From Prometheus, With Love

by Grimalkin

Summary

With the Omnic Crisis finally over, Jack Morrison was waiting for the perfect time to have a conversation with his best friend, Gabriel Reyes about their relationship, and mutually obvious feelings for each-other. His plans are slightly derailed after he briefly catches a glimpse of a girl in an aviator's Jacket one night, and is immediately assaulted with visions of a future he has not yet lived.

Completed for the Reaper76 Big bang.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Chapter 1

There was a certain ambiance to these parties that made Jack question if the world had ever really been in danger to begin with. The shiny veneer of wealth had a way of masking all the little flaws and imperfections of reality; The air seemed clearer, the food richer, and the drinks… well, the drinks were still a waste on someone like him, but he’d swear up and down they were fizzier too. People laugh lighter, smiled brighter, lived in this carefree little bubble of life while people who suffered firsthand from the crisis, and could still be waiting under rubble for a rescue that would never come.

“Gabriel looks as if he’s running through plans to blow up the building over there.”

Jack felt Ana’s finger tap against the jacket that laid over his bad arm, though careful to not touch his sling, her voice low and amused as she spoke into her glass of champagne. Her eyes trained on a point on the far side of the room, where if Jack followed her line of sight, he could make out man who was probably Gabe. Jack wasn’t entirely sure. The 80 or so meters of ballroom between them might have had something to do with it.

The two of them had stowed away into a more reclusive corner of the gala, hoping to get at least one night where they weren’t forced to do the dog and pony show for politicians. It had been two weeks since they won the war, and in that space of time they had attended 6 parties. Normally, Jack was fine with playing PR jockey for the team, but the past few parties had driven him to the end of his rope socially, and his rather broken arm’s refusal to set, let alone heal properly, had drained his patience. Ana, although relatively uninjured, had far less patience for politicians. Especially those desperately trying to take whatever credit they could scrounge out of the success of Overwatch, facts be damned.

“Care to share with the class Ms. Armari?” Jack raised his glass to his mouth, mirroring Ana’s posture, short of his slung up arm, “Not all of us have a bionic eye.”

“He’s doing that thing with his mouth,” she leaned against him, just slightly, turning towards him but keeping her eyes trained across the room. “You know the one. Makes his mustache go up and down because he keeps trying to stop pursing his lips.”

Jack snorted. He could picture it well. “Who’s he talking to?”

“Not sure.” She hummed, “Dignitary, perhaps. Adawe is with him.”

“Metaphorically. She keeps giving him the stare.” Jack winces, leaning his back against the wall. Closing his eyes, he can sense Ana’s stare has shifted to him. “No saving him tonight?”

“Well, he had to learn to play nice with the other children on the playground sometime, might as well be when he’s still high on victory.” Jack cracked a smile, “Strike Commander Gabriel Reyes, leading the victory charge and re-establishing the safety of humanity. He’ll be coasting on that one for months, shifty politicians or no.”

Ana made an amused noise, throwing back the rest of her drink and placing the empty flute on a table beside them. Jack followed suit. That was his fourth flute of champagne, and he still couldn’t get a buzz going. Stupid enhanced metabolism.

“Speaking of Gabriel,” Ana voice had taken an alarming turn for coy, smoothing out a non-existent wrinkle in her blue gown, “have you asked him yet?”
Jack waved down a server with a tray of champagne, taking a glass two glasses with one hand, quickly transferring them to his bad arm, and then grabbed a third he immediately began to knock back. Ana snorted at his side, and he caught her taking a second glass for herself.

“That’s a no.” She sighed fondly, waving off the server as they stared with a growing look of concern as Jack emptied the flute. “Don’t worry, it’s practically water to him.” The server looked unconvinced, but returned to mingle amongst the crowd, as Jack polished off his first glass.

“If we’re going to have this conversation again, I should at least try to get hammered first.” Jack groused.

“You’re officially out of excuses at this point, Jack.” Jack glanced down at her, only for her smug grin to meet him, Jack suddenly looked and felt constipated. “The Crisis has ended, both of you are alive, and incredibly single. I highly doubt the UN, which, I will remind you, has issued no anti-fraternization laws for Overwatch agents, are stupid enough to try to make a fuss about it.”

Jack tried to ignore Ana’s badgering, transferred one of his remaining glasses to his other hand and raised it to his lips, only for it to be snatched roughly out of his hands.

“Hey!”

Ana shrugged flippantly, swirling a glass in each hand, “Oh, like you could get drunk on anything this weak.” she scoffed, “You’re wasting perfectly mediocre drinks.”

Jack huffed, fixing Ana with a stern look, but she just shot one right back. Jack ran a hand through
his hair, looking away, but he could feel her stare on him like hot coals.

"It's not like he's going to turn you down, Jack."

"I know that," Jack's voice fell down slightly so it was less gravel and more growl, but it was short lived. "logically, at least."

"But emotions aren't logical." Ana supplied.

Jack was quiet for a few long seconds as Ana took a sip of her pilfered champagne, shoving his free hand in his jacket pocket, and adjusting his sling restlessly.

"Look, it's just," Jack grunts, "right now the whole world has their eyes on us now that we've won the war. If I ask him right now, and then the information gets into the media's hands, any relationship that would come of it would become a public spectacle. I don't want that. I also wouldn't want my parents learning about my preferences from MSNBC."

"Well that's... Actually quite reasonable." Ana hummed thoughtfully, pressing a glass against her lower lip. "Still, I suggest you shouldn't dawdle. Perhaps things would go well for you if you ask while Gabriel is still high on victory. You might even get laid."

"Ana!" Jack hissed, but Ana only threw her head back and laugh, drawing some of the attention of the crowd back to them for a moment.

"Oh, I'm only teasing. Here, a toast," She clinked both of her glasses against his, "To you growing some balls, say, oh, before the... fifth of next month."

Jack raised an eyebrow. "Oddly specific date."

"You're Imagining things," She waved off him off, trying to hide her grin behind her glass of champagne.

Jack rolled his eyes. He had heard some muffled conversations that quickly came to a stop as soon as he has walked into earshot, and was well aware that there was a small bet going on regarding his and Gabe's relationship, at least between Torbjorn and Ana. He tried to not let it bother him.

"Whatever you say, Ana." Jack mumbled half to himself, debating if he should waste his other glass of champagne or not. Frankly, the stuff was a little too sweet for his taste, but he raised it to his lips anyways, trying to drink in the posh atmosphere if nothing else. To think that nearly a month ago he was darting around street corners that had been converted into crumbling warzones, with the stench of metal and death choking out the air.

It wasn’t a welcome memory, and it caused the tang of the drink in his mouth to shift into the sting of iron, like blood. He took a deep breath and choked down what was in his mouth, eager to let it wash down with the memory.

"Gabriel's coming over." Ana's voice snapped him out of his harsh reverie.

Gabe had that sourpuss 'don't talk to me' look on his face he always adopted in crowds, a skill Jack could guess he had mastered sometime in high school, perhaps even sooner. However, this time it was half-hearted and didn't reach his eyes, like he was only scowling out of habit. A very real possibility.

God, Jack had such terrible taste in men.
"Enjoying the limelight?" Ana asked, raising her glasses of champagne to Gabe as he approached, and Gabe snorted loudly, nostrils flaring.

"You two wouldn't believe the assholes they have here," Gabe huffed, grabbing one of Ana's glasses as she held it out for him. "It's like they decided to only invite the most annoying, politically unimportant idiots they could find. I just talked to some son of a duke of a country with a defunct monarchy."

"The pudgy one who kept hopping?" Ana asked.

"How ever did you figure that one out," Gabe grumbled, chugging his champagne in a equally futile attempt to get drunk. "I don't know how you two can tolerate doing this song and dance so often. You two deserve a pay raise."

"It's not so bad," Jack commented mildly, trying to keep himself from staring at the fresh scars on the side of Gabe's face. They fit him, and Jack felt like he liked the addition a little too much, given it was a war scar. "At least the media isn't here. Politicians actually need you to be alive if they want to use you, most of the time. The media just wants your corpse, or an out of context sound blurb."

"No, unfortunately," Ana sighed, "I saw that Vanterheit woman skulking around."

"Ugh," Jack felt the sudden need to call back the waiter with the champagne, "Who invited her?"

Gabe raised an eyebrow at the both of them. "Who?"

Jack grimace broke out into a smile, smacking Gabe lightly in the arm, Gabe returned the grin, in his own subtle way. "One of the media vultures you throw me at. She's the one who claimed that using containment systems on god AIs constituted cruel and usual punishment."

Gabe's face contorted like he just smelled something rancid. "Oh, her."

Jack laughed, shaking his head, "Yeah, her."

"Shrew of a woman," Ana declared. "Only interested in controversy. Shouldn't have ever made it off of whatever gossip column she crawled out of, but, well, she has some wonderful assets helping her out. She quickly looked around before groping exaggeratedly at her breasts.

Gabe let out a sharp bark of laughter, while Jack hid a chuckle with his hand, his eyes drawn to the other man’s smiling face. A once rare commodity that seemed to be growing more and more common, much to his own personal delight. Gabe looked good when he smiled.

“If that’s all it takes to become a top reporter," Gabe drawled, with a nudge to Jack’s shoulder, “I’m pretty sure that pretty boy here has enough assets to singlehandedly usurp CNN.”

“Oh, definitely,” Ana nodded, “Strong jaw, barrel chest, fine completion, I’m sure if we dumped him at any news station’s door he’d be lauded as their top reporter within the hour.”

“What do you say, Jack?” He held out his glass in to Jack, one hand shoved carelessly into his pocket, his grin growing smug, “Want to report on how great of a job I’m doing?”

“I dunno,” Jack stared down the man “I think a tell-all about your undying love for costume design, and where it comes from, would be a much more interesting story."

Gabe’s face immediately soured.
“You know,” Ana said slyly, “I don’t think I’ve heard the full story. Do tell.”

“Jack,” Gabe warned, and Jack flashed him a massive grin.

“What’s wrong Gabe? Don’t want Jack Morrison, top reporter on CNN to tell people the heartwarming story of a young man with a love for cosplay, who just so happened to grow up to save the world?”

In lieu of a response, Gabe leveled a steely glare at Jack, folding his arms.

Jack shrugged, “Then don’t drop me off at CNN anytime soon.”

“I swear,” Ana sighed, swirling her champagne in the glass, “Every time I talk to you two, I learn about some new secret only you know about.”

“Just comes with the best friend territory,” Jack shuffled closer to Gabe to throw his good arm around the man, and Gabe caught him with a sidelong glance, looking like he was trying very hard not to pout, “Especially best friends who met during a secret program. I know things about him that would make the tabloids froth.”

“Keep talking, Morrison, I’ve got your secrets hostage too.” Gabe said, a bit of mirth in the back of his voice, “One word and I blow the lid on the whole operation. There’s a lot of people here, and I’ve got a loud voice.”

“Your radio voice couldn’t carry to half the room. But, fine, you’ve bought my silence,” Jack took a step away, holding up his hand two fingers extended, “Scout’s honor.”

Gabe rolled his eyes good-naturedly and Ana chuckled as she took another sip from her champagne. Jack cast a quick look back to the bulk of the party’s guests, hoping that they could go more-or-less unnoticed for at least a little longer. Mercifully, he couldn’t see anyone staring at their little huddle, pointing and whispering, but something did catch his eye. A petite woman with wild hair and an aviator’s Jacket and bright orange leggings, who looked like she absolutely did not belong here.

A sharp pained jabbed at Jack from behind his eyes, and he winced, pulling his hand up to his face.

"Jack?"

The pain receded, and he looked back up to see Gabe staring at him, brows furrowing slightly in concern. Ana, too, was staring, her lips pursed like she was about to say something.

"What’s up?" Gabe turned slightly to face Jack with a nod, his eyes scanning him and leaving Jack feeling like he was picked apart in a moment.

"No, No I just..." Jack started, but trailed off, his thoughts suddenly feeling jumbled and... What had he just seen? He felt like he had just seen something, but he couldn't quite recall, like the image had turned to smoke and slipped through his fingers. His tie suddenly just felt a little too tight, like it was choking him, and the idle chatter of the party felt oppressive.

He realized he had been standing there silently for a long enough time for it to be concerning.

"I think I'm just getting a headache or something." He sounded slightly unsure even to his own ears. "Maybe the champagne was stronger than I thought."

Ana and Gabe shared and uncertain glance. Jack swallowed.
"I think... I'm just going to get some fresh air. Long week. Maybe it's just catching up to me." Jack felt like he was getting a head rush. He tried to recall what just happened again, but it slipped through his fingers once again. He saw something. Or maybe a few things?

"Do you want me to come with you?" Gabe offered, taking a half-step forward, "You--"

"No, No." Jack waved him off, "Enjoy the party, and all the politics that come with it. I'll be right back, think I just need to clear my head."

Gabe squared his jaw, giving Jack another once over. Normally the feeling Gabe could assess him at a glance felt comforting, almost intimate, but at the moment it felt like a violation of his privacy. Either way, it seemed like Gabe wasn't going to pry, for the moment at least, as his shoulders sagged slightly.

"Alright," He said slowly, like he was trying to convince himself of something. Ana's eyes narrowed, but she said nothing. Jack gave them a quick nod before walking off.

The party felt like it blurred around him, all of the guests losing definition until they were just blots of color as he navigated through the room. Conversations lost their structure in his ears, and became a mere chattering of words in an alien language he couldn’t understand. He blinked, and pearls of laughter played on his ears, with a flash of blue. It made him feel old. He’d gotten old.

No, he told himself distractedly, that’s not right.

The hairs on the back of his neck stood up, electricity running under his skin and turning it flush. He’d never felt anything like this before. Not when hurt, not when pumped full of mystery serum at SEP, not even when he had nearly died during their mission in Seoul.

It felt like someone had turned him into a snow globe and shook him up, and all of the snow-- Snow like Zurich on a cold December morning, rushed and whirled around him aimlessly. Exhale. The puff of his breath mingling with the steam of his morning coffee. He loved the quiet mornings; reminded him of Indiana.

Sharp pain at the back of his eye surged back to life, drawing a wince from him as he stumbled and a sharp whistle filled his ear.

He bumped into someone who reeked of smoke, and offered an apology on automatic, not staying to look to see who or what he had bumped into, more pearls of laughter cutting through the echoing murmur of the crowd. Cigar smoke stung his eyes. McCree--

Jack stopped dead in the middle of the crowd, all the faces, suits and dressed a blur, frivolous background noise alongside the political doubletalk and the clink of silverware. His thoughts still a whirl of broken glass and debris, like he was digging himself out of rubble.

“Who the hell is McCree?” He whispered low, Shell-shocked.

The name didn’t come with a face, more an impression, a weird collection of connections; the rodeo he had gotten taken to as a kid, a smoke shop, Sharpshooting practice, Revolvers, dust storms, tumbleweeds, and… Gabe. He’d never met anyone in his life named McCree but, the name felt substantive to him, like it was permanently perched on the tip of his tongue.
His chest tightened uncomfortably, but he pushed through it, walking through the crowd of lost faces a smidgen faster than before.

Ghosts of voices kept trying to catch his ear, until the chatter of the crowd was overwhelmed by the sea of hollow and unfamiliar voices, chanting: Jack, Jack, Jack, Jack.

But alongside them, a few voices old and new whispered titles teasingly into his ear: Commander. Boss. Strike commander. Soldier.

By the time Jack reached the balcony, he burst out into a half run until his good hand had gripped hard and fast around the railing, tight as a watchman’s grip on his gun, his breath short and erratic.

Jack’s thoughts were racing, and impossible to track. Each thought shot off into an unknown and barely connected direction with no rhyme or reason; a constant supply of unwanted information.

And none of it made sense.

Glimpses of missions he’s never been a part of. People he’s never seen. Names he didn’t know. It came at him all at once without reason nor warning, and it was impossible to grasp onto any of it. The meaning of all the information slipped through his fingers like it wasn’t there. All the while, his head was pounding.

“What the hell?” Jack hissed under his breath, the stabbing pain behind his eyes crashing into him again like waves against rocks. He wrenched his eyes shut, trying to compose himself, and when he opened them again, the balcony had disappeared.

Instead, he was in a dimly lit, run-down apartment. His eye were staring down into a magnifying glass, and work tools he couldn’t recognize were in either hand. He tried to look around, but neither his body, nor even his eyes would move for him. They were trained down on a very sophisticated-looking piece of technology, working on the inner mechanics that Jack couldn’t even begin to understand what it was for. Jack wanted to shout, scream, anything, but his body simply refused to obey.

Then with no preamble, the machine sparked to life, casting a red glow on the desk he laid it down on. He heard a voice-- His voice, tired and rougher around the edges.

“Finally” He heard himself sigh, and he put down the work tools, breaking it the tech up to his face--

He realized then it was a Visor of some sort. Jack tried to throw it back down onto the table, but to no avail, his hands steadily brought it up to his face.

“Tactical visor, Activate.” He heard his voice say, muffled by the visor. Something blinked to life, a projection, and his vision swirled into a sea of red. Vertigo overwhelmed him, and he tried to close his eyes once more, and this time, succeeded, only for him to rush straight into another scene with a burst of flash of light.

Fluorescent lights passed him overhead. He was walking, briskly, down a hallway. He could hear footsteps behind him, but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t turn around. He was still trapped.

His hand flew up to his ear, adjusting something, he realized he was wearing a headset of sorts, visor over his eye, not unlike the one he had been supplied for missions, but the model was different, and it felt like it weighed nothing at all, like it was barely there.

“Winston, I’ve got another sighting.” He heard his voice say. He could pick out the aggravation in his tone.

There was some sort of commotion on the other end of the comm.
“What?” A voice, deep and somewhat hesitant, crackled into his ear. “Of Lena?”

“Damn near scared Ana and I half to death.” He turned around a corner, and he caught a glimpse of what appeared to be a massive statue of himself just outside the window. “We were getting a status update from Reinhardt when she just popped in there, looking like she had taken a wrong turn or something and got lost. Athena should be forwarding the security footage as we speak.”

“Got it.” The man on the other end hummed in affirmative. “Five seconds. Long for her. Did she uh, say anything?”

Jack could feel his teeth grinding against his will. “She asked for help.”

There was an uncomfortable silence on the other line. Even Jack, unwilling passenger he may be, felt somewhat cowed by his own voice’s gruff response.

“She spent an unusually long time in your office.” The voice on the other line spoke again, though clearly tentatively, “If you’re alright with me making use of your office for a while, I might be able to pick a more stable frequency to tune the chronal stabilizer to, and then, ideally—”

“Look, Winston,” His voice interrupted, a single hand going up to his face to rub at his eyes and pinch his brow, “any means necessary. I’m going to get you more funding for the stabilizer right now.”

“Didn’t they just reject your last request?” Jack wasn’t sure if the man on the other end was more confused or dubious.

“If I can’t convince them, I’ll just piss them off enough to give me hush money.” Jack rounded another corner and found himself facing a large electronic door. He pressed a button and adjusted his… jacket, he could only assume. “Either way, I’m no longer accepting their refusals. Morrison Out.”

The doors in front of him slid open, revealing pure white, and as he took a step beyond them, the ground felt apart at his feet. He could feel himself tumbling in freefall, or caught in a rushing tide.

As he fell, more images seemed to flash before his eyes. Hundreds, no, thousands of scenes, from his eyes, speaking with his voice, of things he’d never experienced. Sitting at a desk that wasn’t his. Living in a home he couldn’t recognize. Leading missions he’d never run with people he’d never met. As he tumbled, they seemed like they’ve never end.

A pain bloomed at his back, like he’d been shot. And he could feel himself crumple to the ground, the world stained red. A voice, distorted like the scrape of metal on metal, echoing against itself, hissed from behind him.

“This is how it should have been.”

He struggled to turn to face the over of the voice just barely managing to catch a glimpse of the barrel of a shotgun from the corner of his eye, when the vision stopped.

He was back on the balcony, hunched over next to the guardrail, his good hand white-knuckling it to the point the metal had warped in his hands. His stomach in an uproar and drenched with sweat. He blinked blinked rapidly, and realized that he was staring down at a puddle of champagne and half-digested hors d’oeuvres, and adjusted his grip on the guardrail.

He could move again. He was in control again. That was good.
His head pounded. The chatter of the party found it’s way to his ears once more. He found himself stumbling back on his feet, though he still felt shaky.

Breathing heavily, he ran a hand through his hair, telling himself that he needed to get a grip.

He wasn’t getting a grip.

Jack had no idea what just happened to him, and he couldn’t even bring himself to feel relief that it was over, because the thought that it could happen again, with just as little warning, had already wormed it’s way into his mind and poisoned him with paranoia.

“Jack?”

“Chissake.” Jacked breathed, blinking hard. Gabe had followed him out onto the balcony. Of course he would. Jack immediately did his best to straighten himself out, but his best at the moment was rather half-assed.

“Jack are you--” Jack could hear Gabe stop short, “Holy shit, you look awful.”

Jack turned to glare halfheartedly at the other man, and as he did so, something inside of his chest clenched, like heartburn, but worse. A combination of that and a bitter taste in his mouth sent his stomach tossing and turning once more until he could feel himself shiver, and yet at the same time, something molten settled in the back of his gut. It was an… unfamiliar feeling.

“I said I was just going to get some air,” Jack grunted, trying to sound casual but failing quite miserably. “What are you, my mother?”

Gabe looked unimpressed. “You were acting strange, figured something was going on.” He craned his neck just slightly, eyes zeroing in on the puddle on the floor, and his brows creasing. “Did you just throw up?”

Jack looked away.

Gabe rolled his eyes, taking a step forward, “No wonder you look so awful.” His voice dropped into quiet, hushed tones as he stepped into Jack’s bubble, leaning up against the guardrail and placing a hand on Jack’s back. “I know you put some pride in your little golden boy routine, but this is just ridiculous.”

“Maybe I shouldn’t have ate all that steak tartare.” He offered weakly.

Gabe sighed, his hand rubbing a small circle in Jack’s back. At any other time it probably would have been comforting, but at the moment, he was fighting down an urge to jostle Gabe’s hand off of him. He just wanted to get out of here.

“He’s always trying to be the hero. You know, I won’t destroy all our good PR in one night.” Gabe snorted, his voice about as fond as it gets. “Why don’t you get on out of here so you can vomit in peace, like in the good old days.”

Jack wanted to jump on the offer, desperately, and almost did, but caught himself. If he was too eager, Gabe might get suspicious, assuming he wasn’t already.

“... You sure?” Jack offered hesitantly.

“I think Ana and I can handle the politicians and shitty media for one night without you.” Gabe scoffed, “Besides, I need my right hand man to be in top form once we get back to work. We’ve got
a lot of work to do, and I need you for it.”

Jack laughed shakily. “Thanks Gabe.”

“Just try not to make another mess on the way out. These people aren’t SEP standard.” Gabe gave him a firm pat on the back that Jack took as a single of dismissal. He started to make his way back into the ballroom so he could leave, feeling Gabe’s stare trained on his as he ambled out.

For a moment he thought about looking back, but he didn’t. Instead it occurred to him that that voice he heard, right before he snapped out of it, sounded just a little like Gabe.

The thought sent an unpleasant chill down his spine.
The doctor clicked his tongue as he scribbled something down on his clipboard. By all accounts he was a fairly young man given his position, mid-forties, but he had been on call working with Overwatch for some years now.

The troublesome thing about having your DNA rewritten by a top secret government program of questionable moral standing, is that the government doesn’t like foreign doctors poking at you anymore. Hence, Doctor Richard Gansey, one of the very few number of doctors in the world who had clearance to treat SEP graduates, had been shipped out to act as a doctor for Jack and Gabe. During the war, he took on more than his share of additional patients out of sheer necessity, but officially, he was specifically assigned to watch over Jack and Gabe’s health.

His bedside manner left a little to be desired.

“Well in spite of your best efforts,” Dr. Gansey sighed, leaning back on his stool, “seems like your arm is finally setting correctly.”

Though to be fair, Jack was not the best patient either.

“Does this mean I can take off the sling?” Jack tapped his fingers against the sides of the examination table absently, “It’s been driving me crazy.”

“It’s the only thing that’s made it so we didn’t have to break your arm again.” Dr. Gansey shot back dryly, “You’d think after all this time, improperly set bones, and me explaining how the regenerative properties of your modifications can cause problems with healing bones, you’d learn to be cautious with broken limbs.”

“Look at it this way doc,” Jack started to undo the straps of his sling, “If I keep breaking my bones, you keep getting money.”

“I have a salary, Morrison.”

“I’ll bring up a raise for you with Adawe.” Jack pulled his sling off and gave his arm a quick stretch, rolling the joint in its socket. “Much better. How much longer until I’m clear for active duty again?”

Dr. Gansey scoffed, “Most people retire after saving the free world.”

“Not interested.” Jack deadpanned.

Dr. Gansey leaned over scratching his head vigorously as he grumbled, flipping through some pages on his clipboard. It managed to bring a small smile on Jack’s face, though it faded quickly.

“Another week at most. Just don’t do anything strenuous. The majority of your injuries were internally sustained, and other SEP graduates have given themselves tumors by straining themselves during the recovery process.” He pointed his clipboard at Jack accusingly, “You may recover from injuries faster, but that just increases risk of complication if you don’t take it easy in the meantime. I don’t need one of my patients saving the world, only to develop cancer.”
Cancer somehow managed to feel like the last thing Jack needed to be worried about. After that night at the Gala, those… visions hadn’t really stopped. They weren’t as powerful as the ones at the gala that has knock him into memory vertigo, but they were every present in his mind, lurking and looming. He’d been struck by deja vu so many times in the past few days it would be easier to count the number of things that hadn’t felt familiar. Even this conversation with Dr. Gansey felt familiar.

Jack was a little more than halfway convinced he might be going insane.

“If there’s nothing else,” Jack started, uncertain, “I did want to talk to you about something else?”

Dr. Gansey raised a skeptical eyebrow. Jack winced, palming the back of his neck. He knows it’s not like him to sound that tentative, especially after he’d known Gansey for so long.

“It’s just, well,” Jack swallowed thickly, trying to word this as innocently as possible. He didn’t need to get Gansey suspicious of him. “are you able to disclose if any of the other SEP graduates are running into complications?”

“Complications.” Dr. Gansey echoed, clicked open a pen and held it to his clipboard, “Are you experiencing symptoms?”

“Oh! No, no,” Jack covered the lie with a short laugh, “It’s just, now that the crisis is over with, and I somehow managed to crawl out of it alive, I was just wondering if there’s anything that I need to look out for, if it crops up later.”

Dr. Gansey’s eyes flicked away from Jack, and now it was his turn to rub at the back of his neck. While the other man had never mentioned if he had worked with the SEP during the actual modification process, Jack had his suspicions.

“Well, thing is,” He made a frustrated noise, “We just don’t have a lot of data to work with, Jack. Of the small handful of graduates from the program, less than half of you have made it through the crisis. Currently speaking, there are less than a hundred SEP graduates alive, and while some have had to leave active duty due to medical reasons beyond injury, the sample size is too small for us to reach any conclusions that it’s connected to genetic modification.

“I know that sounds like I’m trying to cover someone’s ass, but I’m not, really. All I can say for sure is that you’re at a higher risk for developing tumors, so keep your eyes peeled for abnormal growths, especially around injuries. Bone spurs seem to be relatively common, more than a few have gotten them, but that’s comparatively minor.” He threw his hands up in the air. “All I can say for sure at this point. I’ll inform you if we start noticing trends.”

Jack nodded, trying not to worry at his lip, he took a deep breath, “Any mental health problems?”

Dr. Gansey did a double take at that one, and Jack clenched his jaw just slightly.

“Though, Jack,” The Dr. Gansey started, his tone even and diplomatic. It was an easy thing to spot, even distracted by alien thoughts. “Given what you would have had to endure during the crisis, It’s
certainly plausible that--”

“Oh no, I’m fine.” Jack smiles and put out a hand, placating, “just trying to cover the bases is all, doc.”

Dr. Gansey doesn’t look particularly convinced, but he just plastered a somewhat forced expression of neutrality on his face and glances down at his clipboard.

“Alright.” He said, shaking his head near imperceptibly, “Then you’re free to go. Come back in two days so I can check those injuries again.”

“Yes Sir.” Jack nodded in affirmative, making a beeline out of Dr. Gansey’s little office.

Jack marched straight down the halls. The halls of the watchpoint reminded him just slightly of the halls at the facility the SEP was situated. However, the merciless gray on gray color scheme managed to seem warmer at the watchpoint, thanks to boxes of clutter littered around. It felt more lived in and less clinical, though he never did like to stay long at Gansey’s office, or the medbay for that matter. The smell of ammonia and antiseptic made him anxious.

He didn’t have anywhere in particular to go. No one really did right now. The higher ups were trying to assess the damage that the crisis brought down on the world, as well as figuring what to do with the remaining omnics. For the strike team, this meant a welcomed break while they licked their wounds from their last mission. So, once the smell of a hospital had cleared from his head, he leaned up against a wall, took a deep breath, ran his hands through his hair, and tried not to have a mental breakdown.

The visions were still so fresh in his mind, no matter how hard he tried to push them into the darkest corners of his mind, they would scrape and claw their way out far faster than he could shove them away.

After the night at the gala, the visions became less fragmented, much to his chagrin. He could only curse the fact he was off duty. He would lie awake for hours unable to do anything but get a clearer picture, no matter how hard he tried to suppress the information. As the pieces of the puzzle started to fell into place, he could make a strange sense of the visions.

Most of them dealt with one of two things: Visions when he was acting as strike commander, or him investigating some sort of Overwatch-related conspiracy while in hiding. Inexplicably, he knew for a fact that the latter was supposed to be after the former. He tried not to think of why he knew that, because not only did it freak him out, but it painted a pretty negative picture. Honestly, he hated those investigation memories a lot more than others, in them he was always alone, everything was tinged red, and he felt like he had zero context for what he saw.

It was all such nonsense.

Gabe was their strike commander. Thinking of the visions where he was referred to as such by a whole variety of people, most of which he didn’t know, triggered a defensive reaction of sorts. Like getting angry on Gabe’s behalf. Gabe was the tactical genius of their generation; with a near perfect record of command, and could make tough calls unflinchingly.

Though Jack couldn’t completely silence a small, unwanted voice in the back corner of his mind that mused that it would be nice. Logical, even.

“Get it together, Jack,” He reprimanded to himself, shoving his face in his hands and sighing loudly. He couldn’t sit here all day either, but god, did he want to. He could feel an all-too familiar feeling of
lethargy trying to crawl into his bones. Something he hadn’t felt in years, not since before Overwatch, and certainly not strongly since since after SEP.

He tried to stamp it down.

He dragged his hands down his face, taking a deep breath. That was enough time to focus on staving off the mental breakdown for now.

He pried himself from the wall and turned down the hall, only to realize he wasn’t alone.

It was that young woman from the gala, staring him down from the end of the hallway.

In the wake of everything he’d forgotten the weird girl, who was even weirder from the front. Same exact outfit from the night of the gala, aviator’s jacket and orange leggings, with a bizarre device fastened to her chest that looked like it was damaged somehow, cracks splintering it and a broken lens sitting uselessly in the center. She had a dreamy expression, that made her look like she was sleepwalking, not quite looking at Jack as much as she was looking through him.

Jack’s muscles tensed, taking a step towards the woman. His head pounded. She definitely should not be here. He’s got another sighting.

The throb of a headache instantly spiked into a stabbing pain behind his eyes and he flinched, wrenching his eyes shut.

And all at once, the memories came rushing in, leaving his head spinning.

Memories. That definition, somehow, alarmingly, felt right. What he’d been seeing were memories. His memories. Not visions.

Unlike last time, there wasn’t a rush of nausea to accompany them. It was like they just slotted into place. Like he’d been ready for them to come to him, and he could almost feel himself getting swept away in the sea of memories, but he managed to shove those memories down, leaving only the whispering chatter of newly remembered conversations he had never had, and forced his eyes open, just in time to see the girl walk around a corner.

Frozen, though only for a moment, he surged himself forward. He could almost feel the memories rushing to catch up to him, at his heels, waiting until he dropped his guard so he could be tossed headlong into more unwanted sights and sounds.

As he rounded the corner to pursue, he found himself narrowly stopping before he skid into none other than Gabriel Reyes.

Gabe’s face was blissfully blank for a few seconds, but it was painfully fleeting, as his face quickly hardened into forced neutrality.

“Oh,” Jack took a half step away from Gabe, a little too close after their near collision. He could feel his face going red for a whole variety of reasons. “Hi, Gabe.”

“Hey.” Gabe nodded tightly, his voice clipped. Jack could feel blood rush further to his face, like a child with his hand in the cookie jar.

He had sort of been trying his best to avoid Gabe the past few days. He’d made it a point to largely stay a bit away from everyone, but Gabe was the only one who he actively avoided, with very little subtlety, at that.
Gabe just knew him too well. Jack felt like if Gabe just stared at him for too long, the gory little
details of what’s happening to him would spill out of his guts, and he’d be an open book.

Those memories licked at the back of his mind, each a small flame that threatened to consume him if
fanned for just an instant. He peered over Gabe’s shoulder, trying to catch a sight of the girl, but she
was nowhere to be found. Besides that, Gabe would have stopped her if he ran into a stranger.

Maybe he was just going crazy.

He needed to get away from Gabe.

“Going somewhere?” Gabe asked, voice drenched in mock curiosity.

Jack swallowed. Gabe wasn’t exactly the type of person you just walk away from if he’s speaking to
you. Especially not for Jack. He’d spent the better part of the past ten years of his life putting almost
everything on hold to listen to Gabe speak.

Besides, Jack couldn’t deny the other man deserved better than how he’d been treating him lately.
He couldn’t give Gabe an explanation for his behavior, no, but he owed Gabe a conversation.

“Do you have to go to the thing again?” Gabe pressed, acid dripping into his tone.

Jack could only splutter out a very meek laugh and glance away. One of his less than subtle attempts
to avoid Gabe was, as Gabe sat down next to him at the mess, to excuse himself to go to quote: ‘a
thing’.

It was by far the least graceful lie of his life. But he’d never been particularly good at lying to Gabe
in the first place.

“You’re avoiding me.” Gabe said. He had this way about it that made him feel like he was crossing
his arm, when in reality his hands were still firmly jammed in his sweatshirt pockets. “Ever since that
night at the party, actually. Should I expect a reason why, or is this shit just going to continue with
the Morrison brand avoidance?”

“Look, Gabe,” Jack said, considering his words carefully. Lies wouldn’t work. Beyond just a
general preference of not lying to Gabe, he wasn’t sure he could even pull it off. “I’ve just had a lot
on my mind.”

Gabe’s jaw twitched, like he wanted to grind his teeth.

“You know I’m not looking for some vague bullshit.” Gabe snapped, but seemed to collect himself
with a breath. “Be straight with me. What the hell is going on with you? Out of nowhere, Iron
Stomach Jack tosses his cookies over hors ‘d'oeuvres, I cover for him, and then you don’t talk to me
for three fuckin’ days.”

Jack didn’t have any input. Mostly because what Gabe was saying was true, partially because he was
too mentally preoccupied trying to stay focused on the here and now to think of anything to say.

“Well?” Gabe asked, emotion creeping back into his voice, like he was bracing himself.

Jack blinked. Somehow this felt familiar. The ghost of a scene played in his mind. Gabe pushing him
up against the wall, coat balled up in either hand. His face twisted into an ugly snarl that Jack could
recognize, but felt somewhat alien being directed at him. His face was older, subtly so, but clearly
more weathered in places jack could recognize, white poked out curiously from a few hairs on his
face, a new scar rested on his lip.
“Well?” The older Gabe shouted. Jack’s head spun.

He heard himself say “No.”, but it was defeated, almost dead. Gabes face screwed up, Jack recognizing the emotion as hate, and he released jack, shoving himself away.

As quickly as it came, it went, and he was still staring blankly at Gabe, the few wrinkles and new scars gone from his face. Jack coughed awkwardly into his hand. He could see Gabe’s jaw tense just slightly more.

The memory pulled Jack into action.

“Gabe, look, it’s not…” Jack swallowed. There was a lot that he could say, but very little that he should say. “You haven’t done anything wrong, I promise.”

“I know that.” Gabe said though there was the smallest creek of defensiveness to his voice. Be it out of assumed accusation, or insecurity, Jack couldn’t say.

“It’s just, there really is a lot on my mind at the moment.” like a hundred million memories trying to eat their way into the forefront of his mind as he spoke. “It’s just complicated.”

“Complicated.” Gabe repeated, disdainful. Jack tried not to wince. Gabe actually was crossing his arms now. “What’s so complicated, Jack?”

Jack suddenly wasn’t entirely sure what this conversation was about. His conversation with Ana at the gala come to mind. It threw him off balance and left him staring at Gabe for far too long for his silence to not be considered an answer.

Jack felt this was a little unfair. Did Gabe really think he would be acting this off because of cold feet in regards to their relationship? Jack was trying not to have a mental breakdown, and that is what Gabe was pissed about? Anger started to come to steam in his chest, hot, fleeting, but unpredictable.

“Look, It's nothing worth being concerned about,” Jack said, his voice clipped, “If it was, I’d tell you.”

Gabe stared at him. He could feel memories surfacing. More Gabes stared at him, each with a hundred different little quirks to the expression, a curled lip, a frown, wrinkled nose, raised eyebrow, but they all conveyed one thing: Doubt. The sheer number that seemed to flash before his eyes was a little staggering in that instant before one last one burned it’s visage into his memory. Eyes hard, jaw set, frowning, chin raised just slightly.

Distrust mixed with contempt, tempered by cold determination.

Jack thought he was going to be sick again. But besides that, anger and hurt quickly moved to dominate him, and an inexplicable knife in the gut sensation of betrayal. His hands twitched, like they wanted to punch something, but he kept the steady at his sides.

He needed to get away from Gabe.

“Now,” Jack said, trying to keep his voice level, “If that’s all, I need some time alone, thanks.”

“No, it’s not ‘all’” Gabe spat, “But if you’re going to be such a secretive prick about it, then I guess this is about as much as I’m gonna be able to stomach.”

His words felt laced with a challenge. For Jack to continue arguing, or for them to fight it out, but Jack didn’t rise to the challenge.
“Fine.” Jack said simply, walking past Gabe, just barely brushing his shoulder as he did. “Talk to you later, then.”

For some reason, this sort of parting felt like it was familiar rather than alien. Jack’s chest tightened to the point of collapse, but he continued to walk away in spite of it. He blinked hard, trying to center himself, and when he opened his eyes once more, the world was tinged red.

He could hear his shallow breathing up against a mask, feel the condensation making the air around his face stuffy and oppressive. In his hands, a rifle.

Another memory of him investigating the conspiracy. He tried to do anything, move in any way, blink of his own accord, but just as before, it was futile.

Instead, he just kept on walking. Slow, measured steps through an uncertain labyrinth of metal corridors. He couldn’t tell if it was old or new because of the red tinge to the world, muting rust from his senses. Every so often his head would turn just slightly back, as if expecting someone to come at him from behind.

Wherever he was, it seemed abandoned. Every so often, he would pass by an open door, and do a quick check of the interior. Empty cots, cleaned out lockers, a few barren desks with the odd piece of paper that he didn’t check. Wherever it was, it was cold, and he could feel the chill of the air though the jacket he could feel himself wearing.

Just when he started to wonder how he had gotten sucked into such a banal memory, there was a rush of air from behind him, and as he whipped around to face it, rifle at the ready, a rush of air—and smoke, so black it was like the red tinge of his visor was sucked away from the space it occupied, overtook him. He fired his rifle, kickback was smooth like velvet, at the mass of smoke, turning as it ghosted around him, continuing to fire in quick, rapid bursts as the smoke blew past him. Oddly enough, it seemed to react to his shots, each time a bullet found its mark, it jolted to a new location, leaving inky contrails in it’s wake, until it was a good 10 meters away.

There it pulled itself together, like watching a cigarette burn in reverse at it condensed into something solid, something human. Just a torso at first, but with clear, broad shoulders, but eventually arms, and a head formed, through legs never formed, like it was resting on a furious thundercloud.

He could feel his muscles tighten, his finger twitched on the trigger of his rifle.

He couldn’t make out much of the figure in the din of the corridor, but gradually, a mask, shadowed by a black hood, came into view. He could guess that it was bone white in spite of the rosy tinge his mask gave it, and it looked as if it was fashioned to look like a cow’s skull.

“Playing around on memory lane?” A voice—the voice from before, that metal echoing on metal mocking drawl, seemed to emanate from the thing facing him. A shiver seemed to go up his spine.

The name Reaper thundered in his mind. Whatever that thing was, his memories told him it went by Reaper. A quick flash of a classified file with photographs of a matching mask flashed into his mind. He’d seen it before, on a little picture wall, strings of thread connecting various photos and news clippings pinned to drywall.

“What wrong, Jack? Here to kick up more ghosts?” The Reaper mocked, shotguns seeming to appear in his hands from thin air.

Jack wanted to back away, run even, but his body refused to move. Whatever this thing was, it was like it had been pulled straight from a horror movie, and what’s more, it seemed to know who he
was. He wasn’t certain what this was about, but he was sure that he was supposed to be in hiding.

“Nowhere to run,” The reaper continued, his form seeming to glide closer effortlessly, and still, his body made no move, only thing he did with tighten his grip on his rifle. “Nowhere to hide. Just you, and me.”

The Reaper raised his shotguns, and an explosion ripped through the corridor between them.

And the memory was gone with the sharp breath, as his body came back to him in the present day, eyes wide, and muscles tense for action. He forced his nerves back down and jerked himself to face behind him.

The empty, brightly lit halls of Overwatch HQ were the only thing he could see. Even Gabe seemed to have disappeared.

He swallowed down the intense feeling of dread that was trying to crawl it’s way out of his throat, and and marched down the hall as if nothing had happened as he tried to jam the door shut on what he’d just seen.

Chapter End Notes

Please say hello to Dr. Gansey. Also say goodbye because we never see him again.
Legit just needed a doctor for that scene, and Mercy is uh well... like 12 years old and a war orphan at this point.
“What on earth,” A fist slammed down on the table Jack had been enjoying a relatively quiet lunch on, “is going on.”

Jack glanced up. It was Ana. His gut clenched with guilt.

Ever since the second time he saw that woman two days ago, there was a fresh set of memories (no matter how much he mentally chastised himself for thinking of them like that, he continued to) to sort through.

Among them, multiple memories of the fallout of Ana being killed in action in a mission gone awry. Including a very vivid and upsetting funeral, where he spoke. Staring down at a young woman, who he could only know was Freeha, older, sharper from the bright-eyed little seven year old he knew, staring up at him, attempting to stay strong.

He also figured out, that’s where the memory of Gabe slamming him into a wall came from.

He had made a call, and it cost Ana her life.

He couldn’t look her in the eye.

“What do you mean?” Jack mumbled down at the salad he was eating, prodding at it with his fork. He didn’t quite have an appetite anymore. For someone who’s recommended caloric intake was somewhere in the 5000s, that was a bit of a big deal.

Ana scoffed. Loudly. More like announced her disgust to the room. Jack could feel several sets of eyes fall onto them.

“What do I mean? I’m not a blind woman, Jack. No one else is blind. Reinhardt’s blind in one eye and he can see what’s going on as if he still had both. If someone blind was working with us, they could see it too.” She leaned over the table getting next to Jack’s face. “You and Gabriel. What’s going on.”

“Nothing.” Jack said lamely.

Another scoff, this time actually out of disbelief.

“Do you really expect me to believe that?”

No, not really, Jack thought, and almost considered saying.

“Look at me.” She commanded. Her voice growing just slightly far away. Jack looked up. Her eyes were pinched at him, glaring down her nose, arms crossed. Ana always had this way of making someone feel like a bit of a kid, both in good and bad ways.

This was one of the bad ways.

“You have been acting strange. Since that night of the Gala when you disappeared. Gabriel told me you got sick so I brushed it off, but ever since then you’ve been avoiding everyone. And then, Gabriel has plummeted from cloud nine to stomping around the barracks with his hood up, refusing
Jack felt another snap of guilt. He was sort of hoping against hope that Gabe wouldn’t take his brush off personally, but Gabe had a notorious record of taking almost everything personally. He’d definitely have to apologize if he ever figured out what the hell was wrong with him. A part of him selfishly hoped that this wouldn’t jeopardize his chances with Gabe.

Jack sucked in a breath of air.

“It’s nothing.” He lied.

“Oh please.”

“Okay, fine, we had a bit of an argument.”

Ana perked up. Her eyes flashing with something almost predatory, but she said nothing, just laced her fingers together, waiting for an explanation.

“It’s not worth worrying about.” Jack waved his hand dismissively. “Go gossip with Torbjorn.”

“Not worth worrying about.” She deadpanned, arms slapping down against the table as she stared Jack down, glaring. “You must be joking. I don’t think I’ve ever seen the two of you both pissed off at the other.”

Jack perked up. “I’m not mad at Gabe.”

Ana raised an eyebrow. He saw her bionic eye scope inward, like she was putting him under a microscope.

“You realize that makes you look like you have a concussion, right?” Jack commented mildly.

“You’ve been avoiding Gabriel. Rather explicitly above all others. Didn’t he say something stupid at the party?”

Jack left out a breath of laughter, but it was short lived. “No.”

“You just said that the two of you had an argument.” Ana said, squinting, quirking her head off to the side. She pointed at his hand. “And when I mentioned Gabriel, you cracked the table.”

Jack’s mouth thinned and he glanced down. Sure enough, he had put a small dent in the linoleum of the table’s surface, little cracks around the edges. He blinked.

He had no reason to be mad at Gabe, he thought, but the image of his face, hard with determination, glaring at him with contempt, sent a lance of wordless betrayal into his gut. Anger swirled like a thundercloud in his chest, crackling with the urge to spit and curse and shout at anything.

But the moment passed, and as the flash of anger receded, he realized what had just happened.

“Jack?” Ana’s expression had shifted, an eyebrow raised in doubt to both knit in concern. Jack abruptly realized he was grinding his teeth. He stopped. Panic rose in his throat.

What the hell was happening to him.

“Look, Ana,” Jack said, standing, “Don’t worry about it. It’s not like Gabe and I haven’t gotten into arguments before. He’ll cool down eventually.” Jack grabbed his half-eaten plate of food from the
table, and marched to the trash can where he promptly dumped it.

“Where do you think you’re going?!” Ana shouted at him.

“I need to clear my head.”

“Like hell!”

Jack marched out of the mess, Ana quick on his heels. He briefly consider breaking out into a run, but he figured that would just get her to rally people to find him and try to hold him down.

“Jack, what is going on?” Ana grabbed him by the arm, trying to slow him down, but doing effectively little to do so. Jack couldn’t help but snort in amusement. He wishes he could answer that question.

“Are you and Gabriel alright? Did something happen during the last mission? The two of you were in that chamber with the God A.I. for nearly an hour, don’t tell me either of you actually listened to it’s nihilistic trite or something, or so help me,”

“Look, Ana, it’s fine,” Jack said, stopping to face her, “We had an argument. I don’t want to get into it. I know how this works.”

“Gabriel doesn’t seem like the only one in need to calming down to me, Jack.” Ana sniped, eyes narrowing. “And Gabriel didn’t break a table without even realizing it.”

“Look,” Jack lifted his hands up, forming a barrier between the two, “This really isn’t even your business in the first place, it’ll work itself out.”

Ana’s face scrunched up, like someone had just stepped in dog shit then lifted their shoe to her face. She smacked his hand aside.

“Not my business?” She echoed, nostrils flaring “You two are my friends, coworkers, and teammates. Don’t tell me that this isn’t my business, because I’ve saved both of your lives more than enough times for them to qualify as my personal business!”

Jack stared down at her, struggling against the rising panic in his throat. For a moment, he saw the image of her form his memories, older, more tired, black hair turned silver, displayed on a picture, with medals and flowers hung around it. For a moment, he felt tears welling in his eyes, simply because she was alive.

Ana held his gaze for the longest time, breathing slowly and deeply, until something caught her eye, and she turned, expression souring.

“Do you mind?” She snapped irritably before pausing, her head reeling back and eyes narrowing just a bit, “Who are you? This location is for Overwatch personnel only.”

Jack glanced at who Ana was talking to.

It was the woman in the aviator Jacket.

Jack felt the floor fall out from under him.

He blinked, hard, and now, the face of the girl was different, smiling, rather than that lost, sleepwalker look she had before. He was actually staring at her picture on a monitor. Underneath, a name: Lena Oxton
He could see someone in the corner of his eye with silver hair. Even though he couldn't turn his head to look at her, he knew it was Ana.

His gaze shifted to a gorilla wearing glasses and a lab coat. It tapped it’s fingers on it’s lower lip, like it was mulling something over. Then it talked.

“Chronal Dissociation.” The gorilla paused for dramatic emphasis. “Simply put, she’s no longer fixed to linear time. Or time at all, for that matter.”

Jack thought, at this point, why not a talking Gorilla?

“Of course, this also means she’s untethered from space as well. Without time to act as a measurement of action, she can theoretically be anywhere because, well, she already has been there, or could have gone there. Theoretically speaking.”

“So she could be at anywhere, or anytime.” His voice supplied.

“Absolutely. It’s even possible that she’s not limited to our own dimension any more. No time, no real causality to bind her.” The gorilla scratched his head, “Assuming infinite universes, it’s possible this isn’t even ‘our’ Lena we’re seeing. It’s difficult to say. It seems like she has no control over her current situation, so she’s just… drifting.”

“How long can she survive like that?” He turned to Ana’s voice beside him, giving her a glance. Her finger tapped on her chin inquisitively.

The gorilla dipped his head, wincing. “It’s impossible to say. No time to dictate her vitals. She might still have the breakfast from the day of the slipstream incident in her stomach. I would guess she doesn’t require food or water in that state, but it’s possible she can only pop into certain times at once where her timeline is stable for a few moments and that would count as her time moving forward but… insufficient data. Perhaps life and death are no longer concepts that can truly apply to her, sort of like a Schrodinger's cat situation, due to the lack of caus--”

“Winston, that’s all well and good, but the question remains: can you save her?” Jack huffed, crossing his arms. He could feel his fingers digging into his bicep, strangling out the circulation.

The Gorilla, Winston, smiled, though the expression looked a little exaggerated and unfriendly on his face, Jack got the impression it was supposed to be genial. He adjusted his glasses slightly before turning to face the monitor

“I wouldn’t have called you two in here if I didn’t have a plan, you know.” He said, sounding rather proud of himself, “Right now the problem, I believe, is that when she was untethered from time, she was moving, and now she’s unable to stop. with All forward motion with no friction to slow her down.”

Blueprints flashed up on the screen for a device. It looked similar to the odd device on the woman, Lena Oxton’s chest.

“This is the chronal friction liminal support generator-- Uh, Name temporary.”

Jack and Ana shared a glance.

“Anyways,” Winston continued, “I figured, if she can’t stop, then the best answer was something that could hold her in place. Or at least a space. In essence, it anchors her in time by creating a network of controlled, chronal anomalies, almost like a net woven from time. As long as it’s producing a net, she should stay, more or less, on a linear timescale… In theory.”
“Is it dangerous?” Jack asked, scanning over the blueprints, but he couldn’t make heads or tails of the
damn thing.

“I wish I could tell you.” Winston sighed, plucking the glasses from his face and rubbing at his eyes,
“The data from the original Slipstream project was not recorded with this possibility in mind. Even
repurposing the teleportation tech has a risk to it, I just don’t have the numbers to run a proper
simulation.”

“If you don’t know the risks then we can’t approve of testing this on-site.” Ana declared. “We can’t
have any more personnel at risk of chronal dissociation when we know so little about it.”

“Unfortunately, I have to agree.” Jack ran his hands roughly through his hair, which felt alarmingly
thin to the touch, “If we could still access ecopoint Antarctica, it might be a different story, they have
some isolated off site labs, but since that unprecedented blizzard…” He shook his head.

“What about watchpoint Grand Mesa?” Winston asked.

The word seemed to trigger something in his memories, his new memories, and different scene
slowly superimposed themselves over his meeting with Winston, the world slowly tinging red. No
matter how hard he tried to block out the oncoming memories, The voices of Winston, himself, and
Ana were quickly melting into distant chatter.

Instead he was shoving weapons into a duffle bag. A large rifle took up most of the space, but he
crammed as much ammunition as he could into the thing, as well as a few odd-looking devices. Not
quite grenades, filled with a strange orange liquid. There were also a few grenades.

He turned over the duffle bag to see his last name printed neatly on the side. He heard himself scoff.

“A novelty bag. Of course.” He glanced up at the ceiling, where he could hear the stomping of feet.
“Well, too late to unpack now.”

He slung the duffel bag over his shoulder and turned to find a man with a gun trained on him.

“On the ground!” He shouted, and as he took that brief half second to point downward with his gun,
Jack swung the duffle bag in front of him, and charged the man, only for him to disappear into a
plume of black smoke.

The duffle bag in his hand morphed into a rifle, and his whipped around to see the reaper coalesce
into being again.

The location was different from the last time. Now they were atop the rafters in what he could only
assume was some warehouse. Rain roared from outside, and the distant rumble of thunder echoed in
the building. His hairs stood on end, like lightning was about to strike.

“Always rushing in.” The Reaper mocked, words feeling uncomfortably close to how Gabe would
chastise him. “You’ve already run out of people to bail you out of your mess. Just how much longer
do you think your luck’s gonna last?”

His legs became solid and he stepped-- stomped, really, forward.

“Can’t last forever,” the mask of the man before him betrayed no hint of emotion, but it was difficult
to disguise the contempt that emanated from behind it. “And when it runs out, you can trust I’ll be
there. Right at your back. Ready to pay you back.”

Jack flicked his finger to a secondary trigger on his rifle, and fired a spinning barrage of rockets at the
reaper that exploded in a wash of bright blue light, and the floor fell out from under him.

His feet found the ground once more, just in time to see Lena Oxton blink out of existence in a flurry of bright blue sparks.

Beside him, Ana made a choking sound.

Jack’s eyes widened to about the size of dinner place. He shoved off the troubling thoughts of the reaper, how he seemed to know him, into a deep, dark corner of his mind to rot, and turned all his attention onto Ana.

“You saw her?” Jack whispered, leaning in close.

She turned to face him, her mouth hanging open, blinking. She looked like she wasn’t quite sure if she was going crazy.

“She just…” Ana turned back to where Lena was standing just a moment ago before looking back at Jack, “Vanished.” She gestured vaguely in the air in front of them.

Jack tried and failed to fight off a smile. Lena Oxton. The woman who was lost to time. Lena Oxton, who was just spotted by not only someone other than him, but someone who’s never been pumped full of mystery drugs at the government’s behest. Lena Oxton, who was absolutely, irrevocably, real, and the only thing that kept her bound in time was broken.

Jack Morrison wasn’t Crazy.

However, a thought occurred to Jack: If Lena Oxton wasn’t a figment of his mind, and Lena Oxton was someone from the future, then did that mean that all of the memories he had been seeing were exactly that? Memories, but of a him that was from the future?

His gut twisted. Ana.

He grabbed her by the shoulders, squaring her to face, him, leaning down so they were eye level.

“What did you see?” He asked. Ana still looked-shell shocked.

“The girl, she just, disappeared, I--” She shook her head slightly, like she was trying to rattle the information into place in her brain.

“Yeah, She does that. What else did you see?” He pressed, shaking her gently.

“What else did I-- Nothing, Jack, do you know that girl?” Ana’s stare turn piercing, and intense.

Jack’s brow furrowed. “Nothing?” he muttered, half to himself, letting Ana go.

By this time, when he first saw Lena, he was already being assaulted by then unknown memories, but Ana looked fine. Concerned, confused, and questioning, but nothing that would indicate to him she got any memories.

This almost raised more questions than answers.

“Jack,” Ana said slowly, trying to catch his eye, “Tell me what’s going on.”

Jack stared at her for a few long seconds before he took a deep breath. He couldn’t tell her
everything, not yet, but he should tell her something.

“Look, I don’t really know what’s going on,” He said, keeping his voice low, “But I’ve seen her before. Every time it’s blink and you miss it, and she’s gone. Thought I was going crazy.”

He could practically see the key click in the lock in Ana’s head. Her eyebrows rose. “That’s why you’ve been acting so strange.”

“Yes.” He nodded, but faltered. “Well, it’s complicated, but, for now, we should keep this quiet. If we tell anyone about a vanishing girl we’ll get written off as traumatized veterans in an instant.”

Ana grunted in acknowledgement. “What’s the plan, then?”

Jack glanced down the hall either way, making sure no one was watching.

“Let’s just stay low. Tell me if you see her-- Or anything else that’s weird. But other than that, stay separate, see if you can get evidence, vid footage, anything. Physical evidence is probably our only answer here. I’ll explain everything once I can figure out what’s going on.”

Ana looked doubtful. “And how exactly do you plan to do that?”

“I have no idea.” He lied. “I’ll improvise.”

Ana gave him a dry look, but it quickly managed to morph into a smile, she shook her head, chuckling. She cut the action short to give Jack a hard stare.

“This better be one hell of an explanation, Jack.”

“It better be,” He sighed.

Her sigh mirrored his own

Chapter End Notes

Surprise

I know I said every-other day, but because of my work schedule, It's a lot easier for me to post today, Tuesday and Thursday, so I was presented with two options: either doublepost on the weekend (nice) or stall chapter 2 until today (not nice). Considering I've taken my sweet time getting the ball rolling, I figured the least I could do is double post.

In which Ana is a big sister, and Jack no longer thinks he's gone off the deep end.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Let's see how Gabriel's handling things shall we?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It had been three days of no sleep for Gabriel.

The enhancements that SEP had given him put a heavy focus on endurance. He could go days without rest if need be, and the omnic crisis had put that to the test on more than one occasion. Leading a strike team was a demanding job, and oftentimes his only form of sleep was in between drop ships. Sometimes standing, as that was a skill he had all but perfected.

However, Gabriel knew he was at his functional limit. He didn’t want to give up the search, not while he’d made absolutely zero progress. Dead end after dead end, and bad lead after bad lead.

Besides, other people were starting to notice his behavior, and not just other members of the strike team. After everything they’ve been through together, they can tell when someone’s off their game, that was a given. Ana had recognized something was wrong right away, though she’d been off on her guess. But no, these were the faceless somebodies who skittered around the halls of the watchpoint; either junior bureaucrats, or wannabe bastion fodder who didn’t have the physicality for the front lines.

They’re watching him. Like vultures.

Rather pointedly, he decided to not let it get to him. They can shove their nose in a copy machine, seems more their speed.

He’d been prowling the watchpoint for days now, looking for anything that looked amiss, anyone acting odd, and had come up with nothing conclusive. Searching for similar phenomenon online failed him, and only brought up a bunch of unhelpful scifi stories, and hackneyed conspiracy theories. Wandering the halls aimlessly had been the closest thing he could do for an investigation, so that’s all he’d been doing. All that had done for him was remind him how painfully dull the watchpoint was when humanity wasn’t in the on the verge of dying. He needed to talk to someone about making this place a little less like SEP.

Still, he was no closer to his target than he was the days before. The girl continued to evade him.

He breathed out a sigh between halfway grit teeth, leaning back against the wall for a brief reprieve. People bustled along by him, but most already had either the lack of spine, or the good sense to know not to bother him when he’s not in a good mood. He rubbed at his eyes, and they stung, crying for sleep. Odd thing they missed with the enhancements. He might not have been tired, but his eyes sure as hell would act like he was.

Gabriel's mind drifted to the experience in his mind that continued to feel the freshest. Like always, he could only compare the sensation to scratching away a scab of an unhealed wound.

His breath was warm, almost claustrophobic against the mask worn over his face. A part of it had
chipped away around his eye and it eased some of the humidity that comes with wearing a mask, but not all. A strange skin-crawling sensation rippled through his whole body, like ripples. The weight of a shotgun in each hand brought him small comfort, but the scene was still alien and strange.

He knew he was on a battlefield of some sort, and given by the sheer volume of bullets he could hear being discharged, it must have been a warzone, but his eyes were focused securely on a singular target.

“This is how it should have been,” he could feel his mouth moving to the words, but on his ears they felt distorted and unnatural, like they had been crammed into a voice synthesizer a hundred times over. “At Zurich.”

The man he stared down was also wearing a mask, though this one was halfway broken. An eye and a long scar poke out of a shattered visor, glaring back at him defiantly. His face and chest were sticky with blood. A coat that looked like it should have been blue and white was discolored from splattered blood. He had a crippling leg wound, blood pouring like a spring from his thigh. Without medical attention he’d bleed to death. Bullets whistled in the air.

“Gabriel--!” A voice shouted at him from beyond his line of sight, Ana’s to be specific. She sounded desperate.

Something in the man’s mask had to be electronic, a spark jolted out from it before the broken remains fell loose and tumbled to the ground.

It was Jack.

Older, exhausted, bloodied, and battered, with two neat little scars tearing through his face. As he stared down the shotguns in Gabriel’s hands, then to Gabriel’s mask, his eyes burned bright, trying to convey something powerful and vicious.

Even after replaying this memory in his head countless time, the image still made his gut do flips, and left an unplaceable duality of dread and anger fuming in his lungs.

The look made his body tense and his vision blur. He adjusted his grip on his shotguns multiple times, trigger discipline betraying his own hand’s hesitance, his finger hovering halfway to the trigger. His head pounded and the rippling sensation doubled in speed until it was like a whirlwind in his body.

There was a flash of blue, a sound like a record scratch made smooth and something reasserting itself besides him. A woman barreled into his arms, knocking them aside as his hand jostled and he discharged a round harmlessly into the ground. The woman held his arm firm, barely over five feet tall, hair a mess, goggles cracked, covered in the grime of war, but her expression was firm, mixture of determination and subtle fear.

“Stop it!” She shouted, eyes wide. “Don’t do something you’ll regret!”

“Lena!” Jack’s voice shouted

He stared at her, wide eyed for a few key seconds. Static blared in his ear and the ripples in his body all relocated to the arm the woman held onto until with no preamble it completely disappeared into a puff of pitch black smoke, only for it to reform as he jerked away, shotgun still in hand. The sensation was as incredible as it was unsettling.

“Stay out of my way,” he growled, ducking forward slamming the barrel of his shotguns into the side of her face, knocking her down, just as the telltale whistle of a sniper round zipped by his ear.
He moved to take a step forward, Jack still glaring up at him, when something caught his eye, and his gaze shifted to the girl he had knocked aside, eyes widening.

“Oh no,” The girl whispered to herself beside him, frantic, “Oh no no no no no— Shite, shite—!”

He glanced down, and the girl was staring down as a device on a harness on her chest, arms hovering over it twitching rapidly like she desperately wanted to touch it and was terrified to at the same time. Blue sparks poured from the device, bursting out only to collapse back in, playing in timelapse The sniper round had hit it.

She flickered, once, twice, a chorus of shouting from all around him, and he took a step back, from the corner of his eye, he could see Jack trying to right himself to dive away. Whatever that thing was, it was about to--

The girl flickered once more, distorting like static, and a bright blue flash overtook him.

It was not an explosion.

Gabriel knew the sensation of being near an explosion, that hard, full body punch and the shockwaves was something he had grown accustomed to during his time on the Russian front. This was like coming undone. He could feel himself unraveling, one cell at a time, and then there was nothing, only a bizarre sensation of rushing forward faster, far and beyond terminal velocity, with no hint of stopping.

It was one of many experiences that had been forced into his mind since he saw that very same girl wandering the halls of the watchpoint. Other experience told him that her name, or at least her callsign, was Tracer.

It had not been long after his argument with Jack. Jack had been acting strangely for a while now. Avoiding him. It all seemed like it was such a long time ago. Years, almost, though he logically knew it was less than three days ago, it was a sensation that was hard to shake.

All those experience, ones where he was a masked terrorist that went by "The Reaper", that now crawled about his mind, ready to pounce on him with anger, betrayal and hurt if he focused on one for too long until he got swept up in another out of body experience. The one in the warzone with Jack and Tracer was well explored to him by now, having momentarily dipped into the experience many times out of curiosity, searching for hints, or simple self punishment.

It was five long years worth of time inserted into his mind. He didn’t have those out of body experience for everything, but all the information was there. It was like recalling a movie, when all but the most poignant details would melt away, but the plot stuck fast in his mind.

There were a few other odd experiences, where he wasn’t Reaper, but only two of them he could visit with any sense of clarity.

The first was of him entering an interrogation room, file folder in his hand and a dull throb in his shoulder. Inside the room was some kid, bruised, exhausted, and sixteen, tops. Dressed in an oversized flannel vest that made him look smaller than he actually was, his hands lay flat on the table, with shiny new handcuffs bolting them in place near the center. A cowboy’s hat sat opposite to him. And while his expression was a pointed sneer in his direction, He didn’t miss the small tremble in the boy’s hands.

“So you’re the one who got me in the shoulder.” He heard himself announce, before he shut the door behind him. The boy tensed up, like a cornered rat. “Jesse McCree… Let’s talk.”
He had no idea what to even make of it. He was certain that he’d never seen the kid before in his life. The other one was… different.

He found himself sitting on the ground in an apartment, Jack by his side. His face was flush, and a bottle of Vodka was between them, with shot glasses on either side. Jack was babbling, on and on about his mother. How she died. About how he regretted never having come out to her, even when he knew that it wouldn’t change anything between them. Judging by the heavy slur to his words, he had managed to drink past their enhanced metabolism through sheer volume. He noticed two other bottles of vodka on the floor, empty.

“You could still come out to your dad.” His voice reminded, but it was tight, restrained.

Jack hurled a shot glass across the room, and it shattered on the far wall.

“It’s not the same,” He hissed harshly, “I just fucking put it off like I always do. Can’t own up to my fuckin' problems if I pretend they don’t exist, and I don’t even know how to fix *that* problem because I wouldn’t be able to-- to deal with that the shit I’ve been putting off all this time.”

He pulled his legs up to his chest and hung his head between them.

“Can’t fix what broken with it ‘cause I’m pretty sure I’d just fucking break it, you know?”

Gabe stared long and hard at Jack before, tentatively, he placed a hand on the other man’s shoulder, hesitating just before the contact. Jack seemed to sink lower.

"Sorry," Jack said weakly.

The experience blurred until it was just a senseless mess of color, and then ended.

A wash of sourceless anger, tinged with the smallest hint of hurt, always managed to overtake him from that one.

He knew, somehow that these moments were supposed to take place “before” the experiences as the Reaper. Not only did jack look younger, full head of that blonde blonde hair. But also because, well…

He wasn’t supposed to be dead in those.

Call it intuition or whatever, but his experiences as The Reaper were somehow post-mortem. He was living on as some sort of techno-wraith, kept alive, or at least conscious and functional, by nanomachines. If he thought about it at length, he could pull up on some hard facts about his supposed status of undeath. While the nanomachines could stitch his body together for a time, the bonds were tenuous as they were temporary, any sort of massive trauma to his torso reduced him into a puff of smoke and sent the nanomachines on autopilot to rebuild him from the ground up. However, with a bit of focus, he could pull himself apart into a sentient cloud of the things, deconstructing and reconstructing himself almost at will, as well as solidifying his form into almost a fully blooded living human. The ripples that he could feel in the experiences were a consequence of the infinitely finite resurrection, and accelerated rot followed by a reconstruction, heightened by strain but barely kept in line during combat with a containment suit.

A highly personalized, *badass* looking containment suit that he customized to an aesthetic T. He couldn’t help but crack a small smirk to himself as the design for his suit floated easily into his mind. He might have to steal that. It was more than just a suit. It was a work of art.
Truth be told, under any other circumstances, he would have thought the whole thing was monstrously cool. Experiences as the reaper where his state of suspended reanimation proved useful were numerous, and frankly, being a conscious cloud of nanomachines constantly fighting of it’s own cellular degradation, sounded like a pretty sweet deal for undeath.

He pondered, far from the first time since the experiences came to him, if that would become a possibility in the future.

He shook his head. One thing at a time.

He had to question if Jack was experiencing something similar. Would explain the strange behavior. Possibly. His throat tightened just a fraction.

He needed to figure out what this-- this *attack*, no other real word he could call it, was, sooner the better. Which brought him back to the problem at hand.

At first he had suspected it was some sort of new mentally-oriented attack, new technology, but no matter what he managed to scour, he couldn’t find any proof such a device could exist. He could go see Torbjorn, being the cutting edge weaponsmith he is, with numerous connections in various technological fields, if anyone knew anything about a theoretical mind altering device, it would be him. All he would have to do was explain why.

He decided he wouldn’t go ask Torbjorn.

While he was the greatest potential source of information on the subject, Gabe trusted the man about as far as he could throw him. Which was likely a substantial distance given the other’s stature, but he couldn’t rule out anything. Including the possibility the Torbjorn would naturally be the only one who could potentially have invented such a device. Potentially.

Unlikely, given he’d been working almost nonstop on Anti-omnic weaponry, as well as repairing the strike team’s own armory, but a possibility. A small one that nagged at his gut incessantly.

He had tried to pry for information from Ana, but she was too sharp to press too hard. She definitely already realized something was up herself, though mercifully, she seemed to be ignorant as to what for the time being. As for Reinhardt, he could only handle so much of the man to begin with, and information gathering and subtlety were, surprisingly, not the forte of a man who swings a rocket powered hammer in a rocket powered suit of armor for a living.

Fresh out of answers, his only remaining option was to try to find the disappearing woman who could seemingly flicker out of existence. It was going about as well as any sane man might expect it to.

Gabriel huffed out a long sigh, dragging a hand down his face, pressing his back up against the wall. What good was he, sitting here moping? If this attack was designed to occupy his attention and shoot his morale, it worked, not much he could do about that at this point.

His eyes felt heavy.

He dreamed of fire. Explosions that rattled his bones. Mountains of falling rubble and the black jaws closing around him. Over and over. Nothing like the crisis.

Absolutely no escape from those dark, paralyzing jaws, not whole anyways, but torn apart, in one fell swoop, he both cheated death, and has death cheated from him.

Something grabbed him by the shoulder, and he jerked awake, arm lashing out. Spitting and ready
for violence, the world whirled around him, and he could almost feel the phantom of the telltale swirling rot of the Reaper on his body.

Slowly the world slotted back into place.

Jack stared back at him, expression blank, an arm raised in self defense, slowly lowering itself.

“You uh,” Jack said slowly, “Looked like you were having a nightmare.”

A mixture of anger and embarrassment combined to a boil in his gut, he straightens, and looks away from Jack. He can’t stand to look at him right now.

“Right” Gabe groused through grit teeth. Dully, he realized that he might want to apologize, but decided instead to hold his ground, given their last encounter.

Awkwardness tumbled between them like an avalanche. It hadn’t been like this between them just a week ago. A week ago it was always so amicable. Comfortable. Hell, even as they were readying for the final mission and tensions were running higher than ever, Jack and him were square. He wished that things could go back to that, that this was just one long waking nightmare of his.

He honestly couldn’t remember the last time he went three days without talking to Jack. Oddly the silence seems normal to him, though logically, it’s an exception.

“I’ll go find a place a little less public.” Gabe announced, less to Jack and more to the area around him, throwing his hoodie over his head and turning his back on the other.

“Gabe wait,” Jack’s voice cut through him like a knife, sending a brief flash of rage throughout his body that left as quick as it came, only for the slow building resentment that piled up for the past few days to take it’s place.

*He’s going against you* a voice, completely traitorous and unwanted, but all too familiar, whispered in the back of his mind. He shoved it back.

Slowly, he turned back to face Jack, staring at the other’s outstretched hand as it visibly curled back. Jack’s face told him that he didn’t have a plan. Like always, working on emotion.

Jack bit his lip, just slightly, but enough for Gabe to notice his nerves.

“Are you… alright?” He asked hesitantly.

Gabe inhaled deeply through his nose.

“Well,” He started tone perfectly even, “Aside from you playing by your own little boy scouts bad friend guidebook, just peachy.”

Jack straightened at that. A part of Gabe hoped that the other would get pissed off, maybe enough to fight, while another part of him wanted to punch *himself* in the face. Antagonizing Jack had never gotten him anywhere, and only served to make him feel shitty once they worked things out.

But this time felt a little different. Like a massive gulf of silence had managed to carve itself between them in just a few days. Sure, it had been a while since they last had a real argument, but this hardly even qualified as a real argument, and certainly not worthy of the damage it seemed to be doing. His experiences with The Reaper were playing no small part in that.

If this attack was designed to drive a wedge between them, it was certainly working. Gabe hated it.
He wanted to get back on his investigation now instead of snap and posture at burning bridges at Jack.

Jack however, had different plans. Naturally, he didn’t take the bait. He always was good at that.

“Ana was worried about you,” Jack took a step forward, “And you look… Terrible.”

“Thanks.”

“When was the last time you slept?”

Gabe narrowed his eyes, staring that the bags under Jack’s eyes “Could say the same to you.”

Jack mirrored the gesture. “I’m not passing out on a wall having nightmares.”

Gabe’s scowl deepened. So now Jack was interested in talking. After nearly 6 days of radio silence short of an argument they had in a hall that smelled like antiseptic. Anger and bitterness rushed up his throat and threatened to vomit out of him in the shape of words he’d regret. Miraculously, he bit his tongue.

“Look,” Jack scratched the back of his head, “Ana was worried about you. Said you talked to her earlier and you seemed off your game. I guess, I just… hah…”

Jack’s words tumbled to an unexciting halt, with a pained expression. Jack always struggled when it came to saying what he really felt instead of what other people wanted to hear. Gabe’s patience had already been worn far too thin to deal with Jack fumbling on his words.

“Today, Morrison.” He ordered, crossing his arms, and flexing his ‘commander’ voice.

“I’m worried about you, okay?” the way he said it, you’d think he had to physically pull the words from his throat. “Especially after the other day.”

Gabe laughed, breathy and humorless, rolling his eyes exaggeratedly and pointedly directing them away from Jack, where they stayed. It didn’t deserve another response. From the corner of his eye, he could see Jack tense up.

“Fine. Be that way.” Jack said, his voice growing professional, the tone he used when speaking when their superiors were present, “I just figured I should let you know that you should keep an eye out for anything weird, or anyone out of place--”

“What?” Gabe jerked to face Jack once more, his crossed arms coming undone. “What do you mean?”

Jack blinked at him, his expression clearing to that beautifully bewildered look Gabe couldn’t help but love. He could practically see the gears being pulled into motion behind Jack’s eyes. As he stared into them, the two of them fell back onto the same wavelength as easily as they ever could, like the past few days hadn’t happened.

They had both seen the girl.

A thrill of excitement sprung up from inside him. It was an easy explanation for Jack’s behavior for the past few days, trying to avoid raising alarm, or possibly doubting himself. Beyond that, if Jack and him were on the same page, then that means they could tackle the issue together. Jack might even have information Gabe lacked.
Did Jack have similar experiences when he saw the girl? If so, what had he seen?

Gabe wanted to ask all of these questions at once. Instead, nothing come from his mouth, and instead, only held that stare.

“Oh, Captain Morrison!” A relieved voice snapped their wavelength apart as they both jerked to see some random assisant, likely of Adawe’s given how clean cut she looked, “There you are.”

An experience as The Reaper jumped to mind, when as cloud of smoke he slipped behind a man and reformed directly into a choke hold to incapacitate him. He so desperately wished he could replicate it on Adawe’s peon so they could he and Jack could have a moment. He settled on a nasty scowl.

“People have been looking for you all morning! Did you leave your pager in your quarters?” She huffed, pulling out a communicator and rattling off a message in short order. “Director Adawe needs you in the conference room, ASAP.” She said, gesturing vaguely in the direction of the conference room, before her eyes caught Gabe’s and she saluted with a quick ‘commander’. Gabe raised an eyebrow, and waved her off.

What did Adawe want with just Jack?

Gabe could see the hesitation in Jack’s stance. He made a slightly pained noise, his voice struggling to stay perfectly even and pleasant.

“Is it possible to ask her to wait five minutes--”

“No Sir, with all due respect, the director and her associates have already been waiting for a while since we couldn’t contact you. I’m sure they’re already restless.”

Gabe rolled his eyes, arms crossed once more. Adawe’s ‘associates’ always wound up being politicians, or the media. People who got in his way with absurd consistency, apparently interested in keeping up with their track record, because now, of all times, they had shown up.

Jack glance back at Gabe. Gabe gestured vaguely in Jack’s direction, shoulders rising up. He already knew what Jack would do. Too much of a boy scout to turn down Adawe’s summons.

“Fine,” Jack said, before turning fully back to Gabe, pointing a finger at him, “We’ll talk later.”

Gabe was unimpressed by Jack’s sense of priorities. He let it show. Jack had the decency to look sheepish, if just for a moment, before marching off to Adawe’s summons. Gabe continued to stare until Jack disappeared around a corner, and then he sighed, shoulders drooping.

He wasn’t sure if he was too exhausted to go much further without getting a little rest, or too wound up form the electric connection he had just shared with Jack. After days of not talking, it was like taking an injection from SEP all over again, energizing, but painful at the same time.

Sighing quietly, letting the tiniest bit of relief settle in his chest, he turned around. He could at least try for sleep. Who knows how long Adawe’s meeting was going to run. However, the thought of sleep was quickly purged from his body when he realized that the girl, Tracer, his mind supplied, was standing in his shadow.

He blinked. She stared through him. The device on her chest was still hopelessly cracked. His arms flew into action at the same time as his mouth, trying to grab her by the shoulders.

He made contact, for merely the briefest second, and it felt like his hands had just been electrocuted. Her eyes went wide, like she had been startled awake, and she was whole in his grasp.
“Who--” He started. Indignation rising in his chest like a tower of flame, but the girl shattered in his hands, into bright blue fragments that faded like embers. He stumbled forward as his arms swung in to grasp the empty air.

A thought reached his mind like a brand on exposed skin.

Today, Jack Morrison would take the position of strike commander from him.

Gabriel tumbled forward, as if falling into a lake, submerged in memories, all bleeding into each other, dripping with anger, swimming in regret.

Staring up at Jack on a podium as he makes a nauseating acceptance speech. He stands in the background, face absolutely impassive, but he can feel how forced it is, blunt fingernails digging hard into his palms. His face burns with equal parts anger and embarrassment.

He stares down at a logo. It’s not one for Overwatch, but it’s emblazoned on his equipment. A sword black as night piercing the top of a skull, eyes red and full of scorn. A watchful shadow. Vigilant, but disregarded. Resentment boiling on his gut that he shoves a lid down on, hard.

Adawe speaks to him like she speaks to a child. Even and placating. He glances over at Jack derisively, who cannot meet his eyes. He has a slightly newer, fancier uniform, and a fresh new coat. She tells him about his new position: Blackwatch. The seedy underbelly of peace is that it cannot be made without the tremendous loss of life. The Omnic Crisis could bring people together out of sheer fear, but now, there will be people looking to gain power that must be stopped at all costs. Overwatch is being rebranded as peacekeepers, so they need a cleaner image, but to still be effective.

Gabriel will keep it effective, through any means he finds necessary. She says that it’s a golden opportunity for him, and duly, Gabriel admits she makes it sound good, but his eyes never leave Jack. A silent dare to look him in the eyes when this is happening.

Jack does not meet his eyes.

Jack and him pass in the halls. Infinite times, stretched over the course of years in time lapse. Jack’s hair thins, and goes grey, and he is ever preoccupied with something in his hands.

They do not so much as spare each-other a glance.

The world is crumbling around him, literally, as he stares down Jack. He’s older, hair stark white, but missing the two scars, Gabe recalled from his experiences as The Reaper. There’s a scrape of metal and a crash in the distance. A shotgun cleaves a final stretch of unsurpassable distance between Jack and himself, and both men accuse the other of betrayal. The ground shakes, and explodes from beneath Gabriel’s feet.

Gabriel startles back to reality.

He hadn’t moved at all. Still staring at his empty hands clutching at the air, one thought still pounding on his mind like the throb of a headache.

Jack Morrison will accept the position of Strike commander today.

Gabriel’s hands curl into fists. His teeth grind against one another endlessly.

Jack Morrison will accept the position of strike commander, without even showing him the decency of telling him.
He takes a deep breath, and tries to tell himself that what he had just saw was just another attack. An outside force trying to create discord in Overwatch.

Without so much as a word, Jack Morrison will take his position from him.

Gabriel stumbles forward through the bleak hallway, anger and bitterness and resentment burning hot in his chest, icy betrayal rising up his throat like vomit. He tries to stamp down the emotions before they can take shape, but…

The very thought that everything he’d had with Jack was just one big lie leading up to this moment felt wrong. Like someone just turned off gravity.

His hand slammed into the wall beside him, leaving a mark.

In this moment, it felt real.

In this moment, he could only think about how Jack was being lead to a job offer, Gabriel’s Job, and accepting it.

In this moment, he wasn’t sure what to believe.

He trudged off into the din of the hallway, to his room. Trying, and failing, to organize the new experiences

Chapter End Notes

Not all too well, as it turns out.

A lot of how I handle Gabe’s characterization is based on a headcanon I share with Apologija, who also beta read this fic because she's awesome. Basically, I write Gabe as someone with undiagnosed borderline personality disorder. It's something that doesn't really come up outright in the fic, especially since at this point in time Gabe has it pretty well handled since he's in a really positive environment for his mental health, but it does shape a lot of his feelings on the matter. Just a fun fact about his characterization.
Jack was not a fan of meetings with Under-Secretary-General Adawe.

While he found some small comfort in the growing evidence that he was not, in fact, going crazy, it still brought his heartbeat up to about his tonsils.

It’s not that Jack disliked Adawe, far from it, he could say with confidence she was his favorite politician. It’s just...

Politics were stressful. The media was stressful. Meetings with Adawe always had someone from either category, and in rare and incredibly awful meetings, both. However, usually those meetings included all members of the strike team trying to organize their next move, and with Gabe not taking part in this, he doubted it would be both. Yet still, that did little to calm his nerves as he walked into the conference room, where Adawe waited, with several other official looking suits Jack barely recognized.

Politicians.

Adawe’s eyes lit up as he entered the room.

“Captain Morrison! We’ve been waiting.” She said, all smiles, but there was a distinct edge to her voice; mild frustration. It was familiar.

“Apologies for my lateness Ma’am.” He put on his game face, and saluted. “It was my understanding that I was relieved of official Overwatch duties for the time being, and was not wearing my commlink as a result.”

“At ease soldier,” She brushed him off with a smooth gesture. Even after the crisis had etched untold wrinkles into her face and started to rob her hair of it’s color, she still had a smile that managed to be both dazzling and soothing. She gestured to an empty chair across from her. “Take a seat. Oh, and close the door.”

Jack glance down at the seat. A memory flashed into his mind. Deja vu. He swallowed subtly, but followed the orders, making sure to sit up straight.

He glanced around the room. All of the faces were ones he recognized, though he was quite sure that beyond Adawe, this was the first time he was meeting any of them.

“Arm healed up?” she asked, quirking her eyebrow as if she didn’t know the answer.

Jack played along, “Oh, about 90% or so. You know how the broken bones can be for us SEP folks. Heals too fast to set right the first time around, gotta break it again to set it straight.” He rolled his arm in his socket for good measure. “Dr. Gansey said I should be back at operational capacity before the week’s end last time I saw him a few days back. Personally, I’d be out there right now if it weren't for the earful I’d get from him afterwards.

Jack blinked. He… he had said that before. Deja Vu. He’d been here before.

This earned a few feigned motions of bemusement from the assembled crowd. Adawe gave a
impressed looking glance around the room.

“Always a go-getter, Jack.” She sighed fondly, “Always did like that about you. Never willing to put down the torch.”

Jack remembered those words too. He remembered dismissing them with a humble gesture. He missed a beat before reinacting the same dismissive but friendly wave of the hand.

“Well, I suppose we should cut to the chase.” She leaned slightly forward in her chair, steepling her fingers, pausing for a moment, building up anticipation. “As you’re well aware, Overwatch was designed to be a solution for the omnic threat. A desperation move to gather the best and brightest to serve as humanity’s spear against the threat of impending doom, and, while I’ve had my doubts, You all have gone above and beyond my expectations. You especially, Jack.”

Jack could recall, could see, himself making a joke about how she was buttering him up, in a somewhat confused tone. It earned a good natured chuckle from Adawe in his mind, but in reality, he stayed silent, staring. A rift tore open in his mind, like ripping into a sheet of paper, his vision split. It was as if one eye remained honed on reality while the other had been torn out to focus on his memories, an offshoot from his reality.

He tried to keep track of the diverging memory in his mind at the same time he paid attention to her. She gave him a beat to respond, and he missed it.

“You’ve become the heart of Overwatch, Jack. It’s beating pulse that kept it going during the war, pushed it forward and gave it voice, far better than anyone else, and for that, I applaud you.”

The guests in the room nodded in assent. In his memory, he offered up a curious ‘Ma’am?’. Jack did not speak this time around, though his mouth did open slightly.

He remembered this. Adawe’s words, the cardboard smiles of the politicians, the tick of the the clock on the wall, all of it was beyond just familiar; he lived this before. Everything was playing out just like he remembered it, except for his own reaction.

He had been spending so much time trying to force his memories that he had gotten from Lena back, it never really came to mind that there were ones that he hadn’t expressly relieved as of yet. But now they were being dragged to the surface out of familiarity.

A pit formed in his stomach. The Deja Vu was like a nightmare had spilled out into reality.

Adawe gave him a brief look, noting that he was looking uncharacteristically speechless. Jack couldn’t find it in him to give a fuck. She blinked her stare away, closing her eyes before continuing.

“I’m sure you’re wondering what the future will hold for Overwatch now that the omnic crisis is being dealt with. Negotiations are still ongoing, but that’s not our job to officiate at this point. I’ve met with the United Nations several times since you and your team secured us victory in--”

“Gabriel’s team.” Jack interrupted. He did not interrupt in his memory. In his memory, he sat there with a bashful smile and nodded along, paying silent lip service. His expression just barely managed to hedge to the right side of impassive.

Adawe was thrown off by his interruption. Jack noticed the man next to him shift uncomfortably in his seat. Anger seeped its way into the pit in his stomach. Gabriel’s name was never dropped in his memory.

“He is strike commander, after all.” He added somewhat hotly, taking advantage of the silence.
Adawe seemed momentarily stunned, but she recovered quickly like a cat in free fall righting itself.

“Of course,” She said smoothly, “Gabriel Reyes has performed above and beyond our expectations as a tactical leader of the strike team. He is a uniquely talented man, truly. However, as I was saying, we’ve come to a conclusion about the plans for Overwatch now that it’s primary objective has been fulfilled.

Adawe gestured at the man who had shifted uncomfortably at the mention of Gabe’s name. A man with salt and pepper hair and a jawline to rival his own. He brightened slightly.

Jack’s Memory synced into place before Adawe could say his name. William Petras.

“This is William Petras,” She repeated the words in his mind aloud, and Petras extended a hand out for Jack. In his memory, he grabbed it to shake with little hesitation. Now, he stared at it for a second far too long before reciprocating. “Over the course of the next coming months, he will be working with me as we transition into this new era of Overwatch. The UN has come to the conclusion that if Overwatch were to disband at such a critical time, it would be like turning off the beacon at a lighthouse simply because the storm just ended.” Adawe stood up, her chest puffing out with pride.

“And so, we have decided to convert Overwatch to an international, specialized peacekeeping force, designed to bring about stability and counteract international terror threats as well as bring order back to the world. Mr. Petras will be the director of the organization when all is said and done, and I will be taking a step back to work as the official liaison to the United nations once I’m confident in his understanding of the organization.”

“And you, Jack Morrison,” Adawe started with a flourish, her eyes gleaming for the coup de grace. “Have been selected to be the Strike Commander of this new Overwatch.”

Jack stared. Besides him, Petras spoke:

“I look forward working with you, Commander Morrison.” he said, tongue all honey. In his memory, he ate it up. Rising excitement in his chest, barely able to contain himself.

“The world right now, is broken, Jack.” Adawe continued, her expression sombering. Horror rose in Jack’s throat as his memory played out. In his mind’s eye, he could hear himself letting out a breathless ‘me?’ completely swept up in the moment. “And it won’t fix itself. So many impoverished nations were affected so heavily by the crisis. And many more nations brought themselves to poverty trying to fight back. The world borders on anarchy, and the governments cannot hope to fix it on their own.

“But you, Jack, you are the brightest star in Overwatch’s sky. I’ve seen firsthand how you can rally people together.” Adawe was on a roll. A speech that Jack had heard before. It played in his mind word for word a second ahead of Adawe. He needed confirmation. He couldn’t believe this otherwise. It was far too absurd. Far too shameful.

“And you can bring people the hope that they are so desperately looking for.” Jack said, reciting the words from his memory as Adawe spoke them.

Everyone in the room blinked like they hadn’t heard that right, including Adawe, but Jack instead bit down on his own tongue, vicious energy boiled under his skin, threatening to lash out. In his mind, Adawe continued on with her campaign slogan for Strike Commander Morrison, uninterrupted. His hands gripped on the chair's armrests hard, and he pushed himself up, standing.

“I’m going to go talk to Commander Reyes.” He announced tightly, pushing his chair out with far more force than needed and making toward the door.
“Jack!” Adawe exclaimed “please, hold on just a moment, Gabriel will--”

Jack whipped around to face her, expression fierce. For the first time ever, Adawe seemed truly frazzled. Even during the crisis, she had never looked so off balance. Anger roared in Jack’s ears as the other officials in the room stared at him blankly.

“I said,” Jack started icily, looking Adawe dead in the eye, “I will be going to talk to Commander Reyes. I feel I need to discuss this matter with him before I can respond. In the meantime, if you need someone to be your Strike Commander,” He paused, glancing dangerously around the room. “Then ask our current one.”

Jack jerked the door open, marched through, and slammed it shut behind him. He kept his grip hard on the door, as he breathe deeply through his nose once before sprinting away.

In his mind, the scene played out to completion. The memory of what had once happened. Getting all swept up in the moment and starry-eyed with idealism, the possibility of him being the strike commander, all the excited little gasps and a smile so wide it made his face ache. He couldn’t say what he was thinking. Only feel the reactions and hear his own voice speaking. The memory, despite seeming happy, was drenched in regret like gasoline, wishing for a spark so it could be burnt from his mind.

For the first time, Jack willingly reached out to the memories as he slowed his sprint to a brusque walk. He needed to talk to Gabe. Now.

The picture that his memories were quickly painting as he reached out to them was so sharp it hurt to think about it.

He accepted the position of Strike Commander. The first person he told was Ana, simply because he had run into her first after accepting the offer. He could see how her excitement died in her eyes but her smile lingered for a half second before asking a very simple question.

‘But what about Gabriel?’

Jack didn’t need to be privy to his thoughts own thoughts in that memory. He could feel the realization crushing his enthusiasm in every bone of his body. Jack felt anger, his own, not the disconnected sourceless anger of the memories, rising up. He wanted to deny it, but in reality, the memory made it clear.

He had forgotten Gabe.

For him, even if it was for a moment, it was unthinkable. But the worst part is that he could see himself doing it. Accepting Gabe’s Job while Gabe was still Strike Commander-- how else could he even manage to do it? He felt the sudden urge to punch himself in the face as a horrible, sick feeling built up in his chest, mixed between shock and anger at himself, or any version of himself, for doing it, yet clearly seeing how possible it was.

He wrenched his eyes shut. A part of him wanted to shut out the memories, but he had to press on. He needed more information if he wanted to talk to Gabe about this.

He saw himself giving an address as he accepted the position for the whole world to see. He could see himself working missions. Good, bad, everything in between, rushing by like a blur. Information came to him when he reached out for it, though it was patchy in certain places.

He remembered how Gabe became leader of a new division made for under the radar ops that were necessary for peace but unacceptable to do in broad daylight. How Ana became his confidant and
second in command. Years of new faces and new places, mission after mission, challenge after challenge, and how Gabe and him grew apart. A few attempts to bait Jack into arguments or low blow jabs from Gabe jumped to mind, as well as his meek avoidance thereof.

He knew what he had done.

He upset Gabe. Of course he did. He betrayed Gabe’s trust by accepting the position of Strike Commander like that, but it was also clear why he didn’t just go and admit that.

Jack knew... that it was the right decision.

The more the memories gave him context, the more he felt sure of it, and the more he was sure that that’s how the other him had felt. Jack excelled at dealing with politics and working a crowd of individuals, and had a strong tactical mind himself from years of working alongside Gabe, but he was never as decisive, playing to the consensus of his peers. Gabe however, was results oriented to a fault. He was unequaled in qualifications, but responded poorly to criticism of his choices and had little patience for the bureaucracy of political sanctions. When the world needed Overwatch to survive, and they had been working under the order of stop the omnic threat at any cost, Gabe was the perfect Strike Commander.

But things would be different now. Jack could see that in his memories too, just how much political maneuvering, and compromise the position of Strike Commander was going to hold for him. It’s not that he thought Gabe couldn’t do it but... It wasn't his strength, and it certainly would stress him out. Any media scrutiny of his actions during the war had him on edge, even when people largely understood Gabe had to make a call.

The new environment of Strike commander would offer wasn't one Gabe could flourish in at all. The Blackwatch, however, was as perfect as it was necessary.

Jack was never good at the terrible Calculus that war required. Those messy grays of how much life is traded to ensure victory. Gabe, however, was almost alarmingly capable at it.

Jack had always admired his determination in that regard.

Jack continued to press deeper for memories. A drunken night where they had talked. Jack couldn’t remember what about, but after, he could see there was less animosity from Gabe. More like a quiet, respectful distance, and the occasional conversation that wasn’t about work. It wasn’t happy. But it wasn’t depressing, either. He’d almost say things were becoming good between them again.

The memories jump forward a great many years, until he was old and grey. The incident with Lena. Missions gone wrong. Blackwatch outed. Death. Court martials. He can tell him and Gabe are drifting apart again until everything reaches a tipping point.

The world is crumbling around him, literally, as he stares down Gabe. He’s older. Like that vision of him with his face twisted in anger as he gripped him by the shirt, but his face is dead now, devoid of emotion. There’s a scrape of metal and a crash in the distance. A shotgun cleaves a final stretch of unsurpassable distance between Gabe and himself, and both men accuse the other of betrayal. The ground shakes, and explodes from beneath Jack’s feet.

Jack stops in his tracks, feeling his breath fail him. Tears threatened at the corner of his eyes.

“What happened?” He asked himself, breathless. His knees shook just slightly underneath him. He was going to be sick.

But he wrenched his eyes shut once more, and reached out for more memories.
Overwatch Falls. Jack Morrison Dies. Gabriel Reyes actually dies. Feelings twist at Jack’s heart, pulling it in every direction, from guilt, to sadness, to anger and resentment. He dons a mask to hide his face. He tries to look for answers, and succeeds in hitting brick walls for years only cleaning up happenstance crimes.

Then there’s the mercenary, the terrorist, the Reaper. He harasses him for years. On top of immense skill with shotguns, it’s like he’s some sort of ghost, or at least some advanced bioweapon. Whatever he is, he is ceaseless in his hunt, a hunt that seems deeply personal, though Jack can’t for the life of him figure out why--

Jack actually vomits when he reaches the last memory he can bear.

The Reaper’s mask is knocked off in one of their fights, and clattered to the ground, as smoke clears between them. He strained his eyes to see his tormentor’s face, and when he finally gets his first look at him, his stomach dropped to the ground, and he nearly dropped his rifle along with it.

Underneath the mask was the face of Gabriel Reyes, decay spreading along his face like ripples on water, rotting down to skull and bone before knitting itself back together, and he says:

“You did this to me.”

Chapter End Notes

AND THE PROM’S TOMORROW!!

I dislike the idea that floats around the fandom that Jack was strong-armed into the position of the strike commander. I think that Jack wanting the position makes sense--He's a very people oriented person, and a positing where he can influence and help a lot of people seems like it would be right up his alley, despite how difficult it can be, as we saw in the uprising event. Plus, I like the idea that it was Jack and Gabe's fault their relationship fell apart, with Jack causing the damage with his thoughtlessness and deepening it by not confronting the problem, and Gabe being too stubborn (and in his own way, afraid) to directly confront Jack on it.
Jack always wanted time he did not have.

When he was back home in Indiana, he wanted time to invent himself, but was too busy trying to maintain appearances for the sake of his family, and the people around him. In SEP, he wished he had more time to adjust to the changes in his body, instead of that rushed attempt to play god, which cost so many lives. During the war, he wanted time for reconnaissance and rescue, for any straggling civilians still trapped like rats in the war zones, but all his missions were far too time sensitive for that. He also wanted time, the perfect time, to build up the nerve, to walk up to Gabe and tell him how he felt, but it never came.

All of the information from the new memories, of this... *other* Jack from a different time. Maybe it was him. Maybe it was a Jack from a different world, Winston had said Lena might be capable of traversing dimensions. He didn’t know. He couldn’t know. Because he didn’t have the time to try to figure that out right now.

He just wished he had more than a few minutes to process it. That Overwatch, had-- was going to, he guessed-- fall. Violently. That Gabe and him would drift so far they could only come back as enemies. That Gabe had died, and came back as... that thing.

He wanted the time to look for more information, because whatever wellspring of memories that encountering Lena had made in his mind had seemed to have dried up, leaving him feeling like he was critically lacking in context, burning on fumes and emotions that he realized weren’t even his, but that other Jack’s.

He just wished he knew why Gabe was pointing those shotguns at him. He... he wouldn’t have done anything to actually warrant that, right? But then the Reaper acted as if Jack had done something worth killing him over.

But he didn’t have the time to think about that any more. Not after he ran away from Adawe like that. If he didn’t come back soon, they’d seek him out.

Jack shook his head, unsure, and glanced up.

The door to Gabe’s room.

There have been many times Jack found himself waiting alone outside the door to Gabe’s quarters throughout the years. Mostly out of nerves. Sometimes a man needed a moment to collect himself before going to see his best friend as he nursed the hardest crush of his life. But this time, he could feel dread coming off the door in waves. His hand rested motionlessly on the handle.

Part of why Jack wanted time so much, is that he spent so much time squandering it, there was never any time left to say how he felt, or do what he wanted.

Questions gnawed ravenously at the corners of his mind. What would Gabe say when he told him about the offer? Or what would he say when Jack explained he thinks that it’s the right decision? He knew Gabe had seen Lena from his stare in the hallways, but what else had he seen? Ana hadn’t gotten any memories, but what if Gabe did? If not, then why was he the only one? And if yes... What had he seen? What did he know?
Did Gabe hate him now as much as he hated him in the other Jack’s memories?

The idea made Jack feel like his chest had been replaced with something fragile.

Though, as always, he was incredibly lucky, because despite the fear and dread that spread through his body like wildfire, he didn’t have the time to run anymore.

He took one last bracing breath, and opened the door.

Gabe glared back at him.

He was lounging on the corner of the little bed in his small living quarters, back against the wall. He was buried in the fabric of a dark hoodie, hand shoved angrily into their pockets, hood still up, casting a dark shadow over his face. It reminded Jack vaguely of the Reaper, but he shook it off.

“Don’t you knock?” Gabe spat, all bristle. Jack’s heart stuttered, but he took a step into Gabe’s room.

“We need to talk.” Jack took another step forward, closing the door behind him. His throat felt tight as he continued to stare at Gabe. His face reminded him of that spitting anger as the older Gabe slammed him against the wall, but it had less direction. More at the world than at him. Still, Jack dared not move, placing his hands behind his back.

Gabe scoffed, but the sound felt as miserable as it did mocking.

“Now you want to talk,” Gabe said slowly, shaking his head, before his eyes locked back onto Jack. The accusatory finger felt implied. “I thought you had to go suck off some politician for Adawe?”

Jack did not respond other than to purse his lips. He’d been through this before. Gabe was definitely angry with him. Jack, too, felt at a bit of a loss of how to feel about Gabe. There was anger, fresh like ripping off a bandaid, the gut feeling of betrayal, the how could you, of course, but there was still the sadness; the hope. He cared about Gabe. He couldn’t say for sure, but he thought that even in his memories, even after everything that happened between them, he never stopped caring about Gabe.

One memory came to mind. He was with Ana, in some strange ruins. She was so much older, hair all white, wearing an eyepatch. with a small scar peeking out behind it. She must have lost her Bionic eye.

He was trying to insist that Reaper wasn’t a priority of theirs, while Ana shouted back that Gabriel would always be a priority of hers, and that no matter how much Jack denied it, he still cared about Gabe.

Jack did not hear himself reply, but he felt the sting of the truth on his ears, and the way his fists balled at his side, just before the memory shattered into fragments. Gabe was intertwined with him in a way no one else was. He could feel a million awful things about Gabe, but never apathy.

“You’ve been seeing her too, haven’t you?” Jack asked, feeling somewhat breathless and uneven on his feet.

Gabe looked away, and his hands came free of his pockets, only to cross themselves in front of his chest.

“Yeah,” He admitted tightly.
“And have you seen the other things?” Jack asked, nerves creeping into his voice, “The memories, whenever you see her?”

Gabe raised a suspicious eyebrow at that, and for a moment Jack worried that he was going to ask what he was talking about, but eventually he nodded. Jack breathed a sigh of relief he hadn’t realized he’d been holding.

“Oh, thank god,” Jack’s shoulders slumped and his hands untangled from behind his back. “That saves us time-- Look, I--” Jack cut himself off unsure what to say. His eyes searched around, like he was looking for a cue to speak.

“Stop stalling and just spit it out already.” Gabe growled, though there was a small nervous edge to it that Jack was certain that Gabe himself couldn’t even hear. “Fuck.”

“I…” Jack took a deep breath, “Adawe just offered to make me Strike Commander.”

Gabe’s shoulders rose up. His eyes burned, like Jack had just stoked a fire that was already just barely under control. However, he didn’t seem shocked in the least.

He must have the memories from the same future Jack did.

“And I told her,” Jack said, swallowing the lump in his throat. “That I needed to talk to you before I gave her any answer, and in the meantime, if she needed a Strike Commander, she should talk to our current one”

Gabe blinked, his expression clearing. He shifted on his bed, scanning Jack up and down, eyebrows knitting together. Trying to read him. Jack still felt a bit dressed down by it, but he was not going to flinch under Gabe’s scrutiny. Eventually, his arms tugged free from being crossed over his chest, and he adjusted himself so he was sitting up a little straighter.

“Really?” Gabe eventually asked, his voice steeped in caution.

Jack only nodded. He pressed his lips tight together, breathing deep through his nose and holding it in, his muscles tense like spring coil.

Gabe pulled his legs a little closer to him, freeing up space on his bed. He nodded at the new space as he continued to stare at Jack, a little unsure, still visibly angry, but no longer squarely at Jack. Jack complied, sitting at the foot of Gabe’s bed, but not staring at him. They were both silent, but it wasn’t the tumbling silence of an avalanche of things unsaid, it felt reproachful.

“You don’t seem to surprised,” Jack said eventually. Gabe hummed in response. “So you saw me taking the position from you.”

“Yeah” Gabe said, voice becoming just a bit cutting again, “I saw that.”

“I’m sorry.”

“… Why?” Gabe asked, real confusion in his voice. Jack responded in kind.

“For… taking your job? I got caught up in the moment.” Jack shook his head, an uncertain laugh escaping his throat, “I know that’s a pretty terrible excuse.”

“What do you have to be sorry for? It’s not like you actually did anything. It’s just this…” Gabe gestured vaguely in the air, “thing they did to us.”
“Thing? What thing?”

Gabe frowned. “Jack I’m not exactly in the mood to be fucked with. Those weird experiences we were shown. Some weird… mental attack thing, to fuck with us.”

“What?” Jack reared his head back. “Those aren’t… Gabe that’s ridiculous, does that sort of thing even exist?”

Gabe shrugged, as if that was a non-issue. “How else do you explain it? I’m open to new ideas because looking for cutting edge mental weaponry has gotten me nowhere.”

“Lena’s Chronal dissociation, maybe?”

“Who, or what, the hell is that?” Gabe asked, an edge creeping into his voice.

Jack paused, giving Gabe a strange look. Gabe mirrored the look.

“We haven’t seen exactly the same things, have we?” Gabe asked slowly, eyes narrowing. “What did you see?”

“Gabe, they’re memories.” Jack said like it was the simplest thing in the world, Gabe made a face. It was a very suspicious face. “Of us in the future. Or… some future. Lena’s Chrono Stabilizer, that thing on her chest, is broken. She’s…” Jack Grunted, “Look I don’t understand the exact Mechanics, I remember that scientist, Winston, explaining it, but I don’t know how it works. If that thing on her chest is broken, she stops* adhering to time, or space for that matter. That’s why she keeps appearing at random. She’s jumping in and out of little points in time and space.”

Jack thought that for now it might be best to omit the fact Winston was a talking Gorilla, if Gabe didn’t quite remember him. “Her coming here must have… triggered memories somehow. Of things that haven’t happened yet.”

“Has anyone else seen her?” Gabe asked, a hand moving up to scratch idly at his beard.

Jack faltered for a second. “Ana. At least. But…” Jack made a grunt of disapproval “I don’t think she got memories. As far as I know, we’re the only ones who got memories. Not… very sure why.”

Gabe continued to scratch at his beard for a few seconds, thinking. After a while he grimaced.

“Assuming your whole… time traveling girl thing is correct,” Gabe started slowly.

“I’m certain,” Jack pressed, but Gabe gave him a doubting glance.

“I think I might know why it might only be us.” He grunted, “Did you experience that fight we had?”

Jack barked out a humorless laugh under his breath.

“Which one? It seems like we had a lot.”

“That one where everything was like a warzone, and I broke your mask. Had you at gunpoint.” The image of the two of them standing in the crumbling word with Gabe’s shotgun pointed squarely at Jack filled Jack’s mind, but he dismissed it as soon as possible. Gabe cleared his throat a little bit, “We were older, and I was…”

“The Reaper.” Jack interrupted. The word sliding out of his throat like a snake and coiling dangerously between them. He glanced subtly at Gabe, looking for a reaction, guilt, regret,
something, only to be disappointed as the other man just nodded. Anger bloomed inside him, and frantically, he tried to box it in, but his voice felt tight as he continued. “I don’t remember you ever breaking my Tactical Visor.”

“Well, that girl, Callsign Tracer I think, tried to jump in between us. Wound up taking a sniper round to that thing on her chest.” Gabe squinted, like he was trying to recreate the event his is in his head. It occurred to Jack he likely was. “After that, the thing started fritzing, and she freaked out. It exploded, though it wasn’t a regular explosion. I was caught in the blast, and I imagine you were too.”

Jack’s mouth dropped a bit. “So you think that we’re-- those future versions of us are caught between time and space too?”

“Look, you brought up the time thing.” Gabe snapped, suddenly sounding aggravated, “don’t ask me how it works.”

Jack frowned, silence slotting back in between them. Gabe seemed to be lost in his thoughts, like when he was coming up with plans for their ops. His lips pursed and his eyes focused on somewhere far away. Jack allowed that not particularly companionable silence to linger, unsure of what to say. The Reaper still loomed between them.

“Look just,” Gabe sighed, “there’s nothing for you to be sorry about. It’s not like you went around my back and took the job.”

“What?” Jack snapped to face Gabe, whose expression expression crinkled defensively, “Yes I did.”

“You just said you told Adawe you were talking to me first.” Gabe’s eyes narrowed.

“Yes?” Jack threw his hands up, his face growing hot, “I mean the other me. The other me-- I went behind your back and took the job, and then I don’t even think I wound up apologizing for it, so there, I’m sorry, It was thoughtless. I shouldn’t have… I shouldn’t have done that to you. I know how important trust is to you.”

“Jack that's...” Gabe leaned forward, his expression bewildered, and made a half shrug with one arm. “you didn’t do any of that. Even if you’re spot on with this time traveling girl thing, that’s not really... you. You talked to me.”

“Only because of the fact I could literally see myself getting caught up in the moment as they delivered the exact same pitch to me that I can remember them pitching. I knew that I had been made Strike Commander, and that something happened between us that made us…” Jack didn’t have the word for what happened between them, or rather, it wasn’t something he wanted to speak aloud. “The point is, if it weren't for these memories showing me the fallout of what happened, I would have probably done exactly what the memories showed me doing. I didn’t do anything.”

Jack bowed his head slightly, lacing his fingers together, “You have every right to be furious with me for what I did. I get that.”

“Well I’m not.” Gabe rolled his eyes, before prodding Jack’s side slightly with his foot. “You talked to me. It’s that simple. Your life experiences differ from that Jack’s life experiences, you’re not the same person as him. I’m not gonna hold what he did against you. That’s fucked.”

Jack turned to face Gabe, his brows knit together and anger boiling up inside him. “We’ve been different for all of a few days, Gabe. I know I could have made the exact same choice as he did. Who we are right now eventually became what we ended up as, and we could still go down those paths. That potential is right there, in us. That’s a fact.”
Gabe studied Jack’s face for a moment, before his expression hardened.

“You’re talking about the Reaper.”

Jack’s lack of response might as well have been one.

“Unbelievable,” Gabe breathed, leaning back up against the wall, the only way Jack could describe his expression was hurt. “That wasn’t… That’s years-- Decades away, you’re seriously going to hold me accountable for--”

“No, I just--” Jack sucked in air through his teeth, “I never would have even considered it possible for you too do any do any of that. I just-- I don’t understand it. Why? How? I mean you’re…”

Jack gestured hopelessly at Gabe. Gabe stared back, his own eyes searching. Jack had to wrench his eyes closed to keep himself together.

“You’re so much better than that, Gabe. I just want to know how you could have done all those things. For a greater good, sure, fine, but... You were a terrorist.”

Silence hung around the room, so painfully uncomfortable it was almost like it didn’t want to be there itself. Jack couldn’t find it in himself to look Gabe in the eye, and he swore at his own cowardice.

“I don’t know.” Gabe sighed quietly, “I didn’t get to hear any of my own thoughts in those situations, I was just along for the ride.”

“That’s it?” Jack said through grit teeth. “You don’t know?”

Jack leaned forward, lacing his fingers together and squeezing his hands as hard as possible, until they shook and he pressed his forehead down on them. Gabe remained silent.

“How do you expect me to be okay with that?” Jack said, his voice breathless, “Knowing what I know, how can I just accept it without so much as an explanation?”

“Well I don’t have one.” Gabe snapped, and Jack could feel him closing in on himself on the bed beside him.

“Well then to figure out--” Jack’s voice started to transition into a bark before he cut himself off with a choking sound, balling up the boiling anger in his gut and trying to let it dissipate. Gabe had a point when he said it was a bit unfair to hold him accountable, but the shock and anger at the mere fact his best friend was even capable of doing the things he did as the Reaper was like a huge gaping wound, throbbing with anguish every time it was so much as blown on. If he could understand what was going on in Gabe’s head, even just a little, he could hold onto that until the damage that had been done between them had time to repair. Because, if nothing else, if he wanted anything to survive this, it was his trust in Gabe.

When Jack finally trusted his own voice again, it was significantly quieter, almost defeated in tone.

“Just give me something, Gabe. Anything. You don’t have to be right. Just anything that could possibly explain why you did what you did.” Jack opened his eyes, staring down at the floor. “I don’t want this to get in the way of our trust in each-other. You’re too important to me for me to not understand you.”

Jack could feel gabe slowly unwind at his side, his defenses lowering just a bit as he gauged the situation. Jack allowed him some time. After a handful of long seconds he could hear a small sigh
from the other man.

“I don’t know, I guess… I guess that after Overwatch fell, I probably just felt like there wasn’t
anything left for me. I’d been killed, and left alone, and lost everything I ever had, and felt betrayed
and…” Gabe cleared his throat. “I just wanted to get even. With everything. Everyone.”

Jack finally forced himself to look at Gabe. Gabe’s stare seemed a little far away, more drawn in, but
not in the defensive way he was used to seeing. He looked almost smaller. Jack felt the sudden,
almost overwhelming need to give him a hug.

“That… that makes sense.” Jack sighed loudly, a coil of tension unknotted in his gut. “After
Overwatch fell, I’m pretty sure that all I wanted to do was get even too. Just with different people.
I’m not really sure who, to be honest.”

“There was a lot of corruption in Overwatch near the end,” Gabe stated, resigned.

“Yeah. I got the same sense.”

Silence, now practically a participant in the conversation, skirted coquetishly between them. Jack
focused on the low sound of Gabe’s breathing, the weight of him on the bed beside him. The creaks
of the mattress every time he shifted his weight just so.

He had time.

“Gabe?” Jack asked, his voice sounded rough on his ears.

“Yeah?”

“I don’t want that to be us.” Jack said solemnly. He left some space for Gabe to speak, but the other
man remained silent, so he continued, “I don’t want us to become like those other versions of us.”

He turned his head to face Gabe straight on. His brown eyes had reflected almost every emotion in
front of Jack at one time or another, but right now, they looked a little lost, still a little mad, but there
was hope and relief there too. Jack found himself creeping closer to Gabe on the bed.

“I don’t want us to stop talking. I don’t want us to grow apart. I don’t want to just… pass you by in
the hallway, without even acknowledging you’re there. You’re my best friend, Gabe, and you’ve
been such an integral part of my life for so many years now, I’d almost forgotten what it’s like to not
have you around. But, now I know what it’s like when you’re not around, and it sucks. It fucking
sucks.

“You’ve been here with me for the past decade, and whether it was SEP, or the crisis, or Overwatch,
it still managed to be the time in my life where it felt like someone really was right there with me,
standing by my side, just because it’s me. My whole life I’ve tried to fit in so many molds in order to
try to keep up the peace, so I won’t let anybody down, but you... You make me feel like I don’t have
to be something for someone. But, when I’m with you, It feels like me just being Jack is good
enough. I hope to god you feel the same way; The last thing I’d want is for you to feel like you’re
alone when I’m right here, at your side.

Jack had somehow managed to enter Gabe’s personal bubble. He blinked at this realization, and
retreated slightly back out. “I just… I wanted you to know that. I don’t want the two of us growing
apart like how we did in that other future.” Jack cracked a somewhat shaky smile, “Plus, I mean, we
don’t have a falling out, and Overwatch might not crumble and give way to an anarchistic society
with terrorist cells running rampant.”
Gabe stared at him, looking more than a little blown away, but eventually, a tiny, muted smile peeked out from behind his beard which he covered with a cough.

“You’re making good points.” Gabe muttered into his hand, which was about as good as vocal reciprocation got with him. “For a sap”

Jack allowed himself to laugh a little stronger, giving Gabe a good natured shove.

“Same to you too Gabe.” Jack sighed, “Same to you too.”

A small, easy smile found it’s way to Gabe’s face, not unlike the one he’d been wearing before the party, when things had been all the high of victory. Except this one felt a little less manic. It felt subdued, and private, a small side of Gabe that he brought out, peaceful and relieved and happy.

It felt like ages since he had seen it, even if he must have seen it not too long ago. Jack realized, that never once in all the memories could he envision Gabe with the same expression on his face. No matter how hard he stared, he couldn’t conjure the image on the face of an older Gabe from his memories, because he had robbed it from the two of them when he took that job without talking to Gabe first, and because he never managed to tell the other the truth.

Not telling the truth had already destroyed their relationship once. Even now, the background hum of his unspoken feelings was starting to feel like more and more of a lie as he remained silent. Their relationship shouldn’t have to bear the burden of things unsaid for no good reason, and he hadn’t had a good reason to not tell Gabe how he felt for a long time now.

Gabe deserved better than that. They both deserved better than that. And while he was already going out of his way to be honest with Gabe, he could think of no better time to be completely honest with Gabe.

Maybe the moment was poor timing. Jack didn’t care. Because for once in his life, he wanted to choose his own time to say how he felt, instead of stalling until he ran out of it.

“You know,” Jack started casually, leaning back ever so slightly, back into Gabe’s personal bubble. “We really should try to do everything we can to make it so we don’t end up like those other versions of us.”

Gabe raised an eyebrow. “Yeah…?”

Jack clicked his tongue, a bundle of nerves in his gut. “I don’t have any memories of us kissing.”

Gabe stared blankly at Jack for a few agonizingly long seconds, before he snorted.

“You think that’s smooth?”

“To be fair,” Jack raised his hands in defeat, his voice just a bit tight, “I haven’t really tried flirting… ever, actually. So yes, that’s about as good as I get.”

Gabe found this amusing, and he leaned himself forward to an extent that almost looked uncomfortable, Jack turned slightly to meet him halfway. His heartbeat was loud in his ears, but a solid, quick but steady tempo. Their noses were practically touching.

“You’re lucky you have other redeeming qualities.” Gabe said with finality, before turning his head just so, and closing the distance between them.
It was terribly, horribly unfamiliar territory. Kissing someone with a beard was about five times more rough by default, and neither of them were exactly the most sexually practiced as of recent times. Jack thought it felt a little clumsy, though less so than his adventures in kissing from high school, which also happened to be the last time he kissed anyone. There was a softness to it as well, under the scratch of the beard and the fumbling of inexperience, there was something small, delicate and vulnerable to it, like if he pressed too hard it might just fall apart. The longer it went on though, the more confident it seemed to be, a firmness added to their lips as this once seemingly impossible act between them became more and more of a reality.

But what made it good was that it was Gabe kissing him. It felt substantive, like a weight had been lifted off his back and cork popped in his gut. His face burned from Gabe’s whiskers, but he’d gladly keep going for hours.

But, unfortunately, he did not have the time. Adawe was still waiting for him to return. He still needed to give her an answer.

He broke the kiss, and took a few moments to catch his breath. Gabe face, for all it’s hard lines and scars, somehow pulled off looking soft in that moment.

“Heh.” Jack said, “that was…”

“Ten years of sexual tension wrapped up in a mediocre kiss.” Gabe deadpanned, but it felt fond.
“I wouldn’t say mediocre,” Jack shook his head, “But this means we have room for improvement.”

“It was okay.” Gabe corrected with a small roll of his eyes. “You better show up for the second one Jack. Felt like I was kissing a CPR Manikin.”

“If you’re referring to your tongue’s daring attempt to lick my front teeth, sur--” Jack started to laugh, only for Gabe to cut him off by grabbing him roughly by the shoulder and pulling him into a second, deeper kiss. Jack made a pleased noise at the back of his throat, closed his eyes, and leaned into the kiss.

When Gabe finally broke the kiss, Jack felt even more dizzy and breathless.

“Now that’s better.” Gabe said, self satisfaction dripping from his tone, but it did little to hide the fact he was just as breathless.

“Gansey is gonna be pissed if you dislocate my shoulder again.” Jack commented mildly, rolling his shoulder, to which Gabe just chuckled. “Though, uh, we should probably stop for now.”

“Why?”

“Adawe might try to destroy the building if I keep her waiting much longer.” Jack glanced back towards the door.

“Oh. Right.” Gabe glanced to the side, leaning back to a more comfortable looking position. “What’s the plan for that?”

“I think…” Jack scratched at the back of his head. “It might be a good idea for me to take the job.”

Gabe pursed his lips and narrowed his eyes. His hands twitched, like they were itching to cross. Jack winced.

“Now, here me out,” Jack raised a hand up to the other, the little bundle of nerves popping right back up again, “I already can remember some missions that we end up doing somewhere along the road. If we keep getting more, then--”

“Jack.” Gabe interrupted, his voice even, “I get it. You want the position.”

Jack opened his mouth to protest, but one look into Gabe’s eyes shut that down. Instead he just nodded in defeat.

“Yeah.”

Gabe stared at him for a long few seconds, mouth twisting off to the side, before he took in a deep breath, and spoke.

“Okay.”

Jack blinked, and then cocked his head to the side. Gabe expression was positively neutral.

“That easy?” He asked, doubtful “You, uh, seemed pretty upset about it before.”

“Well I’m not exactly happy about it.” Gabe groused, glancing away and clenching his teeth, “Adawe has some fucking balls to turn this into a backroom deal right under my nose, but…”

Gabe sighed heavily, his arms folded tightly against his chest. Jack placed a hand on Gabe’s knee, rubbing it soothingly. Slowly, he could see Gabe unwinding himself, bit by bit.
“I can see the logic in it,” Gabe grumbled eventually. “Even if you ignore all this time travel memory bullshit, the media loves you, and can’t handle me. You can talk to politicians without vomiting, and can even get them to see eye to eye with you. That’s talent. One I don’t have.”

Jack mock gasped. “Gabriel Reyes, intolerant to politicians? No!”

“Shut it.” A smile found its way back to Gabe’s face as he kicked at Jack halfheartedly. “If Overwatch really is going to become some public peacekeeping agency, then I guess… You would be the more logical choice to lead it.”

“… You’re sure?” Jack asked eventually, it which Gabe shrugged, And Jack pursed his lips before continuing. “I don’t have to take the job Gabe. We could talk to Adawe and figure something else out. I don’t want you to… feel like you have to just because I want the position.”

“Jack it’s not about the position.” Gabe shook his head, “Just the fact you came here to ask, to talk to me, be honest about the situation, let me have my say in the matter, that’s what matters.”

A grin broke open on Gabe’s face. “Besides, if these so-called memories are to be trusted, someone’s gonna have to run blackwatch and get shit done while you pose for pictures with politicians.”

“Fair enough,” Jack chuckled slightly, before he turned serious once more. “You’re… sure you’re alright with this?”

“Alright isn’t exactly the word I’d use.” Gabe grumbled, “and we’re gonna have things be a bit different this time around. I want to be more involved in Overwatch duties instead of falling off the face of the earth and into 24/7 Blackwatch babysitting.”

“Absolutely.” Jack nodded.

“Then I’m willing to give this a go.” He ducked his head slightly, before adding, “Together.”

“Together.” Jack agreed. Gabe’s expression turned unusually sheepish, a smile slowly trying to infiltrate his expression.

Jack let a moment pass before smacking Gabe lightly with the back of his hand, and Gabe raised an eyebrow.

“You wanna make Adawe and all her political buddies make the offer to your face?” Jack said with a click of his tongue. “Scare ‘em a bit?”

Gabe’s smile quirked up in the corner.

“Now we’re talking.”

Chapter End Notes

This is kinda gay.

There's a not-unpopular idea in the fandom that making Gabe the strike commander (and ostensibly, Jack the Blackwatch commander) during the golden age of Overwatch would 'fix' things. I don't think Overwatch would ever even get off the ground with that
setup, but to each their own I suppose.

Lovely art of the boys smooching(which i will add into the story itself once I'm off mobile) by pastelgayloser on tumblr:
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I don’t like it.” Torbjorn declared, folding his good arm over his prosthesis, jutting his chin upward definitely. Or perhaps to make eye contact, sometimes it was hard for Gabe to tell.

Gabe rolled his eyes, casting a sidelong glance at Jack. There was a certain tenseness to the other man’s neck as he pursed his lips together. Jack returned the glance, as if looking to Gabe for instruction, but he could only offer Jack a shrug. Telling the others was Jack’s idea in the first place, and it took no small amount of convincing to get Gabe to agree to it. He figured that Torbjorn, if no one else, wouldn’t respond well to what was happening.

Luckily, Ana was there. She smacked the shorter man in the back of the head.

“Ow!” Torbjorn hopped away from her, shielding the back of his head, “What was that for?!”

“Don’t be so unpleasant.” Ana said sharply. Reinhart cast an uncertain glance between the two of them, as if worrying if he should step between them, but didn’t move from his hunched over spot on a crate. Not that he could stand in this tiny, off the beaten path storage room without bashing his head on the ceiling.

At least it was private.

“Oh, what? Like I’m just supposed to accept after we finally put the whole mess with the bots to bed, Jack goes ahead and swaps jobs with Gabriel, Gabriel becomes the leader of this new thing I ain’t ever heard a peep of ‘til now, and we got this—“ Torbjorn gestured madly at the air in front of him, “girl poppin’ into our base and making them go loony!” He jabbed a finger back at Gabe and Jack.

Gabe shrugged, lifting his hands up in the air, “And here I thought that meant we’d finally be operating on the same level.”

“Gabe, please,” Jack sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. Gabe redirected his shrug at Jack, without a hint of guilt.

“Need I remind you that I saw this girl too?” Ana cocked her eyebrow.

“ You didn’t get some ridiculous vision hogwash to go along with it.” Torb said, pointing a finger at Ana, who could only frown. He took a deep breath, before turning to face Gabe and Jack, holding up his hands, trying to be placating. “Look, it’s not that I don’t believe the two of you. But you have to admit, this sounds crazy.”

“As much as I would like to believe the two of you as well,” Reinhart started slowly, gesturing vaguely at the two soldiers, “I have to admit the whole story is, eh… what’s the word…”

“Fanciful.” Ana supplied.

“Ja, thank you my dear. Fanciful.”

“Look, I know, that’s fine.” Jack said, taking a step forward, “We know it sounds crazy, it is crazy, but it’s all we really have to go on.”
“It could still be some sort of new tech.” Gabe pointed out mildly, nodding at Torbjorn. “Have any of your friends from Ironclad R&D mentioned anything about mind-altering weaponry?”

“I don’t know what’s scarier, the possibility such a thing exists, or your time traveling girl.” Torbjorn huffed, stroking his beard, “I haven’t heard anything, and something like that likely wouldn’t come from any of my old colleagues. Something like that would be useless on omnis, so I can’t see it getting much in the way of funding in the past few years… if it existed, of course. I can’t imagine omnis could build such a thing, lack of test subjects, would need to divert resources from producing combat units, plus, their ability to understand the intricacies of human emotion is questionable, at best.”

“So, is that a no?” Gabe raised an eyebrow at the shorter man, who hesitated.

“… It’s a ‘probably not’,” He said eventually, “but I’ll ask around just to be sure. Last thing we want is some megalomaniac giving you-- us, a hard time.”

Gabe scoffed, “Thanks.”

Jack elbowed him in the side, flashing a knowing grin, Gabe’s scowl deepened.

“C’mon Gabe, you’re the one who’s concerned about it. Least you could do is sound like you appreciate it.” He moved in closer to elbow him again, which Gabe allowed, briefly, before he shuffled out of Jack’s elbow range.

Gabe snorted, trying to suppress a smile as he straightened and folded his arms again. Briefly, he noticed Ana’s hard scrutiny flickering between the two of them, but he ignored her.

“Yeah,” Torbjorn said, a smug look taking over his face, “C’mon Gabe.”

“You’ll get nothing and like it.” Gabe deadpanned, the hint of warning in his voice as he narrowed his eyes at the shorter man. While some gentle ribbing from Jack always managed to bring a smile to his face, it wasn’t something he welcomed from Torbjorn. Something the other man either never picked up on, or simply ignored, likely the latter.

“One thing I am not certain on,” Reinhardt interjected, adjusting himself on the crate in a fruitless attempt to find comfort. “is when you see this girl, Lena, you said these memories from the future returned to the two of you. How much do you remember, exactly?”

Gabe shared a look with Jack. He seemed like he was hesitant. Gabe didn’t need to guess why; even before they had gathered the other members of the team here, they had agreed that they should keep the finer details of their memories more or less between the two of them unless it was necessary to share details. As a tactician, Gabe knew the dangers of over informing one’s team. Sometimes, it’s best to keep your cards to your chest and limit the flow of information to a need-to-know basis, in order to better keep track of all moving parts. This was a situation where they really needed to keep track of all moving parts.

“It’s… different for the both of us.” Jack said, eventually, slowly breaking eye contact with Gabe. “We have some far-off ones that… will hopefully never be relevant. If something is very similar to something we’ve already experienced, then it’s like an instant deja vu feeling. When Adawe offered to make me strike commander, I could see myself… well…”

Gabe’s expression softened just a fraction, and he took a step back towards Jack, brushing his shoulder against the other man’s. Jack paused briefly, eye flicking to his shoulder before continuing. “I could see myself accepting the position without taking Gabe’s feelings into account,” He admitted,
tone smoothing out slightly, “And then a few more. If I focus, I can recall a few new pieces of information, but they’re pretty scattered, and there are probably more of them that I haven’t quite dug out yet.”

“They are mostly years off, from after I died.” Gabe paused, realizing that probably sounded pretty bad. “And then came back.”

The three other members of the team stared blankly at Gabriel. The silence was broken by the sound of Jack’s hand slapping against his own face.

“Do you really have to say it like that?” Jack sighed, exasperated.

“I mean,” Gabe scratched idly around his beanie, “It’s true. How else would I say it?”

“It sounds awful, Gabe.”

“That because you don’t know much about it.” Gabe shrugged. “It was actually pretty sweet deal. Countless tactical maneuvers, limbs were practically impossible to disable, didn’t need to reload, and infiltration was basically guaranteed, which was awesome.”

“Unbelievable…” Jack muttered, shaking his head.

“I need… a drink.” Ana announced, lightly massaging her temples.

“Make it two, thanks.” Torbjorn nodded along with a weary sigh.

“I am beginning to get the impression this future was not a very happy one.” Reinhardt said, his expression was growing more concerned, and confused, by the second.

“No.” Jack deadpanned, tension worming it’s way back into his body. Gabe frowned.

In the few days it had been since they had talked and reconciled what was going on between them, one thing had made itself abundantly clear: The memories Jack had from after and during the fall of overwatch were a touchy subject for him. Gabe himself didn’t quite understand, it was, after all, just a possible result of a path the two of them weren’t following, if they could trust the memories to begin with. The Gabe and Jack they had seen in that future were wildly different people from who they were now, with another lifetime’s worth of experiences to shape who they were. Jack wasn’t privy to the inner thoughts of soldier: 76 any more than Gabe knew exactly what the Reaper was thinking, though he could guess. While Gabe could sympathize that the mental image of the other man at his gunpoint was disquieting, Jack seemed to have a greater sense of discomfort with the choices they made than anything.

Classic Jack Morrison form was always to avoid, so the subject of the Reaper, and by extension, soldier: 76 had quickly become an unspoken taboo, only referred to if absolutely necessary. One day, they’d have to talk about it more, but now wasn’t that day. Their memories were so fresh and new, and in all likelihood, they would gain more, with greater context in time.

Gabe placed a steadying hand on Jack’s shoulder and gave him a quick squeeze.

“Doesn’t matter.” He declared. “That’s not gonna be us. We’re making sure of it.”

Jack blinked once and leaned into his touch. A soft smile slowly warmed its way onto his face.

“Oh my god.”
Four heads all turned to Ana, who was staring, eyes wide, flicking quickly between Gabe and Jack, her finger pointing upwards, hovering just for a moment, before falling quickly on the two men.

“You two finally did it, didn’t you?” She said breathlessly. Gabe glanced at Jack, who returned the look for an instant before returning to Ana, “Ya khabar abyad, you did.”

“They what?” Torbjorn reared back, fixing Ana with a strange look.

“They’re together!” Ana exclaimed, a wicked grin taking over her face.

Reinhardt and Torbjorn’s heads snapped back to stare at Jack and Gabe, mouths parted just slightly. Reinhardt leaned forward eagerly in his seat, while Torbjorn just seemed completely dumbfounded.

Gabe offered nothing but a shrug and a smile. Jack seemed frozen in place.

“That’s not really what we’re here to discuss--” Jack had started to say, but Reinhardt lunged forward, and pulled both men into a fierce death grip, one in each arm, knocking the air from Gabe’s lungs.

“My Friends!” He bellowed, a hearty laugh rumbling throughout the tiny room, and Gabe felt the ground leave his feet as he was lifted up in the air. For far from the first time this week, he wished he could escape this moment just like the reaper could. “I’m so-- Ooof.”

Gabe’s body jostled in time with a loud thump and the German death grip was as brief as it was bone crushing as he was released and dropped back to the ground.

Reinhardt stood just barely above him, rubbing the back of his head, glaring up at the low ceiling. But it was short lived, as his eye flicked down to flick excitedly between Gabriel and Jack, unsure of who to focus on.

“Heh. Forgot about the ceiling.” He he quickly admitted, before his grin returned tenfold, “but this is fantastisch! You must tell us when this came to be!”

“Wait, wait, wait” Torbjorn stomped his foot on the ground, wagging a finger up in the air “Hold on wait just a second… You mean, after all these years, you choose to hook up after getting harassed by some time traveling pixie woman?”

Ana slid in front of Torbjorn, ignoring the man, pulling Gabe into a quick but much more welcome hug. Before moving over to give a much longer one to Jack, who still looked completely blindsided.

“Oh I’m so proud of you two.” Ana sighed letting Jack go, “After all these years-- I’m just glad you’re finally together, we should celebrate!”

“Wait, no…” Jack stammered. Gabe gave Jack an amused look. It was rare that he got to see the man totally out of sorts, and of all the moments he could remember, this was the only one that struck him as distinctly positive. He nudged Jack’s arm good-naturedly, eyebrow raised expectantly, and Jack’s expression cleared, finding his footing.

If he was supposed to be strike commander, then he would need to be able to take charge of a situation. He gave Jack a snort nod, which Jack quickly reciprocated.

“Oh, look, everyone calm down,” Jack announced, holding his hands up in front of their small crowd. “Yes, Gabe and I are together. We don’t need to make a big deal about it.”

“Ohhhhh yes we do.” Ana said, and reinhardt nodded enthusiastically. Torbjorn’s expression was that
of a man watching a train derail.

“Fine, alright, you can make a big private deal about it later, when we’re not in a broom closet talking about time travelers.”

“Interesting choice of location, by the way.” Ana quipped.

Jack blinked, and then his face morphed into a deep scowl.

“You know, she has a point,” Gabe said with a small smirk and glance Jack’s way.

“Christ.” Jack sighed heavily pinching the bridge of his nose. “It was the only place out of the way enough that we wouldn’t get interrupted. Adawe and Petras are probably hunting me down as we speak.”

“I’m with Jack.” Torbjorn announced, rocking forward, suddenly into the center of their little group, “No need to make a big fuss out of nothing. Got more pressin’ matters and all.

Reinhardt chuckled deeply, a devious expression cast over his face. “You just don’t want Ana to realize she—”

“Shh!” Torbjorn scrambled forward trying in vain to silence reinhardt, but Ana let out a quick bark of laughter.

“Oh, I haven’t forgotten.” She said, “It’s well before the fifth, Torby.” She leaned down to Torbjorn’s eye level, her eyes sparkling like a predator with it’s prey in hand, and punched his cheek viciously, “and I expect my payment by the end of the week.”

Jack buried his face in his hands. Gabe couldn’t say he was particularly surprised. He’d figured there had to have been a pool going on the two of them for a while now, but he didn’t think anyone would be so lacking in good sense to bet against Ana.

“People, can we focus, please?”

“Now you know how I felt the past five years.” Gabe deadpanned.

“Sorry Jack” Ana stood up straight, casting one last smug glance in Torbjorn’s direction. Torbjorn huffed and crossed his arms tight to his chest.

Jack glanced around the room, letting the silence built but for a few moments before continuing. Reinhardt sat back down, tired of hunching over from the low ceiling.

“I just want all of us on the same page here.” He explained, “As far as any of you know, and as far as me and Gabe know, we don’t know a thing about this woman. If any of us spot her, we tell the others as soon as we can privately do so. Gabe and I thought it was best that we leave the higher ups out of this, for the time being. Besides, any of us start talking about this without solid evidence, and we get labeled as PTSD stricken veterans immediately.”

The other members of the strike team murmured their agreement.

“You know,” Torbjorn scratched at his beard, thinking. “I’ve already got people talking to me about altering the security of this place. With the god AIs contained, security cameras don’t present a security risk to our infrastructure anymore. They’ll probably be installed soon.”

“That would be sufficient proof of this girl being real, don’t you think?” Reinhardt spoke up and
gestured to Gabe with a open hand, “plus, proof that this isn’t the result of some sort of trick, or a uh, machine.”

“Not if they’re smart about it.” Gabe shook his head, “Video footage can be doctored. And if they’re able to project what I’ve seen into our minds, then I think conjuring a fake girl on a computer screen would be child’s play.”

“Now you’re starting to sound like this is some conspiracy.” Jack said.

Gabe quirked his head to the side, shooting Jack an odd look.

“I’m sorry-- you don’t think this could be conspiracy? Mr. Fake-my-death-to-investigate-a-conspiracy? Jack, come the fuck on.”

Jack’s shoulder’s slumped. “Alright, Fair.”

The rest of the members of the strike team exchanged odd looks.

“You two are going to tell us the full story of your memories one day.” Ana grumbled, running a hand through her hair, “Over drinks. I have a feeling I’ll definitely need them.”

“So what are we gonna do then?” Torbjorn asked, “If this time traveling girl thing is true, I doubt we’ll be able to keep it under wraps. You said her appearances seemed random, right? She could pop into the cafeteria during lunchtime and half of everyone in the building would see her.”

“Right now, we're just trying to see if there is a pattern to when or where she pops up. With any luck, Gabe or I will get some new memories that could help us out. I saw the blueprints for what looked like a prototype for that thing on her chest, what’s supposed to keep her tethered to time, but It’s not like I can replicate it.”

“Could we contact the person who built it?” Ana asked.

“No, the… person who built the device was…” Jack shot a pained look at Gabe, and he returned to with a raised eyebrow. He’d have to ask Jack about it later. “It’s just not feasible.”

“Will she be… alright?” Reinhardt asked, his voice steeped with caution.

“I wish I could tell you, Rein.” Jack’s expression turned downcast. “She can survive like this for a while, though I have no idea how long. The technology that was used to help her is decades away from where we are now. Even if we could get a team of scientists together to help her, I doubt they would be able to do much with our current technology. Besides, resources are going to be stretched thin enough already with the rebuilding process. For all we know, she could have already had this problem fixed in her time. They did it once before.”

Gabe caught Jack’s hands balling into fists at his side with the corner of his eye. Jack always managed to take things like this as if it was some personal failure of his. Barely knew the girl, and he looked like he was ready to put his first through a wall out of frustration for her sake.

Gabe tapped a finger on Jack’s hands and he felt it relax just a bit, before it quickly grabbed on to Gabe’s hand with a quick squeeze.

“So, we wait.” Gabe took a step forward. “See where the chips fall, and then figure out what to do from there.”

The three other members of the strike team nodded in affirmation.
“Then let’s get out of this goddamn closet.”

“Here here.” Reinhardt mumbled, as the other members of the strike team graciously parted to allow the lumbering giant his way out first, whereupon he immediately straightened out and stretched.

“I still want to know the full story behind you two,” Ana’s eye narrowed dangerously “How exactly did it come about?”

“We’ll tell you later.” Jack waved her off “Adawe actually is probably looking for me.”

“Me too.” Gabe sighed pulling his beaning down as far as it could go, “Setting up the logistics for Blackwatch and garnering a set of agents for me is gonna be such a fucking time sink.”

“We should all get together later today, once you’re free.” Ana suggested, “So you can give us the full story.”

“It’s really not that interesting,” Jack said weakly, palming at the back of his neck.

“I think it’s a wonderful idea!” Reinhardt’s voice echoed back into the closet. “There’s that little bar in the downtown, the Volkshaus, me and Torbjorn have gone there before! There were some private areas, too.”

“The bartender did say that heroes drink free…” Torbjorn said with a devious grin on his face, “The two of you might even be able to work up a little buzz without breaking the bank.”

“It’s settled then!” Ana clasped her hands together. “Will the two of you be free from Adawe by nine?”

Gabe scoffed. “Adawe couldn’t pay me to do paperwork after six, let alone nine.”

“We made it clear that the little stunt she pulled with the position of strike commander wasn’t appreciated, she owes us big time.” Jack said. “We’ll meet you there.”

Torbjorn and Ana followed Reinhardt out the door, and just as Gabe was about the follow suit, he was pulled back by a tug on his hand, and wrapped in Jack’s embrace.

“Just had to get the last word in, didn’t you?” Jack said, but there was no bite to his words, and amusement twinkled in his eyes.

“Hey, I let you lead the party.” Gabe said with a shrug. “Gonna have to learn to deal with grown ass adults acting like teenagers sooner or later. Can’t pan them off to me anymore.”

“Hmm, thanks for that,” Jack leaned forward and placed a quick kiss on Gabe’s lips. “Not sure if I’m gonna be able to get used to being the one ordering everyone around.”

“Did it well enough the first time around.” Gabe grunted, “Though this time you’ll have the benefit of having the best teacher ever. Plus, you’ve got a nice, scary yelling voice.”

Jack scoffed, leaning forward again and pressing his forehead against Gabe’s. They stood there for a long moment, simply enjoying each other's presence, a feeling of warmth, contentment, filled Gabe’s chest. The memories of that other future still felt fresh in his mind, from the fallout of when Jack had accepted the offer of strike commander without talking to him, and how he spent hours, sulking alone, waiting and wishing for Jack to come in so they could have a conversation that never came.
He decided he liked his future a lot more than that of the other Gabriel’s.

“Hey.” Jack said after some time. Gabe hummed in response, letting his eyes slip close.

“There’s been something that’s been bothering me, basically ever since the start of this.”

“A memory?” Gabe asked.

“Yeah, kinda… for some reason, I seem to associate it with you, though I can’t figure out why.”

“What?”

“Does the name… McCree mean anything to you?”

Gabe frowned deeply. Images of cowboy hats, old black and white spaghetti westerns, and spurs flicked into his mind and took to it like a match to a candle, illuminating the repressed horrors. The word ‘Howdy’ echoed in his head like a mantra.

“What?” Jack asked, cautiously.

Despite himself, Gabe couldn’t help but groan, shaking his head.

“Goddamn headache is what it means.”

Chapter End Notes

What Ana said basically means oh my god, but in the context of someone receiving good news. At least, that's what the website said. Don't hesitate to tell me if I fucked that up and I'll change it right away.

And so this story comes to its somewhat open conclusion. Truth be told, if I had more time to write, I probably would have extended this shit out a lot, I really love the AU. So, open ending is unfortunately the best I could do due to the time constraints of the big bang. C'est la Vie. That being said, I don't think I've quite got this AU out of my system, so maybe I'll write more? I think there's a lot of room for more stories to come from this, from how Jack and Gabe handle their not-quite second chance at overwatch, to their relationship, to whatever the heck's going on to poor Lena. But, that's something for another day.

Lastly, some thank-yous. Thank you to everyone who read this fic, especially those of you who left a kudo, comment, or bookmark. Thank You to Apologija for encouraging me while I wrote this, as well as graciously beta'd the pile of trash I originally presented her with. Than you to Pastelgayloser for encouraging me throughout the big bang, and providing their lovely art to accompany my story. And lastly, a big thanks to the staff of the big bang, and all the other participants, without the big bang, I doubt this fic would have ever been written to completion.

End Notes
Lovely art for Ana teasing Jack about his big gay mancrush on Gabe Done by Pastelgayloser on tumblr right here:
http://pastelgayloser.tumblr.com/post/163226926943/my-piece-for-the-reaper76bigbang-i-was-paired

Look at it. Live it. Embrace the Gay while you still can.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!