweaty bodies hanging from ropes wasn’t really her scene.

“Chang Wufei and … well, who is this?” She eyed Fara curiously.

“Agent Faramond Maurel,” Wufei introduced him politely. “This is Miss Dorothy Catalonia.”

“I know who she is.” Fara smiled politely although there was a hint of judgment in his sparkling hazel eyes. Everyone knew who Dorothy Catalonia was. She had quite the reputation. “Nice to meet you.” He said, taking her hand when it was offered but otherwise keeping his distance. She was a viper hiding in a red dress, although Faramond was confident he could take her on in a battle of words if prompted. One of the few things they had in common was a sharp tongue. And fabulous eyebrows, although his were cleaner.

“Charmed,” Dorothy replied politely, mirroring Maurel’s judgemental glance before turning her attention to the man attached to her arm. “This is Thomas Bernard, he is my absolutely adorable date for this evening…” She gestured to the man beside her, approximately the same age as the Gundam Pilots clad in a fine Italian leather shoes and designer suit. He was average in appearance at best, with wide-set enormous eyes and a sloping forehead half covered by shocks of platinum blonde hair. He held his hand out to politely greet each agent in turn before stopping on Heero, his hand stiffening and refusing to release after a couple of shakes.

“Heero Yuy it’s been a while,” Thomas Bernard said with a smile. Heero quirked a brow at him his confusion apparent.

“… have we met?”

Thomas laughed. “I didn’t think you would remember me… does an ambulance and a naval base ring a bell? A party?”

Heero tilted his head and kept his hand firmly gripped with the blonde’s, his expression thoughtful. He said nothing.

“You nearly took my eye out in a fencing match. Saber right through the mask…?”


Thomas laughed again and nodded before finally releasing Heero’s hand. “So many years ago.
You look much the same, though you aren’t as skinny as you used to be…” He looked to the other Preventers and smiled. “This guy terrified every girl in that school, and yet they all loved him for it.”

Heero shifted uncomfortably, especially once he realized that Dorothy was studying him with a catlike grin.

“Poor Relena,” Dorothy said suddenly, drawing the attention to herself again. “All she wanted was for Heero to come to her birthday party…”

Wufei noticed Heero was shrinking under the weight of the conversation and quickly decided to change the subject. “Mister Bernard, how did you meet Dorothy?”

Thomas Bernard smiled and leaned into Dorothy with a happy sigh. “Relena introduced us a couple of summers ago… even after all this time, Relena and I remained very close.”

Heero’s eyes narrowed at the statement. He didn’t recall Relena ever mentioning this guy, or speaking of him and the past.

Trowa noticed the way Tom and Dorothy were looking at Heero, like two hungry predators. He kept silent as he continued to watch closely, analyzing their body language, facial expressions, and voice.

To keep the conversation moving Quatre turned to Dorothy and said, “That dress is lovely. Who is the designer?” He really didn’t care. He just wanted her to go away. The pounding inside his head increased with each fake word that came out of her mouth, but he continued being polite.

In the middle of Dorothy’s explanation about how she had sent for a man who used to be a dressmaker on L5 and had HIM come to Earth specifically to design her gown for her a trio of L1 Police Department officers came through the crowd. All of the patrons who saw them paused mid-conversation to watch as they made their way straight for the group of Preventer officers as if one of them were wearing a homing beacon.

Duo gawked as the men approached and immediately grabbed Heero by the arms. “Hey, what the hell is all this?!”

“Heero Yuy? You’re under arrest for the murder of Relena Peacecraft,” the main officer said swiftly as he and one of his companions wrenched Heero’s wrists behind his back and began cuffing him.

“Oh my, this has to be some sort of mistake,” Dorothy exclaimed as she watched in theatrical horror.

It took everything in Heero not to retaliate to being roughly handled. His reflexes screamed and strained, wanting to fight the hands that were binding him. He sighed and looked to the ground, annoyed. He had a feeling something like this was coming, but he hadn’t expected it to happen at the gala itself.

“Oh hell no, don’t you know who HE IS?” Duo’s voice was uncharacteristically shaken. He tried to put himself between one of the officers and Heero. The officer replied by putting her hand on her side arm and giving the American a warning glare.

“We are very aware of who he is,” the arresting officer replied.

“Fuck this, this is ridiculous. He’s a fucking Preventer-”
“Duo… stop,” Heero muttered, his eyes still downcast. He didn’t want the other agent to get into trouble over something that must have been a simple mistake.

Trowa stepped forward this time, putting himself in between the officers and Heero. “The case is under Preventer supervision, not the police force. Agent Yuy has already been cleared with proof that he was not in France during the time of Miss Peacecraft’s death. Release him.” His voice was firm, eyes narrowed as he dug into his pocket for his Preventer badge. Fara and Quatre stepped up as well, standing next to Trowa in support.

“New evidence has been found that links Mister Yuy to the death of Miss Relena Peacecraft,” one of the officers said, obviously frustrated. “If you want to challenge this matter you can come down to the station. In the meantime we have our orders.”

The man nodded to his companions to direct them to go ahead and take the suspect in. Heero looked over his shoulder as he was carted away and gave Trowa one last glance- urging him silently to let it go. He was confident this was a mix-up, albeit an annoying and poorly timed one. He followed the officer’s lead willingly.

Duo was pacing around in his two foot by two foot personal bubble, throwing his arms up irritably. “This is fucking outrageous!”

“Yes, shocking…” Dorothy murmured as she watched them take Heero away. Thomas Bernard was watching with a blank expression. He looked back at the other Preventers, his expression concerned. “Relena had said that their relationship had been rocky…”

“You know nothing about him.” Trowa said icily, turning on his heels and walking away in search of Noin. He wasn’t going to stand by while his partner was wrongfully hauled in. Especially when the police had no right to interfere in the case.

“Why didn’t you stop them from taking Heero?” Fara looked over at Wufei, eyes narrowed.

Wufei gawked, his hands held up. “There is a way of going about this,” he admitted to Fara, “and a fight in the middle of a gala is not one of them.”

“Well, I dunno about you, but I am totally done with this party,” Duo snarled, storming off in a random direction and wondering whether his lockpick kit was back at the hotel in his backpack or not. Quatre sighed and turned to follow close on Trowa’s heels as he hunted down Noin.

Dorothy stared in awe as the Preventer agents dispersed. She wasn’t happy about Trowa being so venomous to her date, either. “I’m sorry about that. I don’t know why he was being so rude.

Thomas smiled and shook his head, taking the hand of his lovely date. “Don’t worry about it. Everything will be alright in the end,” he said softly, kissing the back of the blonde woman’s petite hand through her glove.
Duo had spent the majority of the following morning sulking around the hotel room. He was so freaked out that he couldn’t even eat. The idea of anyone arresting HEERO for the death of Relena was mind boggling to him. The guy practically worshipped the ground the chick walked on, and he had every opportunity to kill her during the wars. Many times from what Duo could recall- why would he wait until now?

All he could think about was how absolutely devastated Heero seemed to have been right after her death. Sure he seemed to be doing better now but some time had passed, and the guy was adaptable. It also seemed to help that he had Trowa, now, too.

Duo glanced up at Trowa, a worried expression on his face, his take-out thai food sitting cold on the little table in the center of the common room of their hotel suite. “You gonna be okay, man?” Trowa had been unusually quiet all night. He hadn’t said a word since they got back to the hotel.

His boyfriend-no, that wasn’t the right label. His partner had just been hauled off to jail for a crime he didn’t commit. Of course Trowa seemed preoccupied. He looked over at Duo and nodded. “I’m fine.” In his mind he had been listing all possible ways to free Heero, including going down to the station on his own to break him out.

I’m not a big fan of L1… I’ll just be glad to get out of here after that gala…

He perched his elbows on his thighs and leaned forward, placing his head in his hands. There was a dull thump against his temples, early signs of a raging headache to come.

In the other hotel room behind a closed door Fara was interrogating Wufei. “There has to be something we can do. Trowa was right, the case of Relena’s death is under Preventer NOT the police force. Under what grounds did they have the right to arrest Heero?” He sat on the edge of the bed, arms crossed over his chest. “We have to do something… You know this isn’t right. Heero would never harm Relena.”

“Of course I know that,” Wufei said sourly as he scowled down at his laptop, picking through different laws and regulations. “According to this e-mail from Une, Paris PD, which had the case first, are the ones who were given this ‘new information’. They were the ones who called L1 to have them apprehend him. They’re taking him to Paris, it looks like…” He sighed and looked up from his laptop to study Fara with a worried expression. “The original filer of the charges can take control of the case at any time if new information becomes available. They only handed it to us because they didn’t want to waste their manpower on such a high profile but dead end case. Now, it seems, they’re interested again…”

Wufei sat up in his chair and crossed his arms over his chest. “I want to know what it is they think they have on Heero… and I want to know if he’s told us the entire story. Something is off about this case, and I just can’t quite put my finger on it…”

“Merde.” Fara cursed and slid off the bed to pace the room. “Does it say when they are transferring him to Paris?” The blonde strode over to the computer and looked over Wufei’s shoulder, eyebrow twitching in irritation. He hadn’t been home in over 3 years…

“No, but I suspect not for a few days. The police are rather involved in keeping L1 clear of threats with all of these diplomats around,” Wufei grumbled with a dark frown. “If we could just get them to hand him over to us, maybe they’ll let us transfer him for them…” Wufei wasn’t sure if they
would, but it was worth a shot to ask.

“We’d need to come up with a good reason.” It was hot in the hotel room and Fara was still in his fancy suit. He shrugged off the black jacket, tossing it casually onto the bed, then started to undo the first few buttons on his white dress shirt, his collarbones peeking out from the newly made opening. He swept his hair over his shoulder and resumed his pacing. “If they are so busy, maybe they wouldn’t mind Preventer helping them. We could try that angle…”

“That’s what I’m thinking,” Wufei replied. “We can make it seem like we had a shuttle already en route to Europe, and that we could easily take him with us. Even if we volunteer to have one of their men ride with us, it is better than nothing. Then perhaps Yuy can tell us what they’re holding against him- if he knows…”

“It’s well within his right to know.” Fara put his hand on Wufei’s shoulder, leaning in to squint at something on the screen. His hair brushed against the other agent’s ear. “Let’s do it. We should go down to the station tonight and offer our assistance.”

Wufei reached up to gently pat Fara’s hand. “You’re a good friend. Heero is lucky to have you…” Unlike Barton, who seemed to be falling apart, Fara had been determined to do something. “I’ll e-mail Noin telling her what we propose to do, and hopefully they’ll give us an extra shuttle to use.”

“Thank you.” Fara gave Wufei’s hand an affectionate squeeze before pulling away. He went to his bag and pulled out his Preventer jacket and a shirt. “I’m going to change out of this.” He gestured to the remainder of his formal wear and then headed to the bathroom.

“Alright, I’ll let the others know what the plan is,” Wufei said, watching Fara drift off into the bathroom. He had hoped that he would be able to spend more one on one time with the other agent on what was supposed to be a fun, recreational trip but it seemed things had changed. He got up from the bed and poked his head out into the common area where Duo was poking at a bowl of noodles with a frustrated expression while Trowa sat with his head in his hands. He took a seat beside Trowa and pressed a hand to his shoulder in his best reassuring gesture. “It will be alright,” God he sounded weak… “Fara and I have come up with a plan. We’re going to try and see if we can get them to agree to let us transfer Heero from L1 to Paris for them.”

Duo looked up, a wicked grin on his face. “So we can break him out of custody?! I know some really awesome places to hide out around L2…”

“No!” Wufei blurted, scowling again. “So we can sort things out with him, come up with a defense if they do have any evidence…”

“I’m not going to escort him from one prison to another.” Trowa said stubbornly. How could he do that? He straightened his back and looked over at the Chinese man. “He didn’t do it. Whatever ‘evidence’ they have is false.”

Wufei sighed and rolled his eyes. “I know. I’m not saying he’s guilty, I’m saying we have to play by their rules. This could just be some hoax, or a misunderstanding. If he’s innocent, we’ll be able to clear him. In the meantime, Barton, we have to play their game.”

Duo forked his mouth full of noodles and nodded before saying muffled through his bite, “I still say we bweak him owwwwt…”

“What do you mean IF he’s innocent?” Trowa pulled the navy blue tie from around his neck, wrapping it around his hand in a fidgeting manor. “He is innocent.” Wufei was right, though. They would have to play by the rules and he knew Heero would want it that way. If they went in and
'busted' him out, it would make him look even more guilty.

Wufei frowned again and crossed his arms over his chest. It was clear that Trowa was touchy about the topic. “We don’t know what they’ve got to implicate him…” he reminded him calmly. “Whatever it is has to be strong evidence that makes him look guilty enough to press charges. I keep feeling like he’s holding something back from us. He needs to be completely open and honest otherwise we can’t help him. Whatever they’ve got on him, we don’t know about otherwise our lawyers would have warned him.”

“What could they POSSIBLY have?” Duo growled through another mouthful of noodles. He swallowed them down hard and sighed. “Other than his entire teenage childhood he spent protectin’ HER!”

“People change,” Wufei said slowly. “Actions speak louder than words, yes, but people grow up. They could be trying to make his dedication out to be borderline obsession…”

“He’s being framed.” It was obvious now. Someone was trying to frame Heero, and the attacks around the Earth, on the satellites, and on Relena where all related. They had to be. Trowa stood up.

“Where are you going?” Duo asked, hopping up as well, eager to help in any way he could. “Tell me we’re goin’ to bust him out,” he added with a smirk.

“I was going to change out of these clothes.” Trowa gave the over eager agent a look before disappearing into his room.

Wufei looked down at his tablet and scowled at the fourth correspondence e-mail that had been returned to him from the Paris PD. Each e-mail had nothing but roundabout information and elusive language. They weren’t trying to HELP them to figure out what was happening at all.

The chime for the overhead intercom sounded. The Preventer pilot assigned to the shuttle on loan to bring Heero to Paris spoke over the intercom. “We’re preparing for our descent through the mesosphere. Please take your seats and strap in for transfer to the planet…”

Wufei reached to the side of his seat and buckled his lap strap before looking up at the seat facing his. “It’s been a while since I’ve been to Earth,” he admitted to agent Maurel.

“Same here. Three years to be exact.” Fara crossed his legs and calmly looked over at the other.

“Oh, that’s right, you’re from Paris,” Wufei thought aloud. “Are you going to visit your family?” He spotted some movement from the rear of the shuttle. Heero’s guard, an L1 Police Officer, had gotten up and was walking to the rear of the shuttle to use the on board restroom. Heero himself hadn’t been allowed to interact with any of them, much to Wufei’s dismay. The former Wing pilot had spent the entire trip seated behind his escort officer with his eyes closed, handcuffed to his seat. He narrowed his eyes at Fara. “The officer is getting up, we should use this time to see if Heero knows anything…”

Fara nodded and waited until the officer was out of sight before unbuckling his seatbelt. When he stood he immediately saw Trowa whiz past him down the aisle. Apparently he had been waiting for the short window of opportunity as well. Heero was going to have a group of visitors.

Trowa took the seat next to his partner and leaned in, making sure to keep his demeanor calm and patient even though he was feeling anything but. “How are you holding up?” He hadn’t talked to
the other since his arrest at the Gala. Unfortunately Heero didn’t have time to answer. As soon as the agent opened his eyes Wufei and Fara were standing over them, urgency written all over their stern faces. The blonde took the empty seat across from Heero, knowing they had only a few minutes to extract the information they needed. “We need to talk.”

“I’m fine,” Heero said plainly, addressing Trowa first. He had a few interrogation bruises beneath his shirt but he wasn’t going to divulge that information. He had experienced worse. “They’ve got an e-mail that Relena supposedly sent to someone who then reported this information to police. In this e-mail she claims that I had threatened to kill her because she was in love with someone else, and that I went to Russia after she kicked me out.” His expression darkened. “They won’t give me any more details, only continue to insist that this e-mail was real and of course that I should confess to having an abusive relationship with her. That I was controlling, and that it could be possible that she was in fear for her life.”

Wufei scowled. “What e-mail address was this sent from?”

“They won’t tell me, only that it was ‘her’ e-mail. She had a few- some for work, some personal. If you go on my work account I have sent her e-mails from that address to both.”

“He’s being framed.” Trowa repeated his suspicion from the night before and Fara nodded his agreement, leaning in closer to inspect Heero. Something under the collar of his shirt was calling his attention. “It certainly seems that way.” The blonde reached out and pushed aside the collar to expose the light signs of bruising. “It looks like you’ve been enjoying L1’s 5-star hospitality.” Nothing got past him.

“They weren’t very happy about my pointing out their incompetence,” Heero replied plainly. “It’s fine.” He shrugged a shoulder and looked to Wufei with a sigh. “I don’t know who would want to frame me, the only thing I can think of is someone wanted what Relena had left for me in her will- but I gave all of that up and left it to the estate. I can’t think of anyone or any other motivation.” He shook his head and shifted his shackled wrists.

“I’ll look over the reports from all the cases you’ve done for Preventer… see if any names stand out.” Fara offered, thinking that would at least be a starting point. “We’ll log into your email account and dig around. Hopefully you have nothing personal stored there.” It was his attempt to lighten the mood a little, still unable to rein in his naturally flirtatious behavior around Heero.

It was probably best that Fara was the one who was logging into his e-mail, considering it was the blonde agent who he had e-mailed concerning meet-ups and ‘satisfied’ evenings the past 2 years. Heero smirked and nodded slowly. “That’s a good start.” He looked up at Wufei and then Trowa, his expression serious. “I didn’t do it…”

“We know.” Trowa resisted the urge to reach out and touch Heero’s shackled hands. “We’ll figure this out… I’m not going to let you rot in a Parisian prison cell.” Or worse… He quickly shook his head. Nothing bad was going to happen. Preventer would work this out, they had to. They’d done it on cases before.

The L1 PD officer fumbled with the lock to the restroom. Wufei stood quickly and walked to the rear of the shuttle and approached the man as he stepped through the door. As he moved to pass Wufei in the narrow hall Wufei used the sudden shake of the shuttle shifting through the atmosphere to stumble into the man.

"Excuse me, pardon me...” Wufei said with a grunt, tangling himself purposefully with the other man.
As Wufei distracted the officer, buying them more time Heero gave Fara a pointed look and then turned to Trowa and smirked at him.

"My e-mail password is the access code for our new mobile suit's OS multiplied by the date we officially first met..." Heero said, his amusement obvious.

Wufei hadn't been able to keep the officer distracted for long. The officer came up the hall, his heavy footsteps becoming louder as he neared.

Fara got up and headed back to his seat, leaving Trowa alone with Heero. He knew the guard was coming but couldn’t move, unsure of when he’d see his partner again. Act on your emotions… His emotions were telling him to bust Heero out of there, but he knew he couldn’t do that, so he leaned in and pressed their mouths together, the movement desperate and needy.

Heero would gladly go to prison if it meant he could get desperate, frantic kisses like these from Trowa. He lifted his shackled hands up to caress Trowa's chin as his lover kissed him- not caring who saw or what the consequences were at that point.

The guard approached them from behind and immediately spotted the two heads together. It wasn’t rocket science, even he knew what was going on. He frowned and cleared his throat loudly as he approached, giving them a chance to break it up before he had to physically part them.

“When this is all over,” Trowa breathed, lips trembling against his partners, “I’m taking you home with me. To the circus…” He kissed Heero again before reluctantly pulling away and standing up. Quickly swallowing his emotions, his expression went blank. The guard gave him an annoyed look and it took all of Trowa’s restraint not to punch him.

Heero felt his stomach clench as Trowa pulled away and took his seat. He had become so dependent on having the other pilot close and had taken advantage of the fact he had the freedom to share such small intimate gestures with him in the past that now, with restriction, the idea he couldn't just walk over and claim those lips as his own was driving him insane.

Wufei slid past the officer and took a seat beside Fara, fished his laptop from his bag and clipped his seat belt across his lap as the shuttle jolted and shook with the heat and resistance of reentry. He opened his e-mail terminal and began typing in Heero's e-mail before handing it to Fara. "I don't know his password," he admitted, having not heard the secret conversation between the other three agents.

A hand reached out and stopped Trowa as he walked past their seats. Fara looked up at him, gripping his arm. "Password." He said, having no idea how to do the math without the numbers needed to solve the equation.

"16,946,340." Trowa said slowly so Wufei could type the numbers in. He’d done the equation quickly in his head.

With a nod Wufei put in each number and gained access to the organized folders of Heero's e-mail. He leaned in close to Fara so that he could share the monitor with him as he scrolled through what had been saved and recently sent, searching for any contact information for Relena.

There was a starred folder marked 'Fara Maurel' but Wufei didn't bring attention to it. "It feels strange doing this," he admitted quietly so that only the blonde could hear. "I have never been in anything personal for Heero before." It was almost unsettling. He wasn't sure what they would find there.
“Type ‘Relena’ into the inbox search bar.” Fara reached over to grab his black-framed reading glasses from his bag under the seat. He slipped them on and then leaned in to share the computer with Wufei, their shoulders touching. ‘Relena’ was typed in and they watched as all the corresponding emails filtered through.

Wufei shifted uncomfortably as the first e-mail that appeared on the search had a subject line that read "I'm Sorry" sent from Heero to what appeared to be Relena's personal e-mail. He glanced up at Fara with a sigh, hesitant to read it.

“Well? Click it.” The blonde was getting impatient.

With a frown Wufei clicked it open. He wasn't sure what he thought he would find, but the e-mail was rather straightforward.

'Relena,

I'm sorry about the other night. I shouldn't have said that. We need to talk.

Heero.'

Wufei looked up at Fara and shrugged his shoulders. "This is dated four days before her murder," he said softly.

“This could be anything. Maybe he said something she didn’t want to hear, told her no to something she wanted. This doesn’t mean anything.” Fara shook his head. “Keep looking, is there more?”

The truth was there were many emails to and from the two, but nothing seemed very emotional. Just planning, logistics, some with Relena expressing her frustrations at work. It was all rather bland.

"There doesn't seem to be anything here, and nothing sent from him appears threatening. Now that we know her email we can possibly get someone to ... " Wufei hesitated to say 'hack' - "acquire the one the police claim she had sent to this mystery person who reported it."

“Is Duo still sleeping? He could get us the information we need.” Fara stood up and looked over his seat to see if the braided man was still passed out. “Wake up. We need your help.” He reached out to poke at the top of Duo’s head impatiently.

Duo snorted and sat up from his nap, his eyes bleary. He saw Fara over him and blinked widely before replying, "Hey hotty."

Then he paused and sighed. "This... isn't a dream is it?"

“You wish. Can you hack into Relena’s email for us? Please?” Fara pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose and impatiently waited for a reply.

"I mean I COULD," Duo said with a groggy, sly grin. "BUT hacking is illegal... and if I could hypothetically, it'll cost ya," Duo teased. He made a kissy face for affect.

“Get us into the account and I’ll think about it.” It was obvious Duo wanted a kiss, and right now Fara would do just about anything to get Heero out of this situation.

"Hmm. Alright," Duo replied. He tilted his head to the side. "Gimme her email," he said as he
fished out his own laptop and began booting it up. "While I'm on it, I could use a good shoulder 
massage," he hinted with a grin.

“I’m not a masseuse. But I’m sure Heero will be more than grateful for your help.” Grabbing his 
bag from under his seat, Fara pulled out a notepad and pen. He scribbled down Relena’s email 
handle and then handed the paper to Duo from over the top of his seat.

"Ah, helping out Heero is what I'm good at," Duo said with a chuckle. He looked over the back of 
his seat and yelled loudly across the fuselage of the shuttle. "Hear that, Heero? I love ya, man!"

Heero had resumed his default posture of eyes closed and arms crossed of his chest. His eyebrow 
twitched in response to Duo’s confession of love.

With fingers flying furiously across the keys Duo set to work.
Chapter 13

November | Paris, France

Heero wasn't happy, but he didn't want to worry whoever had shown up for visitor hour. It has been two days since his transfer to Paris and nothing had changed as far as his investigation. The police wouldn't divulge much. Every day was the same thing. He woke up, they fed him, pushed him around in an attempt to intimidate him and then insist that he sign his confession. Relena had many fans in the jail, and all of them were rather angry with her 'killer' and treated him accordingly.

He had started out in a community cell but by the middle of the afternoon of his first day he had been assaulted by drunks and thieves who had decided to take the role of Relena's White Knights. Shortly after he was put in a private cell for the sake of the other prisoner's safety.

Heero grunted under his breath at the hand of his escort slamming against his back as he was shoved into the visitor room, which consisted of three empty stools positioned facing a pane of bulletproof glass. A single black phone hung beside each one. He was directed to the first stool and pushed down to a sit. He ran a hand through his hair and shifted uncomfortably beneath his drab gray jumpsuit, his tongue slipping over his dry lower lip, the bruise at the corner of his mouth stinging on contact. He waited for his mystery visitor.

He didn’t have to wait long. The door to the opposite half of the room slid open and a familiar face appeared, expression unreadable. Trowa, clad in a grey turtleneck sweater and a black slim-fitted over coat took a seat across from his partner. He was shoving a pack of cigarettes into his coat pocket, a sign that he was stressed. That was the only time the taller agent smoked.

After adjusting himself on the uncomfortable metal stool, Trowa picked the black phone up and waited for Heero to mirror his actions. Green eyes tracked over Heero’s body, silently documenting any hints of mistreatment. “Heero.” He said in greeting.

Heero lifted the phone and pressed it to his ear and studied Trowa through the glass, his expression flat, matching his lover's. He knew the police would be listening to their conversation so he chose his words carefully.

"I'm fine,” he said plainly, trying to reassure the hidden worry in the handsome pilots face. He wanted to tell him how handsome he was- how, even though his brow was furrowed with worry, he still was the most beautiful person he had ever seen. He felt the sudden urge to punch the glass in an attempt to break through it. He wanted to touch him, quietly comfort him. The most he could do was press his hand against the bottom of the glass, imagining how it would feel to push his hand into the taller agent's chest.

"I haven't learned anything new..." he frowned, his eyes darkening. "It feels as if their proof is weak. They're desperate for me to confess."

“You can’t confess to something you aren’t guilty of.” Trowa noticed the discoloration at the corner of Heero’s mouth, and while he knew Heero could take care of himself in a place like this, anger still burned through his veins at the unjustness of it all. “We logged into your email account and found nothing unusual…” Except that one message to Relena where Heero had apologized, but Trowa wouldn’t bring that up now. Not while they were being monitored. “And we got access to one of Relena’s email accounts. We found nothing…”
A small nod. Heero had a feeling they wouldn't find anything. "Don't waste your time trying to clear me, Preventer needs to use its manpower to focus on finding the real killer."

Heero sighed and narrowed his eyes. "You're not sleeping." He could tell. "I want you to take care of yourself." He didn't know when he was coming out of the jail, and he didn't know when the next time he would be able to see him. He didn't want to waste this time talking to him about a case that obviously was a dead end.

"I find it hard to sleep when my partner is in a prison cell." It was the truth. Over the last few months Trowa had gotten used to sleeping with Heero by his side. "Are you sleeping well?" He doubted the other man was. Shaking his head, Trowa ran his fingers through his bangs and looked down for a moment. "I can take care of myself. Don't worry about me."

Heero couldn't help but smile. "This isn't the first time that you've seen me in a prison," he said playfully, trying to lighten his mood. He had been held prisoner by OZ while Trowa posed undercover as an OZ soldier. "I definitely preferred having YOU guarding me..."

"I think we both prefer that." Trowa watched the corners of Heero’s lips curve up into another smile. He was addicted to those smiles. But he wanted his partner out of here. Drawing the conversation back to the case, he reluctantly asked, "When you left for Russia, did Relena not want you?"

Heero was caught off guard by the question. He hadn't expected him to ask about that. "She wanted me to come to Paris with her, but I finally told her I needed to find my own way... find myself. She asked me to go after her work so she could accompany me, and I put it off for a few days but her work kept her longer than she had anticipated. I left... in the middle of the night without telling her. She called me and when we spoke I told her I was ..." he paused, hesitant to say anything over the phone. "I told her I was tired of being in her shadow. She... didn't take that well."

One of the officers poked his head into the room to let Trowa know his time was almost up. Trowa gave a nod and kept his face wiped clean of any expression, turning his gaze back to his partner. "I’ll come back tomorrow.” He promised. "I’ll visit every day that I can. ‘I’m not sure when we are heading back to the moon. We’re staying at a hotel not far from here. Duo makes a lousy roommate…”"

Heero’s guard strode across the room and grabbed the back of his neck. He gripped the phone tighter and frowned. "Trowa, I-" he began, wanting to tell him to take care, not to waste his time there in Paris. He wanted to thank him for coming, for worrying about him. He didn't get a chance. He was wrenched up to his feet by a pair of officers, the phone tugged out of his hand, and hauled out of the room.

5 minutes. That was all the Parisian police had allowed. Trowa set the phone none too gently back into its cradle and sat there for a moment, posture stiff and unyielding. Yes, he’d seen Heero in prison several times before, but that didn’t mean this time wouldn’t hurt any less. They didn’t even let him say goodbye.

It was difficult to have a good time when there was work to be done, but after Duo's tenth complaint that he was hungry and Fara's insistence that they go out and get fresh air he finally consented to going for a walk. It was six o'clock and a brisk, cool breeze blew through the narrow historic district as they picked their way through the stone covered streets. Duo was happily munching on a mushroom cap sandwich behind them as Wufei strolled alongside Fara, a worried
look on his face.

"Barton should have come with us," he muttered, worried about leaving their companion back at the hotel. After his visit with Heero at the jail he appeared even more stressed and was acting more distant than usual.

“He said he had stuff to take care of.” Fara waved Wufei’s concern off with the flick of his wrist. He straightened the scarf around his neck and shoved his hands into his pockets. It felt strange being back in his hometown after having been away for so long. Paris was ever changing, the sights evolving as the years went by. He glanced to his right, golden brows arching as he asked, “How are you liking the city of love?”

Wufei shrugged a shoulder. "It's nice... Earth."

Duo scoffed and spoke through a mouthful of his sandwich. "He'd a nerd, take him to the library THEN he'll be happy..."

Wufei scowled and glanced over his shoulder at Duo. "And perhaps you should try READING a book."

Duo laughed. "I read War and Peace last week!"

Wufei sighed. "What was it about?" He knew a joke was coming.

"It's a rounded, warm story that shows there are no heroes or heroines in the world, and that extreme life experiences cause us all to change- some for the worst, some for the better..." Duo said absently before shoving the rest of his sandwich into his mouth.

Fara rolled his eyes. “Speaking of books... one of my favorite bookstores is in this neighborhood. They should still be open if you're interested.”

Wufei perked up. "Sure," he replied quickly. "Lead the way."

Duo grinned as he watched Wufei and Fara walk together in front of him. It was clear that Wufei was totally into the blonde agent, and that Fara was playing it cool. He had to know, right? Duo had never seen the Chinese pilot tripping over himself like that before, so eager to please someone. It was cute.

"You guys go ahead," he announced with a grin. "I'm gonna go find me some crepes..."

L'Ecume des Pages was a small family owned bookstore tucked away on a quiet side street. Fara used to visit at least once a week when he was growing up, drawn to the massive selection of both new and used books in multiple languages. As they approached the storefront he spotted the yellow lights from within illuminating the windows. “Looks like they are open.” Taking Wufei’s hand the excited blonde tugged him inside.

The air smelt of paper on ink, one of Fara’s favorite scents. He let his lungs fill with it. “What types of books do you like to read?” He asked, still holding the Chinese man’s hand as they headed down one of the aisles, tall bookshelves hiding their figures from the rest of the store, creating a sense of privacy.
Wufei face exploded with a rose blush. He cleared his throat as the lovely Frenchman dragged him into the shop and for a moment forgot how to speak. "Hi...history, and nonfiction," he finally replied, painfully aware of Faramond's cool, soft fingers against his own.

As he was led through the racks and shelves he couldn't help but wonder how he happened to be there, in Paris with a gorgeous companion talking about BOOKS of all things. It was like a dream. As he watched Fara pick through the titles, clearly looking for something in particular, he wondered how someone as soft and gentle as him could have been with someone like Heero. He didn't have anything against Heero, but he seemed so different from Fara. So hard, distant, cold.

"I should have guessed... What about philosophy?" Fara’s fingers stopped on the spine of a thick book. He pulled it out and held it up for Wufei. “This is a classic. Please tell me you have read it?” It was *The Prince* by Machiavelli. “Oh, or this?” He grabbed *The Analects* by Confucius. Looking at Fara one would not think he’d be into reading, much less classical history and philosophy texts. But the truth was he was a complete bookworm.

"Of course. You’ve read these...?" Wufei was pleasantly surprised. He hadn't expected the other to be so well read, which he supposed was silly. The guy was an analyst. Despite the many treasures in front of him he couldn't help but find himself fixated on the blonde agent beside him. "You continue to surprise me," he admitted. *How the HELL did Heero end up with this guy!?*

"I hope all in good ways?" Fara saw a rare smile creep onto Wufei’s face. He shelved the books and walked further down the aisle.

Watching him move down the aisle, Wufei sighed and took in his surroundings. So Fara spent time here? It was interesting taking in what was essentially the formative parts of the other agent’s life. Earth was so different from life in space. Not just the complication of life support, or the fact that the cold, deadly grip of the vacuum of space was just on the opposite side of a manmade metal wall- it wasn’t genuine. There were hardly ancient artifacts, old buildings, historic monuments lying around. To waste space for sentiment was unheard of in space. The inside of a colony was precious- planned.

On Earth you could be walking and stumble upon an ancient, abandoned castle. Statues lined the streets, ornamental buildings were in abundance. The little details made Earth so desirable. So different.

As he walked down the aisle in pursuit of his companion he spotted a figure slip out from behind a nearby, leaning bookshelf and begin to creep up behind the blonde. Wufei’s shoulders stiffened and he immediately got on the defensive. He watched as the tall, muscular body slid up behind Fara and grabbed him around the waist. It sounded as if the man had begun to say something but he was soon cut off by a sharp, chopping motion by Wufei’s hand at the base of his skull. The formidable figure crumpled to the ground, landing heavily on his knees. Wufei pushed the flat of his shoe against the man’s back and held him there.

Fara spun around, eyes narrowed but otherwise seemingly unaffected by the ‘assault’. He looked down and recognition spread across his fair skin in the form of a blush. “Xavier?” He hadn’t seen the man in years.

It seemed Fara knew the man, which caused a frown to form on Wufei’s face. He released his foot from the guy’s back and watched as he stood up slowly with his hand cradling the now forming bruise on the back of his neck. Despite being assaulted he was laughing, his voice smooth and calm. He looked over his shoulder and Wufei noticed a pair of amused, bright caramel-colored eyes assessing him.
“Fara,” the man said with a small smile, still studying Wufei closely but made no move to retaliate. “Who’s your friend…” he said with a chuckle, his voice dripping with a Spanish accent. “He’s got quite a strike on him…”

“My coworker, Chang Wufei.” Fara said in French as he addressed Xavier with a smile. “What a pleasant surprise seeing you here. It’s been a while…” He then turned to Wufei and nodded his head in the other man’s direction. “This is my friend, Xavier.” This time he spoke in English.

To say he was embarrassed was an understatement. Wufei had assumed the man was assaulting him. When Xavier offered his hand for a friendly handshake he took it and clutched it firmly, his expression apologetic. “I’m sorry, I thought you were-

Xavier smiled and nodded. “It is alright, I shouldn’t have snuck up on him,” he replied in English, shrugging a shoulder casually as he shook Wufei’s hand, his demeanor cordial. He glanced at Fara and said quickly in French, “you have a bodyguard with you, and here I was worried about you,” he teased. He dropped Wufei’s hand and turned to Fara, gesturing to the bookstore around them. “I can’t believe it. I never thought I would see you around here again,” he exclaimed, his English smooth but heavily accented with a blatant, Spanish lilt.

“I wasn’t planning on returning. At least, not this trip, anyway. Work brought me here.” Fara eyed the dark-haired man, looking him over in his expensive clothes. He was still just as handsome as when he’d last seen him. “You look well. Wufei, Xavier used to teach at the college I attended.”

Wufei quirked an eyebrow and eyed the man. Interesting. “What subject did you teach?”

“Classical art, mostly,” Xavier replied conversationally. “You are coworkers?” He had no idea where they worked. “In space, I assume?” He eyed the Chinese man before glancing over his shoulder at Fara. “Where is it you work?”

“In space. I’m a risk analyst for Preventer and he’s a field agent.” Fara explained vaguely.

“Oh, sounds like important work,” Xavier replied, lifting a hand to rub his stubbled chin thoughtfully.

“It is,” Wufei said, his eyes narrowing. He wasn’t sure what he thought about this guy. He seemed to be trying too hard to be friendly.

“I’m not surprised you’re doing such work,” the Spanish man added, turning to gently grasp Fara’s shoulder so he could turn the small, blonde man toward himself to better see him in the dim yellow light of the bookstore. “You were the smartest, top of your class. I knew you’d put those studies to good use.” He sighed and looked him over. “You look fantastic, and you’re home- it is nice to see these two things together. And here I thought not to come. I haven’t been back here much myself, but the league is up for the season and I had some down time-”

“League?” Wufei echoed, his eyes studying the two as they interacted.

“Yes, a few years ago I hung up my paintbrushes and decided to pursue my other passion- soccer,” Xavier explained as he let his hand drop from Fara’s shoulder. “I have been in the FIFA league for two years now. Do you watch soccer, Mister Wufei?”

Wufei shook his head. “Sadly, no. I am not a big fan of sports.”

“I had no idea, congratulations. That is a huge deal.” Fara said in a silken tone, impressed with Xavier’s career move. Like Wufei, he wasn’t into sports, but soccer was one of the more tolerable ones to watch. “I am happy for you.” He neither backed away nor leaned into Xavier’s familiar
touches, just stood there with a relaxed posture and a calculating gaze.

“Thank you. Yes, living my dream- for a few years anyway. Soon I feel I will be aging out of the sport. It is a young man’s sport, and my body has been protesting as of late…” the Spaniard said with a sigh. He raked his fingers through his thick, dark brown hair and continued to study Fara like a patron of an art gallery would observe and appreciate a fine marble sculpture. “God, it is so nice to see you. Tell me you’ll be here for a few days? We can grab a drink or something, catch up?”

Wufei watched the exchange with a skeptical expression, feeling suddenly shoved aside for the handsome European man. It was clear that Xavier was ignoring him, or at least he had forgotten that he was standing there, and that Fara was alone in dealing with his past.

“I’m not sure how long we will be here, but a few more days at the least.” Catching up with Xavier was dangerous, and Fara knew better. The way the older man was looking at him made it clear he hadn’t moved on, and every time they were alone together the blonde always ended up on his back.

It had been his first serious relationship-his only serious relationship, and one that they had both known was wrong from the beginning. At the rebellious age of 17, shortly after the death of his twin brother, devastated and alone, Fara found comfort in an unexpected place. A minor having an affair with a teacher. The intense amorous relationship had lasted a year and a half, and when his parents found out he had practically been disowned for dishonoring his family. Luckily the secret affair never surfaced to the student body of École Polytechnique, but Fara had a feeling it was why Xavier had ultimately left his academic job.

“I have a new number,” the older man explained as he pulled his cell phone from his pocket and began thumbing through the menu. The entire exchange was making Wufei feel awkward, and strangely uncomfortable. There was something off about the entire thing, about how overtly friendly the man was acting. He sighed and muttered a small excuse under his breath before working his way out of the bookstore to wait for Fara on the sidewalk outside.

“I don’t think your friend likes me very much,” Xavier said with a sigh, watching Wufei vanish out of the shop. “I’m sorry if I was interrupting something- was it a date?” He held his phone loosely in hand, his eyes studying Fara’s face, his surprise obvious. The serious-faced Chinese man wasn’t who he had expected the pretty blonde to keep company with.

“Something like that, yes.” Fara’s hazel eyes darted to the exit of the bookstore, aware that Wufei was feeling uncomfortable. He knew he needed to go out after the other, but Xavier had him cornered against a bookshelf. He looked back at the older man and rattled off his number, which he was sure Xavier no longer had memorized.

The man eagerly put the number in, his happiness at receiving it obvious. “I’m sorry for interrupting,” Xavier said with a sigh, though it was clear that he wasn’t. “May I give you a call just for a friendly chat, or to run out and grab a coffee?”

“Yes.” I mean no. I mean, I don’t know… As Fara’s mind went back and forth he had to look away, hoping to clear his thoughts. Xavier was a distraction, and he was still shocked to see him here.

“Alright, well, I better go- and you better find your friend before he freezes to death out there on the street,” Xavier said with a chuckle. He held his hands out to his sides, signifying he wished to hug him, but this time was hesitant about just taking liberties lest he get attacked from behind again.

Fara obediently walked into the embrace, giving Xavier a quick hug. “I’ll see you around.”
“I sure hope so,” Xavier replied. He reluctantly released him from his arms and turned to slip out of the shop, passing the annoyed looking Chinese man on his way. He gave him a wink and a smile before continuing his own stroll down the sidewalk.

Wufei watched him go with a sour expression. He didn’t like the guy. He crossed his arms over his chest and waited outside, his eyes scanning the relatively empty streets.

Fara hurried out of the bookstore and found Wufei. He approached him cautiously from behind. “Hey, I’m sorry about that. I wasn’t expecting to run into an old friend.” It was getting colder out and there were signs of snow. Fara adjusted the scarf around his neck.

“It’s alright,” replied Wufei with a small nod of his head. “It must be nice seeing people from your past?”

“Sometimes.” Fara didn’t want to stay on the discussion of Xavier. “Did you want to head back to the hotel or?” He wasn’t sure what Wufei’s mood was now. The other had an unreadable expression.

Wufei shrugged. “Up to you. Personally the longer I am away from Trowa and his sullen mood, the better.” He glanced over his shoulder and peered around the empty street vaguely aware of the fact that Duo hadn’t returned with his sweets yet.

“If your lover was in jail, wrongly accused of an atrocious crime, wouldn’t you be sullen?” Fara asked, although he found Wufei’s apathy at the situation oddly adorable. They started walking aimlessly down the sidewalk.

Wufei shrugged. “He acts like Heero hasn’t been in the exact same situation before. I personally think Trowa is obsessed with the idea of protecting him, and thinks that Heero can’t live without him or something… those two have got it hard for each other,” he replied plainly, stuffing his hands into his pockets. “Which is fine. I’m glad they’ve got each other but… I am more concerned with how it will effect their time with Preventer. Their work.”

“You think dating someone at work is a bad idea?” Fara wasn’t really worried about Heero and Trowa’s performance. As their risk analyst, he wasn’t recording anything that pointed to the fact that they were distracted by their relationship.

“I don’t mind inter-workplace relationships happening,” Wufei explained, “but when people become emotionally compromised, it leads to risk. You’re our analyst. I suppose I should leave that idea to you. Do you think it poses a risk?”

Now that he thought about it, there was the incident in Paris when Trowa had been shot in the shoulder by the sniper as the two partners leaned in for a kiss. “Yes… It can.” But sometimes the risk was worth it. Fara was jealous of how obviously into each other Heero and Trowa were.

“… Is that why you haven’t kissed me yet?” The blonde looked over at the other, his breath hanging in the cold air. He knew Wufei liked him, at least that was what Duo said. But the Chinese man was slow to act and that wasn’t something Fara was used to.

Wufei’s face exploded with heat. He stopped in his tracks and looked at Fara, wide-eyed. Did he just ASK HIM to kiss him? He suddenly realized that all he had been saying about how unprofessional and what kind of poor judgement it would be on agents to have relationships directly related to the casual dating he had been doing with Faramond.

“You’re… you’re different,” Wufei explained. He looked around the street, seeing nothing, but
then decided it didn’t matter who saw him or what anyone else thought. “I have wanted to kiss you but there didn’t seem like a good time or place,” he admitted openly.

“Understandable.” Fara said calmly, stilling his feet as Wufei stood there. The younger man was shy. That was also probably why they hadn’t kissed. Fara wasn’t used to men acting so… modest around him. It was kind of refreshing. “Then I’ll look forward to it. Whenever the right time and place is…”

Wufei felt as if he was disappointing him, and was just mustering up the nerve to grab him and show him that right then WAS a perfectly fine time when a happy howl sounded from across the street.

“Aye, yo! Guys! There you are, I thought you were at the bookstore!” Duo said as he approached from the opposite side of the street, his hand raised high, a crepe rolled in the shape of a cone filled with berries and cream held aloft like an Olympic torch. “You gotta try this!”

Xavier had only been home for less than a week, but he had already acclimated back to the lifestyle he had once had here in Paris when he was a professor of Art. He had visited all of his favorite spots, lunched with friends, shopped and dined his way across the city enjoying all of his favorite places. He had ordered an espresso and a crepe and had taken a warm, sunny seat beside the window in his favorite cafe just down the street from the university he used to teach at. He sipped at the hot, thick bitter coffee and waited patiently for his coffee date to arrive.

The little bell on top of the café door dinged as it swung open, bringing with it a gust of cold winter air and an attractive blonde. Fara pocketed his phone and looked around the room in search of Xavier. He spotted him by the window and headed in his direction. “Sorry I’m late. I had a Skype meeting for work before this and it ran a few minutes over.” He took a seat, unbuttoning the front of his coat. His hair was tied back and his glasses were on, and while he always looked well put together, Fara was feeling a little out of it that day. He’d been up all night with Duo and Trowa trying to dig more into Relena’s other email accounts.

“It’s no problem,” Xavier said with a broad smile as Fara took his seat. He flagged down the server who caught a glimpse of them and slowly worked his way across the room to come take Fara’s order. Once he was gone Xavier finished off his espresso and leaned back in his chair, his hand lifting to rub at the five o’clock shadow on his chin. “You’ve been working hard, so … what exactly brought you here to Paris? Must have been something specific? Can you talk about it?”

“I can’t really go into detail, but we are investigating someone’s death. It’s a rather challenging case. I don’t always fly out with the field agents for cases, but this one was different.” Fara shrugged, folding his hands under the table as he coolly studied Xavier. “How are you? Anything else new besides the career change?”

“No, not really,” Xavier admitted with a sigh. “Just moving forward, trying to find new passions, that sort of thing. What about you? That man you were with last night… the one you were on a date with? Is it serious?” He couldn’t help but ask.

“Did it look serious?” Fara asked curiously. It wasn’t. Their relationship was still in its innocent stages and Fara was still uncertain of where it would go. He liked Wufei, but he couldn’t read the Chinese man.

“Well the guy almost gave me a concussion. How serious do you THINK he is about you?” Xavier shook his head and laughed.
He’s an ex-Gundam pilot. Of course he almost knocked you out, Fara smirked. “I don’t know, honestly. We’ve only been on a few dates. What about you? Have you been seeing anyone?”

“I’ve had a few friends here and there,” Xavier replied casually. “But nobody comparable to you. You must know you set the bar extremely high.”

“Sorry. I don’t think your soccer career would do well on the moon.”

The waiter came over and handed Fara his hot chocolate. He took it between his hands, warming his fingers while gazing down at the creamy liquid. “I had hoped you would move on. I’m sorry things ended the way they did…”

“You shouldn’t be sorry. It was… it was a bad situation overall, to be honest.” Xavier reached across the table to brush his knuckles against the back of Fara’s hands as he warmed them. “I don’t expect anything from you, but I have to be honest, it has been impossible to get over you.”

“I guess I’ll take that as a complement.” Fara caught Xavier’s gaze, his fingers tightening around the cup. “I haven’t been in a… committed relationship since I moved to the moon. So I guess that makes two of us.”

“Relationships are difficult,” Xavier replied. “Is it that you can’t find someone compatible? You are too lovely to be alone, Fara.”

Fara shook his head. “Just busy with work… And the dating scene on the moon is small.” Too lovely to be alone, huh. He brought the cup to his lips and took a cautious sip, feeling the steam rise and hit his cheeks.

“Don’t let your work consume you. Youth doesn’t last forever,” Xavier replied, ever the vain one.

“You act like you just turned 60. Such and old, old man.” Fara teased, setting the hot cup down again. “You’re 8 years older than me. You’re not geriatric… yet.” He smirked.

“Haha, true, but I have to find someone who will care for me in my old age,” the older man replied, a kind smile on his face. “I hate being alone. I don’t want some stranger or nurse tending to me. I suppose your sights are now set on someone your own age now?”

“You know age never mattered to me.” It was almost like Xavier was hinting at getting back together. Fara wondered if he still had that ring… No. He didn’t want to know. “I don’t do long distance relationships.”

“Yes, they never work, do they?” Xavier replied sadly, sighing. “I often find myself thinking of ‘what could have beens’ and such. I guess that’s what we old men do in our free time. Reminisce.”

Fara rolled his eyes at the continuous use of old. Xavier never once entertained the idea of moving to the moon to be with him. “Are you still painting?” He asked, trying to switch the topic.

“A little here and there, but nothing like I used to.” Xavier crossed his wrists on the top of the table and shrugged a shoulder. “Not feeling very inspired lately. Maybe one day you’ll pose for me again?”

“Sure.” Fara knew it would never happen. When would the run into each other again? It wasn’t likely. He took another sip of his hot chocolate and watched Xavier’s expression change from playful to thoughtful. He wondered what he was thinking about.

“How about tonight?” Xavier proposed. He gestured out the window to the university nearby. “I’m
“Sure I can pull some strings, get some supplies from my old classroom.”

“I’m not sure what my plans are for tonight.” Fara wasn’t expecting the other to offer so soon. “…and we both know what will happen.” It wasn’t a good idea.

Xavier smirked and reached across the table, his fingertips grazing on of Fara’s pale, exposed wrists. “What will happen, aside from me memorializing your beauty once again on the canvas? Unless you are hoping something else will happen…”

“You’ve seen Titanic. You can figure it out…” Fara said sharply, knowing Xavier knew damn well what would happen.

Xavier laughed. “Okay, so maybe I would try to touch you. You’re too irresistible. Could you possibly blame me?”

Fara shook his head. “I can’t…. We can’t do this again.” He wasn’t the same person anymore, no longer the rebellious teenager who purposely made stupid mistakes to get attention. He couldn’t repeat this pattern with Xavier. It was so tempting to go with him tonight, but he knew what would happen, and in the end Fara would feel guilty. Especially now that he was trying to date Wufei.

The older man sighed and gave a small nod. “Alright. I don’t want to push you into anything. I honestly do just want to be friends and chat. Like I said, I’m not expecting anything more than that.”

“Alright. I think I can do that, at least.” Fara finished his hot chocolate and set the empty cut down, pushing it aside. His phone buzzed inside his coat pocket and he reached in to check it. The message was from Wufei.
Chapter 14

It had been hours since Duo and Trowa began their chipping away at the emails, scouring old servers and saved information in various places for the email that had supposedly been sent from an account Relena herself had owned to a mystery recipient, who then- according to what Heero had divulged- turned it in.

He was exhausted. He leaned to his right and nudged Trowa’s shoulder with his own, gesturing to a half empty can of JITTERBUG energy drink beside the laptop the two agents were currently huddled in front of. “Hand me that, will ya?” He rubbed his eyes with his palms. “Ugh… this shit is drivin’ me nuts. Maybe the cops are lyin’? Where the hell is this damn email? We’ve been through every account and email on the internet. Even Relena’s stupid middle school hotmail account. ’pink3tprincess4EvA’. We found EVERYTHING there is to FIND.”

It was 3am in the morning and both agents were exhausted. Trowa handed the energy drink to Duo, eyes still glued to his laptop. “We can’t find anything because there is nothing. Whatever evidence they think they have is planted. Heero was framed and this confirms it.” He was ready to go bust Heero out of jail now. Enough of these games.

“Well yeah, of ‘course he was framed, but we gotta PROVE that it was a plant. Otherwise it’s our word against theirs… or whoever the guy or gal was that brought this shit to light…” Duo took a long, deep gulp of the sickeningly sweet soda and groaned. “And who would want to do this? Why him? Heero’s been out of the spotlight for a while- he doesn’t interact with ANYONE, it’s not like he has enemies. An angry ex… a rival?” He sighed and shook his head sadly. “All this shit just reminds me how little about that guy I really know. Who KNOWS what he’s doin’ in his private time. Aside from YOU, of course,” he added with a chuckle.

Trowa ignored the last comment and sat back, stretching his tired arms out. “We can at least show the police that we scoured all these email accounts and found nothing.” They needed to get their hands on the fake email so they could find its source… “You can’t hack into the Parisian police departments digital evidence files, can you?”

Duo hesitated before glancing up at Trowa. “It’s on a closed network inside the jail. I could gain access to it, but only by directly connecting to the system there itself. I couldn’t do it through the internet.” He glanced over at Trowa and raised an eyebrow at him. It was clear that at this point Trowa would do ANYTHING for Heero, even break major laws. “You miss him? I kinda miss his grumpy face, too.”

Missing him was an understatement. “He isn’t always grumpy… And yes. I miss him. He’s my… partner.” Trowa had been so damn defensive over Heero lately, which was a new development. He shook his head and sighed. “What if I could get you access at the jail. Would you do this? For Heero?”

Duo sighed loudly, tossing his hands up and then tucking them behind his head. “I mean, what haven’t I done for that guy?” He grinned and nudged Trowa playfully with his upturned elbow. “I’ll do it, but mostly for YOU. So you can have your ‘partner’ back.”

“Thank you.” Trowa nodded, shutting his laptop down. They needed to sleep, but his mind was still going, thinking about how he’d get Duo into the jail unnoticed. He’d have to do something that would distract all of the staff at the jail… maybe blow up part of the building? Start a fire? Hmm. Yup, it was official. He was going crazy.
Duo smirked and shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly. “No worries man. I’m an old pro at this kind of thing” he said confidently. “Just leave it to me.”

The incessant, sharp sound of a nightstick against the metal of his cell door startled Heero awake once more. His ears rang in protest and the sharp, pounding ache of the headache he’d developed the night before accompanied the rising sense of irritation swelling in his chest. As the correctional officers slammed into his door for the seventh time that night, Heero was convinced that if he had to stay in the slammer much longer he was going to go insane well before his body gave out.

He had grown soft in his ‘old age’ and had gotten used to at least two or three hours of uninterrupted sleep a night. There were no consecutive hours here, not with the guards set on keeping him awake for days on end, attempting to unsettle him so that he would break and finally give them a solid confession for Relena’s murder.

A murder he didn’t do. Over his dead fucking body would be admit to that. Not for the sake of self-preservation, but for the simple fact that if he confessed to anything concerning Relena the investigations would stop and her true killer would roam free.

He couldn’t allow that. He wanted the man/woman responsible brought to justice- by the police or by his own hand.

Angry, exhausted and weak he pushed himself to a stand just as the pair of his tormentors stormed into his private cell for another ‘bunk inspection’ which consisted of them flipping the only item in the room (the cot) and forcing him into the hallway where they made him squat against the wall or do as many push-ups as they saw fit- usually in correlation with how angry he made them.

And everything made them angry. If Heero gave them the silent treatment: push-ups. If he replied without looking at them: push-ups. If he gave them an attitude: push-ups.

Heero was convinced that the two overzealous officers would have made amazing OZ interrogators during the war. However, as efficient or thorough as they may be, they were dealing with someone who had been trained to endure much worse.

They didn’t know that about him. They didn’t know anything aside from the purpose of his arrest. The idea that he was the one who, supposedly, had torn down the People’s Princess* and had single-handedly brought civil unrest to the city and the Earth-Sphere had created anger amongst both the police and the other criminals in the jail. Everyone loved Relena, no matter their background, status or creed, and the hatred for her killer had brought all of them together against Heero.

“Get up! Get out!” one of the officers commanded as he rushed into the cell and hurried him out into the hall with a few sharp jabs of his nightstick. Heero followed orders, despite every exhausted cell in his body protesting and his brain sluggishly plotting how he could most efficiently take out the guards single-handedly with a few well-placed punches and kicks. IF he could even get those kicks off. It had been days since he had slept and just as long since he had eaten anything. When he had first arrived they kept him penned in a large community cell. Word quickly spread why he was there and his entire time in the community cell had been spent awake and on his guard lest one of the threatening well-meaning, white knight criminals came after him to avenge Relena. He had been given a meal there in the cell but then quickly whisked away for another interrogation. One of the half-drunk brutes in the cell had taken his meal for him and quickly suffered such a violent reaction that he had been carted away in an ambulance.
Poison. It couldn’t have been anything else. Now every slice of bread, every unsealed meal was suspect and out of the question. The guards had accused him of refusing to eat and on his file had listed him as participating in a “hunger strike”. It had been four days, and he had consumed nothing but bottled water. The effects of his lack of sustenance, along with the constant strain of physical activity, were becoming obvious. He could barely stand, his voice was weak and he was beginning to see splotches of darkness at the edges of his vision. His muscles were cramping, his stomach was gnawing at itself, desperate for something—anything—to digest.

*I won’t let them kill me,* he thought sourly as the taller of the men shoved him against the wall in the hallway while the other slammed the metal frame of his cot around the room. *I have to live so Relena’s true killer can be found.*

Duo finished putting the final touches on his special USB drive, which he loving called his ‘Mini Shini SD’, before handing the stubby black drive to Fara.

“All you gotta do is plug it into a desktop or laptop that is directly wired to their internal network. This little baby will do the rest.” he explained with a wide, excited grin. He shifted around in the back seat of the black rental sedan, surrounded by cords and wires and various small, mysterious black devices, looking like Indiana Jones seated amidst a sea of pit vipers in a technological Temple of Doom.

“Then once you plug it in, I’ll do the rest. You don’t even gotta take it off, the thing will delete itself when I’m done. I need ten minutes, tops, so you gotta keep ‘em from unpluggin’ it until I’m done, okay?”

He studied the two figures in the front seat of the car. Trowa was behind the wheel looking as serious and sullen as ever, while Fara sat in the front passenger seat listening to his instructions intently. “You’ve got this,” he added brightly, perhaps a little too excited about doing something nefarious and rather illegal for once.

Agent Maurel was excited to be out from behind the desk doing fieldwork. He wasn’t worried about pulling this off, his entire body exuded confidence and calmness and Duo rattled off instructions. Fara stuck the drive into his coat pocket and clutched the massive stack of papers against his side. They had printed all of the email communications between Heero and Relena. All of them. The heavy bundle straining against his arm was made up of 5 years worth of communications. A little excessive, yes, but they hoped it would be enough to distract the police officer and buy Duo the time he needed to hack into their system.

“Alright.” Fara put his gloved hand on the door handle and cracked the car open. “If anything goes wrong I’ll let you know.” He had a tiny earpiece in so that he could communicate with Duo while inside the jail.

“Just say the codeword. ‘I’m craving Vegemite tonight,’ and I’ll be there ASAP,” Duo explained as he watched Fara hop up from his seat and stride confidently into the police station. He glanced over at Trowa with a smile before clapping his hand reassuringly against his shoulder. “You okay, man?”

“Fine.” Trowa said, his gaze trained toward the side mirror watching Fara walk into the building with the ridiculous stack of papers. “I might leave the car for a little while… if I’m not back in time, don’t worry about me. I’ll find another way home.”

“Huh?” Duo blinked, surprised. “Wait a minute, where are ya goin’?” He tried to protest that this
wasn’t part of the plan, but whatever it was that Trowa had set his mind to, it appeared as if there would be no swaying him. “Psh, fine, keep the car runnin’ then…”

There was a short line of people waiting to talk to the rather irritated looking secretary at the front desk. Fara took his place and waited, glancing around the front lobby of the police department. It was sterile looking, almost like a hospital but less hospitable. He reached into his pocket and dug out his Preventer badge, fingers curling around it with familiarity. When it was finally his turn he gave the secretary a smile and flashed his badge. “Hello. I would like to speak to the person in charge of the Relena Peacecraft case, please.”

The secretary looked at the badge and nodded. Without further questioning she pointed down the hall. “Three doors down. Mr. Dubois is covering the case.”

“Thank you.” Fara bowed his head politely before heading down the hall. He raised his hand and knocked on the heavy wooden door, waiting a few seconds to see if anyone was in.

Mister Dubois was indeed in his office, mulling over the latest empty, aimless reports from the investigation team. When he heard the knock on the door sat up from his work and took a long sip of his now cold chai tea in a paper cup on the edge of his desk and muttered irritably, “always with distractions. How am I supposed to get anything done around here?” He slammed the empty cup on the table until it crumpled and then tossed it in the waste bin beneath his desk before replying, “come in.”

He hadn’t expected someone outside of his own staff to enter, let alone a pretty and rather androgynous young blonde. He blinked and straightened his back in his chair, his hand automatically fussy with his half-loosened tie. “Oh, hello, I thought you were someone else. Come in…” he gestured to the peeling black chair across from his desk. “You are?”

“Faramond Maurel. I work for Preventer and was hoping you’d have a few minutes to go over some evidence we found for the Relena Peacecraft case? I shouldn’t take up too much of your time.” The blonde said in a saccharine voice, giving the officer a pleasing smile as he stood before his desk.

Dubois studied the massive stack of papers with a hint of skepticism. “That is all evidence?”

Fara eyed the chair in front of the desk. “Can I sit down?” When the officer nodded the blonde man took a seat and set the stack of papers on the desk. “My team gained access to all of Relena’s email accounts, as well as Heero’s account, and went through to see if we could find the email you claim to have. We found nothing that looks suspicious.”

The lead investigator lifted the first sheet of paper and peered down at it with a frown. “That’s because you don’t have Relena Peacecraft’s correct email address. She wasn’t using these outdated emails at the time.” He set the page back on the massive pile and frowned across the desk at him. “What did you think you were proving by bringing me all of this? We HAVE the evidence we need to implicate Mister Yuy. It is crystal clear.”

“If you turn past page one you would see that we checked ALL of her known email accounts, past and present. Work and personal. The proof you say you have has not been found on any of her accounts. Whatever ‘proof’ you have is false.” It was hard keeping a smile on his lips. Fara didn’t have a lot of patience.

“Does Preventer honestly think we don’t cross reference our information? That we haven’t already
looked at all of these emails from Mister Yuy? That we haven’t verified that Miss Peacecraft may or may not have used the email submitted to us? Perhaps she had a lover? Or she was frightened of Mister Yuy so badly that she created a NEW email to correspond with this source so as not to agitate him and force him to act violently against her? Which I’m sad to say… happened anyway.”

Dubois scrunched his nose at Fara, unconvinced. “Preventer is very protective of its agents which is why we took over this investigation. We couldn’t rely on you all to remain impartial.”

Fara shook his head. “You are wasting your time trying to get an innocent man to confess. All over a false, planted email. It’s clear someone is trying to frame Agent Yuy. You are so willing to sentence someone to death over ONE email? Looks like you guys are getting lazy, pegging the first person you find as guilty while the real killer is still out there.” He glanced at the officer’s computer quickly, not letting his eyes linger for too long. It was an older computer, a PC with a tower. The USB ports would be on the back of the tower. Hazel eyes re-focused on the older man in front of him and he held his breath for a few seconds to calm himself. “Will you just give me the time of day and look over our findings? Please?” It was really hard to act sweet and sexy when you were pissed.

“You can say whatever you want Mister Maurel, but I doubt highly you have anything I need that could convince me otherwise. And how do you KNOW he didn’t do this? What makes you think we don’t already have our confession?” Dubois wasn’t moved by the blonde’s change of tune. He crossed his arms over his chest and leaned back in his chair, eyeing him closely.

“Because there is no solid proof he did it. We already extensively looked into him as a potential suspect from the very beginning.” Fara tried his best to keep his voice at a more even tone, soft and as sweet as he could muster.

He picked up a few of papers and was about to lean in to show the officer a specific email conversation when his wrist hit the side of the stack, knocking the entire pile over. He watched as the papers toppled, sprawling out across the desk and all over the floor. “Oh no, I’m sorry!” He gasped, looking at the mess he had made.

Dubois made no attempt to hide his annoyed, frustrated sigh as he stood from his desk and crouched down to the ground to help the clumsy Preventer agent pick up the massive flood of paperwork that now coated his carpet. “Mister Yuy has made some comments here that lead us to believe that he has some involvement with her death. Our methods work, clearly your questioning has not,” he said as he began picking up each sheet, glancing over them as he went.

Fara got out of the chair and started to help. “I’m so sorry for the mess! Can you help me put the papers back into order? There are page numbers on each of them… Please?” He pretended to act flustered as he gathered papers up and tried re-ordering them.

While the officer was occupied with the mess Fara quickly reached into his coat and pulled out the drive. Looking up, he saw the back of the computer tower and swiftly plugged the drive into the USB port before returning to the papers on the ground. “Thank you…” He went for the same piece of paper as the officer and purposely brushed his fingers across the older mans, then pulled back flushing. “Sorry.”

“It’s alright,” Dubois finally broke, feeling somewhat sorry for the agent as he seemed overwhelmed. “Who told you to bring all of this pointless crap in here anyway? They should be ashamed. We have digital information transfer…” he picked up the papers and shuffled them, irritated, trying to get them in order.

“Apparently my boss likes to kill trees. You’re right, it is silly, isn’t it? I could have loaded all of this onto my tablet and brought that instead.” Fara played stupid. No shit they had digital
information transfer, but he couldn’t scatter that across the floor as a distraction, now could he? He scooped up some more papers and put took up the tedious task of putting them in order. “Thank you again, for helping me…” Now to keep the man distracted for the next 10 minutes.

“You’re not eating.” Trowa held the first bar out, carefully moving it in between the bars while he shoved the wrapper in his pocket. “Are they not feeding you?”

Heero couldn’t help but laugh at Trowa’s statement. His muted chuckle shook his shoulders and made him gasp as he tried to catch his breath. He carefully pushed himself to his feet and moved as quickly as he could to the bars and leaned heavily on them. He could immediately smell the peanut butter of the protein bars. He leaned his forehead against one of the chilled bars and looked up at him with a smile. “You shouldn’t be here…” Trowa Barton was like a cat, he did what he wanted no matter what the consequences. “But I’m glad you are.”
quickly—perhaps too quickly, and simply shrugged his shoulders and closed his eyes. “They’re trying to feed me,” he explained softly. “I’m certain that it’s poisoned.”

Trowa’s heart sank to his stomach and he swallowed down his emotions, knowing he needed to stay calm for the other. He unwrapped the second bar and held it out. “Slow down… you’ll make yourself sick.”

Heero knew Trowa was right, but his body was so starved for calories it insisted—begged for more. He ate half of the second before forcing himself to slow down. “How did you get in here…?”

“Through your dreams.” Reaching into his pocket again Trowa pulled out two small pills. “Take these… They’ll help you relax.” Not only were they full of essential nutrients, but the would help ease the pain. He stuck his hand through the bars, biting the inside of his cheek as he continued to study his fragile lover.

Heero reached up to grasp Trowa’s hand, forcing his fingers to close tighter around the pills and refused to take them from him. “No… I deserve this, this suffering…” he said faintly, frowning. “For what?” Trowa’s nose wrinkled in disgust. “You have done nothing wrong. Take them…” He pressed his fist against Heero’s clammy palm. “Take them…” The words were desperate.

“She would be alive,” Heero replied slowly, staring down at the pills in his hand with a distant expression. “If I was there, I could have taken the bullet instead.” He was exhausted, he didn’t know what he was saying. The distant, dark thoughts he had been thinking for months were spilling out, taking advantage of his weakness and his unrestrained despair. “She would be alive, and none of these people would be hurting or worried.” His upturned palm trembled, the pills rolling haphazardly across his damp flesh.

“Take them.” Trowa demanded again, this time with force. Heero’s words hurt, hanging between them like breath crystallized in the frigid winter air. You should have taken the bullet instead? And then what? What about those who love you? You’re life isn’t so cheap, Heero…

His partner wasn’t thinking straight. He was disoriented and mentally unstable from his surroundings. Trowa shook his head as he reminded himself of this. “Take the pills, Heero. If not for yourself, then for me.”

There was no hesitation when it came to that order— that sentiment. Heero slammed them into his mouth and swallowed hard, forcing the little capsules down his dry throat before leaning against the bars again, his eyes downcast to the floor. “You’ve always been the one keeping me alive,” he said faintly, his voice little more than a whisper. “What would I be without you…”

“Dead.” Unable to hold back any longer Trowa reached past the bars, hands finding Heero’s shoulders. He gave them a light squeeze and moved them up to his lover’s neck. “We’re going to get you out of here. Just hold on… wait for me. Don’t give in.”

“I’ll never give in,” Heero replied, his eyes flickering up to lock with Trowa’s. “They’re trying to get me to confess. I will never confess to this. I … I didn’t do this…” he spoke his last words like a mantra, as if by speaking them they were somehow self-soothing. He reached through the narrow gap in the bars and softly thumbed the taller pilot’s cheek. “Thank you for always believing in me. Trowa tilt his head so he could kiss Heero’s palm. Once, twice. He closed his eyes and sighed, soaking in the contact he hadn’t realized he so desperately needed. He missed Heero more than anything and the understanding was threatening to break his defenses, his stolid demeanor quickly dissolving. “I’ll be here when you get out.” It was a promise.
Seeing Trowa, the pills and having eaten something had given Heero a much needed second wind. He let his thumb glide down the fine, sloping line of Trowa’s jaw, up the center of his chin and then across his lips. He made a mental promise that as soon as he got out he was going to show the former Heavyarms pilot just how much he appreciated the risk he had taken to come and see him. “I know you will,” he replied confidently.

“I should go…” Trowa pulled away from the cold bars, from Heero’s warm touches.

Of course Trowa should go. Heero could hear the incoming, familiar pound of the pair of boots that tortured him every half hour like clockwork, but he wasn’t ready. He was greedy. His hand snatched the front of Trowa’s jacket as he pulled away and with an unceremonious yank he pulled the taller pilot up against the bars and pressed his face against them, kissing him through the gap.

It was snowing by the time Trowa exited the building, stepping out into the bitter cold with his coat hanging open. The fluffy accumulation crunched under his boots as he made his way back to the sedan, wondering if Duo and Fara were still there. He looked down as he walked, his mind trapped inside Heero’s prison cell, refusing to leave the other. Guilt swept over his conscience.

Leaving his partner behind was one of the hardest things Trowa had ever done and he was still struggling with the decision. When would he see Heero again? How many more days could he go without sufficient food? What if they were unable to prove him innocent? The morose thoughts consumed him.

Duo spotted Trowa approaching their rental car from the rear view mirror. He was suddenly very glad they had decided to wait up for a little while, despite the continuous flow of inquiry in the form of text and concerned phone calls from Wufei, who had been left behind at the hotel without any clue as to what the trio were up to. Duo nudged Fara’s shoulder from the driver’s seat and nodded to the side view mirror as the sullen, sorrowful agent appeared in its reflection.

When Trowa finally crawled into the back seat Duo turned around and grinned at him. “Hey, listen up, we’ve got lots of data to go through tonight. Fara did a phenomenal job hookin’ us up. Hope you’re ready to get to work tonight,” he paused and squinted at him, bummed that Trowa didn’t seem as enthusiastic about their new information as he was. “Hey, what’s up? You looked like someone just ran over your dog or somethin’.”

“I don’t have a dog.” Trowa’s voice was dull. He looked out the window and waited for Duo to put the car into motion. “I’m glad you guys got the data. Thank you, both of you.” He would stay up all night digging through it if it meant freeing Heero sooner rather than later.
After spending a majority of the evening scouring through the case information swiped from the Paris police department, the team finally stumbled upon the infamous email that Relena supposedly send to an unregistered recipient.

“To: (blacked out)
From: Peacecraft, Relena (2102911@colony.esu.com)

I can’t take it anymore. He’s scaring me. The other night Heero finally threatened my life. He held a gun to my head and told me that I could never leave him, and if I even thought about leaving he would kill me and my brother. What was I supposed to do? I told him I would never leave him and then he left for vacation, but all I want now is to cry because I am terrified he’s going to show up here in Paris and finally kill me. Please don’t let him hurt me. I think he’s going to actually do it this time. I can’t tell anyone else this information, not even my best friends. You’re the only person I can talk to about this. Please help,”

Relena”

Duo gawked at the email, his violet eyes wide with his disbelief. He pushed away from the computer and shook his head, cradling his forehead with his palm as if the new knowledge had caused his head to balloon with stress.

“No way. There is no way. I mean, look at this damn language! ‘All I want to do now is cry’? Relena would never say some shit like that,” said the American agent with a scowl. “And they blacked out the person who got it. What the hell!?"

“That is so fake, it makes my stomach hurt.” Fara said, leaning over Duo’s shoulder to glare at the screen. Trowa stood next to him, head down and arms crossed over his chest. “We need to find out who planted that email. It didn’t come from any of Relena’s email accounts.” They all knew Heero would never do or say anything like that to anyone, least of all Relena.

“Well, lemme figure out if this email is even legit. We can run it through few programs and search a couple of databases to see when it was created, where it was sent from… hopefully.” Moderately confident in his ability to get the job done, Duo began copy and pasting things into various search engines, his fingers skimming over his keys with practiced ease. His urgency was palpable. “So, if we can prove that this email was made recently we can at least instill… what is it called? Reasonable doubt?” He glanced over his shoulder at Fara, raising an eyebrow for approval. “then they would at least have to let Heero go, right? Or at LEAST post fuckin’ bail on him. Seriously, he’s like not even allowed to have THAT?” He turned back to his computer, clicking away at the keys. “Damn French. Urm, no offense, Fara.”

“None taken. I don’t live here anymore.” Fara straightened up. “Yes. Let’s see when it was created… And try and call unreasonable doubt.” This was complete bullshit and he was tired of not gaining any headway in the Relena case. They needed evidence that pointed towards someone else. Towards the real killer.

Trowa leaned back against the hotel room wall while Duo’s fingers clicked away on the keyboard and mouse. “I feel like I should be doing more. Like this isn’t enough… Heero is rotting away in that cell.”

Duo’s head shot up at Trowa’s statement. Is he…. Confiding in us? He knew he would have to
tread carefully from here on out, otherwise Trowa would retreat back into his personal gundanium fortified shell. “There isn’t much you CAN do, pal. At least not right now. You know Heero, he’s a tough little fucker, he’s probably sweep kickin’ the guards and elbow-droppin’ the inmates as we speak.” He turned back to typing, trying to be as nonchalant as possible. “Where did ya go back at the precinct, anyway?”

“To check on Heero. And no, he isn’t sweep kicking the guards and elbow-dropping the inmates. He is wasting way in a cell. Not eating… suspects they are poisoning his food… He’s weak. I am worried.” The words flooded from Trowa’s mouth and he couldn’t stop them. He needed someone to confide in. The constant ruminating in his mind was driving him nuts.

This caught Duo by surprise. He looked up once again from his monitor and eyed Trowa. “You .. you know what, most people try to break out of jail, and here you were breakin’ in.”

“Who broke into where?”

The hotel room door was open, with a particularly annoyed looking Chinese agent standing inside it. Wufei slid inside the hotel room with his briefcase in hand, his round glasses still perched on his nose and the residual headache from his hours long meeting with the local authorities and the press still lingering in the back of his skull. He let the door close behind him with a click, dropped his briefcase loudly on the coffee table beside Duo’s laptop and looked from the American to the frenchman to the sullen looking former soldier by the wall.

“What’s going on here? I thought you were all sightseeing…” He peered down at the streams of data and loading pages flickering across Duo’s monitor. “... what’s that?”

Trowa sighed and pushed off the wall to face Wufei. “We got tired of sitting around doing nothing… So we went to the jail and got ahold of their so called ‘evidence’.” He left out the part about breaking in to see Heero.

Fara was sitting on top of the desk, legs crossed as he looked down at Duo’s computer screen. “I also tried talking to the officer in charge of the case. Tried showing him that we combed all of Relena and Heero’s email accounts and found nothing alarming.”

His frown deepening, Wufei immediately plopped down onto the couch beside Duo and elbowed him out of the way so he could take over the computer. He reached up to absentley free his tightly bound hair, the long silky black tresses spilling across his shoulders and curtaining his face from view as he peered through his glasses at the information on the screen.

“This was illegally apprehended information,” he pointed out slowly, a faint knot of muscle forming in the center of his sleek eyebrows. “You can go to prison for this, you know that, right?”

Duo shifted uncomfortably beside him. “Yeah, I know. What are ya gonna do, turn us in?”

“... no.” Wufei sat up on the couch and sighed, slipping his glasses off to rub his eyes with his forefinger and thumb. “But I have no knowledge of this information, or how you came about it, do you understand?”

“Uh…” Surprised, Duo nodded, his jaw hanging loosely. “Uh, yeah. Sure.”

“Do what you will with this, and then … submit it anonymously to Une. And then you sit back and let the process work on it’s own, do you understand? No more secret agent business behind my back.”
Duo nodded furiously. “Yeah, okay, yeah. But, uh… Wufei, the process isn’t WORKING on it’s own. Like what if we submit this and they discount it somehow? Trowa says Heero was lookin’ rough in the Big House, and that he isn’t eatin’. They can’t starve him to death, can they?”

Suddenly Duo flinched and slapped his forehead.

“… how does Barton know this?” Wufei looked up from the now pale American to Trowa, his expression stern. “Talk.”

“You can’t keep me from him.” Trowa folded his arms in defiance and gave Wufei a stubborn look. “The Parisian police department is not doing a good job on this case… they are trying to sentence an innocent man to death because they are too lazy to investigate any further. I won’t sit back and do nothing, Wufei.”

“It’s true.” Fara spoke up. “The officer didn’t care that we found nothing in the emails. He seems hell-bent on sentencing Heero.”

With a long-suffering sigh Wufei rolled his shoulders and nodded. “I know. I have been arguing that point all day. If you had gotten caught,” he jabbed a finger in Trowa’s direction, “and you had fucked it up somehow,” he jabbed another finger at Duo, “you could have lost Preventer all of its credibility.” He folded his glasses and stuffed them in the front of his uniform jacket before peering down at the computer. “Find out who sent this email, Duo. Forward it to Une, but also send what you find directly to me. Once we find out, we will ALL go together to the police department and present this case. Properly, with lawyers present. Is that understood? Barton?”

“Understood.” Trowa said and then headed to his room, done with the discussion.

Fara slid off the desk and went to sit next to Wufei. “How was the press meeting?”

“It was as to be expected, much like beating your head against a brick wall and hoping some ideas will stick,” Wufei replied, his voice hinted with sourness. He never much cared for the press, and normally avoided handling them at all costs. Public relations was more Sally’s thing. “Word has spread about Heero, and there was a leak that he was… a former Gundam pilot. Needless to say he isn’t going to be happy about that. Even if he gets out of jail without charges, he’s going to have to deal with the reality that his face is being posted all over the news as a “FORMER TERRORIST”. Let’s just hope the rest of our identities remain under wraps.” He finally tore his eyes away from Duo working on the laptop to study Fara. The sight of the blonde made his headache a little less.

“Tell me those two forced you unwillingly into this little mission of theirs…”

Fara shook his head and grinned. “No, I’m sorry. I wanted to be part of it… I want Heero out of jail.” He reached over to playfully grasp a strand of Wufei’s silky hair, twirling it around his finger.

“Why does everyone think that I DON’T want him out of jail?” Wufei asked, trying to get his mind off of the fact that the blonde agent was toying with his hair. It was one of his weaknesses, people playing with his hair. He tore his eyes away from him and cleared his throat faintly.

“Because you’re a heartless bastard,” Duo replied, not looking up from his computer. “Everyone knows this…”

“No he isn’t.” Fara countered Duo’s comment and turned back to Wufei. “I know you want him out of jail… It’s just, sometimes I have trouble playing by the rules. And I feel bad for Trowa…” He never thought he’d say that. Fara didn’t talk with the taller agent that much, and was still sore about losing Heero’s affections over him. But he could tell Trowa really cared for his partner.

“I’m doing all that I can to help Heero. We all are, but you must understand, too, that the integrity
of Preventer must remain intact. We cannot allow the organization to seem weak, or somehow
discredited. Heero wouldn’t want that, either. And neither would Relena.” Wufei sighed and shook
his head. “It’s a complicated situation, and by hiding these things from me, you put much more
than yourselves or Heero at risk.” He felt like he was lecturing them. Perhaps he was. He reached
over to place a hand gently on Fara’s. “Think of those things in the future when you make
decisions. In the meantime, I am glad you have acquired this information. It does give us a better
opportunity to combat their charges.”

Duo grinned and glanced up at them from his computer. “That’s his way of sayin’, ‘thanks guys,
you’re the best.’”

After presenting the information Duo had acquired the night before pertaining to Relena’s
supposed email to a mystery person and then sicking their company lawyer, Mister Alabaster
Reynolds, on them, the Paris police could do nothing but post bail for Heero and insist that they
were still diligently working on his case. Preventer quickly paid off the sum of his bail VIA a
blank check Wufei had been given by Une and the police could do nothing but reluctantly hand
over the former Wing pilot while muttering weakly that he couldn’t leave the country.

Wufei watched with his arms crossed over his chest as a pair of officers practically dragged Heero
Yuy from the back holding cell to the front of the precinct. They released their hold on his
shoulders and uncuffed him. He watched as the former Wing pilot rubbed his wrists, the exposed
skin on his bare arms and chest dingy as if he hadn’t bathed the entire time he was being held. He
had dark circles under his eyes and he looked extremely pale and weak - weaker than Wufei had
ever seen him, as if a heavy sigh could knock him over.

“Agent Chang, I think we should take photos of this agent’s current condition to build a case
against the precinct for neglect and professional misconduct,” Alabaster murmured into Wufei’s
ear as Heero shuffled past them and walked straight into Trowa, burying his face into the taller
pilot’s chest.

Wufei nodded and slowly approached Heero. “Yuy, we need to get you to a hospital for an
examination-”

“No,” the other agent replied, his voice muffled, without picking his head up. “... Duo, get me a
burger,” his fragile voice said.

Duo nodded. “Yeah, I’m on it,” the American said with a frown as he ducked out of the main
entrance of the police department like a man on a life and death mission.

Trowa wrapped Heero in a protective embrace, his chin resting on top of his head. “Let them give
you an exam... we can use the proof of mistreatment against the Parisian police.” He was reluctant
to let the other out of his arms now that he had him. Reaching into his coat pocket, he pulled out
yet another protein bar and placed it against Heero’s hand.

“I don’t want anyone touching me,” Heero announced with frustration. “I don’t want to pursue a
case against them. I just want to leave.” He didn’t pick his face up. He wasn’t seeking justice. He
didn’t want to waste any more time with the Paris PD. Relena’s killer was on the loose and he
didn’t want the focus taken off of that fact.

Wufei sighed and glanced over at the company lawyer with a frown.

“Ok. Let’s take you back to the hotel...” Trowa wasn’t going to push him. He carefully guided the
other towards the doors so he didn’t have to remove his face if he didn’t want to. If Heero had to stay in France for the useable future, they’d need to find a more cost efficient place. Trowa wasn’t planning on leaving France until Heero could. He hadn’t told Preventer that, though…

Duo and Fara were already in the car waiting for them. They left the back seat empty so Trowa could slide Heero in carefully. The taller agent buckled his partner up and then took a seat next to him, arms reaching out to reclame the frail body again.

“Duo said you wanted some food? We can stop at a fast food place on the way back to the hotel.” Fara offered, trying not to stare at Heero. He’d never seen him this weak before.

Heero wasn’t listening. Having had no formidable sleep to speak of he simply collapsed against Trowa and passed out, his head drooping limply, free to sleep in the comfort and protection of his friends.

“Ho–oly shit,” Duo muttered as he pulled the rental car out onto the street. “Dude what the hell did they do to him…?” Having familiarized himself with everything that pertained to food within a twelve mile radius, Duo wasted no time speeding off towards the nearest market and cafe corner stop. “They can’t fuckin’ treat him like that,” he said with a frown, gazing up at Trowa through the rearview mirror. “Dude, what are we gonna do?”

“I don’t know about you, but I’m staying in France with Heero until he can leave…” Trowa looked out the window. “Let’s grab some food and then take him back to the hotel… I’ll clean him up. He needs food and sleep.”

Heero was roused from the deepest sleep he’d had in years by a warm, wet sensation rubbing against the skin of his neck. Reflexively he sat up, his spine snapping him upright, and he smashed his head into a firm, cloth padded shoulder. Trowa’s shoulder. His eyes popped open and he stared up at the other agent, his brain taking careful stock of his surroundings. He was lying on a bed. A hotel room? Something was clutched in his hand. The protein bar Trowa had given to him at the police station.

“I...must be disgusting,” he murmured, rubbing his forehead with his free hand. Hadn’t he said this to him before? His brain supplied the first time they had met after so many years had passed on the train station. He had felt disgusting then, too, as well as self conscious. His fist tightened around the protein bar. 

The cookies... he is always taking care of me...

“Maybe a little smelly, but not disgusting.” Heero would never be disgusting to Trowa. While the other slept he had carefully removed his partner’s dirty clothing and started to administer a gentle wipe down, eager to get every last particle from the jail off his lover’s body. “Go back to sleep…” The warm washcloth continued to move against Heero’s flesh, running down to his shoulders and chest. Trowa focused on the task at hand.

One thing Heero hated more than anything was being ‘smelly’. After years of being spoiled with daily showers he couldn’t stand the feeling of having oily skin, greasy hair and most of all the scent of his own post-pubescent body. The thought was making his own stomach churn.

“Shower,” he grumbled, forcing himself to a full sit and sidling onto the edge of the bed. Weak or not, he wasn’t going to lay around like an invalid and let Trowa have to endure his smelliness. “I need a shower.” Absolutely unabashed, he forced his grimy naked body to a stand and immediately
felt the room spin. He dropped the protein bar to the floor, nearly dropping himself as well and managed to right himself with a shaken arm against Trowa’s shoulder. “Please.”

The washcloth dropped from Trowa’s hand as he quickly moved to help support Heero. He knew there was no use in arguing. Heero was stubborn and if he wanted a shower he was going to get home. “Alright.” There was only one bathroom in the hotel suit. Trowa grabbed the white fluffy robe from the back of the door and helped his partner get into it before slowly walking him out to the main room and in the direction of the bathroom.

“Hey, well, look who’s back from the dead. Again. How many times is that now, huh pal?” Duo greeted them brightly as Heero shuffled across the common room in a white spa robe with his nursemaid Trowa ghosting along behind him. “Hey, where ya goin’?”

“Shower,” Heero replied tersely.

“Well, when you’re done, come on out me ‘an Fara got a little bit of everything at the market for ya because I wasn’t sure you REALLY wanted a burger. We’ve got croissants, seven different cheeses, two bottles of wine, fresh bread, these little pork chop lookin’ things….”

Once they were in the bathroom Trowa shut the door, locked it, and turned the exhaust fan on. He went over to the shower and set the temperature while Heero took his robe off, then proceeded to undress himself. He wasn’t going to let Heero shower alone, not in his frail state. The other could slip and fall, and if Trowa was honest with himself, he wasn’t ready to let his partner out of his sight.

“Come here, stinky.” He teased, moving to stand under the spray of water once it was nice and warm.

“I’ll kill you,” Heero muttered half-heartedly, having no other way to threaten or playfully retort with a specific insult. Trowa was absolutely perfect, gorgeous and the kindest person he knew. He felt guilty for having him all to himself just now, as if he was undeserving. Despite those misgivings, he wasn’t going to argue. He carefully slid under the water, allowing it’s harsh pressurized blast to smash into the back of his neck and gave an audible moan as the warmth overwhelmed his senses. *I love showers…* he thought with a sigh. After allowing the water to completely drench him he peered up through his sopping wet, messy hair and smirked.

“You couldn’t resist another shower with me, could you?” he asked, amused, referring to the last time they had showered together and the various sexual, borderline yoga positions he had managed to fold his lover’s body into.

“I don’t want you to fall. It’s very slippery in here, and you’re body is weak.” Trowa stated, reaching over for the bar of soap. He lathered it up in his hands then started to wash Heero’s body, standing close to him just incase he needed to help stabilize him again. They both knew the real reason Trowa insisted on showering with him. He had missed Heero and didn’t care to be around anyone else right now. “I just… need to be next to you. Need to touch you and make sure you are ok…”

His body may had been weak, but his mind was processing everything crystal clear. As his partner worked his body over for him, firmly but gently washing away any and all remains of his torturous time in the Parisian jail, a thought that had formed one of his first days there alone slowly began to resurface. *I owe Trowa more than just friendship*, he thought with a frown. *He’s more to me than just a friend, more than just a work partner.* It was clear that Trowa felt that way, too, but was waiting for him to make the next move. To take the next step. Up until now everything Heero had ever thought about centered around Relena and the investigation, unless he was alone with Trowa.
Only then could he really appreciate the other pilot and feel his tension dissipate- be comfortable in his own skin. He knew that it was in Trowa’s nature to be nurturing and worrisome, to be there for his friends, but it was more than abundantly clear now that he was more dedicated to him, dedicated in a way he hadn’t seemed to be with anyone else, and that it was time that Heero acknowledged him and his feelings.

He raised a hand to slowly seek out Trowa’s, which had been following the trail of his hip and grabbed his wrist, stopping his movements so he could get his full attention. Once he had it, he sought out the other agent’s surprised eyes through his wet bangs and said calmly, “be my boyfriend.”

A moment of silence passed between the two agents as they gazed at one another through the hot, steamy air. Trowa didn’t realize it when the bar of soap slipped from his hand, landing on the tiled floor with a bounce and skid. The shock slowly faded from his face and he nodded, placing his hands on Heero’s hips while leaning in to press their wet foreheads together. “I always wanted to date a criminal…” he breathed.

Heero laughed, his voice carrying and echoing against the bare tile walls of the shower. “A criminal? What would your sister say?” he asked in a serious voice, the fingers of both hands raking through the taller pilot’s wet hair to slick it back away from his face before his palms settled on his shoulders, water pooling between his opened fingers to run down his wrists, forming twisting rivers of warmth that slid down his upturned forearms, falling free to spatter against Trowa’s hands as they clutched his at hips.

“Since when do I care what my sister says?” Trowa didn’t care what anyone said or thought. His heart had ached for Heero for so long. Suddenly he couldn’t stand the distance between them and moved in to close the gap, pressing his lips against his boyfriend’s in a passionate kiss.

Heero was becoming very aware that, when not caught off guard, Trowa was an excellent kisser. His mouth was somehow both submissive and demanding, firm yet soft at the same time. It was something he had noticed about the other pilot after first meeting him again and becoming more sexual with him. Trowa was the perfect mixture of both aggression and subdued, gentle subservience. He wasn’t sure if it was his nature, or if he just transformed into whatever counter-role Heero happened to need at the time. He knew that Trowa was an expert at fitting in- it was what he was known for- but he hadn’t ever expected him to be this way behind closed doors. Everyone always assumed that Trowa was aggressive, forceful and quiet but alone he could be demure, outspoken and humorous.

So when Trowa leaned in to kiss him first he wasn’t the least bit surprised. He let the other pilot come to him, cover his mouth and show him how he was feeling. It was nice to see him so unguarded, as if by asking him out Heero had dropped his final defense. It was as if he had forced his way through the final crumbling wall of restraint and self control. He slid his arms around the other agent’s neck in response, tugging him closer, tasting the faintly present menthol of his secretly smoked stress cigarettes, easing him closer so that their bodies were completely flush, sharing the heavy rush of the warm water gushing down on them from directly overhead.

Without thinking Trowa pushed Heero back against the tiled wall, pinning him there while his hands started to explore, his lips still claiming dominance. Relief set in, allowing his tense muscles to relax and his mind to ease. Heero was here with him, safe and no longer behind bars. The relief served as fuel for his desire, urging him on as the kiss deepened, his tongue slipping into his boyfriend’s mouth. He knew he couldn’t allow this to go all the way, knew that Heero was still weak and needed food and sleep, not a cock between his cheeks. But for the moment Trowa let himself go, determined to show Heero just how much he had missed him.
Heero was tired, but with the soreness of his overworked arms and legs came a dull, deeply emanating tingling that seemed sourced from his very bones. It surfaced slowly like ghostly fingers massaging his aching muscles and forcing the raw, golden energy of arousal to the surface. His skin tightened under Trowa’s hands, his heart pounded in his chest and despite logic dictating that he should go have a lie down on the bed he wanted nothing more than the body against him with him, pushing him into the bed. Having Trowa want him made him want Trowa more. He couldn’t stop thinking about how the tall, handsome pilot was not like everyone else. Everyone thought the person they cared about was special but even before he truly got to know him he knew that the former Heavyarms pilot was. Everything he did was surprising; from saving him on the battlefield, to visiting him in the Parisian prison. He was fearless, intelligent, empathetic, incredibly sexy and, above all, he was now exclusively his.

That thought alone forced a low, frantic moan from his throat. He broke their kiss to raggedly gasp for breath and then, no sooner than he finally caught his, he dropped his mouth to his new boyfriend’s shoulder and slowly began to assess and taste his skin with soft kisses and slow, careful licks, working his way across his collarbone, up his neck and across his throat while his hands traced down the raised, beveled lines of Trowa’s finely formed shoulders and back, settling finally upon his ass where he grabbed him roughly as if to lay claim to it.

Carefully Wufei slid the pen from Fara’s hand and set it aside. The other agent had fallen asleep writing up something pertaining to Heero’s defense with his head in his arms, slumped over against the hotel suite desk. He looked over at Duo, who was flopped out on the couch channel surfing with a bag of popcorn perched on top of his chest, clicking through the late night infomercials and sultry, over the top ads for phone sex. It had been a long day for everyone. He, Fara and Duo had spent the majority of the evening compiling everything the lawyers would need to make Heero’s case. The fact that Yuy refused to have a physical exam completely discounted any ideas of putting a formidable case up against the Parisian police.

Wufei dipped his fingers beneath the silken curtain of Faramond’s hair to carefully slip his reading glasses from his nose. He set them gently on the corner of the desk and then peered down at the frenchman’s elegant, font-like cursive handwriting and raised an eyebrow at it. Nobody wrote in cursive anymore, it having been taken from the school curriculum in most of the Earth primary schools by AD 2020. It was considered a lost practice. Wufei had taught himself cursive, for fun, as a young man back on his home colony. He found the smoothly transitioning, curving loops and dips of the script fascinating.

“Heh, I wonder if this ‘Late Night Hotties in Bugattis’ company has a chick who is willin’ to give a guy a Cleveland Steamer or a Hot Punjabi Punchcard?” Duo said with a chuckle from his spot on the couch. Wufei blinked.

“It’s like you’re speaking a different language,” the Chinese agent replied irritably, his voice muted and quiet so as not to rouse the sleeping blonde beside him.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if you were looking for someone to shit on your chest,” a voice said from a nearby doorway. Heero slipped quietly from the room he had vanished in with Trowa a few hours before and padded across the common space to the coffee table where Duo and Faramond had amassed a formidable assortment of foodstuffs. He looked somewhat more alive than he had when he first arrived at the hotel with Trowa. After a rather long shower and a light meal he had vanished into one of the hotel rooms with his partner, presumably to sleep. He was now clad in clothes that obviously weren’t his: a over-long v-neck black t-shirt and a pair of baggy grey sweatpants. With a sigh he sat on the couch across from Duo and began poking around at the pile of fruit on the far
side of the coffee table. After selecting a banana he peeled it slowly and took a bite, looking up as Duo chuckled at him. “What?”

“Nothin’. Just thinkin’ you probably have had your fill of **bananas** tonight, huh?” Duo said with a smirk before stuffing a handful of popcorn into his mouth.

Heero sighed, took another bite and chewed thoughtfully before replying, “if you’re trying to insinuate that I had Trowa’s dick in my mouth earlier, I’d say you aren’t wrong in that assumption.”

Duo choked on a loose kernel and laughed. “Holy shit, dude. Hahaha.”

Wufei frowned and looked down at Fara, wondering if he should move him before sighing and deciding not to interfere with him. He walked over to the couch and sat down beside Heero, looking between the two with a sad shake of his head.

“C’mon, Wufei. You’re one of the guys. This is how guys talk to each other. Well… maybe not how NORMAL guys talk, but you get my drift,” the American agent said as he continued flipping channels.

“No, not all men are as lewd and disgusting as you two,” Wufei replied sourly. Heero smirked but said nothing. Duo chuckled again and shrugged a shoulder.

“Lighten up, will ya. I was fuckin’ jokin’.”

“… I wasn’t joking,” Heero said flatly, his expression serious.

This time Duo was really choking. He sat up and buried his head between his knees, coughing loudly. Wufei hurried over and sat down beside him and began pounding on the center of his back with the flat of his hand. “You idiot,” he said.

After Duo had finally dislodged the wad of popcorn from his throat he looked across the coffee table at Heero and jabbed a finger at him. “You’re gonna be the death of me one of these days, damn it…”

“One can only hope,” Heero replied with a small smile.

The coughing was loud enough to wake the sleeping blonde. Startled, Fara straightened his back against the chair and unconsciously clenched his notebook, the paper crinkling under his fingers and words distorting. He was only disoriented for a few seconds as consciousness seeped in. “What time is it?” He murmured, getting up and walking sluggishly over to the couch to sit in a graceful sprawl against Heero’s side. “You’re awake…”

Heero knew only two people on the planet who could be graceful while sprawling. One was seated beside him on the couch, while the other was gracefully sprawled out naked on the bed he had just left minutes before. He took the final bite of his banana before continuing hunting for more calories and nutrients. He picked past a chocolate stuffed pastry and some sort of fluffy meringue cookie and found a turkey sandwich on a baguette. He began peeling the plastic back slowly as he spoke. “I am. And so are you,” he said plainly before turning to look over his shoulder at his former lover. “Thank you. Trowa told me what you did back at the police department.”

“Anything for you.” Fara said sarcastically with a hint of teasing in his voice. “I’m glad you are ok.” He studied the other for the first time since leaving the jail. It was easy to see why Trowa had been so concerned, so anxious to take action. “Really though, you should thank your lover boy. He was determined to get you out. And Duo… he did the hard part. Hacking into systems isn’t really
my number one skill. But I guess stumbling around like a floozy and causing a distraction is.” The blonde shrugged like it was no big deal.

Heero had an unspoken agreement that he and Duo never thanked each other for anything. He never had thanked Duo for all of his help during Operation Meteor, and Duo in turn had never thanked him for breaking him out of the OZ brig. They didn’t have to thank each other. It was just understood.

“Well, I appreciate everyone’s efforts,” Heero replied slowly before diving hungrily into his sandwich.

Duo smirked and nodded. “Yeah, well, Fara, ya gotta give yourself more credit than that. Floozin’ up the joint is hard work. Right, Wufei?”

Wufei looked up from studying the ingredients on the back of a bag of sweets Duo had procured from the market. “I’m not a floozy.”

“I’m just sayin, you could make a pretty chick, we should try that one day as a distraction tactic. Let the hair down, get rid of the sour puss face you're always makin’…” Duo teased as he stopped on the local news and watched a reporter fighting with her umbrella in the thunderstorm raging outside.

“This coming from the young man with longer hair than most ladies I’ve met…” Wufei rebuffed with a frown.

Duo blinked and glanced over at the Chinese man with a smile. “Hey, low blow, dude. I was just complimenting’ you on how pretty you are. Don’t get your fundoshi in a bunch…”

“... do you even know what a ‘fundoshi’ is?” Wufei asked, amused.

“Sure, it’s those little g-strings Sumo wrestlers wear,” Duo replied smartly.

“So you just assumed that because I’m Asian I would wear one?” Wufei asked, narrowing his already intense gaze on Duo.

“Huh? Well, I mean… it was just a-”

“You’re being very culturally insensitive right now,” Heero said flatly between bites of his sandwich.

Before Duo could say another word Fara cut him off. “Just stop. Your foot is already ankle deep in your mouth right now.” He smirked and slumped against Heero’s shoulder as he sank into the plush couch cushions.

“Heero you can’t even be entirely offended, you’re only a halfling,” Duo replied quickly as he jabbed a finger at the other agent as he coolly ate. Heero raised an eyebrow at him and shrugged a shoulder.

“Are you trying to say that my feelings are illegitimate because I am of dual race? …. Typical American,” Heero replied as he dusted the remaining crumbs leftover from his sandwich from his hands.

“We are from the colonies! Being ‘American’ or ‘Chinese’ or whatever is just a label, you know as well as I do that nobody is really anything anymore. We’re all mutts,” said Duo in his own defense.
“Actually, I have the purest of Imperial Chinese blood that dates back to the Zhou dynasty,” replied Wufei coldly. “How dare you accuse me of being anything but. Have you an issue with my distinguished heritage?”

“Ha! You, ‘imperial’? Hilarious. And what, is Heero the long lost Tsar of Russia?” Duo barked, laughing loudly.

Heero’s eyes narrowed sharply. “Who says I’m not.”

“You two are fuckin’ ridiculous. Next thing I know, Fara’s gonna claim his real name is Louis—what’ll it be now? The CXXth?”

“No, but my brother’s name was Louis... And it would be ‘The 19th’.” The name was very popular in France for obvious reasons. Fara’s parents had marked his twin as ‘special’ at birth. There were no historical kings named Faramond.

Wufei studied Fara’s face as he spoke. It was clear that the topic of his brother was a sensitive one by the sudden hardening of his expression. He also noticed how comfortable the blonde was getting next to Heero, and now the former Wing pilot didn’t seem to mind the close contact. Had Duo tried to lean on him like that he would have eventually shifted away, but with Fara Heero had made no effort to put space between them.

Wufei was feeling a touch jealous and decided to focus on the television rather than watch the interactions between his fellow agents. The conversation went on without him for a short time and he managed to drown out their voices until they became nothing more than one soft, droning sound beside him.

“Oh, shit, uh…” Duo’s voice broke through the white noise. Wufei blinked and finally SAW what he was looking at on screen. It was Heero’s mugshot.

“Turn up the volume,” Wufei ordered sharply. As Duo did the newscaster read dully off the prompt in French while staggered, typo-laden English subtitles flitted quickly across the screen at the bottom.

“…former colony terrorist and supposed freedom fighter known as ‘Heero Yuy’ was released today from the third precinct in our city of Paris. He had been under arrest as the primary suspect in the untimely death of our planet’s beloved Relena Peacecraft. New evidence seems to have confirmed Mister Yuy’s connection to her murder. More on this story later this week when we will be hosting live coverage from his preliminary hearing at Courthouse Primary on 14th Street.”

“Thank you, Matilde. Today protests have been erupting all over the city as the people rally against the release of the suspected murderer.” The television showed locals holding signs and pictures of Relena as they picketed along the capital building sidewalk in protest. “All of this comes with the sad news that one of Miss Peacecraft’s confidants and valued friend, Dorothy Catalonia, was killed in a sudden shuttlecraft accident while she and her associates were on their descent from the Lunar Base to Paris to join in on the protests. Miss Catalonia had supplied the Earth and Europe with valuable legislation and tirelessly supported Relena Peacecraft’s efforts ever since the end of the horrible Eve War. She will be greatly missed.”

Heero couldn’t do anything but stare at the television, his eyes locked onto the feed of the protesters picketing across the sidewalk with posters raised high. One in particular was a crude drawing of Wing Gundam with a red X through it, while another read “THERE IS NO ROOM ON EARTH FOR KILLERS”.
“The timing couldn’t be any worse…” A low voice called from over their shoulders. Trowa stood there leaning against the doorframe, arms crossed over his bare chest, sweatpants sitting low on his hips. *Now that Dorothy is dead it will just make Heero look even more suspicious, as the only suspect...* He frowned.

“Holy shit. I can’t believe it. Doro is dead? I didn’t think anything could kill that chick off,” Duo stammered, his shock obvious.

“You’re right,” Wufei said to Trowa with a deep frown. “This isn’t going to help Heero’s case at all…”

Heero couldn’t believe what he was seeing. Strangely enough he didn’t care about Dorothy’s dead. He had no feelings on the matter. He could have cared less about his own case. If worst came to worse he could just disappear off of the planet. It wasn’t his favorite option. He didn’t want to live life on the run, but now that he was outed- now that the world was seeing his face and being told *who* he really was, could he ever live his life without looking over his shoulder? What little carefree feelings he had felt previously all vanished, leaving him feeling alone in the room, as if he were shrinking into a deep and dark chasm dug out by his own stress and hopelessness. It was like nobody else was there, as if everyone around him with just out of arm’s reach. The truth was- prison or no prison- he would never be free again.

Immediately Wufei’s cell phone rang. He fished it out of his slacks pocket and saw that it was Sally. He muttered a quiet and polite word or two before excusing himself to his own room to take his call.

“Heero… you okay man?” Duo asked. He had tossed the popcorn aside and was looking worriedly across the coffee table at his colleague. “Don’t worry about it. So what if they see your face- it isn’t like you can’t blend into a crowd. You’re not THAT much of a stand out. We can get you a haircut, put some sunglasses on ya, and nobody will notice the difference. Am I right?” He looked to Trowa and Fara for backup.

“Touch his hair and I’ll kill you…” Trowa gave Duo a look as he approached his boyfriend. He stood in front of him, blocking the TV from view. “Come back to bed.” The news was stressful and he didn’t want Heero to get caught up in it. Not in his current state. Fara rubbed Heero’s arm, also watching him with concern. It was like everyone in the room had their eyes on the jailbird.

Heero didn’t much care for all of the attention he was getting from the media and from his friends. He didn’t like feeling weak and pathetic. He didn’t want to be so reliant on others. Seeing the protesters on the TV brought forth something vicious and alarming inside him. He was feeling panicked, as if something had unlocked in his mind. A distant memory. A painful memory. With a frown he stood up and without saying a word walked into the bedroom he had been in with Trowa before. He dropped down onto the disheveled bed and curled up on his side, attempting to hold back whatever strange and distant deja-vu sensations were threatening to overtake his thoughts.

“Nobody is paying attention to the real issue here…” he finally said as Trowa closed the door behind him. “Relena’s dead. Someone killed her… this is all distraction from the real problem. Now they’re bringing this up… my attachment to the colonies is only going to make people on Earth feel even more threatened by colonists.” Whoever was playing these cards was playing them with expertise.

“Someone is using you as a scapegoat.” Trowa got onto the bed next to Heero and lay on his side facing him. “You can’t worry about this right now… you need sleep. Let us take care of it.” Heero wasn’t going to be ok with that and Trowa knew better, but right now all he was concerned about
was his lover’s health. He could care less about the protestors, Dorothy’s death, or Relena’s even. All that mattered was lying next to him, staring at him with sad blue eyes.

“I’m sorry you all have to deal with this,” said Heero with a sigh. “Please don’t let them stop searching for her murderer. We’re all just wasting time…” His frustration was beginning to grow exponentially, and more than anything he was finding himself more determined to find the person behind this. It was personal before, but now that he was being directly attacked, it had ascended to a whole new level. Every cell in his body was activated, wanting to go outside and lurk or prowl the streets in search of the real culprit. It would be more difficult to move through the city now that a bullseye had all but been placed on his head. He forced his eyes closed and tried to relax. I can’t do anything tonight, he tried to reason with himself. I’ll look at what Duo and the others retrieved tomorrow. Reaching out blindly he found one of Trowa’s hands and clutched it tightly.

“We won’t stop looking.” Trowa promised, determined to see this through. He scooted closer, wrapping his arm around Heero while their fingers tangled together. “I couldn’t sleep worth a damn without you.” He confessed, closing his eyes. I missed you. I’m becoming too dependent on you… The thought brought with it a temporary frown. Trowa had never been dependent on anyone, but with Heero it was different. He couldn’t stop thinking about him, would do anything for him. His body constantly ached for contact and he couldn’t sleep at night when the other was away. It was like he was obsessed. Was that what it felt like being in a relationship?

Trowa’s confession was adorable, and truth be told Heero had the same problem. Ever since they had first started having sex at the dorms they ended up just bunking in whatever room they happened to pass out in together. Soon it turned into a new level of comfort. Heero felt more comfortable knowing that Trowa literally had his back when he slept, not to mention he craved the warmth of the other pilot’s body. Even if they didn’t sleep on top of each other he found himself unconsciously touching him in some way, whether it be a foot against his, or a leg strewn over top the other’s. Small, seemingly insignificant things that had become habit. They had become necessary.

“I couldn’t either,” he replied. Though his issue wasn’t primarily lack of Trowa so much as having guards pounding on his ribs every half an hour. His body was still sore from the overworking and random bouts of “physical training”. If he had to even think about doing a push-up anytime soon he would faint. It had been a long time since he had been pushed to his limit. He settled in under Trowa’s arm and slowly pulled their clasped hands upward so he could kiss the top of Trowa’s knuckles slowly. “Thank you, Trowa. For everything.”
Chapter 16

December | Europe

It was raining. Not a heavy downpour, but a light drizzle, just enough to warrant an umbrella. The weather was rather fitting for a funeral. All around were people dressed in their finest black attire, sniffing, crying, and blowing their noses in their expensive handkerchiefs. Those who neglected to bring an umbrella were subjected to the elements, their tears melting with drops of rain while streaking tracks along their cheeks.

Fara had no tears. He watched as the gaudy white casket with ornate gold-plated trimming was slowly lowered into the ground, feeling no sense of remorse for the body that lay inside. His side was pressed firmly against Agent Chang’s as they shared cover under a large umbrella. Across the sea of guests he spotted the familiar face of Quatre Winner, who was doing an A+ job of looking morose.

Wufei hated funerals, thinking that they were an obscene waste of time and money. For years only the elite had been privileged enough to be buried on the planet. The rest of the people who lived out in space had cremations unless against a specific sect of religion. In which case orbital arrangements were made. People were put in chrome tubes and shot out into open space with a few mutterings of prayer before the colony began to spin again without them. Life went on. What was the point of moping over the dead?

Perhaps he was bitter. His entire colony had been sacrificed- killed off without so much as a ceremony or kind word. It had been Wufei’s private experience. He was the only one present at that lonely ‘funeral’. He didn’t even try to look sad. He didn’t much care of Dorothy Catalonia, and if she were not cousins to Treize Khushrenada- whose ghost had come to earn his respect- he wouldn’t have given this funeral the time of day.

His eyes drifted from the gaping hole that was currently swallowing up Dorothy’s remains to the massive, marble headstone of the former head of OZ. He had known of this place. Director Une had mentioned it’s location to him as she often came to pay respects, but Wufei had turned down her offer to accompany her many times. He didn’t know how he should feel right now, and sometimes it was easier just to deny feelings than to come face to face with them. As the priest said his hollow words, Wufei simply stared at the nearby headstone of his former rival, his mind lost in thought.

“-may she rest in eternal peace.” The priest finished and bowed his head, stepping back so guests could come forward. A mass of white roses flew through the air and landed in the grave, signaling a last farewell to the deceased. Fara and Wufei stayed back, heads bowed politely. As if on cue the rain picked up and fell in heavy sheets like tears falling to Earth from the gods above. Fara felt his shoes sink into the grass as the soil was drenched.

*Dramatic.*

He gripped Wufei’s arm and looked over at him, a bored expression on his refined features. “This is the best date you’ve planned yet.” He murmured sarcastically, his voice low so only his companion could hear.

“You can never accuse me of never taking you somewhere painfully formal,” Wufei replied coolly, gesturing with a tilt of his head to the finely dressed people around them. The casket Dorothy had been buried in was probably just as expensive as her gold plated space shuttle and
everyone around them were wearing clothes made by designers Wufei couldn't even begin to attempt to pronounce the names of. As the people around the casket tossed flowers on to the grave and left weeping and lamenting their sorrows Wufei led Fara around the foot of the grave to approach Quatre, who was practically hugging himself, a genuine frown on his face. He huddled beneath his black umbrella alone, but at the edge of the cemetery the large, foreboding figure of Rashid could be seen clad in a dark brown trenchcoat, efficiently blending in with the trees as if he were one of them.

“Winner. It’s been a while,” Wufei greeted him, offering a hand across the steady rain for a firm handshake.

Quatre grabbed Wufei’s hand and gave it a firm squeeze. “A few months.” He nodded, having been unable to return to Preventer’s base on the moon due to work. “It would have been nice seeing you again under different circumstances.”

“Yes,” Wufei replied. He reached into his pocket and pulled forth a plain white cotton handkerchief and handed it to the blonde former Sandrock pilot. He wasn’t sure if it was the rain or his old friend’s sensitivity and empathy playing in his eyes. “This is Agent Maurel, you’ve met him before?”

“Faramond, yes.” Quatre smiled at the other blonde as he gratefully took the handkerchief. “One of the talented Risk Analysts, if I remember correctly. You’re helping with the Relena case?” He hand a photographic memory and remembered faces well. When Fara nodded Quatre continued, “I haven’t worked with you on a case yet, but I’ve heard you are the best on the team. Lady Une talks very highly of you.”

“She’s too kind.” Fara said although he was well aware of the reputation he had earned through hard work and a high success rate on previous cases. He wasn’t one to gloat, but it was nice that the Winner heir knew of him.

Among the unfamiliar faces of the terran elite came a vaguely familiar, overly smiling face of the man who had accompanied Dorothy previously to the Preventer donor event. Thomas Bernard. He was clutching the hands of the leaving family and patrons, giving them his sentiments, before spotting the trio like a hawk on the hunt. “Ah, hello. How nice to see that all three of you came to give your condolences,” Thomas said with a grin, offering a handshake in greeting to each one.

“Thomas.” Quatre said, shaking the other man’s hand. He remembered meeting him at the Preventer Gala last month as Dorothy’s date.

“Ah, you remembered my name. How quaint.” Thomas looked Quatre over once as if he were assessing a piece of real estate, and then sighed and looked over at Wufei and then Fara. “Last I recall, there were more of you… the ‘clown’, Dorothy had said? I don’t think I was properly introduced to him. A guy with a ponytail like a member of American West Coast biker gang…” he paused and chuckled at his own joke before adding quickly, “and Heero Yuy?” He pretended to survey the now dwindling population of the cemetery. “Have I missed them?”

Wufei shook his head. “No, they were unable to attend due to work related assignments,” he explained plainly. He slipped his arm through Fara’s and began leading him to the line of taxis and limos nearby. “I’m sorry Mister Bernard, but I don’t think it will do any of us good to stay in this rain.”

“Oh, of course, of course. Say, since we were all good friends of Dorothy, why don’t we have dinner tonight? After the official gathering at her family estate? In her honor?” Bernard trailed after them like a barracuda locked onto a shiny object.
Dinner with this pretentious jerk? Fara looked over at Wufei and frowned. “Did we have plans tonight, or?” He tried to give them an easy out.

“Well, yes, we did actually. I’m sorry,” Wufei said slowly and firmly, quickening his step in an attempt to break their tail. Bernard would not be so easily diverted.

“Well, okay, not dinner but perhaps a coffee or something? I would love to exchange stories about Dorothy Catalonia with you. It could be a nice way to honor her memory,” he said as he followed them along the long row of multicolored, expensive cars. Quatre had taken the opportunity to escape by crossing the field to the opposite end where one of his staff met him up with his car. He had abandoned them. Wufei couldn’t blame him.

“We really shouldn’t,” began Wufei in protest but he was stopped short by the realization that their taxi was gone. With a frown he frantically began tugging his phone out of his suit pocket to hail another ride.

“What’s wrong? Did your Uber leave with someone else? Damn snipes. It happens. Why don’t you let me give you a ride?” Bernard asked as he gestured to a long, stretch, cream colored Mercedes limo parked nearby with the driver standing beside it, waiting expectantly.

Fara sighed and looked at the rain as it continued to pour down. “Maybe we should just accept a ride…” He was tired of standing around and getting wet.

Wufei reluctantly put his phone back in his pocket. Bernard smiled in accomplishment and led the way to his limo. The driver assisted them with their doors. The inside was plush with ivory leather seats and deep, burgundy carpeted floorboards. Polished golden oak accents covered every unupholstered surface. Wufei slid onto the rearmost seat and scooted over to make room for Fara, shrugging his damp jacket clad shoulders. Thomas Bernard took the seat directly across from them and was typing something on his phone. “Where are you staying?” he asked with a grin. “I can take you back- but understand, now that I have given you a ride, you owe me an hour of your company over coffee.”

Wufei frowned. *This sneaky fucker.*

“We are staying at the Hilton off Grand street.” Fara replied, looking around the lux interior of the limo. “And we actually had a date planned for tonight. Dinner. Alone.”

“Alright,” Bernard replied, typing that in and presumably sending it to the driver. “I get the hint. You don’t want to talk to me. That’s fine,” he said, feigning a pout. “I guess I’m just desperate for friends. Two of my closest have died. First Relena, and now poor … lovely Dorothy.”

Wufei raised an eyebrow at that but said nothing. According to Heero, Relena had never once mentioned ‘Thomas Bernard’ nor had he seen him at any of her private functions. He crossed his arms over his chest and studied the man closely before finally saying, “I have a few questions, if I may, Mister Bernard.”

The blonde and smiled warmly and began digging through his mini fridge, pushing around bottles of whiskey and vodka, seeming to search for something. “Of course. What is it? Drink?” He gestured to the glasses in a small built in cabinet and looked over at Fara. “Some whiskey to take the chill off, perhaps?”

“Sure, why not.” Fara shrugged and waited for his drink.

Bernard leaned down behind the mini fridge and fumbled with the bottles, filling a crystal glass
halfway with a high quality, perfectly aged whiskey mixture poured from a small, unmarked bottle. One for the lovely blonde agent before carefully handing the glass across the rear of the limo to Fara. He capped the bottle and proceeded to pour himself whiskey from a different bottle. “Here you go, Mister Maurel. Mister Chang?”

“No,” Wufei said plainly.

“Alright then, your loss. This is a great vintage,” Thomas said with a chuckle before taking a long, deep sip of his own whiskey, smacking his lips theatrically and sighing contentedly. “So, about that case you’re working on. How is it going? I hope they finally solve the case. When I found out Heero was the killer it took me completely by surprise at first, though I don’t know why. He was rather… extreme in school. It wouldn’t have been the first time Relena felt threatened by him, that’s for sure…” he said quickly, taking another long sip.

“Heero isn’t the killer.” Fara corrected sharply, watching Thomas through narrowed lids. He held the glass but didn’t drink from it yet. “The evidence the Parisian police department thought they had turned out to be fake. Most likely planted.”

“Really?” Bernard replied, his voice filled with his shock. “How about that. Last I heard he was holed up in jail, and the news… why, the news hasn’t reported anything about his acquittal. Such a shame, the whole thing. Especially the twist that he was a Gundam pilot. Now that I know that a lot of the crazy things he did in school make so much more sense!” He sipped again and paused as if he had just taken a swig from the nectar of the gods. “How sick that Relena loved someone so twisted. So… so VIOLENT. It’s really a shame. I can see why the police thought that he was the suspect. Anyone would, with a background like that. At fifteen years old, can you imagine? How unstable he must be right now…”

Wufei’s eyebrows were slowly coming together and shifting into an irritated angle throughout Bernard’s self-righteous, annoying, misinformed rant. “Need I remind you, Mister Bernard, that… if memory serves, the pilot of Wing Gundam SAVED the Earth from a potential nuclear winter?” Wufei was feeling rather protective of Heero and his accomplishments all of a sudden.

Fara was getting tired of this conversation. In his opinion, no one had a right to judge Heero for all that he had done during Operation Meteor. He rolled his eyes and then brought the glass to his lips, finishing half its contents in two gulps. Looking out the window, he tried to gauge how far they were from the hotel.

“Well yes, he did, didn’t he? But he was following orders then, wasn’t he? From what I’ve read, Wing Zero didn’t exactly accomplish that feat alone.” Thomas Bernard was smiling behind his glass as if he had told himself a private joke.

Wufei straightened in his seat. “Mister Bernard, I don’t know where you get your information, but you are ill informed on this topic and I would rather not insult you further by calling you out for being the absolute imbecile that you seem to be. So let’s stop discussing this topic right now.”

Bernard scowled. “Are you calling me an idiot? For your information, Mister CHANG, I am very well versed in weaponry and the full capabilities of beam destruction. My father was the CEO and owner of Unicorn Enterprises, who supplied all of the beam based munitions not only for the Alliance Leos, but he even developed components for the OZ Taurus suits as well.”

Wufei couldn’t help but smile. “That’s interesting. Is he in business now?”

“Of course not,” Bernard snarled. “Not ever since the disarmament pact.”
“Oh. Well, yes. Of course. There is that. I was thinking perhaps he went out of business due to the inferior build and effectiveness of those beam cannons in general. Weren’t they ineffective against anti-beam coated gundanium alloy? At least… that was what I’ve read,” replied Wufei calmly as his lips curled into a tight sneer.

Thomas Bernard’s formerly cool, pale face brightened to a particularly vibrant shade of rouge. He slammed his glass down hard into it’s shallow cup rest. “That is inaccurate. Our beam generators were installed in the OZ 13MSX1 Vayeate, which used a full charge to direct blast to completely decimate Gundam 02.”

“Simply because it didn’t have it’s own generators active, and from what I’ve heard they laced the entire cockpit of that Gundam with explosives to make it seem more effective for the television broadcast. OZ’s fakery,” said Wufei confidently, knowing this to be true. Trowa had divulged this information to him years later.

A proud grin spread on Fara’s lips as he listened to Wufei rip the pretentious asshole apart. The Chinese man’s confidence and sharp tongue was a turn on. His hand, flush against the leather seat, snuck across the gap between them and sought out his date’s. He took it and gave it a firm squeeze while downing the rest of his whiskey and setting the glass aside.

“There was nothing fake about that. The Gundams were extremely patchwork, as they should be, having been just slapped together with subpar colonist technologies. Their only benefit was the fact they had enough space-acquired gundanium to outfit five suits, and that the colonies were desperate enough to force brainwashed, fucked-up prepubescent children in the cockpits. Children who knew no right from wrong. I heard on the news that Heero Yuy was genetically altered or something like that. How can we as a world possibly compete with monsters like that? No. The colonies had no ethics. No morals. They were desperate, and it shows.”

Wufei squeezed Fara’s hand and attempted to muster all of his self control. Anything to keep himself from leaping across the cabin to pummel the pompous, idiot asshole to make his smug, lopsided face nothing more than a bloody, unrecognizable pulp. This man knows nothing but what the Earth tells him. What the news wants him to know. “I wouldn’t know about any of that,” he lied. “All I know is that the people of space were tired of having the rich terrans exploiting them and keeping this planet to themselves. They had to do what they felt was right, in my opinion. If it weren’t for those ‘prepubescent children’ you speak of, we wouldn’t have the prosperous peace we’ve been so thoroughly enjoying. Your good friend Relena believed in that cause. She believed in Heero Yuy.”

To Wufei’s relief the limo pulled up to their hotel. Before the doorman could reach the door Wufei had already wrenched it open and was outside it, helping Fara to his feet. “While this conversation has been enlightening, Mister Bernard, I’m afraid I’m weary of it and must retire. Thank you for the ride…”

Bernard frowned. “What about that coffee?” Wufei slammed the door in his face.

“You really let ‘Mister Bernard’ have it.” Fara took his coat off and tossed it onto a chair as they entered their hotel room. He was so turned on right now, but was feeling too tired to act on it. That and they still hadn’t shared their first kiss, so sex was out of the question. There were two queen-sized beds in their suite. Fara walked over to his and sat on the edge. “I’m so proud of you….”

Wufei shrugged his own coat off and hung it carefully. He always buttoned the top button of anything he hung as insurance to keep it from falling. He hated ironing, but he was too much of a
perfectionist not to iron out even the most minute crease or wrinkle.

“That man is just like everyone else here on this damn rock,” Wufei snarled, still heated from the exchange. “He has no idea what he’s talking about. He is spoon fed everything he is supposed to think. He’s a goddamn sheep. A rich, golden sheep. Just like the rest of them. It was how the damn thing started in the first place. Exclusive, rich aristocrats who all kiss each other’s asses, pat each other on the backs and congratulate themselves for ‘ruling the masses’ and ‘keeping those pathetic plebs in line’ whenever there is but a single inkling of unrest or complaint.” He strode across the room and sat down on the other bed, leaning down to untie his glossy black leather shoes. “People like that don’t care about others. His father made weapons? He didn’t care how many he made, or who died in the process. The Alliance made subpar, shit weapons. While the CLO formed Gundams to be precise, perfect machines the Alliance contracted assholes like that man’s father to flood the market with pathetic excuses for beam just so they could intimidate us. So they could make the colonists feel outnumbered.”

Angry. No, fuming- Wufei got up and grabbed his shoes, practically stomping to the sink. He grabbed a small washcloth and began furiously scrubbing the mud and blades of grass from them, ranting. “And yes, he’s right. We were children. Children who weren’t swayed by money or false promises. Children who were pure of heart, who knew right from wrong. Deep down, at a primal and human level. Children can feel when things are right. We all acted on our feelings.”

Finally satisfied with cleaning his shoes he set them in the bathroom on a towel to dry and came back into the room, standing in front of Fara with his arms crossed. “I’m sorry. That man … he got under my skin.”

“I can tell.” Fara’s golden brows arched, his eyes studying Wufei’s face. There were slight flushes of pink seeping onto his cheeks. Laying back on the bed, he looked up at Wufei curiously. “You loathe us Earthlings.” He was smirking.

“No. I loathe people who think they have authority and should have respect from others simply by their birthright, and not by the merits of their own work and actions,” Wufei replied seriously, not getting the joke. It took him a moment to realize Fara’s face was turning pink. “... are you ill?”

“No? I am tired, though. Am I offending you by laying down?”

Faramond looked tired. Finally having gotten his frustrations off of his chest, Wufei was becoming more aware of his companion and his weary looking expression. Perhaps he was experiencing shuttle lag? He could recall many times he had the same thing. He nodded and knelt down in front of him to help him with his shoes. “Here, let me help you…” he offered, though he didn’t give the blonde agent time to protest. He grasped him by his dainty ankle and began carefully untying his shoe.

“Why don’t you just… take a nap with me? And then we can get dinner later?” Fara reached out and draped his arms over Wufei’s shoulders, pulling him down on top of him without really knowing what he was doing. He was fighting to keep his eye’s open.

Wufei blinked as he was grabbed, and what blush the blonde had previously bore now transferred to his own face. He didn’t fight him, though he seemed anxious about being so close to him. He propped his arms against the mattress on either side of his companion’s head and stared down at him. “I… suppose we could,” he finally replied before carefully sliding down to lie beside him. _That whiskey must have been a high proof_, he thought. He carefully ran a socked foot down Fara’s leg and found the heel of his other shoe and with a careful flick toed it off for him. It was going to drive him crazy if he didn’t.
Fara curled up against Wufei’s side like a sleepy feline. He rest his head on the other man’s chest, blonde hair spilling out across his shoulder, and let his eyes close. “Fei… I like you.”

Wufei blinked and looked down at his shoulder, spying the top of Fara’s head and his now closed eyes. Even in the dim light of the hotel room the other agent’s long, smooth and curled eyelashes caught the light and appeared elegant and glossy against his pale, raised upper cheek. He was gorgeous, and looking at him felt like observing a perfectly crafted and sculpted classical statue. It was what made it hard to look at him sometimes and why often he avoided doing so, lest he find himself gawking and staring dumbly.

The fact that this perfect creature liked HIM was stunning in itself. “I like you too,” he replied honestly. His fingers twitched. He felt like there should be more behind that statement, otherwise it was nothing more than a hollow reply. He reached up with his hand and slowly ran his index finger across the other agent’s temple so he could tuck his soft hair behind his ear. “I’ll wake you at dinner,” he promised.

“Thank you…” The words were murmured and seconds later Faramond was asleep.

Wufei had an extremely accurate circadian clock. It never failed to alert him to the UTC time no matter where he was in the Earth-Sphere. His internal clockwork activated him and he came to life, his eyes popping open almost immediately after the digital clock beside the bed struck what was locally 4:30 pm. His body hadn’t deviated from its original spot, and neither did his companion, who was still against his shoulder, pressed against the side of his supine body. He reached up with his free hand to rub his forehead and blinked up at the ceiling as he gathered his wits. Finally he tilted his head to the side and glanced down at the pale, partially exposed face against his shoulder. “Fara…? Faramond.”

“Hm?” The blonde opened his eyes slowly, letting his blurry vision focus on the wall across the bed. His body lay limp and he didn’t move at first. It took a few seconds to remember where he was, his mind groggy and lagging. He could hear the dull thud of Wufei’s heartbeat under his ear, the repetitive rhythm soothing and helping to wake him up.

After a few minutes of just laying there processing the quiet moment Faramond started to stir. The arm that was draped around his companion’s waist tightened and he shifted into a sit, hovering over the other, looking down at him with a soft and tired expression. Blonde hair hung around his face like a golden frame, a temporary curtain of privacy. He studied Wufei, hazel eyes moving down to his lips.

Was it hot in there? Wufei felt his entire body break into a cold sweat as he stared up, dumbstruck, at the lovely Preventer agent. “Uhm… it’s time for dinner,” he said awkwardly, reminding the blonde why he had woken him in the first place. His mouth felt suddenly dry and his tongue reflexively slipped out across his own lower lip in an attempt to soothe and moisten them. “Unless you’re wanting to sleep more.”

The tip of the tongue was mocking him Fara decided as he watched it peek out before Wufei spoke again. They had been ‘dating’ for the last month and a half and still no kiss. Those lips were constantly on his mind. What would they feel like? How did Wufei kiss? Was he possessive and dominant like Heero, or submissive and gentle? Never before had Fara patiently worked this hard for a simple gesture of affection. Last time he had brought it up Wufei said he was waiting for the right time, the right place. That was weeks ago and still nothing. Was it him? Was there something wrong with him? Maybe he was reading too much into this and Wufei wasn’t interested. Or maybe
the other was just too much of a gentleman, too shy to make the first move. That was new to Fara who was used to more forward, aggressive partners.

Fara shoved the frustrating thoughts to the back of his mind, letting his heart take control. Determined, he tuck a few strands of hair behind his ear and leaned in closer, lips hovering over Wufei’s hesitantly. Their breath mingled together in the tight space between them. “If you don’t want this, tell me. Just push me off.” He murmured before eagerly pressing their lips together.

The truth was Wufei had never kissed another man before, and while Faramond was hardly an intimidating example of masculinity he still wasn’t sure how to go about making moves. He had always felt completely open about his attractiveness to men and women but had never found himself connecting to anyone of his same gender until now. A stickler for politeness and etiquette, he had no idea how any of this was supposed to work. He had asked Duo, who had simply blurted something along the lines of, ‘Jesus, man, just be yourself,’ but he was having trouble accepting this version of himself.

However, when Fara’s lips pushed against his own it was suddenly very easy to accept the gesture, and to come to terms with the fact that he really liked this intelligent, androgynously handsome man and, well, fuck protocol and etiquette. His body automatically reacted and rather than push the other figure away his hands shot up to cup the sides of Fara’s face. He matched the fervor set by Fara, evenly kissing him back before hesitating for a long moment as he pulled back slowly and then leaned in again to kiss him a second time; only this time this kiss was his own.

When Fara pulled away from the second kiss he was smiling. He licked his bottom lip and sat back on his heels. “Feel free to do that to me whenever you get the urge.”

Wufei was suddenly overcome with the urge. He sat up, meeting Fara’s face with his own and gently slid his fingers under his chin to steady him so he could plant another firm, purposeful kiss to his smiling lips. When he finished he pulled back and replied, “then I am afraid I’ll be kissing you all day.”

“I don’t see anything wrong with that.” Fara kissed Wufei again, fingers tangling in his soft hair. He gave a light tug, testing the waters.

Wufei loved his hair played with. The tug forced a soft groan to form in the back of his throat, which immediately made him tense with embarrassment. He had surprised himself. He broke off their kiss and cleared his throat softly, nodding and tilting his head in the direction of the clock. “Dinner... uhm,” he said, curses himself silently for being so weak and ridiculous, “-let me take you somewhere nice... since we’re already dressed up.”

“Yes, I’m hungry.” Fara scoot off the bed and went to the bathroom to straighten himself up, the gogginess finally leaving his system. His cheeks were tinted a light shade of pink and a smile permanently graced his lips.

After both men had freshened up they exited the hotel room and headed for the elevator. Wufei had hailed a ride which had messaged him that it was waiting at the front sidewalk for them. He offered his arm politely to Fara and led him to the elevators, pounding the button and waiting for the doors to open. When they did he slid inside and tapped the lobby button. As the doors closed he tugged his phone out again and checked his emails for any new information from Sally or Une.
Fara’s nose was also buried in this phone, his thumb flicking through emails and text messages at a rapid pace. Even though he wasn’t on the clock he couldn’t help but check his messages, making sure his team was doing all right while he was gone. They had brought on a new analyst the past week and Fara was in charge of training. “I might have to do some remote work from the hotel room later tonight…” He murmured, still looking down at his phone.

As the elevator car descended to the lobby on the first floor Wufei felt the air shift around him. Despite being distracted by work he still had an acute sense of spacial awareness. The small, cramped quarters of the elevator car made the movements of the man behind them more noticeable. He tensed automatically, and then his fingers released his phone.

It happened in a fraction of a second. Before Wufei could react the man behind him lunged at him, arm raised, prepared to stab him in the back. He turned around just quick enough to catch the downward stab with his left forearm. In the process he obtained a rather nasty gash through the sleeve of his black suit.

Fara’s eyes caught sight of the glint of a blade, and without thinking he jumped to action. As Wufei stumbled to the side the man with a horrible taste in fashion raised his arm to strike again. Fara reached out and grabbed his wrist and then drove his knee into the man’s groin, while at the same time twisting his hand back in a painful direction, disarming him. The knife dropped to the ground, bouncing off the metal floor.

Their assailant, now unarmed, shoved Fara roughly with a boot to the side to knock him backward against Wufei, who was clutching his injured arm in an attempt to slow the blood flow. The Chinese agent narrowed his eyes and straightened as Fara fell into him, intent on kicking the shit out of the man who attacked them, when the door to the elevator opened. The tacky man jumped out as soon as the doors parted and made for the entrance to the hotel. Wufei followed him a few strides before turning quickly to check on his companion.

“Are you alright?” He couldn’t be sure whether Fara caught the edge of the blade during the scuffle or not.

Fara nodded. “I’m fine. The blade didn’t’ touch me…” He looked at Wufei’s arm, saw the sticky, dark red liquid that stained his fingers. “We can’t let him get away.” The attacker was already outside. Fara lunged out of the elevator and started to sprint towards the exit, carefully weaving around hotel guests who looked on in shock and confusion.

Wufei snarled under his breath, annoyed with himself for allowing someone to get the drop on him. He followed Faramond across the lobby, leaving the spatterings of his own crimson blood in his wake. As he exited to the street he saw that his blonde companion was standing a few yards away on the sidewalk, peering through the shadows of dusk for their assailant, who had somehow managed to vanish. If Wufei didn’t have the man’s calling card on his forearm, there would have been no proof of the tacky man’s existence.
Trowa slung his duffel over his shoulder and pulled Heero into the trailer. “My room is on this end.” He nodded past the kitchenette to a set of sliding doors. He and Catherine had renovated a 1970s Airstream about a year ago, an upgrade from the smaller trailer they were living in before. It featured a cozy bedroom on either end, a shared bathroom, kitchenette, and small living area sandwiched in the middle. Trowa liked the layout because it gave him more privacy. He carefully led Heero through the kitchenette and to his bedroom, sliding the door open to reveal a white, minimally decorated room with windows framing the head of the bed and little skylights on either side of the ceiling. The full-sized bed took up most of the space, but there were little night stands on either side for storage.

Heero set his bag on the floor by the foot of the bed and looked up at the skylights. He had never considered the benefits of such a thing before, but he could see the appeal. The trailer was neat, tidy and bright. Nicer than most places he had lived, which was impressive. He wondered how two incredibly tall people could manage to live in such a cramped space comfortably, however it seemed to be working for them.

It beat living in a mobile suit cockpit, anyway.

“Nice,” he said with a nod. He noticed what little was in the room consisted of a few books, and a rather cheerful vine-like plant. At least that was what was on the surface. He knew better than to take anything about Trowa at face value. He reached out to tug the pocket door until it closed, giving them a small amount of privacy. He slid his hand into the front of his own jacket and fingered the safety strap from his handgun which had been nestled beneath his arm in his vest holster for the majority of their trip. He rolled it in his palm and held it by the barrel, handing it to Trowa. “Where do you keep these?” he asked, nudging his boyfriend’s chest with his pistol’s grip.

“Under here.” The entire underside of the bed was made up of storage. Trowa bent down and pulled one of the drawers out, revealing his small stash of guns. He took Heero’s and added it to the pile, then opened up his duffel and stuck his new addition, the ornate gun from his old mercenary comrade, in as well.

Heero had seen the ornate pistol a few times but hadn’t asked about it. It wasn’t the usual gun Trowa had carried, but he hadn’t offered any information about it, and Heero wasn’t about to pry. He studied Trowa’s stash with a satisfied smirk and then waited for him to close it before gesturing to the bed. “Do you ever miss it? Being here?”

“I do. This little hole… It’s not much, but it’s all I have.” Trowa had been homeless for the first 15 years of his life. He was more than grateful for the trailer he shared with his sister, a place he could finally call home.

“Your sister said something about a performance tonight?” Heero asked, the corner of his mouth perking at the thought. He distinctly recalled the video Trowa had shown him on one of their first ‘dates’ and wouldn’t be opposed to seeing such a thing in person. He tried not to seem to eager.

“Yea, there is one tonight. At 7.” Trowa scratched the back of his head. He hadn’t expected to be performing during their trip home, but Catherine said they could really use his acts, that the crowd here was really taking to the aerialist performances. “I’ll need to practice and warm up this afternoon.” It had been almost 6 months since he’d been home, back with the circus.
Heero nodded. He reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone, setting it on the bed before shrugging off his jacket, empty shoulder holster and began to unbutton his pale, body-hugging green oxford. He unbuttoned it halfway before rolling his sleeves up to the elbows. “Anything I can help with?”

He had been feeling rather useless lately. After being cleared from the Paris PD to leave the country due to lack of evidence to indict him, he was put on temporary leave of duty by Preventer, much to his frustration. He didn’t want to be put on hiatus or stuck on some high shelf to collect dust while Relena’s case grew ever cold. He wanted to work. Unfortunately he was deemed unfit to after his small stint in the jail and told by Une to take some mandatory vacation. Despite his suspension, he was still actively working on the case on his own. He had spent the majority of the flight poking and prodding at the raw data, trying to make sense of it.

“Do you really want to work on your vacation? Come with me to practice. I’m sure someone there will put you to work.”

There was once an old saying that Heero had heard once: circus folk have sawdust in their veins. He found that statement to be true. They definitely had it in their veins. They had it just about everywhere. It was amazing how clingy the fluffy, pine dust could be.

He tugged off his borrowed work gloves and brushed off the sawdust that had collected on his navy blue slacks. He made a mental note to wear tank tops and denim the next time he offered to help out under the Big Top. He wiped his sweaty brow with the back of his forearm and sighed as he looked up at the underside of the newly pitched red and white striped tent, feeling accomplished. Despite the fact that this circus featured no animal acts they had still lined the main ring with sawdust. One of the acrobats explained that it was a tradition nobody wanted to break, while another performer was convinced that it was necessary for good luck and that he would never do the high wire without a little sawdust sprinkled on the ground below him.

“Good work, let’s break for lunch!” the Boss Canvasman yelled over the crowd of roadies who Heero had blended in with for the afternoon. “We’ll string the lights and sound system after.”

As the crowd of men and women dispersed Heero found himself standing alone in the middle of the center ring. Stadium seating had been wheeled in and was unfurling along the walls of the tent, the sound of the electric motors humming was the only other sound he could hear. He couldn’t help but compare the sound to the faint, low hum of the gyros spinning deeply within his old mobile suit.

It felt nice to be around people who didn’t know about that. Who didn’t know who he was. Since his face had been revealed on the news he couldn’t mingle in the general population- not that he had done much of that before. The average person wasn’t the problem. He could walk into a movie theater without anyone giving him a second glance, but when he exited the theater he would be battered with a swarm of bloodthirsty mosquitoes looking for an exclusive shot or story with the now infamous Gundam pilot.

Heero didn’t want that kind of fame. He didn’t want the people who had lost loved ones by his hand to have to relive that pain again. To know his face, and assign it to the death of their friend or family member. Now they would have to come face to face with him on the news. There was no justice in war. He hadn’t been punished for taking their lives. They had just been casualties of war, nameless and faceless sacks of flesh laid out in sacrifice for the cause. For peace.

He stuffed his hands into his pockets and stared up at the inside of the roof of the tent, wondering
how he would feel seeing the face of the Alliance soldier in the Leo that had killed his mother. He hadn’t thought of the person who was responsible before. Would it matter if he knew his name? If he saw his face? Would it make his mother’s death and easier to bear?

“There you are.”

Heero turned around and spotted Catherine striding across the sawdust, dressed in a nude-colored bodysuit under a black, sleeveless leotard. Perfectly even footprints traced her steps as she crossed the center ring, approaching him like a cat on the prowl. It was something Heero noticed about Trowa and his sibling; they both were catlike in their movements and, unless they announce themselves, could be upon you within moments without you ever hearing them.

“You’re coming for lunch, aren’t you?” Catherine asked as she reached out to pick the sawdust off the shoulder of his damp shirt.

“I’m not very hungry, actually,” came Heero’s honest reply. Catherine scoffed as if he had slapped her. He knew she took food very seriously.

“You and my brother,” she muttered, though it was clear by the smile on her face that she was amused. “He’s working through lunch, too. Honestly, how do you two even survive?”

Heero smirked at the statement. It was a question he had often asked himself during Operation Meteor, and it sounded strange coming from the tall, lanky woman’s lips.

“Where is he?” he finally asked. He hadn’t seen Trowa since they had first arrived that morning.

“Practicing. Overdoing it, as usual,” she said with a huff. “He’s such a perfectionist. If he doesn’t ease up he’ll overwork himself.”

Heero nodded. “I’ll talk to him,” he replied, though he was pretty sure Trowa knew the limits of his own body and that Catherine was just overreacting and being too protective.

“Thanks, and I’ll grab some sandwiches for you guys anyway and leave them in the trailer,” she informed him with a wink and left, giving him a parting small wave as she did.

“See, you are getting better! Even after your long absence, you almost beat me this time.”

Trowa looked up at the German man suspended in the elastic cables a few feet above him. The black cables tangled around his legs and arms as he pulled his way up to the top, finishing the exercise with a light pant. “I am out of shape…”

“Nonsense. Give yourself some slack. I’ve been doing this longer than you.” Finn smiled, balancing himself in a sitting position. “You’re already becoming a rising star. Soon you will outshine me.”

“She is…” Trowa flipped himself around so he could balance a cable under himself and sit next to Finn. He looked down at the ground several feet below, surveying how high they had climbed. Feeling at home in the air he relaxed, exhaling deeply. He missed this.

“It will be good to have you in the show tonight. I know Catherine prefers performing with you, and your solo act is always so stunning…” Finn reached up to adjust the messy bun atop his head, fingers pushing in strands of unruly brown hair.
“She’s too dependent on me.” Trowa observed, shaking his head. “She does just fine when you perform with her in my place.” Both men were shirtless, wearing only the skintight leggings they used for training. Hanging elegantly in the air, bodies sprawled across the many cables, the two aerialists possessed the beautifully proportioned musculature of fit young men.

“She trusts you. You’re her brother.” Finn added. “Hey look, your cute boyfriend is here.”

Trowa gazed down towards the entrance of the practice area and saw Heero stroll in. He couldn’t help but smile. *My cute boyfriend*… The label was still new to him, causing the butterflies in his stomach to flutter around in chaos every time he heard it. *Heero*… As he approached, Trowa untangled himself from the cables and gracefully slid down.

Heero spotted Trowa descending from the massive spider web of ropes. The man he had been training with, Finn, waved at him in greeting and he gave him an awkward wave back. He had been introduced to all of the other performers earlier and had been surprised at the variety of characters the circus employed. Despite the colorful diversity of the crew everyone was incredibly open and welcoming. Nobody had said anything about Heero and the news, though he suspected a few of them must have recognized him from it by now. It was part of the charm of a group of traveling performers. They took you at face value and never pried into your business. It was no wonder Trowa had been able to blend in so easily during the war.

He met Trowa halfway across the training area. His eyes immediately took in his form clad in the tight leggings. He had seen Trowa in a wide variety of outfits since he’d known him, and of course he had seen him with nothing on at all, but there was something alluring about his swollen, formed muscles twisting and slipping beneath a thin layer of spandex and lycra that couldn’t be ignored.

“Busy?” asked Heero, standing in front of Trowa, forcing his eyes to rip away from their investigation of his boyfriend’s impeccable body. “Your sister said I’d find you here. I’m on a mission to keep you from ‘overdoing’ it.”

“Of course you are.” Trowa wanted to roll his eyes but restrained himself. “I was just finishing. It looks like we could both use a shower.” He looked over his sweaty boyfriend with a smirk. When Heero had said he wanted to help out around the circus, he had meant it.

“I’m a little disappointed I missed it,” admitted Heero honestly. “You practicing.” Nobody was around except Finn, who was grinning at them from high upon the ropes though it was clear he couldn’t hear what they were saying. “Some of the clowns invited me to a party tonight. Called it a ‘Charivari’.” He paused and raised an eyebrow at Trowa questioningly. “Should I be worried?”

“No. Not with the way you drink.” Trowa leaned in and kissed the corner of Heero’s irresistible mouth before adding, “we should go. It’s usually a lot of fun…But first, a shower. Stinky.” He teased, wrinkling his nose for added effect. When had he become such a flirt?

“Hm.” Heero stared at him for a moment then as casually as he could he tilted his head and sniffed himself. “Am I really that bad? I wouldn’t know, I have sawdust in my nose.” He rubbed the side of his nose with the back of his hand. “Actually, it’s everywhere…”

“The worst.” Trowa reached for Heero’s hand and gently tugged him towards the exit.

The bathroom in Airstream was tiny, the shower stall even smaller, but the two men managed to fit together under the steady stream of hot water. Trowa ran his hands along Heero’s body, unable to keep himself from touching him. He pulled him in for a wet kiss, nails possessively digging into
the flesh covering his boyfriend’s lower back.

Trowa’s body was tense from the exertion of his workout and practice earlier and as Heero’s hands slipped across his sides and the backs of his arms he couldn’t help but marvel at how unyielding the muscles there were. He loved kissing him. He had never been so addicted to someone else’s mouth before. He also couldn’t help but groan as he got rough with him, the sensation of his lover’s nails digging into his skin sending pinpricks of delicious tingling warmth across his back and shoulders. For a moment he was completely lost in the body against him, having forgotten about the stresses that lie beyond the trailer and the circus itself.

How different was this from his other life? Heero couldn’t help but compare the small, simple home Trowa and Catherine shared to the ancestral estate of Relena and her prestigious family. He had spent so much time wandering the massive, gilded antique halls of the Cinq Kingdom Manor feeling just as alone as he had felt during the war. He felt like an old relic of the past there. Like something that had served its purpose and now was set on a pedestal to be admired from afar. Nobody was allowed to touch him. He felt like he was surrounded by glass, unable to really connect with others. To be himself.

Now, cramped in the small shower stall, he felt strangely comfortable. Needed. Like he belonged there.

*I could do this forever,* his mind supplied him as he pushed Trowa against the shower wall and deepened their kiss. *I could live like this with you forever…*

Lips obediently parted as Heero’s tongue demanded entrance into Trowa’s eager mouth. The water sprayed across their bodies, adding extra lubrication so that flesh moved smoothly against flesh. Trowa brought his leg up, hooking it around Heero’s hips and then moved it down and back up again like a cricket, his firm calf rubbing against ass and thighs. Nails traveled upwards to tangle in the back of Heero’s head, applying perfect pressure as he started to massage the shampoo into his lover’s scalp.

Trowa was lost to the sensations of Heero’s body against his own.

Heero groaned as his hair was being lathered and it was obvious that he was thoroughly enjoying Trowa’s company. The evidence of that enjoyment took the form of his hardened arousal against Trowa’s. He broke their kiss abruptly, panting, “I can’t be this close to you without you driving me mad…” If he didn’t fuck Trowa within the next minute or two he was going to be certifiable.

“Cathy’s gone…” Trowa said as if reading Heero’s mind. He opened his eyes and stared at his wet lover, noticing the little beads of water that trailed down his body, the hair that hung in his face, his swollen lips, and those smoldering blue eyes. Heero was the most handsome man he had ever seen, having always desired him. “It’s too bad I drive you crazy… I love being this close to you.” It was an insatiable craving. When Heero was away the longing burned through his veins, made his nerves itch with anticipation. Truthfully, Heero drove Trowa crazy, too. He reached out to cup his partner’s cheek, thumb stroking it gently. “What do you want right now?”

“You on your back and me, inside you,” Heero replied immediately. He didn’t have to think about it. He plunged his hair under the water to let the suds rinse out, slammed his palm against the shower stall door and opened it. He didn’t even bother turning off the water. Before Trowa could protest he grabbed him, soaking wet, dragged him out of the shower stall and shoved him unceremoniously onto his bed, letting the pocket door slip closed behind him.

“I’m sorry for the puddle on the floor, and for your bed being wet… but I’m crazy,” he teased in a monotone voice. “Just remember this is your fault,” he added as he climbed on top of him, nudging
his hips forward to part his legs.

Trowa reached out blindly, arm dipping to the side of the bed as his hand opened the nightstand drawer to find a small bottle. He pushed it against Heero’s chest, looking up at him while his thighs spread in submission. The urge to be completely dominated by his boyfriend suddenly took control of his being. He wanted to be pounded into with so much force that he couldn’t walk afterwards. He wanted to scream the other’s name, tug his hair, cum so hard he saw stars. “Don’t hold back…”

“Mission accepted,” Heero replied, amused. He then proceeded to give Trowa exactly what he asked for. He folded and bent Trowa’s sleek, pliable body into position and after a quick application of lube entered him. Every twitch and groan from the body below him sent his mind into a state of lusty fervor. There was something absolutely irresistible about the tall pilot’s body, built like a dancer but possessing an underlying power that made itself known with every countermovement and loud, pleasured groan. Trowa wasn’t meek, and he wasn’t entirely submissive, occasionally grasping and tugging at him, urging him on.

All Heero wanted, more than anything, was to please him. With each soft cry and deep, raspy moan he felt encouraged to try harder. To please him more. *I’ll do anything…. His mind was chanting incessantly in the back of his mind.

Finally he found his release and as he coated Trowa from deep within he grabbed him by the back of the neck, wrenching him up to smash their lips roughly together, nipping the corner of his mouth, as if to remind him that he had just laid his claim of him. That he was his.

The spasms of orgasm ran through Trowa’s body as he fell back against the mattress. His swollen lips hung open, his chest rising and falling heavily with each breath he took. A thin sheen of sweat covered his skin and his eyes were closed as he fought to regain control. All Trowa could think about was Heero, his senses completely consumed. Touch, smell, sight, sound. He was hopeless. What was this strange yet pleasant feeling that kept invading? This obsession?

*Could it be… Am I in love?*

Yes.

He’d never loved anyone before, but something told Trowa that what he was feeling was real. It wasn’t just the great fuck. He knew it to be true. He was head over heels IN LOVE. The realization gripped him tightly, refusing to let him breathe or speak or do anything except lay there in a state of shock.

The stunned look on Trowa’s face wasn’t the same expression he normally made when they did this, and Heero was concerned. After a few moments he steadied his trembling arms and legs and slowly pulled out of him, easing carefully onto the bed beside his lover and reached up to caress the side of his neck with a finger. “Are you okay?”

Looking up at the ceiling was easier than facing his boyfriend’s concerned eyes. Trowa wasn’t sure what to do. He opened his mouth but nothing came out. He was afraid to admit that he loved Heero, unsure it was the right time or that it was too early to feel this way. Would he spook Heero with the confession? Trowa closed his eyes and bit his lip. “…I’m ok.”

Looking up at the ceiling was easier than facing his boyfriend’s concerned eyes. Trowa wasn’t sure what to do. He opened his mouth but nothing came out. He was afraid to admit that he loved Heero, unsure it was the right time or that it was too early to feel this way. Would he spook Heero with the confession? Trowa closed his eyes and bit his lip. “…I’m ok.”

It was clear that he was not okay. Years ago Heero had learned Trowa’s subtle clues and had seen him make this face before. Something was on his mind but he wasn’t going to pry. He knew whatever it was, Trowa would tell him in his own time. He let his fingertip slowly trace his boyfriend’s jaw, gliding over his soft chin and up to caress his pink, kiss-swollen lower lip. “If I
was too rough, you should have said something,” he said in his usual flat affect, though he spoke through a smile, obviously teasing him in an attempt to lighten the mood.

Trowa kissed fingertips and shook his head. “You know I can handle it.” He turned to the side, finally looking at Heero. “It was good. It was… more than good.” The sex had been phenomenal, as usual, and the familiar ache between his thighs was welcomed.

“That’s what I’m known for,” Heero replied as he slipped his Trowa-kissed fingers up his temple to brush his soft bangs from his eyes. “More than good. They call me the ‘More-Than-Good Soldier’,” he added, teasing as he tilted his head in to nuzzle Trowa’s cheek, releasing a warm breath against his ear. “I hope you won’t be too sore. If your sister found out I damaged you before your show, she’ll have me strung up on the high wire. Which, for the record, is a major pain in the ass to rig.”

“You give yourself too much credit thinking YOU could damage ME that way.” Trowa’s hand found the back of Heero’s head and affectionately ran his fingers through his hair, pondering the question on the tip of his tongue. He’d been meaning to ask it for a while now. “…What will you do after Relena’s case is solved? Where will you go?”

That was IF the case was ever solved. Heero was beginning to lose confidence on that front. He sighed at the sensation of Trowa’s fingers digging into his hair, forcing a tingle to rise in his scalp. “I hadn’t thought that far ahead,” he admitted. “I don’t know.” Where you’ll be, he thought. Is where I would like to go… but he couldn’t be that presumptuous. It was clear that Trowa was settled here with his sister. Heero was becoming fond of the place, fond of the people… but was this where he belonged? Despite how open and accepting the people there were, it was a small community. He couldn’t just presume that he could just simply show up and never leave.

“I don’t want to leave him, though.” The thought burned into his brain like a smoking hot brand. “What about you? Will you come back here?”

“Yes. I always do. It’s home, for now.” Trowa pressed their foreheads together and closed his eyes again. “You would be welcome here.” He offered breathlessly, heart clenching in his chest.

Just say it… Just get it out. No I can’t-it’s too soon. He’s going to think I’m crazy. A lovesick teenager…

Heero’s eyebrow raised. Was he reading his mind? Leave it to Trowa to know everything. “I wouldn’t want to impose,” Heero replied softly. “I would get my own place… if I came here.” He wasn’t sure Cathy wouldn’t want an extra person to have to take care of.

“Getting your own trailer wouldn’t be practical. They are expensive to ship between earth and the colonies. Most of the circus workers stuff 4-5 people in their trailers…” And Trowa couldn’t sleep well without Heero.

Heero smiled. “Are you asking me to move in with you?”

“Yes.” Trowa answered honestly, separating their foreheads so he could search Heero’s eyes.

Heero sighed. “I will. But only if the circus hires me and I pay my way. I am not staying here for free,” he said, his expression determined. There was no hesitation in his reply.

“Of course.” Somehow Trowa knew Heero would say that. He took his boyfriend’s hand and brought it up to his lips, kissing the knuckles one by one, green eyes still watching blue ones.

God, he was fucking gorgeous. Heero couldn’t stop staring at him. He felt a sudden wave of
happiness, of belonging. It was a strange feeling, something he had never experienced before.
“You’re beautiful,” he blurted, awkwardly, his mouth broadcasting his thoughts. “I mean that. I… I
can’t ever look at you without thinking it.

Trowa chuckled against the back of Heero’s hand. “You’re the only one who ever calls me that.”
He felt his heart thud quickly in his chest. I love you…

Heero’s eyes narrowed sharply. “I may be the only one who says it, but it’s true.”

Suddenly the distinct sound of the trailer door opening filled the small space. As the door clicked
closed Catherine’s voice gasped loudly.

“Look at all of this water on the floor,” she said loudly. “The shower’s still on!?”

“Shit…” Trowa reached for the covers and pulled them over their bodies while burying his face
against Heero’s shoulder to muffle the sudden laughter that erupted.
Chapter 18

Every year on Christmas Eve it was traditional for the colonies to open their biggest parks up to the public for holiday celebrations. Typically ice skating rinks were constructed and on the eve of Christmas artificial snow was sent raining down upon the audience. Soft, light and fluffy, none of it ever stuck to clothes or the ground. It is just enough of an illusion to make people feel festive and to lend ‘authenticity’ to the winter experience.

It wasn’t until Heero had seen ash-like snow falling upon the rubble of the apartment building he had accidentally destroyed before Operation Meteor that he had ever seen anything fall from the sky like that, and during the armistice of the Eve War the entire northern hemisphere of Earth was plagued with a cold snap that had plunged much of Europe into extreme winter conditions. The snow had fallen for three days straight, coating the battlefields with a thick blanket of white that covered the charred remains of fallen suits and smouldering buildings. The world became refreshed, new and optimistic with the hope that Total Pacifism would finally become a conceivable dream. A reality.

It was the first time that Heero had truly encountered snow. He had stood ankle deep in it, touched it with his bare hands. That had been years ago, and somehow he had managed to avoid being caught up in it again until now.

This New Years Eve, with the snow falling heavily on the caravan of parked trailers behind the Big Top, Heero picked his way through the nearby knee deep mounds of snow to Trowa and Catherine’s personal trailer. Nearby one of the stagehands was laughing and building a snowman with a group of children. Naturally snowballs began to fly. As he reached the door of the trailer one smacked square against the side of his head. Ice trickled down into the collar of his jacket. Turning his head sharply as he spotted the culprit, a girl named Allison who was the granddaughter of the tent boss. She blushed furiously and tried to hide behind the half-constructed snowman. Heero smiled and despite having no gloves plunged his hands into the snow beside the stairs to the trailer and began packing a formidable snow ball.

“I’m sorry! I’m SO sorry!” Allison screamed, her seven year old frame stumbling through the snow as she tried to run away. The other kids and the stagehand laughed. Heero shook his head, his expression serious as he trudged through the snow after her. Her shrieking screams echoed between the trucks and trailers as she fled.

Five minutes later Heero was lying face-first in the snow with four kids sitting on his back while Allison was playfully dumping handfuls of fluffy white over his head.

“That doesn’t look like a fair fight. 5 against 1?”

Allison dropped the snow from her purple mittens when she saw Trowa standing over her. “He started it.” She was quick to accuse the man lying in the snow. The kids hurried to get off his back, feigning innocence. They hadn’t seen or heard the taller man approaching. He moved like a panther in the night, even in the thick snow.

“Oh he did, did he?” Trowa’s perfectly shaped brow rose as he gazed down at his lover, a smirk rising at the corner of his mouth. “I could have sworn I saw you throw a snowball at the back of his head…” He was still addressing the little girl while holding his hand out to help Heero up off the ground.

Once Heero was standing again Trowa brushed the snow from his hair. The crystallized
condensation scattered about the dark brown fringe resembled a constellation, abstractly painted. It was mesmerizing. He slowly traced a finger down to remove the lingering snow from Heero’s frosty cheeks, green eyes holding blue ones in a stare. “Is she telling the truth, were you terrorizing these children?”

Heero cast a sideways glance at the retreating, nervous looking kids before replying slowly. “Yeah, she’s telling the truth,” he lied. He reached up to wipe the pink, cold tip of his nose with the back of his sleeve and sighed. “I was asking for it.”

Allison smirked and glanced over at her friends, who all looked confused, too stupid to agree with Heero when he was clearly giving them a way out.

Heero’s mouth twitched up into a half smile. “And now it looks like you’re asking for it…” he said playfully, suddenly dropping to grab a handful of snow, packing it menacingly as he approached Trowa, forcing the taller pilot to start shuffling backward. The sudden turn of events caused the kids to scream and laugh, encouraging Heero to start the fight.

“Then it’s true what they say about you. You are a bully.” Trowa played along, a sparkle in his eyes as he slowly moved backwards. “I guess I’ll have to take you down. I can’t have you harassing children anymore.” He bent to the side to scoop up his own handful of snow, making sure to keep a safe distance between them. The lethal ball formed quickly in-between his bare hands.

The stagehand who had been playing with the kids stood back and chuckled as he watched the two stand off. The kids were going insane, screaming things like, ‘get him, get him!’ and ‘show him who is boss!’

“I’m a menace,” Heero replied calmly. He froze for a moment before slinging his snowball at Trowa.

With ease the taller man ducked, watching as the perfectly shaped frozen ball flew over his shoulder and plopped into the snow bank behind him. “Your aim was always lousy. You should stick to close-range battle.” Trowa quickly dashed to the side and threw his snowball, hitting Heero flat on the shoulder.

Heero smirked, ducked to grab another fistfull of snow and chucked it at Trowa, missing him again. For such a tall, formidable target, he was difficult to hit. After a third failed attempt he sighed, shrugged and ran at him, tackling the taller man in the waist to knock him over into the snowbank, his actions encouraged by the wild children hooting and hollering nearby. He wrestled Trowa through the powdery snow until he managed to pin him down, his ice cold hands pressed over his head. He panted, chuckling under his breath, the tops of his cheeks pink from the chill.

“You’re going to catch a cold, Frosty.” Trowa murmured so only Heero could hear him. Earlier that day he had told his boyfriend to borrow a spare pair of gloves and a scarf, but Heero hadn’t listened, obviously. Sighing, he wrapped his long legs around Heero’s midsection and with force, flipped their bodies around so that he was now on top.

“Hm, Frosty now, instead of Stinky?” With a quirk of his eyebrow Heero went limp under Trowa, though he feigned as if he were struggling with his arms for the sake of the kids who were still catcalling nearby. Trowa’s shoulders and back were covered in snow, and now too were his own. He grit his teeth and resisted the urge to smile at him. “Wanted to be on top this time, didn’t you?” he teased, his voice barely audible.

“Your body fits better under mine.” Trowa said logically, although he had to admit that seeing his
lover sprawled out below him gave him the urge to top next time they fooled around.

Heero opened his mouth with the intention of speaking but was cut short by a volley of snowballs being practically dumped upon them both. He turned his face away from the onslaught and laughed. “Time to retreat!”

“Get ‘em! Get ‘em!” Allison was chanting, clearly the ringleader, while the other children circled them, tossing snowballs as fast as they could at the two former pilots. Heero scrambled to a stand, taking Trowa’s hand and dragged him through the snow as they were being assaulted. After spilling into the trailer Heero slammed the door closed, watching through the curtain as the window was pelted with snow.

“What on Earth happened to you two?” Catherine spoke up from the kitchenette, her eyes wide as her brother and his little boyfriend stumbled inside, bringing half the yard of snow with them. Trowa’s hair was dusted over with snow, and Heero’s face was bright pink from the cold. Loud bangs filled the trailer as snowballs continued to slam into the door. “Trouble! Both of you. Look, you’re dripping all over the floor.” Ever since Heero showed up the floor seemed to be perpetually wet.

Heero sighed and began dusting off Trowa’s back with his hand. “We were ambushed by…” he paused for a moment before finishing his statement. “Midgets.”

“Midgets?” Catherine shook her head in disbelief and watched as her brother chuckled at the comment. She hadn’t seen Trowa this happy in… well, ever. He was practically glowing. She knew it was because of Heero.

Trowa hadn’t been in a relationship like this before and Catherine was relieved it was working out so well. It was almost like her brother was a completely different person when Heero was around. He smiled and laughed more, was in a consistently good mood, and was more sociable. He was happy, and that made Catherine happy in return, which was why she had agreed to let Heero move in when he was ready.

“Go take your wet clothes off before you catch a chill.” Catherine waved her hand in the direction of Trowa’s bedroom and called out as the two boys turned their backs, “Don’t forget we are watching the ball drop over at Finn’s trailer tonight!” The little New Year's Eve celebration had become tradition. Each year a bunch of them would cram into Finn’s small living area, drink champagne, munch on snacks, and watch the live broadcast as the seconds ticked down to midnight.

Space ran on Universal Coordinated Time, which was aligned to the former ‘GMT’ or Greenwich Mean Time, or the general hour by which most of Europe conducted their business. That meant that their ball would drop at the same time as the ball drop in London or Paris. The colonies had small, local ball drops, but the moon had no major celebration to speak of other than live broadcasts of the Eiffel Tower or Big Ben illuminating as it struck midnight.

Preventer had arranged a massive party for all of the staff. The front lobby that had formerly been used for the Halloween festivities had also hosted the holiday Christmas dinner, and now was the stage for the drunken annual New Year's gathering.

Duo saw Fara and Wufei standing beside one of the desert tables, clearly mulling over whether to try the fruit tarts or the handmade ice cream. He grinned and pulled the leftover white beard from that year’s Santa costume up over his mouth and tugged the black hood over his head before
lumbering out into the tipsy crowd. He raised the scythe he had made in the material shop up high over his head and crept slowly up behind Wufei and Fara, straightened one of the analog wall clocks that hung around his neck that he had stolen from the office, and carefully tapped Fara on the shoulder.

“It’s your time….” he said in a mock-mysterious voice, raising the scythe high over his head menacingly.

Fara looked over his shoulder and wrinkled his nose in confusion. “My time for what exactly?” He eyed the clock that dangled from Duo’s neck, thinking he looked like a homeless Flavor Flav. “If this is your way of picking up girls, I highly suggest you go back to the drawing board.”

Wufei laughed openly at that, his mirth only accentuated by the stunned and surprised look on Duo’s bearded face.

“Just gettin’ into the New Year's spirit,” Duo replied, sighing through the frayed beard. He sputtered and spit as the fibers got caught in his lips before yanking it down to dangle around his neck. “I mean, what else is there to do ‘cept drink and make out at the end.” He paused and straightened his clock again, looking down at it to check the time. They had half an hour before the ball dropped. “Shit, speakin’ of which, who the hell am I gonna kiss?” He eyed Wufei and then Fara hopefully. “Three way kiss, mayhaps?”

Wufei scowled as he cradled a cream filled blini on a plate. “No. Just… no.” He pointed at Fara with his fork for emphasis. “Off limits,” he said sharply to his American friend before stabbing into his sweet.

Duo rolled his eyes. “Jeez, was just an idea is all.” He looked around the crowded party with a sigh, noting that most of the patrons were already paired off. “I bet if Trowa were here he’d kiss me.”

“He would be kissing Heero.” Fara corrected, setting his empty champagne glass down. It was his 6th that night and he was handling it expertly, at least he thought so. Looking away from ‘Father Time’, hazel eyes scanned the area calculatingly. He wasn’t planning on spending the last few minutes of AC 200 in a crowded space with a bunch of rowdy drunks. No, he had another idea…

“Heh, yeah probably. Hope that goes better for him than it did for me.” He reached up to tug his hood off and pointed to his right eye. “Laid one on Heero a few years ago at a New Year’s party, and he popped me right in the eye. Now THAT is how to bring in the new year,” Duo said with a laugh.

Wufei shook his head as he chewed his dessert. “You’re an idiot for even trying.”

“Hey, I knew he was gonna kick my ass. I weighed my options.” Duo smirked and rubbed the back of his neck, laughing. “Totally worth it.”

Fara reached for his 7th drink. “Since when do you have the hots for Heero?”

Duo laughed again. “Since that asshole pulled a gun on Relena Peacecraft,” he explained, leaning on his scythe as he recalled the first time he saw Heero. “Stupid lookin’, skinny kid with his tank top tucked into his ass-tight spandex shorts like some sort of dweeb, wavin’ a gun in a pretty girl’s face while stealing a bunch of military grade explosives… I mean, what isn’t hot about that?”

Wufei sighed and set his plate aside. “You’re insane.”

“Well yeah, we’re all a little nuts, aren’t we? You ever really sit back and THINK about what
happened back then? Especially Heero- that guy was off the chain.” Duo grinned at Fara and shrugged. “Guess I had a little boycrush, but he’s always sorta been off limits.”

“Maybe he wasn’t into your pickup lines or…. costumes.” Fara eyed Duo’s outfit again, reaching over to tug on the fake beard that hung under his chin. “So sexy.” He said sarcastically.

“Psh, like clown costumes are any better than this?” Duo waggled his eyebrows suggestively. “I wonder if he makes Trowa keep the clown shoes on…”

Wufei nearly snorted his sip of champagne up his nose. He coughed loudly and covered his mouth with the back of his hand, speaking between gasps. “That is disgusting.”

“I’m just sayin’…” replied Duo with a wide grin. “Those fuckin’ clown suspenders are …. Hnnng…”

Fara was already halfway done with his drink. He pulled the glass away from his lips and frowned. “You have an obvious obsession with your friend’s sex lives.”

“Aw c’mon, you guys are no fun.” So Duo was a little drunk too, but whatever. He leaned in close to Fara and pointed at Wufei. “I got ten creds that says this guy likes missionary only, lights off, and he wants to keep his socks on…”

Wufei’s eyes widened.

“Actually he likes it when I ride him. And socks off.” Two more gulps and the champagne was gone. Fara set the empty glass down among the other glasses he had accumulated.

“Backwards,” Wufei added plainly, grabbing Fara another drink from the table and handing it to him.

Duo blinked and then chuckled loudly. “Well, what do ya know. Wufei’s finally venturing to the gay side!” Okay so his voice was a little loud. A few nearby partygoers looked up curiously.

“Speaking of which…” Fara reached for Wufei’s hand and tugged him gently towards the double doors of the lobby, quickly finishing his last glass of champagne. He didn’t even bother pardoning themselves from Duo’s company.

Duo stared at their backs as they left.

The hallways were deserted since everyone was inside the lobby celebrating. Fara pulled Wufei along, a determined expression on his face as he looked for one of the meeting rooms.

Wufei smirked and let himself be dragged through the halls by his very mission focused lover. When they finally made it to an unlocked, empty meeting room he waited until Fara closed the door, locked it from the inside and then grabbed the blonde by his shoulders and pulled him into an urgent, passionate kiss.

Hands moved down Wufei’s pants, fingers quickly unbuttoning them. Fara’s teeth grazed across his partner’s lips, claiming the bottom one and tugging on it. “We have a couple minutes until midnight.” He breathed, pulling back just enough to let his hands efficiently work at Wufei’s clothes. “I want you inside me…” They could truly ring in the New Year together.

Wufei’s eyes narrowed and he gave Fara a curt nod, inhibitions gone, his usual hesitation dulled by the countless flutes of champagne he had. He grabbed Fara by the hips and snaked his arms around him to lift him by his ass and carried him to the conference table. He set him down and began
helping him to disrobe, tugging his pants off. He kicked his own from his legs and slowly ran his hands up Fara’s thighs, parting his knees and then leaned in to kiss him softly, nudging him gently with the tip of his instantly hard arousal.

A moan escaped the blonde’s lips and they hadn’t even started yet. Fara blamed the champagne. He reached down to grasp Wufei’s erection, guiding it to where he wanted it. “You better make the last few minutes of AC 200 count.” His voice, laden with lust, hung between them before he crushed their lips together, letting Wufei know he meant it.

Trowa weaved through the densely populated trailer in search of his boyfriend, positive the tin can had passed its allotted capacity. “I didn’t invite this many people over, I have no idea how this party got so big!” Finn’s voice called out over the sea of people. Trowa was annoyed. He wasn’t a fan of big parties and just wanted to spend New Year’s Eve alone with Heero, but they had been separated somehow. He had no idea where Catherine was, either. How could you lose someone in a 30-foot trailer? Frustrated, he shoved his hands in his pockets and pushed his way towards the exit, needing some fresh air. It didn’t matter that he didn’t have his coat. Thankful to find a pack of cigarettes in his back pocket Trowa slid outside.

Heero had managed to claim the farthest corner of the crowded trailer where he was handed a beer and given a polite bubble of personal space. The clowns he had come to meet at the Charivari party were standing around him, laughing and nudging one another as they told inside jokes about performances past. Heero was attempting to be sociable, nodding occasionally but having no real idea what the hell they were talking about. He had decided to stick to bottled drinks ever since the one cup of neon green Jungle Juice that he had been given at the beginning of the night had nearly knocked him unconscious. He didn’t know WHO had made that, but the guy or girl responsible deserved a reward. Clearly the culprit was a secret chemist.

He smirked at the thought. The clowns assumed he was smirking at them and their banter. One of the women reached over to pat him kindly on the shoulder. “Where’s Trowa?”

Heero could barely hear her over the music. “Not sure,” he admitted with a frown, his eyes darting around the cramped confines. They had somehow managed to get separated shortly after their arrival. Catherine wanted to show Trowa something, or brought him to talk to someone, which left Heero alone and adrift amongst a crowd of strangers. It didn’t bother him. He had made his way, found a circle and managed to blend in. He had pressed his back to the wall- his customary pose. However, he was becoming concerned. It had been a while. Where the hell was he?

Heero spotted Trowa’s head as it cleared the crowd and ducked out of the trailer and into the cold night. He sighed and muttered apologies to the performers as he inched through the hubbub, making his way out. An advantage to being short and rather compact was that you could squeeze through a crowd effortlessly. He passed through the people like a hand through water and finally made it to the door, stumbling outside. The contrast of quiet calm compared to the loud chaos within the tightly packed trailer was stark. He ran a hand through his hair, sighed and watched as his breath crystallized in the air in front of him and fell to the snow covered ground. The muffled laughter and music from the party was the only other sound. He could smell a lit cigarette nearby and immediately knew who it belonged to. He slipped quietly around the corner of the trailer and spotted a figure leaning against the backside, blowing smoke out of the corner of his mouth, the glowing ember of the lit cherry of the cigarette glowing faintly in the dark.

“Not having fun being crammed into that clown car?” He asked as he approached. He finished off his beer and set the empty bottle on a nearby stump before dutifully taking a leaning position
beside Trowa against the rear of Finn’s trailer.

“Not really. Can’t even see the TV to watch the ball drop.” Not that it mattered. It was a silly concept. Trowa held the cigarette out to his boyfriend, curious if he’d take the offering. He had decided to try and stop smoking in the New Year, so this would hopefully be his last. But easier said than done, he knew. Old habits die hard. The cold air pricked at his exposed skin and Trowa ignored it.

Heero eyed the cigarette for a moment before taking it with his index finger and thumb and took an experimental drag. The sting of the smoke filling his throat, seeping into his lungs, gave some unexpected warmth to his nearly drunken body. He blew out slowly, watching the smoke curl in front of his own face. He had tried cigarettes before, but never saw the point of smoking them. He never found himself drawn to or addicted by anything, really. He ran his tongue along his bottom lip, shrugged and handed the cigarette back. “I like the way they taste on your mouth better,” he admitted plainly.

“Fair enough.” Trowa brought it back to his lips and looked up at the night sky, exhaling slowly. The stars were out in all their glory, not a cloud in sight. Despite the bitter cold the surroundings were calm and beautiful.

The stars looked so different from Earth, Trowa thought as a comfortable silence fell between the two young men. He missed being out in space, but preferred the Earth to the colonies. Maybe it was because, out of the other Gundam pilots, he was the only one born here. This nugget of the past had been uncovered last year when Catherine insisted they take a DNA test to see if they were biological siblings. The results came back positive.

“What are your wishes for the new year?” Trowa murmured, breaking the silence.

Heero coughed and shrugged a shoulder, crossing his arms over his chest. “I don’t make wishes,” he replied. I want to find Relena’s killer, his mind supplied automatically. He followed Trowa’s gaze up. The faint glow of L1 floating in it’s sector of space could be seen from this vantage, through this clarity. “I plan on working. I don’t know what else. Don’t people normally choose some sort of self-improvement or something? A goal?”

“I guess. I don’t really have any.” Trowa finished the cigarette and put it out in the snow. “Besides taking a break from smoking.” He glanced over at his partner, the back of his head rolling against the siding of the trailer. His body was starting to take chill, but he wasn’t ready to go back inside yet. Through the darkness his hand sought out Heero’s, grabbing it and linking their fingers together.

Heero sighed and tightened his fingers with Trowa’s. “You could always lose weight,” he said in a flat voice, though his eyes were clearly smiling in the darkness.

“My boyfriend thinks I’m fat.” Trowa ran his thumb over the top of Heero’s knuckle.

“No, I think you’re too perfect. Something has to change. I don’t deserve you the way you are now…” Heero replied with a smirk. “There are some Twinkies in the trailer… if you’d rather go the opposite route.” Okay, so Heero was a little drunk.

“I prefer Zebra Cakes.” Trowa pushed off the wall and stood in front of Heero. He placed his hands on the wall behind him, one on either side of his head, and leaned in. “Your lips are turning blue.”

Reflexively Heero grabbed the front of Trowa’s shirt, preventing him from pulling away- not that he thought he would. “So are yours,” he murmured, tilting his head up and leaning the rest of the
way to press their lips together for a firm kiss. Yes, he definitely preferred the taste of cigarettes on
Trowa’s mouth.

Warm breaths mingled and slowly their lips regained their natural color. Trowa pulled away just
slightly, noses still touching. “I love you.” He hadn’t been able to vocalize his feelings since
realizing them two weeks ago. Why he was able to speak the words now, Trowa wasn’t sure. But
they had floated past his lips, frozen in the air between them. “I am in love with you, Heero…”

“Trowa…” Heero stared at him for a moment before narrowing his eyes. “Being with you makes
me comfortable. Happy… most of the time I don’t think about anything else but you-” he confided
softly, ever the one to vocalize what he was thinking. How he was feeling. “If that is love, then I
love you, too.”

His hands were practically freezing against the side of the trailer, the ice-cold burning sensation
numbing his fingers, but Trowa didn’t care. Now that his true feelings were out there he felt the
urge to let the words flow freely. “I love you.” A carefully placed kiss was planted on the corner of
Heero’s mouth. Removing his hands from the frigid wall, Trowa grabbed Heero’s and pulled them
up under his sweater and against his warm abdomen, hoping his body heat would take the
numbness away. “...I love you.”

Heero knew how difficult it was for Trowa to express himself. He never really told him how he
felt, at least verbally. He spoke with his body, with his expressions and his body language. Having
him vocalize anything was huge- and he knew that this admission was important. That Trowa
needed to hear himself say it aloud, to cement it. To fully realize it.

He had suspected that he felt more than just basic attraction to Trowa for some time now. Having
his partner so readily open his life up to him, offer him his own bed as a place to stay- it had meant
a lot to Heero. He hadn’t been able to stop thinking about the gesture ever since it had happened,
and the weight of that seemingly innocent conversation had been on his shoulders from the
moment the words were initially uttered.

Trowa was the most important person to him. The biggest influence in his life. He had been for
some time, even when they were kids. Out of everyone he knew, he admired and respected his
partner the most. His boyfriend. His lover. His chilled palms slipped across Trowa’s warm flesh,
and despite the darkness Heero knew this body. He didn’t have to see it to know where the curves,
dips and lines were. More importantly, he knew the person it belonged to, and he loved that person
deeply.

“I love you, Trowa,” he said quietly, his voice hanging in the dark. He slipped his fingertips down
to tug at the front of Trowa’s slacks to get his attention. “Let’s go home.”

Home. Yes. Trowa had a home and now he had someone to love, who loved him back. It wasn’t so
long ago when he had believed these two wants were just a distant dream. And now he had them
both. Trowa kissed Heero again as voices rang out from the inside of the trailer, cheering happily,
“-three, two, one… HAPPY NEW YEAR!”
Chapter 19

January AC 201 | Moon

After arriving back at Preventer’s lunar base after nearly a month of ‘recommended leave’ Heero was eager to get back to the investigation of Relena’s murder. He had requested that all of the new pages of her file be scanned and sent to his account, where he spent the first night back scouring over information that essentially led to nothing. There had been no break. No new information. The case was becoming cold, and it was frustrating him.

The following day they were set to run a few simulations on their mobile suits and after four hours of nonstop drills and battle scenarios Heero found himself back on his tablet, skimming the information in the file as if a sudden breakthrough would materialize between two mundane words. He forced himself to set the tablet aside and continued his cockpit maintenance, running system diagnostics on the main computer while he dusted and cleaned each switch and button with a soft, rod-shaped duster. The suit hadn’t been touched since he had left for his vacation with Trowa and light, powdery lunar dust had accumulated here and there on his control panel.

He could recall being tedious about cleaning his mobile suit out, even as a teenager during Operation Meteor. Sometimes the mundane act of polishing or dusting helped him to focus. To think. It was like meditation, sometimes bringing a sense of overwhelming calm with it.

Not now. His anxieties over Relena would not be quelled. Perhaps it was his previous bout of adrenaline from his simulations that had worked his mind up- activated every neuron in his head to overfire with feverish thought. Whatever it was, he was feeling overwhelmed. Anxious? Is that what was happening?

He was frustrated with the case, and frustrated with his position at Preventer. Despite his break from work he was still limited in his agent abilities, only limited to simulations and mundane activities so as not to ‘overwhelm’ him. At first it was insulting, but now that he couldn’t get his heart to slow and his palms had grown clammy he could see why they had restricted him.

I’m not okay… even after all this time?

Sitting still, poking around in the cockpit wasn’t getting him anywhere. He set the duster aside and pushed himself to a stand, peering out over the open hatch for the only other person in the hangar. Trowa…

Heero spotted Trowa below working at a workbench, dressed in pale grey coveralls, peering down at something. The occasional hiss and puff of smoke that accompanied the soldering iron lifted from the bench like a smoke illusion from a magician’s hand. He reached up to unzip the top of his own coveralls, freeing the top half of his chest to allow the cool hangar air to soothe his anxiety. With a seemingly careless motion he stepped off of the edge of the open cockpit hangar, snatching the descent line with his hand as he did. He rode the wire all the way to his mobile suit’s feet, released it and approached his boyfriend quietly from behind.

He was absolutely perfect. Ever since their confessions of love back at The Circus Heero had become much more aware of just exactly what he loved about Trowa. He was surprised to find that this list was infinite, and that he was adding to it hourly.

He loved how diligent Trowa was when he worked, how focused he could be. He loved how he stood, with one hip knocked out, his weight shifted to one leg in a casual, somewhat effeminate and
yet exceedingly masculine stance. How someone could be so elegant and yet so deadly all within moments of each other, Heero didn’t know.

But he loved it. He loved him- everything about him.

Heero had come to depend on Trowa for so much, but within the past few months his need for comfort and calm had been increased. The former Heavyarms pilots had been openly willing to help him in that regard, never hesitant to make himself available to listen. Heero was finding that he needed to be close to him to feel secure. He had never felt that way about anyone before.

Still wound tight from his thoughts and residual energy from the hours of simulation, he simply slipped up behind Trowa and slid his arms around his waist, hugging him from behind, burying his face into the soft depression between the taller pilot’s shoulders.

Trowa knew at once who was hugging him. He carefully set the circuit and soldering iron down but made no move to turn around and disrupt the embrace. “Hey...” He called softly, wiping his forehead with the back of his hand. “Everything okay?” Heero’s body formed flush against his back and he could feel the muscles of his lover’s jaw clench and release as he ground his teeth. Heero was stressed and had something on his mind.

_I don’t know if I am okay_, Heero’s mind supplied automatically. He sighed and buried his face against Trowa’s spine, nuzzling him, trying to push everything that had been crowding his brain out to replace it all with only him- the tall, handsome, caring pilot in his arms.

“Yeah,” was his instant reply. He supposed he would be okay, it wasn’t like he was going to self-destruct or anything. He just needed calm, he needed to focus on something -someone- else. “I just had to touch you,” he admitted, which was definitely the truth.

There wasn’t anyone else in the hangar and now that both pilots had stopped working on their Gundams the large space was eerily quiet. Trowa decided to turn around so he could comfort the other, sensing that everything was not okay. He wrapped his arms around Heero before speaking. “Then touch me.”

With a deep sigh Heero leaned into Trowa, let the flat of his hands slip up his back, his fingers pressing into the thick fabric of the coveralls. Trowa smelled familiar and pleasant, the comforting citrusy scent of his skin mixed with the somewhat acrid, faint smell of lunar dust and singed metal from the circuit board filled his senses. There was nothing delicate about Trowa’s body. It was solid and tightly muscled, yet lean and elegant. He fit so well in his arms, the gentle dip and curve of his torso blending seamlessly into his own.

Heero would do anything for him, all Trowa had to do was ask. He didn’t know how he had existed without him before. Being so dependent on someone else was daunting. What happens when Trowa was no longer there?

The thought made him frown. He tilted his head down, dropped his hands to the small of the taller man’s back and grabbed the back of his coveralls tightly. _I’ll never let that happen. I’ll never make the mistakes I made with Relena again._

“You need help...?” Heero finally asked.

Just a few more touches here and there and Trowa would be done fixing the circuit. He didn’t need the help, but he could tell Heero wanted something to do. He needed to keep himself busy. Trowa would never say no to the other’s company, so he picked the soldering iron up and handed it to his partner. “Have at it. I’ll be glad when this thing is fixed. It’s been bothering me all day...”
Taking the soldering iron in hand Heero slipped around Trowa and began studying the board he had been working on. His partner’s work was impeccable, as usual. Heero was skilled enough at maintenance but didn’t match the skills of Trowa, who he recalled mentioned once that he had freelanced as a mobile suit mechanic years before. It definitely showed.

“You did better than me at the simulations today,” said Heero quietly as he finished up Trowa’s project, his eyes narrowed as he tried to focus on task. He couldn’t help but look at their test results after they had finished. “A lot better…” which didn’t necessarily bother him, except he hadn’t been bested like that by anyone before. “Your ZERO mastery is impressive.” Oh, Heero compliments. “…it’s a turn on.” There it was.

“A turn on… Really?” Trowa crossed his arms over his chest and leaned against the workbench while he watched Heero. “I had no idea you had a ZERO kink.” He teased. Truthfully the only reason he had achieved better results was because Heero was unusually off his game that day.

“I have a talented pilot kink,” replied Heero in a flat voice, though he was resisting the urge to smile. “And if you don’t stop making those coveralls look sexy you’re going to find yourself in a predicament.” He finished the last connection and stood up straight, lifting the rectangular board to study it.

Heero had a ‘Trowa kink’, period. The mild flirting brought a confident smile to Trowa’s lips. He glanced over his partner’s shoulder, eyes scanning the connections. “Looks good. Thank you. You’re so skilled with your hands…”

There was a tone that Trowa used whenever he was making a suggestive statement. It was slightly lilted, heightened and accentuated just enough that the practiced ear could hear the double meaning, even if a casual bystander couldn’t. Heero had spent plenty of time studying these ‘Trowa-isms’ lately to know. He set the circuit down and turned around just in time to see Trowa’s smile fading from his lips. “And you’re skilled with your mouth,” he said flatly, lifting a hand to caress an index finger across Trowa’s lower lip.

Without warning Trowa’s lips parted and he took the finger into his mouth, tongue sliding across it suggestively. Damn right he was good with his mouth. Normally he wasn’t so forward with his displays of affection or his flirtatious behavior, but Heero’s presence just did something to him. The longer they dated the harder it got to keep his hands off of him.

Just as Heero decided to make Trowa’s suggestive gesture reality the overhead door to the hangar slammed open. With a twitch of his eyebrow he dropped his hand from Trowa’s mouth, reluctantly, and tilted his head up to see who had so rudely burst into the hangar. He had expected one of the mechanics or engineers. Instead a very intense, very energized Wufei peered over the railing of the catwalk.

“Barton! Yuy! We have a situation. Conference room three, now!”

As Heero entered the conference room behind Wufei he spotted the projection screen already lit, casting an image of debris floating in space against the wall. Both he and Trowa hadn’t even changed out of their coveralls. The room was hot, packed with bodies all seated and standing against the wall. It seemed like everyone on their floor was somehow crammed into the rectangular room. He unzipped his coveralls the rest of the way and tied the arms around his waist, letting his white tank top underneath breathe as he inched inside and took a stand beside a woman he recognized from the analysis office. He spotted Fara seated at the table, his glasses on, expression stern as he fumbled and pushed around various paperwork that had been lain out across the table.
Duo was seated next to him, along with Noin and Sally who were whispering something to one another. Everyone’s expressions were dark, sad or tense.

“Alright, listen. We knew this was coming,” Wufei began as he pushed his way to the front of the room. “It was only a matter of time before we had an attack as massive as this one.” He pointed to the chunks of rock and twisted metal in the image. Wherever the debris came from, it was clear it was hanging just within range of the moon. “This was the lunar resource satellite M-OII. Destroyed approximately 30 minutes ago. We’re currently taking fallen debris against our upper levels. Anti-missile technology from the war era is being used to blow up larger chunks that are threatening to crash into populated areas. We don’t know what kind of explosion, it appears nuclear from the radiation ring being detected around the debris cloud. All essential personnel are expected to stay in the bottom two levels of the compound until the situation has been cleared. Nobody is to leave to the surface levels. All upper crust facilities have been evacuated.”

Heero crossed his arms over his chest and studied the expressions of his companions. Duo was gawking, his eyebrows turned down as if angry but yet somehow stunned. Une was seated at the end of the table with her usual poker face. It was difficult to tell what she was thinking. He glanced over at Trowa while Wufei gave off the pre-established plans for evacuation should another explosion strike the lunar base.

Trowa slowly unzipped the front of his coveralls. He felt tiny beads of sweat travel along the side of his neck, over his collarbone, and down under the rim of his shirt. Building maintenance must have turned the air conditioning off because it was stifling in the cramped conference room. He leaned his head back against the wall and tried to continue listening, but his thoughts kept wandering.

On the outside Trowa looked cool, calm, and collected, but on the inside he was anything but. He knew the situation was alarming, that the destruction of a resource satellite was a big deal, but his hormones were wreaking havoc on his body and he couldn’t focus. His thoughts were on the finger that had been in his mouth just minutes ago. The salty taste was still fresh on his tongue. It was a good thing he had the baggy coveralls on because he could feel his cock twitch into arousal as provocative images of his boyfriend splashed colorfully against his mind.

Heero raised an eyebrow at Trowa, noting the somewhat flushed skin of his neck and the way he was looking at him.

“Alright, the mobile suit team will be activated. Full arsenal, all weapons. We’re not going to take any chances. Lunar PD says there is increased chatter in the terror networks, and that civil unrest is at an all time high. Clearly this is colony.” Wufei was cut short by Duo standing quickly from his chair. The American pilot slammed a fist onto the table.

“No way the colonists did this shit! NO WAY! That makes no sense, man! This is all a set up! It has to be… why would colonists destroy their own resource satellite?! What would they have to gain from it?” Duo’s face was red, clearly he was agitated.

“The satellite supplied resources to both colonists and terrans,” Une said from her seat, her expression grim. “There is no proof that it was colonist unrest that caused the blast, but we can’t rule it out either. Have a seat Mister Maxwell.”

Duo slumped to a sit and crossed his arms defiantly, seething, glaring at the tabletop.

“We are at Red Alert on the advisory system,” Wufei continued, unfazed. “Follow protocol.” He pointed at Trowa and Heero. “Coordinates have been put in your inboxes. Noin and Sally will be taking Aries suits to assist. Deploy.”
Heero nodded and without another word stepped out of the conference room, taking long strides down the hall back to the hangar. As Trowa caught up beside him he glanced up at him with a worried look. “You alright?” He still looked a little flushed.

The hallway as deserted so Trowa wasted no time acting on his emotions. He put his hands on Heero’s shoulders and quickly pushed him against the wall, leaning in for a needy kiss. He slipped his tongue into the other’s mouth, deciding to take a more dominant approach per the usual. When he had had his fill he pulled away, panting lightly, a serene expression returning to his features. “When we’re done with all of this, I want you.”

It wasn’t often that Heero was caught off guard. He found himself pinned to the wall, his mouth thoroughly probed and then propositioned within moments. His widened eyes narrowed and a smirk formed on his wet mouth. “First one to their mobile suit gets top.” Heero was always down for a challenge.

“Continue higher altitude patrols,” Sally instructed over the communications, her voice tight and more tense than usual. Heero saw Noin through the visuals monitor leaning over Sally’s shoulder, her expression forced flat so as not to show the worry that was clearly glistening in her eyes. “Report anything unusual, you are free to act autonomously and to respond to any threat at will.”

“Current intel says that a second explosive charge has been set somewhere here on the lunar base. They’re doing everything they can to locate it…” Noin explained softly, her shoulders shrugging. “But you know how these things work.”

Heero sighed and nodded. “Understood.” He reached out to deftly disconnect the com, leaving a constant stream with his companion mobile suit, Prometheus. He could see Trowa’s helmeted figure in a small communications pane to his right, his eyes visible through the translucent visor. His own mobile suit, Argo, was positioned just over the Lunar spaceport where a swarm of mobile suits from the local authorities were making their rounds, searching the area. Nearby was Preventer’s shuttle, with Noin and Sally’s mobile suits in the rear bay ready to deploy as needed.

The reality was it was safer out in space around the lunar base than it was to be on the Moon itself. Sally and Noin had decided to take the shuttle out as well, just in case the main Preventer facility was attacked.

The situation was tense. Heero understood ‘how these things work’ very well. In the past it was his job to set up explosives just like the one that had destroyed the resource satellite. In his short career as an assassin and subsequent terrorist he had planted many a bomb. Now he was experiencing what it felt like to be on the receiving end. To be a sitting duck- waiting for the second shoe to drop.

It was a terrible feeling.

Nearby evacuation pods and shuttles were making their way to Earth. The civilians on the Moon were being ushered off the surface as fast as possible.

And time was ticking. He frowned within his helmet and tilted his head so he could study Trowa’s image again. “I think we should let the local authority scan this area. I feel like the presence here is too dense. What do you think about scanning the northern ridge?”

“I was just thinking about scanning the northern ridge.” Trowa replied coolly. “Did you want to take the east?”
“Sure.” Heero grabbed his controls and forced Argo up and away from the Aeries police suits circling the spaceport. The lunar base was settled deep within the center of one of the luna craters. He plotted a course east, his battle system computer scanning and searching the drab, silver dust below. After some time had passed he checked his map and spotted the blip that was Trowa’s mobile suit on the northern ridge.

“Nothing here…” he found himself watching Trowa’s image as his head tilted, his eyes downcast through his helmet as he looked at his readouts. Knowing they were on a secure connection he smirked within his own helmet and said slowly, “I may have let you win.” Referring to their little race to the hangar, and how Trowa had managed to hop up into Prometheus a couple seconds ahead of Heero.

“I beat you. Fair and square.” The corner of Trowa’s lips tugged up into a smirk as he continued to scan his area. Despite the ongoing communication with his partner he was focused on the area. It seemed too quiet on the northern ridge and a tiny sliver of suspicion slid into his mind, causing Trowa to suddenly be on alert.

Heero wasn’t paying attention to the scans at all. He couldn’t stop looking at the small communication pane, watching Trowa lean to the side while he worked on something on his control panel. It wasn’t until he heard the loud whine of an alert siren on his own controls that he was snapped out of his mindless stare.

BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP- frantically, loudly the mobile suit’s computer was picking up heat exchange on the surface. The surface of the north ridge. Suddenly the ground directly below Trowa’s mobile suit broke open and a bright, white blast erupted up from the ground. Lunar dust and dirt, large chunks of rock as well as debris from the mining facility underground erupted into a massive, quickly spreading mushroom cloud.

A storm of electricity, radiation and debris swirled and swelled up from the ground, engulfing everything around it. Trowa’s mobile suit vanished from visuals, caught in the tempest of destruction. The communications feed broke, Trowa’s visual on Heero’s control panel went black.

“Trowa?!” Without thinking Heero tossed his his suit’s thrust wide open, sending Argo careening in the direction of the growing, swirling storm. “Trowa?! Do you read me? Can you hear me?”

Heero couldn’t hear anything but the sound of his own blood pounding loudly, dully in his ears. He could taste bile as it crept up the back of his throat. “Trowa!!!”

“Heero! Pull back, you can’t go in there!” Noin yelled through the open communications, her face appearing on monitor. Heero made out the outline of an Aries cockpit behind her. “Pull back!”

No… no… Heero’s body began to shake uncontrollably. He didn’t comply with Noin’s orders and instead plunged Argo deep into the wall of dust and debris, immediately striking a loose, free floating lump of lunar surface as he did. His suit jolted hard, his body slammed violently against his restraints. “Trowa, can you read me?! His voice didn’t sound like his own- it was shrill, strained as if it were a stranger’s, wrapped in pain. He could hear Noin pleading with him, her voice cutting in and out the deeper he traveled through the cloud.

“-ba… noth…a…-”

A loud rumble echoed through the stairwell and the ground started to shake violently underneath their feet. Fara’s foot slid out from underneath him and he blindly reached out for the banister,
gripping it so tight that his knuckles turned white. He stabilized himself as best as he could, watching with wide eyes as the metal stairs vibrated.

Once the ground stopped moving Fara looked up at Wufei who was standing on the landing above him. He didn’t need to say anything, they both knew what had just happened. A second bomb explosion. There was a soft beep before Noin’s worried, rushed voice came over the radio attached to Wufei’s hip.

“We’re trying to bring Heero in. We’ve lost communication with Trowa and can’t get to his suit… Meet us at the hangar in 10 minutes.”

Suddenly Fara was dashing up the remaining stairs. He flung the heavy steel door open and started running down the hall towards the hangar, panic coursing through his veins. Was Heero alright? What about Trowa? Were there any casualties from the explosion? What was going on!? Would there be more explosions?

The mobile suit hangar was sealed, a red flashing light pulsing over the door signaled that the vacuum of space had filled it and that it wasn’t safe to enter yet. Wufei had run after Fara and had grabbed his hand to stop him from trying to open the door.

“It will be cold in there,” he explained firmly, gesturing to the various forms of suits hanging beside the door. He grabbed a thick, white down jacket from the wall and carefully draped it around Fara’s shoulders, helping him into it. “I don’t know what kind of blast that was… but now we know that the second has discharged.” Which was a good and bad thing. Good, because only two were suspected and now they could lighten up on lockdown, but bad because it just proved that the situation in the Earth-Sphere was more serious than they had originally thought.

The world was slipping into chaos.

He carefully zipped the front of Fara’s jacket for him, his fingers pausing under his chin before turning to grab a matching one, sliding his arms through it quickly. Noin’s voice spoke up over the com again.

“We’ve retrieved Heero’s suit. Towing it in. He’s not responding. We’ve got crews searching the debris for Prometheus, but the radiation is shorting out the Aries basic suits,” Noin’s voice was tight and guarded. Wufei grabbed the radio and spoke into it briskly.

“The Prometheus was lined with depleted uranium as well as made of external gundanium panels. Those cockpits are modeled from a Gundam’s. They can withstand radiation,” he reasoned.

“Yes, we’re not worried about that part. We’re worried about the concussion of the blast… and his life support controls, if his on board computers have failed…”

“He’s got oxygen tanks. He knows how to use them. He’ll be fine, just find him. Those tanks are only good for three hours,” Wufei said with a scowl. He clipped the radio back to his waist and turned to Fara, his expression serious. “Are you sure you want to do this?” he gestured to the red light over the hangar door. The situation had the potential of being gruesome. Wufei knew that Fara and Heero had been together at some point. If Heero was dead in the cockpit, he wasn’t sure he wanted Fara to have to see it.

“Yes.” Fara said without hesitation. He wasn’t a pilot but he understood the potential risks of what might be on the other side of the door.

They stood there and waited for the red light to turn green. As soon as the color shifted the
blonde’s hand was on the door, pushing it open and stepping through with long, urgent strides. He needed to see Heero, needed to make sure he was all right.

Argo had been towed in on a launch platform, set haphazardly on it’s back. As Wufei and Fara entered they were stopped at the top catwalk by a man in a white biohazard suit.

“You need to stay here,” he informed them through his speaker. “The radiation levels on the suit are much too dangerous to approach without proper equipment.

Wufei nodded and leaned over the railing, watching as the crew of mechanics and engineers began to climb in their bunny suits up and over the Gundam’s massive limbs towards the cockpit. Using manual override they forced the hydraulics open, inch by inch the hatch slid aside. The inside was dark. Two men lowered themselves down inside and soon Heero’s limp figure was being hauled out by the shoulders. His helmeted head was lolling limply, his legs and arms unmoving. Just as they set him on a stretcher one of his hands shot up and punched one of the men square in the chest, knocking him off of his feet. He fell over the side of the mobile suit’s chest. As the suited workers began to scramble Heero stood up and began fighting them, shoving them out of the way, trying to get to the Aries suit Noin had parked where Prometheus usually stood. Noin herself was standing at the foot of her Aries being scanned by a geiger counter for radiation while a crew was spraying a solvent on her mobile suit to negate any radioactive particles.

“Shit!” Wufei broke into a run, leaping down from the catwalk, over the railing and onto a lower level before taking giant strides down the stairs. As Heero was pummeling anyone who came between him and the Aries suit Wufei closed the distance fast and put himself between Heero and an engineer, catching the suited pilot’s fist with his hand.

“MOVE!” Heero’s voice was muffled through his closed helmet. Wufei snarled and ducked as the irate former Wing pilot’s fist came at his head. He countered with a palm thrust to his chest, sending him stumbling back. The move didn’t deter Heero, who simply began to throw a wild series of punches and kicks at the Chinese agent, who ducked and sidestepped expertly in an attempt to placate him, but also keep him from getting any closer to Noin’s suit.

“Restrain him!” Noin shouted, frustration ringing out in her voice.

Fara watched from the catwalk as if in a trance, unable to move. Based off their case reports and the rumors floating around the office he knew Wufei and Heero were skilled at hand to hand combat, but he’d never seen their talents in person. His boyfriend managed to block all of Heero’s blows, but soon he could see that Wufei was tiring, his countermoves slowing down by a fraction of a second. Fara rushed down the stairs and to the main floor, headed in their direction. “Heero, stop.” He called out as he approached.

Wufei saw Fara approaching. The sight of him coming closer to the irradiated area, as well as to Heero- who was clearly out of his mind- gave him a renewed sense of urgency. As Heero hesitated at the sound of Fara’s voice Wufei spun around and planted his heel with a flourishing high kick to the side of Heero’s helmeted head with as much force as he could. It was just enough to knock the pilot off of his feet as well as stun him. He jumped on him as soon as he hit the ground and after a couple of moments struggling with his flightsuit slippery limbs he managed to pin him to his stomach. A pair of workers ran up to help him. Heero was struggling against them, his back arching and shoulders twisting beneath Wufei’s knee, which was firmly planted in the center of his back.

“We need to get this suit off of him and get him in the showers,” one of the engineers explained. “For decontamination. You too, Mister Chang, as well as you-” the suited man pointed at Fara. “You’ve come too close to the particulates.”
Wufei nodded and grabbed Heero roughly by the wrists, yanking him to his feet. It was clear that the pilot was beginning to lose his fight. He resisted only a little as he was pushed towards the locker rooms.

By the time they had gotten Heero into the showers he had stopped moving altogether. Wufei shoved him to his knees on the tiles and reached over to yank the helmet from his head, tossing it in an empty stall for the crew to decontaminate. “What the hell has gotten into you?!” he barked as he reached over to turn on the shower. “You took that suit into the blast radius?! Do you realize that all of our firepower- all of our ability to fight this enemy rests on those two suits? Years of building and development. You know better than this.”

Heero said nothing, but simply stared down at the tiles in front of him, his eyes puffy and red.

*His boyfriend is still out in space. That’s what has gotten into him.* Fara wasn’t going to voice his thoughts, knowing the mention of Trowa would probably send Heero into another fit of rage. He slid the thick jacket off his shoulders and laid it across a bench, back turned to the other two men.

With a scowl Wufei reached down to try and unzip Heero’s suit, intending on stripping him and leaving him under the water to cool off for a minute when Heero’s hand shot up and slapped him by the wrist, knocking his arm away.

“Stop fighting me!” Wufei snarled irritably, expertly snatching the kneeling pilot’s wrist to wrench it around to his back. “You’ve got to decontaminate. What good are you to Barton all covered in radiation, acting like a psychopath? Think, Yuy. Calm down.”

“Don’t touch me,” Heero hissed as he twisted beneath Wufei’s arm lock. “I don’t want you to touch me…” his voice sounded tremulous, weak.

“I can take care of him.” Fara offered without turning around. He had started unbuttoning his shirt, fingertips tracing over the fabric as he stood there and listened to the scene behind him. Heero was hurting, and while Wufei meant to help him, he was approaching it at the wrong angle. “Let me help him…”

Wufei paused in his lecture and looked up at Fara with a raised eyebrow. Then his dark eyes snapped back to Heero. He leaned in close to his face and narrowed his eyes menacingly at him. “If you hurt him, I’ll kill you.”

“I don’t need help.” Heero said plainly, though it was clear he wasn’t going to get the skin tight and now half wet flight suit off by himself. Wufei was just about to propose that he stay and make sure Heero didn’t lay a finger on Fara when Noin’s head popped into the stall. She was already undressed, standing wrapped in a white towel, clearly preparing to shower as well.

“Wufei. I need to talk to you for a minute,” she said. Her eyes scanned Heero’s back before adding, “outside.”

Fara waited until he heard the receding footsteps echo against the walls of the shower room hall. He slipped his shirt off and then his pants before approaching Heero with caution. He wasn’t afraid of the other. If Heero lashed out he’d pop him in the nose or knee him in the crotch, although he was sure the other would overpower him after that and he wouldn’t get anymore moves in.

“Wufei. I need to talk to you for a minute,” she said. Her eyes scanned Heero’s back before adding, “outside.”

Slowly, Fara knelt down in front of Heero, knees resting on the cool tiles as he reached out to grasp the zipper on the front of the flight suit. He waited a few seconds to see if Heero would stop him. When nothing happened, he slowly started to pull the zipper down.
Heero recognized the body that knelt in front of him almost immediately. It had been the same body he had sought comfort with for years, the same hips he had hugged close to his own. Pale, smooth limbs moving with refined, calm grace and a curtain of silky blonde hair filled the edges of his vision. He didn’t look up. He knew who it was.

“I need to be out there,” he said quietly, though his voice echoed against the stall tiles. “He’s out there…”

“The search party is looking for him now. They’ll bring Trowa back. You’re right where you need to be…” The zipper hit the end of its track and Fara let go. He leaned in to gently push the clingy fabric from Heero’s shoulders, his hair brushing against the other’s face as he diligently worked. Soon he had freed Heero’s top half, pulling the sleeves from his right arm with careful precision. “This is a pain in the ass to get off. I don’t envy you…”

Heero’s mind was racing and for a moment he wondered whether it was worth punching Fara in the face to make his escape. Disgusted with himself for even thinking it, he closed his eyes tightly and shook his head.

I’m wasting time. I’m wasting time again. I have to stop this… I have to find Trowa… A dark, bitter seed that had been planted within him some time before began to grow and blossom within his consciousness, forcing ugly thoughts to the surface. I lose everything I love. Anything close to me dies. He reached up to grab Fara’s hands, squeezing them, forcing them off of his skin. “You have to get away from me…” anything close to me dies.

“I’ll go away when I’m done helping you shower.” Fara freed his hands from the grip, locking his gaze with Heero’s. He saw the hurt and confusion swimming around those deep blue irises, drawing him in and threatening to drown him. He had to look away. “It’s ok... Trowa will be ok. They’ll find him… You know him better than any of us. Have faith in him. You would feel it here if he were dead.” He reached out to place his palm over the left side of Heero’s chest.

“I feel nothing,” replied Heero coldly. His entire body was numb and had been from the moment he saw Trowa’s face flicker and vanish from the com. “It’s me who is dead.”

Fara shook his head and held back a sigh. “Can you stand up so I can roll the rest of this suit off your body?” He managed to get the stubborn synthetic cloth down to Heero’s hips.

Normally Heero wouldn’t accept help like this, especially with something so simple as pulling off his clothes, but he couldn’t force his fingers to move or grasp anything. He couldn’t bring himself to do anything but sit there. Somehow he found the strength to push himself to a stand, his eyes closed tightly, unable to look at Fara any longer. Instead of the pretty blonde his mind began to supply him images from the past. Blue chunks of shrapnel floating freely in open space, with a similarly blue suited body floating limply among them.

He thought Trowa had been dead so many year ago when they had been testing the Mercurious and Vayeate mobile suits under OZ supervision. Trowa had thrown his own suit in front of him to protect him and the colony from Quatre who, under the influence of ZERO, had decided that the entirety of space was his enemy and had set out to destroy everything in it.

He had seen him explode, seen his body float off into space and could do nothing but fight Quatre off, helpless to help Trowa. The one time he could have done something and he did nothing for him.

He was always saving me… Trowa always saves me, Heero thought with a frown, his eyes still closed as he felt the remainder of his flight suit peel away from his body under Fara’s determined grip. I need to save him. His hands formed two tight fists, his shoulders quivered. He’s out there, I can’t leave him behind again… “They’re not going to find him,” he finally said darkly, his eyes
slowly opening to take in the tiled floors once again. “I have to... “ his voice became coarse, dry. “Fara, help me…” he caught the blonde’s arm, his expression serious. “Help me get out of here.”

“I can’t… I’m sorry.” Fara avoided Heero’s gaze, letting his hair fall to the side to curtain his face. His heart was aching and he wanted to help his friend. If Wufei were out there, lost and likely injured, Fara would do everything he could to get to him. He didn’t blame Heero for wanting to go against orders, but he couldn’t allow it. Sending him back out there while in his current mental state was dangerous and he had faith in the Preventer team. They would find Trowa.

“Please don’t ask me… you know I can’t…” Fara took the other's hand and tugged him in the direction of one of the stalls. He turned the water on and adjusted the temperature before stepping under the spray, pulling Heero with him.

Numb, feeling nothing of the water that smashed into his shoulders he simply stood there, staring at Fara expectantly. Had it been selfish to ask him for help like that? Possibly, but he couldn’t stop himself from trying. His fingers slid through Fara’s hand, tangling his calloused digits with the blond’s soft, slender ones before tightening them firmly.

“I left him for dead once,” he said plainly, his voice expressionless as he confided his thoughts to him. “He sacrificed himself for me. Saved me. When he came back he didn’t know me… couldn’t remember who I was. I don’t know if I could endure that again, losing him like that. What if he isn’t dead, but he doesn’t remember me…?”

Outside the showers Wufei had finished his conversation with Noin. According to their analysts, the blast had been formidable. The chance that anyone could survive, in a Gundam or not, was marginal. The odds weren’t in Trowa’s favor.

Wufei stepped quietly back into the main shower chamber but stopped just inside the doorway, hearing the soft murmuring of Heero’s voice through the rushing of the water. He couldn’t see anything but the very top of the pilot’s head. He crossed his arms over his chest and frowned, knowing the only other person in there was Fara.

“I’m sorry, Heero.” The words sounded lame as they passed his wet lips. Fara didn’t know what else to say. He wished he could take the pain away from the other, wished he could promise him that Trowa would be ok and there was nothing to worry about. But he couldn’t do either of those things. There wasn’t a damn thing he could say to reassure Heero, to make the situation any more bearable. All they could do was wait and hope that the search party found Trowa, pray that he was safe.

Fara gave in to his instincts and wrapped his slender arms around the other man, pulling him in for a tight embrace, just wanting to be there for him, physically, a shoulder to cry on if he needed it. “I’m sorry…” He murmured again, fingers running up Heero’s back, interrupting the rivulets of water that ran down his body.

It was this body he had sought comfort in for two years, this person who had left his door open for him anytime that he needed it. He owed Fara more than he could ever admit, and even after choosing someone else OVER him the blond was there trying to help him. He was feeling alone and despair over losing Trowa, but he knew he was lucky to have such supportive friends. He automatically responded by curling his own arms around Fara’s smaller frame, firmly pressing into him and buried his face against the side of the slightly shorter man’s neck in an attempt to hide from the heavy, stifling sense of impending doom that had shrouded his shoulders.

“Thank you,” Heero said quietly.
Wufei cleared his throat loudly as he rounded the corner and made his way to the stall that appeared to be occupied by his boyfriend and Heero.

“Need any help?” he said loudly, his voice carrying over the roar of the water. “Yuy, make sure you wash your hair. All of the particles need to be removed.” He wasn’t sure he wanted to look in the shower stall and see what was happening in there. He trusted Fara, but there was still something disconcerting about actually seeing his ridiculously hot boyfriend naked with his colleague. Especially now that he knew their past history.

Heero sighed and gently grasped Fara’s shoulders, pushing him away and studied his face for a moment before saying flatly, “thank you. I can do the rest.”

“As you should. I’m not a bath slave.” Fara teased and exited the stall to leave Heero to his own hygiene routine. He practically walked right into Wufei. “Hey… Did Noin have anything new to report?”

Wufei frowned at the mention of Noin and cut his eyes at the shower stall Heero was using, shaking his head. He took Fara gently by the elbow and led him down to the end of the row of stalls and leaned in to speak to him as if Heero’s hearing was somehow superhuman. “She said that our analysts measure the blast as being … potentially unsurvivable.” Which meant that if Trowa had perished they were down one mobile suit and essentially two pilots. There was no way Heero was going to be able to pilot Argo any longer while grieving his loss.

“Potentially? So they haven’t found the Prometheus yet. Did you not say they had only three hours to find Trowa before the oxygen tanks ran out?” Fara pulled Wufei into the last shower stall. He needed to finish rinsing off. Once they were both under the water he looked up at his boyfriend with a serious expression. “Tell me. Honestly, do you think Trowa survived?”

“I don’t know what to think,” Wufei replied with a frown. He reached over to pump soap into his hands and began scrubbing at his skin, his expression irritated. “It doesn’t seem likely… and while this is horrible, we have to remember that there are much bigger things happening here, too. A bomb went off at one of the manufacturing and mining plants. Workers died. At least a hundred, possibly more. This place was a target for a reason. We need to find out why, and we need to do our jobs. We need to PREVENT another attack before it’s too late.”

He began shampooing his hair with a scowl. “Heero acts like he is the only person to lose someone… I know this pain. However, he can’t act like this. He can’t let this cripple us as an organization.”

“We’ve all lost someone. Some of us multiple people.” Wufei had a point. They had a job to do and couldn’t dwell on the losses right now. But his boyfriend was rather abrupt with his words and could learn to take a softer approach. “What do you need from me? Where can I best assist the team right now?” He rinsed the soap off his body and pushed his hair back.

“Your analysis team. Run all of the data picked up from Heero’s mobile suit, let’s try to figure out if there was any unusual activity in the area. Security cameras, personnel check-ins, new hires. Anything that could give us a clue as to who is behind this and why they targeted that location,” Wufei explained as he rinsed his hair out. Once he was finished he stepped aside to give Fara the full brunt of the water.

“Alright. I’ll gather what information I can.” Fara finished rinsing off and exited the stall in search of a towel. He passed by Heero’s stall to make sure he was alright before making his way to the lockers for a spare change of clothes.
Wufei watched Fara leave, noting that he paused to cast a glance at Heero. Shortly after the blond had left the shower room the former Wing pilot stepped out of the shower, dripping, his red rimmed eyes practically glowing with energy. Wufei crossed his arms over his chest and sighed as Heero’s gaze settled upon him. “I know you heard me.”

Heero frowned. “Your priorities are in the wrong place, Wufei.”

Wufei laughed, his voice echoing off of the vented ceiling. “My priorities are set on maintaining this world’s peace. A peace that your Relena Peacecraft had hoped to foster and nurture, might I add.”

“Haven’t we given them enough?” Heero’s voice was calm, his tone empty. “The world. Haven’t we sacrificed enough… and for what? What is left? I’ve given everything to the Earth and the colonies. Everyone. So have you.”

Wufei scowled. “What are you trying to say, Yuy?”

“I’m saying I’m done.” Heero ran his hand through his hair, pushing it from his eyes. “I can’t do this anymore.”

“What are you talking about?” Wufei snapped, his eyes widened with disbelief. “You’re saying ….”

“I’m done with Preventer,” replied Heero firmly. “I’m out.”
Chapter 20

Sally Po had never seen so much destruction on the Moon before. The blast had ripped through the northern ridge of the Curie lunar crater, which it its current libration had the cusp of the moon’s darkened face cast across the now massive hole where the eastmost edge of the northern rim used to be. The subterranean blast had forced lunar rock a swell as the charred, melted remains of the mining facility to the surface, some of which was still free floating within the Moon’s weak, thin atmosphere, the vague gravity of the lifeless rock clinging desperately to the smaller debris, creating a thick and dusty cloud over the blast site. The nuclear explosion had radiated the loose particles tossed into the air, forcing all communications technology to go on the fritz. To do inside the cloud was to travel into the darkness alone, with no way to contact the outside world in the event of an emergency.

It was a risk Sally and Noin had to take. External probes of the blast site were getting them nowhere, and the construction and mining mobile suits sent to work the debris weren’t equipped with enough radiation shielding to dive directly into such a high concentration. It was up to them to use their upgraded Aries suits to find Prometheus and Trowa, its pilot.

Within the cloud itself there was hardly any visibility. Closer to the surface where the still smoldering subterranean facility was the airborne debris was thinner, making it easier to search with external cameras. Due to the disruption of the transmission, Sally could only communicate with Noin through text message forced over a different frequency than the visual communications. She spotted a low pile of rubble and scanned it the best she could with her on board computer before typing in to Noin:

- I think we should move some of this rock - Her Aries pointed to the spot. -If he wasn’t thrown up and out with the blast he has to be buried somewhere around here.-

She knew they were running out of time. Now they would race the clock.

-I agree. He’s probably stuck under all of this. –

Noin moved her Aries carefully towards the rubble, eyes searching her scanner screens. She was worried. The explosions went off over 2 hours ago, which meant Trowa, if alive, had just shy of 40 minutes left before his oxygen tanks ran out. The pressure weighed heavily on her shoulders and she knew Sally could feel it too.

They had spent all their time searching the surrounding outer layers of the atmosphere, thinking the blast likely throw the Prometheus out into space. As each second ticked by, Noin realized they should have checked the surface area first.

They got no luck with the first outcropping of rocks and had moved on to the next, their mobile suits straining to shove aside massive rocks and boulders of drab, grey lunar rock in search of the formerly shining mobile suit. Time was running out, and with only ten minutes remaining Sally told herself she wasn’t going to leave- not until they found Trowa, dead or alive.

At that silent promise she spotted something sticking out of a thick mound of loose debris. A hand?! A mobile suit hand. Quickly she gestured for Noin to follow and bounced her Aries across the ground in the direction of the hand. Grabbing a large slab that pinned the attached arm, she forced her suit to push. With both her and Noin’s Aries giving mighty shoves they manages to move the debris from the top of Prometheus, its eyes dead and deactivated. It was clear it didn’t have any power. Hooking one arm over her suit she waited for Noin to get in position before
forcing the modified boosters of her own suit to full thrust, lifting the formidable Gundam up and through the radiation cloud. They had less than ten minutes to get him to the Preventer MS hangar.

“We need to get that cockpit open NOW!” Noin pulled her helmet off as she walked down the catwalk towards the damaged Prometheus. “It looks like the computer system isn’t running, so we’ll have to pry it open. Hurry!” They made it back to the hangar in approximately 8 minutes and 22 seconds. Noin feared they were too late. Their estimate on the oxygen level was loose from the start. They had no way of knowing if and when Trowa had activated the tanks. She stood at the base of the massive mobile suit and watched the crew work, worrying her lower lip as she waited impatiently for the cockpit to open. What will we do if he’s dead? Heero won’t be able to pilot Argo if we lose his partner… we’ll have to find two replacement pilots.

Engineers and workers in bunny suits scrambled to the closed cockpit hatch and began to forced the hydraulics to release manually. The process was slow going, but eventually they cracked it open, flooding the inside of the cockpit with hangar air. A medical team was nearby and once the cockpit was fully opened they dove inside with oxygen masks.

“I can’t believe you’re doin’ this,” Duo said sourly as he leaned across Heero’s desk to pick at his post-it notes. “You can’t just quit!”

Heero was shoveling paperwork and what few personal items he had in his desk into a file box. “It’s not up for debate,” he replied coldly, snatching the post-its from Duo’s fingers to toss it into the box.

“But where will ya go? What about Relena’s case?”

Heero sighed. “I have a place to go, and I’ll still work on Relena’s case, my own way.”

Duo crossed his arms over his chest and pouted. “You’re being childish, man. C’mon- we need ya around here. Who else is gonna-”

Heero’s watch beeped as the timer he had set went off. Trowa would be out of oxygen by now. He froze and stared down at the messy pile of items in the box. The sound of boots pounding the floor in the hall grew louder as someone neared. Wufei poked his head through the door to the community agent pod.

“They’ve found Prometheus. They’re taking Barton to the medbay.”

Duo jumped off of the desk, his eyes wide. “He’s alive?”

Wufei frowned. “I don’t know.”

Trowa gasped as his helmet was pulled off, exposing his burning lungs to the air. One of the medics tried fitting an oxygen mask around his face, but he pushed them away sluggishly, leaning to the side to throw up from the nausea that consumed him. Like a sloth Trowa’s movements were slow and he was suffering from a lack of coordination. People were shouting things at him but he couldn’t comprehend what they were saying. He was dizzy and experiencing what felt like vertigo from the low oxygen levels in the cockpit.
“Give him some room to breathe!” Noin shouted out, watching the crew frantically crowd the confused pilot.

Two of the medics pulled Trowa from the cockpit and helped him down to the catwalk where he ungracefully fell to his knees. He dug his gloved fingers into the grating below and threw up again, emptying the rest of his stomach's contents while his lungs worked overtime.

Despite the frigid cold of the mobile suit hangar, Heero slammed through the door and leaned over the railing. He spotted Trowa on his knees, surrounded by rescue crew and engineers. He was moving. The confirmation that he was, indeed, alive forced the tension that had been building in his body to release. Calmly he walked down the catwalk, watching as Trowa threw up between his gloved hands. It was the most relieving thing he had ever seen.

“Mister Yuy, you really shouldn’t approach with the radiation levels as they-” one of the engineers was attempting to reason with him as he walked down the steps and approached the lower level catwalks where Trowa was struggling to catch his breath. As he drew near he unceremoniously shoved one of the workers aside and dropped to his knees in front of Trowa, putting his hands on top of Trowa’s gloved ones, wanting to feel him and to verify that he was, indeed there.

“I was right, wasn’t I? Dying hurts like hell,” Heero said softly.

Trowa couldn’t bring himself to look up at the other. The room was spinning and the closer he got to flattening himself against the ground the more secure he felt. He pressed his forehead against the cool grating and closed his eyes, fingers entwining with Heero’s. “So this is what hell feels like…” His lungs were on fire. Never before had he felt this nauseous, this dizzy. He wanted it to stop. His body gave out and he slumped against the catwalk like a mass of useless bones and muscle. At least he could breathe now.

The medics began to circle again, dragging the stretcher with them. They set it beside Trowa and were trying to urge him to roll over onto it. Heero reluctantly released their entwined fingers and inched back to let the medics do their job. One of the engineers came alongside Heero and gestured in the direction of the showers. “Mister Yuy, we can’t let you leave until you decontaminate, sir…”

With a groan Trowa rolled onto the stretcher, keeping his eyes closed to help with the spinning sensation. He was well aware that he was covered in vomit and really didn’t want his boyfriend seeing him in his current state. He draped an arm across his face when he felt the stretcher start to move, carrying him in the direction of the medbay.

After having his second decontamination shower that day Heero changed into his civilian clothes and made his way down to the medbay. He spotted Duo and Wufei sitting side by side in the waiting area just beyond the door where Trowa had been admitted, both hunched over and looking at something on a tablet clutched in Wufei’s hand. They both looked up as he approached.

“This is some real serious shit,” Duo said with a frown. He gestured to the tablet as Heero came closer. “Fara just sent this down, footage from the blast taken by one of the observation cameras just outside of the northern ridge. You should see this shit-”

Heero shook his head, refusing to look at it. “I saw it,” he reminded Duo. “Firsthand. Also, I am no longer an agent with Preventer, you’d be breaking protocol 21.21.A by showing me confidential material so freely.”

Duo scowled. “Come off of it, man. You’re not really gonna-” he was interrupted by a firm hand
on his shoulder. Wufei had grabbed his shoulder and was frowning, shaking his head as if to tell him not to push the issue. Duo sighed loudly and tossed his hands up in defeat.

“Alright, alright. Whatever mister t-shirt wearin’, cool bro civilian. I guess you’re down here to visit a friend, right? Not your partner?” Duo was taking Heero’s resignation rather personal it seemed.

Heero crossed his arms over his chest and nodded. “My boyfriend. Yes.”

Duo blinked. Boyfriend? That was a new development. He smirked and pointed at the door. “They said no visitors, but I bet you can use your infectious Heero charms to get them to let you in.”

Heero nodded and walked over to the door, knocking on it loudly. A calm, collected nurse poked her head out.

“I’m sorry, there can be no visitors right now while Mister Barton is in recov- uh, sir, wait!” The woman exclaimed, stunned as Heero shoved past her and let himself in.

Trowa sat up and immediately regretted it. He winced and laid his head back against the pillow, forcing the lingering dizzy spell back under control. Aside from the vertigo and nausea there wasn’t any noticeable injuries. He’d been lucky that Noin and Sally found him in time. If it weren’t for them he wouldn’t be laying in medbay right now, locking gazes with his boyfriend.

“Hey…” Trowa watched Heero approach the side of the bed, thankful he no longer had vomit clinging to his lips and chin.

The nurse was tugging at Heero’s arm in an attempt to get him out without causing much of a scene. However, when Trowa appeared to recognize the intruder she backed off a bit, muttering that he only had five minutes before he had to give Trowa time to rest. She ducked out of the room for a moment to give them some privacy. Heero sat on the edge of the bed, used a few fingers to smooth Trowa’s hair from his face and leaned down to gently kiss his lips, every ounce of thankfulness within him at the sight of Trowa lying there, alive, transferring through his lips into his boyfriend’s. He had never felt so relieved in his life.

“Still dizzy?” Heero was familiar with oxygen deprivation. He had been trained at a young age to handle the effects, often through grueling processes that involved water chambers and CO2 masks.

“Yes… it’s manageable now.” Trowa slid his hand across the sheets and grabbed Heero’s, pressing his palm against his lover’s for the warmth. As he sat in the dark cockpit, buried under thousands of pounds of rubble and breathing the last remains of oxygen, Trowa had wondered if he’d ever see Heero again. He wasn’t afraid of death, he’d never been afraid of it. But he was afraid of leaving Heero, worried about what his lover would do after he was gone. Trowa had slowed the flow of oxygen, lowering the level as far as possible to make the supply last longer. It made him lethargic and sluggish. All he could do was sit there and wait, hoping someone would find him before it was too late. He thought of Heero as the hours passed by…

“Sorry for the scare.” There was a lot on Heero’s mind, Trowa could tell.

“You don’t have anything to be sorry about. I’m sorry I couldn’t find you,” Heero confided firmly. He slid his fingers through Trowa’s hair again, letting the tips of his fingers glide down his cheek and across the side of his neck. “You’re beautiful,” he murmured. It was true. He had never seen anyone so gorgeous, never seen a sight so beautiful as Trowa lying there now, his face pale and his eyes dark with exhaustion. “I’m glad you’re here.”
“I wouldn’t leave you so easily.” Trowa tried to lighten the mood, his voice tired but playful. “I’m like a plague. You’re stuck with me, Yuy.” He squeezed his partner’s hand. “How are you holding up? Do they know who caused the explosions?”

Heero hesitated. He didn’t think worrying Trowa about the state of the new attacks or his resignation was wise. “They don’t know. Did you see anything when it happened?” Trowa was the closest living survivor to the blast. “All I saw was debris.”

“I didn’t…” It had all happened so fast, the blinding white light from the explosion and then the rubble that had covered all of his sensors and cameras.

“Alright,” Heero replied softly, not pushing the issue further. It didn’t matter now. He was safe, and Heero was no longer an agent. None of this was his concern. Nothing except Trowa. He leaned forward again and pressed his cheek against Trowa’s, nuzzling his ear softly. “Don’t worry about that now.”

Trowa closed his eyes and focused on the feeling of Heero’s warm cheek against his own, his soft breath tickling his ear. “I’m glad you’re okay… that you weren’t caught up in the blast.” His thumb traced over Heero’s knuckles, feeling each defined ridge, memorizing the tiny details.

Duo grinned from ear to ear as he eyed himself in the floor length mirror in the newly decontaminated locker room of the Preventer Mobile Suit hangar. He turned around and eyed his ass, now tightly wrapped in the ridiculously constricting black Preventer flight suit.

“I thought I would be happy to get back into one of these things, but damn! My balls,” he muttered to himself. He spotted Heero walk in to his left and gave him a small wink and salute. “So, what do ya think?”

“About what?” Heero asked, dropping to a sit on the bench. He opened his locker and began picking his things out of it. His resignation from Preventer also included his status of pilot. He had negotiated with Wufei, who had been insistent that he didn’t leave entirely, and agreed to stay on as a ‘technology consultant’ which still gave him access to the hangar and to interactions with the pilots.

“About me takin’ your place,” Duo said casually as he tossed his braid over his shoulder and tugged at the zipper of his suit irritably. “You’re not gonna kill me in my sleep because I got your mobile suit, are ya?”

“It’s no longer my mobile suit,” Heero replied slowly. “So I don’t really care either way.”

Duo huffed. “Way to be happy for me, Yuy.” He slumped down to a sit beside Heero and crossed his legs knee over knee before immediately regretting it. The suit didn’t lend well to breathability of the crotch and the tightness tugged at his manhood uncomfortably. He dropped his legs into a wide, splayed resting position before continuing casually, “you tell Trowa yet?”

Heero frowned and shook his head. There hadn’t been a good time to tell Trowa he had resigned. Between his boyfriend’s rehabilitation schedule and Heero’s involvement with the
civilian groups clearing the debris from the blast he hadn’t really had a chance to sit down with Trowa for longer than ten minutes at a time for the past five days. “It’s not important.”

Duo rolled his eyes. “Alright, pal. Whatever you say…”

“Not important?” Trowa had been leaning against the doorframe of the locker room the entire time, unbeknownst to the others. He heard everything. Confusion swept across his face and he frowned. “My partner, who i’ve trained with for 6 months, is being swapped out and it’s not important?”

What was going on? His eyes narrowed.

Duo stiffened at the sound of Trowa’s voice, his eyes wide as saucers as the other pilot rounded the corner. He looked from Trowa to Heero, who was scowling down at the tiles beneath his feet.

“Anyway I’ll see you out on the floor, huh?” Duo said as he hopped to his feet, making a hasty retreat out of the locker room. Once Duo was gone Heero looked up at Trowa, his expression pained.

“I meant to tell you,” he said slowly. “I’m sorry. I resigned. I am no longer an agent… or a pilot.”

“Why?” Trowa masked the hurt he felt and stayed planted to the doorframe.

“... when you disappeared I realized that the most important thing in my life isn’t working here. That I no longer care about Relena’s mission, about the people of space… about anything but you. I lost control of myself, I’ve reached my tipping point. Everyone is so eager to look the other way with me because of my skill and past accomplishments, but I am not cut out for this work. I am a liability. Wufei knows it, Une knows it- that’s why they keep periodically suspending me, hoping I’ll snap out of this funk I’ve gotten into. The reality is that this isn’t a temporary mindset. This isn’t me being confused. This is who I am now, and I am not fit to be a pilot. Not anymore.” He ran a hand through his hair, his expression fixed with a frown as he avoided looking at Trowa. “I may have been born into this life, and my destiny fixed by someone else- but… it isn’t what I want for myself.”

Fair. Trowa couldn’t argue with that. He’d felt his partner’s shift in mood, knew he was struggling with interpersonal issues, and ultimately wanted him to do what was best for himself. But to hear Heero say he didn’t care about finding Relena’s killer anymore? That came as a shock. And now what would they do? It looked like his replacement partner was Duo. Trowa didn’t have a lot of experience fighting alongside the braided man. He wasn’t sure they would mesh together as well. Where would Heero go now?

“What will you do then? What do you want?”

“I don’t want anything but to be happy,” replied Heero plainly. “I’m tired of being the forceful hand of peace. The one who has to sacrifice everything and everyone close to me to give everyone else safety and comfort.” He paused for a long moment before adding, “being with you, outside of here, gave me a new perspective on what my life could be.”

“You’re packing up your stuff but I’m still here.” Heero was quitting, but what about Trowa? He wasn’t sure he was ready to give this life up yet or leave the current mission. He would feel like he was letting the team down. But the loss of his partner, the one person he trusted completely, was a big blow. “Where do we go from here?”

“Just because I’m not working with Preventer doesn’t mean you have to modify your commitment,” Heero explained, standing up and closing the distance between them. “You’re a good agent. A superior pilot. I’m staying on the moon to work with civilian contractors until this is
all over.” His eyes narrowed. “And I’m going to work on Relena’s case my own way. I’m tired of being restricted by bureaucracy.” He raised a hand to caress the side of Trowa’s arm. “I’m not going to abandon you, if that’s what you’re worried about. I’m here to support you.”

Trowa nodded. “Sounds like you have it all figured out, then. You always did like working independently…” He knew Heero wasn’t abandoning him, as much as it felt that way to lose his partner. He straightened and pushed off the doorframe. “I should report to Noin. I’m sure there will be a new training schedule involving my new partner.” He wasn’t looking forward to redoing all the work he’d already done with Heero.

With a frown Heero nodded and stepped aside, letting Trowa move freely if he so chose. He wasn’t about to interfere or hinder his work. “Duo’s a good pilot. Erratic… noisy… but he’s talented.”

Trowa simply gave a nod in agreement and left the locker room.

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