It's Not Over Until The Nightingale Doesn't Sing.

by Crystalina

Summary

Sequel to Earn Your Honor.

Everything that could go wrong, went wrong. A month since the Cabal attacked the Tower, the City, everything they held dear, everything they had. The Red Legion took them by surprise, humiliated everything Guardians stood for, it was only right to take it as an insult. A month since the Guardians had been rendered fugitives from their own home and their Light ripped away from them, living in hiding and dwindling quickly. A month since a Guardian was sent up on a mission to a command ship and hasn’t been heard back since. A month of suppressed grieving, a month of dying hope.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
He traced the swirls of light on her bare back with his fingers, barely grazing skin but still leaving slight goosebumps in their wake. He will never reach a point where he stops being fascinated by it. With a stifled laugh, the mess of red hair moved as Tirion turned her head towards him, glowing green eyes falling on him.

“Hi…” She mumbled, her smile barely visible in the dark, half of it in the pillow. “Can’t sleep?”

Shaxx let his large hand rest on her upper back. “I see no reason to sleep. Just… thinking about how lucky I am to have you by my side.”

She inched towards him, and rested her head on her hands. Just the way she was looking at him was worth losing hours of sleep for. She bit her lip, thinking. Almost like a child before admitting a misdeed.

“You know… I was terrified when I talked to you for the first time, about the broken arena, and then the following talks after.” She admitted.

“How come?”

“You have a reputation of hitting things really hard, and yelling. The big scary Titan with skulls all around you.” An obvious answer, accompanied by her usual hand gestures. She propped herself up with her elbows to be at eye-level with him. “But then you showed me that there is an actual extremely smart and gentle being underneath that armor. Who’s the lucky one here?”

*He* was.

If it weren’t for her insistence, he would be stuck in a hole. A hole of thinking that he didn’t deserve love, didn’t deserve anything like this, these little tender moments in the middle of the night. Most people would have either died or lost patience with him. Shaxx put out one hand to touch her soft face, as if to make sure in the darkness that she was still there, closing his eyes just for a brief moment as the fatigue was taking over, but he wasn’t going to let it take over. He didn’t want that moment to end.

The Titan opened his eyes again only to find a harsh blue light of a console screen staring back at him.

He reached up a hand to rub his strained eyes, only for it to get stopped by the plate of his helmet. This new situation allowed little time to sit down and rest, even less time to sleep. There was work to do, and by the looks of it his brain has resorted to cruel pranks to tear him away from work and get proper sleep. But who’s to say he won’t have that dream again?

There had to be something to keep him occupied until the morning. There had to be something out there that would push the hauntings away. A month.

“I know, I know!” The Exo’s grating voice filled the shack. “We do the whole thing where we really hate each other, but I’m gonna need you to drop that for a second, alright?” Cayde’s sudden voice caused the Titan to turn around to glare holes into the Exo, saying nothing. That old rusty axe next to Shaxx did make the Exo slightly nervous, so he kept his distance just in case. There was no Ghost to revive him. The Titan has been unleashing his anger on Cabal capital ships and
rookies not fighting to their potential, so there was no speculating as to how he will react to what Cayde has to show.

“No response? Don’t stop surprisin’ people. I need you to do me a favor. It ain’t going to be pretty, but you’re all that’s left.”

Shaxx didn’t even bother to shake his head before returning to the console.

“I don’t have time for it.” He said, dismissively.

He tried to sound commanding and confident but the weariness had taken over his voice long ago. Only thing that surprised Cayde about the Titan’s reaction is that he was actually calmly talking to someone, as opposed to acting as the farm’s public announcement system.

Progress, at least.

“You don’t have a choice here, buddy. I’m going to show you something, and I’m going to need you to tell me the opposite of what I want to hear, get it? This is kinda’ important.” Cayde started to dig through a backpack once he said that, not caring about a response. He was going to do it even if Shaxx pulled out a gun and aimed it at him. It had to be done.

Even if he shot him, it had to be done. Exos were made for getting shot at in the front lines.

Shaxx was the only person that could do this for him.

That Warlock may have ruined Shaxx for him, but she was still Cayde’s friend, one of the precious few that he had. She was still his drinking buddy, she has been the one who has been changing that big idiot – as Cayde calls him - for the better for the last two years.

Drinks at his new makeshift bar in the farm simply didn’t hold the same weight. She always listened. Sometimes provided snark, but always listened. She knew secrets about him that only existed in long forgotten journals.

The world simply felt empty without her. It was all miserably quiet without her, and her misfits. All of them missing with her. Sometimes he can hear the commotion they kept causing at their hangar lounge.

Cayde needed the reassurance that she wasn’t dead.

She was also someone the world desperately needed right then. He also wasn’t the only one who needed the reassurance that she wasn’t dead.

“Oh, take a look at this.” Cayde finally said, getting an immediate grunt as a response. He cursed himself for not hiding the axe. And the shovels, and the remainder of sharp objects Shaxx has surrounded himself with.

“I am going to give you one more chance to scatter before I--” Once Shaxx turned around and saw what Cayde was carefully holding, his shout came to a halt and the anger he was feeling got replaced by numbness, breath stuck in throat.

“You still there?” Cayde waved with his free hand. “This is the part where you tell me what I don’t wanna hear. One of my hunters found it near the City. And I uh…” Cayde stopped for a moment, to collect himself. He couldn’t keep on feigning the humor. Not in that moment. “Ah, just say the damn thing!”
It’s been a month.

A month since the Cabal attacked the Tower, the City, everything they held dear, everything they had. The Red Legion took them by surprise, humiliated everything Guardians stood for, it was only right to take it as an insult. A month since the Guardians had been rendered fugitives from their own home and their Light ripped away from them, living in hiding and dwindling quickly. A month since a Guardian was sent up on a mission to a command ship and hasn’t been heard back since. A month of suppressed grieving, a month of dying hope.

A month of people suddenly believing that there was no her to begin with, that she was just a propaganda icon. That she was made up to inspire people, to represent the good that Guardians do.

A month of slowly putting things back together as the enemy force grew stronger and they were at a complete loss.

Shaxx had pushed all thoughts about her back, avoiding things that would make him think about her. He had to, to be able to focus on his work, to be able to focus on survival, to be able to focus on retribution. Their new location that held no resemblance to the Tower helped. Everything was different. They were no longer up high in the air, they were no longer majestic. They’ve been whittled to the ground and settled on a mud covered farm. There was nothing that reminded him of her.

After the first week of her not being seen anywhere, it was the only choice he could take. For his own sanity and for his work.

Now, Cayde was holding a charred Ghost in his hands. A Ghost with quite the personality, that once upon a time was blue, but has been repainted. The bite marks and scratches from various adventures giving it character. What used to be a light blue eye in the center was now a black, lifeless void.

It was undoubtedly hers. Unmistakably hers.

“Right!? Glad you agree! Got uh… worried there for a second. This can’t be Tir—“

“Don’t.” Shaxx growled, with a gloved, slightly shaking, hand raised to emphasize his point. He knew that the Exo wasn’t there to wallow in his pain, but it didn’t make it any less unbearable.

After a while, it became easier to pretend that she never existed rather than admit to himself that she was dead. At least for a little while, at least until enough time has passed so he can accept it. Deep inside he knew that there was no accepting it. But, there was a possibility for closure, at least. At some point. He couldn’t lie, he couldn’t say her name. Seeing her Ghost was like having a wound ripped open. A wound he’s been trying his damnest to keep closed.

Cayde carefully put the Ghost back into the backpack. “You’re… you oughta talk about her someday.”

Shaxx turned his back to the Hunter without a word, looking through the console, trying to find some more work to do. There was nothing for the remainder of the night. Once the sun comes up, gears will be set into motion for the Redjacks and the Crucible. He found himself wishing for what remained of Dead Orbit to complain so he would have to write a counter-report. Perhaps some requisitions, maybe organize some lessons about swordsmanship for the rookies. Anything.

The Exo wasn’t having any of it.

“Hey!” Cayde shouted at him, yet Shaxx still remained unphased. “For all I care, go ahead and
don’t talk to me! If you so want, you can keep yellin’ at my Hunters until they cry. They’re deadbeats anyway, they probably deserve it! But, don’t pretend that Tirion was never here. She was my friend, too! I know that what you two had doesn’t comp--”

Shaxx cut him off by storming out of the room with clenched fists, towards the forest. The world was lucky that his arc powers are now just a phantom limb. To his relief, Cayde didn’t follow him. Shaxx didn’t need to have his Light to annihilate the world.

He had to get to some place where he wasn’t watched. The Titan couldn’t risk anyone seeing him like that, not in a situation where the leaders had to be strong and unbreakable. They already lost one of the best, if not the best they had. The rest was scattered and disorganized.

Once he was far away from the farm, Shaxx pulled off his helmet and threw it forcefully on the ground, feeling the cold air of the night hit his face. He leaned against an old tree with his arms, shaking fists still clenched. The old helmet sat there lifelessly among the leaves, the one horn poking out.

He didn’t regret the last two years, he didn’t regret opening his heart to her. He just wished he wouldn’t feel this dull, unrelenting ache now. But it all went hand in hand. Shaxx knew this would happen, but he was too smitten and too foolish to not believe her when she promised that she won’t die on him. He knew that it was unfair to hold her to something she said back then, but little could be done when he was desperate for something or someone to be angry at.

The difficult task of turning the pain into anger was taking its toll, whether he liked it or not. She died on him, just like everyone had. She finally became one of those Guardians whose story and legend remained but had become riddled with what ifs.

But, he had to keep it together. At least for a little while longer. At least until they take the fight to Ghaul, and he can unleash it on him. At least until it’s been long enough until it doesn’t hurt any more.

Hurt was such an inadequate word to describe it. Hurt wasn’t term that could describe what a person feels after having everything they have and love torn away from them in mere moments.

With a deep breath, he picked up the helmet and put it back on, steeling himself with a deep breath. He needed to stand tall. Let this loss fuel the fire and take his own advice.

For her.

The Red Legion greatly underestimated the fury of someone whose entire world was taken.

> “Your significant goliath is agitating the Cabal again. He’s got damn Cabal bombs and got one of their capital ships. Wait... three Cabal ships? I know of one, but there are more?! Anyway, gettin’ sidetracked. My Hunters no longer want to go near him because he yells so much. A rookie complained that he can’t concentrate while being yelled at, Shaxx YELLED at him to relax. Was... fun. Come and calm him down, would ya? Then come grab a drink! Managed to save your favorite. It was the brown stuff you liked, right?”

UNABLE TO SEND MESSAGE TO THE RECIPIENT

Cayde sighed at the blocky white letters against the blue glowing surface. How could such emotionless text feel so mocking and insulting?

?> Try again.
UNABLE TO SEND MESSAGE TO THE RECIPIENT

?> Try again.

UNABLE TO SEND MESSAGE TO THE RECIPIENT

? > Try again uh… Vanguard authority class three?

UNABLE TO PARSE “Try again uh… Vanguard authority class three?”

?> “Hey, Hawthorne, you’re still up for that bet? Same terms. This may also be a test message. Ignore this.”

MESSAGE SENT TO HAWTHORNE, S.

He tried again. Maybe it was some weird censor. Maybe they have implemented a thing that prevents mentioning Cabal in text messages.

?> “Hey! Come and grab a drink with your favorite Exo. I’m on the third floor of one of the sheds. You won’t believe what the goliath did. Need your help again before he blows us up. When you were around he yelled encouraging things. That was nice. Let’s go back to that.”

UNABLE TO SEND MESSAGE TO THE RECIPIENT

“Oh, right…” Cayde muttered to himself, pushing the datapad away. “You’re dead! Completely forgot.”

He poured himself another drink. Her Ghost was right next to him on the old wooden table, and it will be with him until further notice. He wasn’t going to let the others dissect it for recordings. Only person that should have it wants to impale him with a sword.

“Where should I begin?” Cayde sighed. “The dumb space rhinos attacked… you were there for it. Where did we leave off, me telling you that I have a date with whoever was behind it all and that it’d be a short date? Boy, was I wrong about that. You… you wouldn’t be surprised, actually. Nothin’ ever surprises you…” Cayde spoke to the empty room, almost anticipating a response.

None came.

But, as with many things, it didn’t stop him from talking.

“I went on this glorious adventure where I stole some things from the Vex, and I-- damn it, you wouldn’t believe this either… fine, I got caught stealing from the Vex and some people had to free me. Happy?” He could almost see her raising a red eyebrow next to him. “I got stuck in some time-Vex-too-complicated-for-words-whatever loop, accompanied by – wait for it - an AI with multiple personalities. You woulda liked her. She’s a bit mean sometimes, but you get used to it.”

The datapad vibrated slightly and he immediately scrambled for it, astonished at himself that he was surprised that it was just a message from Hawthorne wondering what the message in the middle of the night was about. He shook his head and continued.

“Point is Guardian, if you’re out there somewhere, come back to us. These rookies? They are good, even without the Light. But they’re not as good as you. I know that once we tell you the situation you gonna do the whole thing you usually do, where you look all annoyed and just want a vacation. But, come back for just five minutes, alright? You won’t need to do much, just get Zavala and Ikora here. Maybe ten minutes, so we have time to catch another drink. Can't let this smuggled
liquor go to waste n' all.”

Nothing about the night changed once he finished speaking into the night sky that was visible through a sizable hole in the roof. Cayde knew it was fruitless, never believing in that kind of thing. Maybe he was just imagining things, but he swore that the birds in the old trees suddenly sang louder. He remembered that Tirion had a thing for birds, he only wished that he’d remember what bird it was. Maybe they just wanted peace and got annoyed by his rambling.

He settled with that.
Shaxx felt a weight on his shoulder when he woke up, and slowly opened his eyes to find a head of red hair leaning on him. Judging by her steady breathing, Tirion was still peacefully asleep. He looked around his surroundings, finding a datapad on the carpet that had managed to slip from his hands when he fell asleep. He couldn’t reach for it without waking her up. He didn’t want to, either.

He let his mind wander, instead. She came over the night before, asking if she could have the couch to sleep on. Her ship was undergoing some much needed repairs after a crash. The joint apartment of the misfits was unbearable to be in, especially if she’s going to have to meet Saladin the next day.

Instead, they spent half of the night talking. He told her more stories about Twilight Gap, about Ahamkara hunts, loving how her glowing eyes widened with every word told. But she still had the upper hand with the details of how she killed Oryx, how they bent the Darkness itself to their will and toyed with Oryx’s atrocities to kill him, constantly flailing with hands for emphasis. There were those moments in-between their stories when the room fell silent, eyes became locked. Moments where it would be so easy to lean in and pick up where they left off after she killed Oryx.

“People are preparing the list of names for the memorial thing.” It was Cayde’s voice that pulled Shaxx out of it. Why was it always him? The sounds and smells of the farm quickly returned to the Titan’s senses, down to the rookies kicking a ball around outside and laughing amongst themselves. “Thought you should know.”

“I didn’t want to know.” Shaxx said, not having the strength to yell at him to go away.

“I took her and her friends’ names outta it. Thought you should know.” Cayde started to walk away, expecting no more responses from the Titan.

“Why are you doing this? What do you have to gain from this?” Shaxx demanded to know, watching the Hunter stop.

“Not much, if I’m gonna be honest.” Cayde shrugged. “I kinda miss Alva. She was tonna fun. Bugging ya’ is no longer fun since the person that loves you more than you love murder isn’t here to prevent… well, murder.” Cayde eyed the axe carefully, hand almost at his gun in preparation.

“And besides, Tirion doesn’t die. She just gets very angry. Remember Oryx? Even Zavala didn’t want to risk getting set on fire.”

Despite the thought filling him with disgust, Shaxx agreed with Cayde. Tirion had this strong tendency to be invincible. In a game of toying with death, she was a fiend to be reckoned with. She has survived without Light before, deep in the Dreadnaught. She could do it again.

He just wished that she was here.

“I can’t believe I am saying this…” Shaxx looked down at the Exo. “Thank you.”
“Now you just made it weird. I liked it way better when we hated each other.”

Shaxx rolled his eyes. “Shut up and go away, then. The world is burning.”

Cayde happily obliged and made his way up the rusty stairs, to where Hawthorne was standing, looking over the horizon, at the long forgotten shard of the Traveler resting in the distance.

“So, Poncho, what’s the situation?”

“Same as yesterday, Cayde. Still need someone to get me a booster. Not many people are willing to traverse through a horde of Fallen and we can’t afford to lose more people. No word about your friend, either.”

Cayde figured as much. As long as they don’t find a corpse there is still hope, he told himself. They just had the entire solar system to comb through for Tirion, remainder of the Vanguard and Tirion’s misfits. He had his suspicions where Ikora might be, at least.

“For my Glimmer, that Warlock ran away. We wasted enough time on this. We need to focus on setting on a comm network so we can move on.”

Cayde shook his head. “Tirion is many things but she ain’t someone that runs away like that.”

“Seems like a convenient excuse to me, as her whole team is gone with her. We’ve waited long enough.” Hawthorne sighed. “Look, all I care about is protecting the people at the fa—you’re not even listening, are you?”

“Nope.”

Truth be told, he zoned out when Hawthorne diminished Tirion to “that Warlock”.

“Well, while you’re not listening, people are dying. I’m going to go talk to Devrim.”

As he watched Hawthorne walk away, he got another reminder why he missed Tirion: she wanted to talk to him. Hawthorne was right, though. They had to do something. Problem was, they were powerless to do it. He leaned against one of the wooden pillars, hoping that it won’t send the entire place crashing down. Cayde could of course attempt the weird thing Warlocks do, where they gaze off into the distance and contemplate things and subjects that he tunes out during meetings. He tried looking at the birds, the Shard, the Kestrel jumpship which was running on fumes wobbling in the air in the distance before coming to a crashing, loud halt on the field not too far away. The ground almost trembled from the impact.

He had to rewind it in his head a couple of times to fully realize what happened.

Some of the Redjacks were already rushing towards the site, guns out, making sure that they weren’t under attack. The inhabitants were worrively shouting about something, wondering what was going on, some panicking about the Cabal finally finding them. Cayde had to force himself to snap out of it, and swiftly ran down the stairs to join the rest of the commotion. Shaxx was already at the wreckage, ordering his Frames around to point pulse rifles at anything that moved. The ship looked mostly unscathed, and the smoke had ceased coming out of it. The last thing they needed to worry about was a big fire.

Tirion was fond of crashing ships and setting things – including herself – on fire. At least she was reckless with definite confidence. Sunsingers, the only ones who might give Hunters a run for their Glimmer when it comes to absolute lunacy. Not getting hopes up was difficult for everyone in that moment. Worst case scenario, another refugee. Best case…
A metal hatch opened and a blur slowly emerged from it, unnoticed by most. It was the crackling sound that caught everyone’s attention and caused breath to hitch in Shaxx’s throat, hands loosening on the gun he was holding. The stealth cloak slowly fell apart, unveiling red hair that was in a bigger disarray than he had ever seen, the pale face, battered and torn armor. She was barely standing, using last of her strength to get out of the ship.

“Told ya!”

Shaxx ignored Cayde’s boasting as he dropped his rifle, and covered the distance between him and her in a couple of strides, quickly catching her when she collapsed forward. Tirion felt lighter than he remembered, bruises visible through the holes of her armor, knuckles bruised and bleeding even past the fabric of the glove. She smelled like gunpowder and Cabal machinery. She was still breathing, but unconscious.

All the sounds, movements, cheers and questions around him didn’t matter, they could be dealt with later. He didn’t even hear any of it. What happened after the picked her up and carried her towards the sickbay was a blur. He didn’t care if people even knew about it anymore. All political reasons for keeping it a secret died with the Tower. Making sure that she won’t stop breathing trumped over it all.

With the help of Tyra, they managed to find a secluded room for Tirion. Putting her in the sickbay with the others could make things worse, as she had enough open wounds to worry about. The medics mended her injuries. Tirion made their work easy as the bullet holes had no bullets in them, and worst of it all was a shattered shoulder. As Shaxx waited impatiently, he read the reports from the Redjacks and Cayde about her ship to keep himself busy. She had enough explosives and bullets to retake the City by herself, cyphered maps, journals, locked boxes. Integral parts of the ship simply **missing** to be able to fit more weaponry.

He never doubted her skills. He also knew how she operated, and strongly **recommended** to others to leave the ship alone until she wakes up, no matter how much he wanted to seize the weapons and explosives for himself.

As to how she ended up in the right place at the right time was a mystery. Shaxx would rather hear about it from Tirion instead of having Tyra try to decipher the maps.

The answers could wait for later. She was alive now and it’s all that mattered to him. Her charred Ghost was on the nightstand next to her, placed there by Cayde as its rightful Guardian has returned.

“It could be the loss of the Light, but I don’t ever remember having a long conversation with the Lady Guardian. Always in a hurry to save the world and get questions answered.” Tyra said, lighting up some candles to bring more light into the dim room. “It’s really quite strange to see her this still.”

Shaxx just wanted to throw the helmet off and rub his eyes to stay awake, questioning himself as to why he even keeps wearing the helmet and finding the answer within seconds. Not only would it cause a commotion, it was a **privilege**. A special secret between him and Tirion.

“You haven’t fallen asleep on me, have you?” Shaxx shook his head almost begrudgingly at Tyra’s attempts to mother him. He was leaning against the wooden wall, arms crossed, out of reports to read and out of distractions. The Redjacks had their orders.

“People that wear helmets all the time tend to get away with a lot of things, all the stories I could tell you about the meetings the Iron Lords had. How long have you been awake?”
He sighed inaudibly, just wishing that he would be left alone.

“Can’t say that I’ve slept since the war began.”

“Well, I have enough experience to know that there is no point in asking which war a Titan is talking about.” Tyra returned her attention to Tirion, pulling a worn blanket over her.

“And you can stop that fidgeting. The Lady Guardian will be fine. For now, she needs rest. Whatever it is she went through put her through a lot of stress as it is. We shouldn’t add to it.”

Despite her being right, he was still about to argue about being called *fidgety*, but was quickly intercepted. “My eyes may be old, but they are not broken. If you find someone that can make a *pupil of Lord Saladin* worry that much, you should cherish that one-of-a-kind thing. Especially in these dark times.”

With those parting words and a wrinkly smile, Tyra walked out of the room and shut the door behind her with a click, leaving the two alone.

Shaxx slowly walked over to the bed, still not quite believing what he was seeing, still not believing that she was *alive*. Almost anticipating her to disappear any moment. Tirion still had quite a bit of fighting left to do, but at least now she was safe. He sat down on a chair next to the flimsy bed, and removed his helmet with trembling hands to see better. She still looked beautiful, the familiar flickers of light still dancing on her skin, but there wasn’t a hint of peacefulness on her face. He hated seeing her like that, seeing that anguish on her.

He grabbed one of her bruised hands, interlacing his fingers with hers.

“You fight to win, Hivebane. So fight.” Shaxx murmured into her hand. “Please.”

Chapter End Notes

So there have been questions about the timeline, and yes it does shift to the AU territory just a bit but honestly I just needed an excuse to write Shaxx and Cayde banter. And it will make sense later. Bungie doesn't make a whole lot of things clear, either. :|

Thanks for all the kudos/comments. I promise I am not evil.
The Darkness

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

How long has she been wandering through the darkness?

Days? Weeks? Months? Maybe even years?

Fell asleep at the wheel, saw a vision of a shard, a forest, something she’s too tired to decipher now. Then familiar arms, followed by heavy darkness. Heavier than the one in the Hellmouth, heavier than anything the Hive are capable of conjuring.

There was no way to measure the time in this strange realm. In the darkness she felt no pain, just weariness, numbness. Voices around her were so loud they sounded like gentle whispers. One of the voices sounded like a bird, a gentle song, so she followed it. When she strayed off too far they brought her back to where she begun, yelling at her to try again.

Reset again, as if it was some twisted gauntlet, a trial. A force that refused to let her go the wrong way by her side.

There was a lot of time to think while wandering aimlessly.

Tirion thought about the Tower, the home she won’t ever be able to return to. The home she failed to defend. She had the strength to kill gods and defend the world but could not save her home. Couldn’t save the City, but instead failed spectacularly. Humiliated, kicked off of a command ship to fall to her death.

The Traveler caged, the very fundamentals of what makes a Guardian a Guardian ripped away from their world, leaving behind wandering husks, seeking a purpose. Tirion saw it as no different than Taken wandering the ground of any given planet in the system, trying to find a purpose without their King to lead them. Lost, disoriented, scattered.

Except now, the Taken had more power than the Guardians.

Even with the Traveler’s light, most Guardians were pretty mediocre. Without the Light, they are absolutely worthless. The Cabal knew that. Majority of Guardians that were still alive didn’t come close to the caliber of the misfits and her. The truth was that Tirion and her misfits weren’t that tough, either. Huritt was right. They survived and gained their reputation just because dead and doomed Guardians left tools for them to use. Praedyth, Pahanin, Kabr, Eris, Mara. If it weren’t for those names laying the foundation, the merry band of misfits wouldn’t have achieved success in anything.

Does might, power and honor even matter when you’re dead? If you would stand in front of a thousand dead Guardians and ask them if honor actually matters, what would happen? What would they say?

She thought about how she lost her friends. Her Ghost, her misfits. How she got torn away from the world, torn away from them. The misfits were still alive, they were too stubborn to die. It was all her fault that they all got separated. There was no point in regrets in that moment. Nothing could be done besides hoping that eventually, they’ll understand.

Tirion thought about her Titan, heart sinking when realizing what pain she must have put him
through. She had managed to realize his greatest fear.

She felt the force of that door shutting in her bones, the last she saw of him. Everything around them burning aside, she was beyond proud of him. She knew far too well how much he wanted to fight, how long he has waited for an opportunity like this. Instead, even after all of those verbose speeches, he chose to stay behind and protect the weak.

Tirion promised to give the Cabal war, she also promised to not die on him.

The mighty Warlock hurt them all, and now she was all alone.

What a Guardian she was, what a mess she left to follow. It made for a great story to tell, at least. Maybe she should succumb, everyone likes a story where the hero dies in the end and prompts others to fight. People needed to be angry.

Maybe perhaps she deserved this purgatory, this eternal darkness. She couldn’t disagree that it was rather an appropriate way to punish a Guardian. Blind them, throw them in the dark, curse them to wander.

The darkness around her, the darkness seeping into her skin almost made her wish for death. This third option was abominable. There should only be life and death, no limbos in between. She closed her eyes, and followed the sounds of the song. Focusing past the yelling, past the berating. She finally came across a camouflaged door.

Tirion had to shield her eyes from the light when she opened it and stepped in. The light felt like a hammer thrown towards her chest, staggering her slightly but not thwarting her resolve. She had to keep going, no matter what happened. Even if it led to the wrong direction, she wasn’t going to die stagnant.

The dimly lit room resembled the Warlock library but was different, the wood was different, the lights were outdated. The books on the endless shelves were about subjects no longer relevant.

A woman was sitting next to a desk, a thick book in front of her. Her ginger hair a tangled mess up in a ponytail, and green eyes wide in fear. Tirion immediately recognized her. It felt too real to be a dream. There she was, and Tirion felt sadness wash over her.

“Are you… Emma?” She whispered. “Emma Owens?” Tirion asked just to make sure, and the woman nodded, as if too scared to speak.

All Tirion knew of this world is that she didn’t belong there. She needed to go back.

“I think my heart stopped beating.” Tirion said to herself, trying to look through the window but only finding endless darkness on the other side.

“What are you?” Emma asked as Tirion pulled out a chair on the other side of the desk and sat down. She couldn’t be stuck there, she just couldn’t. If her heart actually stopped, she had minutes. There was no speculating how long a minute in this place is in her real world.

Tirion laughed to herself, looking up at the ceiling. It was odd seeing it without a hole.

She never even gave much thought to how she wanted to die, whether it be in battle or old age if there is a day where the Ghosts disappear. She never imagined this, place in some sort of limbo, or hell. Hell would be appropriate, but no brimstone was seen around her.

If they aren’t going to manage to write her out of time, they were going to stop her heart. She was
She should have used the explosives sooner. Maybe that could have prevented this.

Tirion looked over at the frightened woman. There are so many things she could tell her, give so many warnings, tell her about things both unspeakable, strange and miraculous. How she needs to be happy, how she needs to cherish every moment. Tell her the truth. Tell her the truth of how she and her world will have to senselessly die for Tirion’s world to exist.

Tirion’s world, despite it being cruel and demanding, it was the world where she had her friends, a life, where she found love. It was a broken world but it was her home. A home she would love to reclaim, to bring a semblance of peace to it. People were waiting for her. The Golden Age was already doomed, nothing could be done to stop the oncoming collapse. But her world still had hope, still had a future, still had potential.

Hence why she couldn’t tell her the truth. This meeting was in Emma’s journal, its ending unwritten, constantly changing. It did actually happen, and it will keep happening. A turbulence in the timeline, a dot of static. An event that is meant to happen over and over.

“This is how I end up here…” Tirion muttered, taking out one of the books from the shelf and flipping through it absentmindedly.

Either one or both had to die.

Emma could escape the Darkness and carry on living and die of old age in the Dark Age. In this moment, the Warlock could finally change it, to let Emma live out her life and not die before she got to fully experience life, like her brother. She could use her skills, to help people, to save lives, to fulfill her promise to her brother. But it would doom the world. Crot will annihilate the Guardians, Oryx would finish them off. SIVA would break loose.

That’s what they wanted. They knew how much Tirion wished for justice for the innocent girl. Maybe they were just desperation to find someone to blame for this.

Things could also remain unchanged. She could enjoy the view and drive, and die, all alone. All alone in the Darkness. Then Tirion would be born, centuries later, and would lead the world into an Age of Triumph. She still scoffed at the name.

But, all of Emma’s knowledge, kindness, work, dying with her. The memory of her brother, the one she fought and lived for, dead with her. Memory of her loving and supporting parents, dead with her.

Tirion always hated choices and dilemmas. It was just easier to be a gun for hire and let others make the hard choices. The decision was made long ago. She wasn’t going to change it.

“So… how did your heart stop beating?” Emma asked. “I could help you.”

Tirion cracked a sad smile. “Darkness finally caught up to it. I was on borrowed time, anyway. Thought I could blow everything up and go out in a Guardian blaze of glory. I needed a fitting end.”

“You sound like you’re someone important.”

“Guess I am.” Tirion whispered. “I should get my heart beating and fight at some point soon. If I don’t, you died in vain and I’m not going to let that happen. I promise.”

Chapter End Notes
Gaaah I give up with organizing this thing. I tried to sort out the series thing but backed out in fear of deleting the whole fic. Earn Your Honor is the first part, this one is the second. I'll figure it out someday. AO3 menus are confusing. :|
The sound of someone gasping filled the room, and it took her a moment to realize that the sound came out of her own mouth. Tirion felt warm, confined, felt at home. A stark contrast from the cold darkness she had been wandering in. She opened her eyes to find two wide bloodshot eyes staring down at her. Familiar ones, deep brown ones. His mouth was slightly agape in disbelief, but otherwise still as a statue.

“Hello…” Her mumble was a raspy one, but it was the best sound the Titan has heard all month. His arms were around her, holding her close. She could hear his frantic heart pound with the ear that was pressed against his chestplate. “I promised that you won’t get rid of me.”

She got no response from the usually outspoken Titan. Shaxx couldn’t process anything, and putting that nothing into words was out of the question. She was alive. That’s the only thing that kept on echoing in his head. She was alive.

Shaxx’ arms tightened around her and he leaned in and kissed her without warning, as he let it all overwhelm him. The kiss was intense, filled with need to further reassure himself that his Hivebane was alive. Tirion felt tears that weren’t her own stain her face when they kissed, felt his trembling fingers in her hair. The hand traveled to the back of her head, pulling her even closer into him, other hand tensing up on her waist. He needed her. Shaxx didn’t want to go through that again. Didn’t want a repeat of the soul crushing pain that hit him when she stopped breathing. There was no Ghost to revive her, and he was completely powerless to stop it, powerless to do anything.

Tirion was the one who had to break it, letting him lean his forehead against hers. The Titan still had his eyes shut, as if afraid that she’ll be gone again if he opens them. That his brain was playing an evil trick on him, twisting his desires. He was used to people dying around him, but not used to someone coming back from a final death.

She kept her promise, after all.

“Hey…” Tirion whispered, and reached up a hand to wipe the wetness on his cheeks with her sleeve, trying to ignore the pain radiating in her shoulder. “I’m here now. Are you still there, big guy?”

Shaxx smirked slightly at the nickname before letting out a shaky breath, finally allowing himself to breathe.

“Don’t ever do that again.” He whispered, slowly opening his tired eyes to look at her, a hand still on her face. “If you were anyone else, I would both commend and scold you for it. But you… you…”

A flash of a smirk appeared on her own face “Your face is still something that you shouldn’t hide behind a helmet.”

Shaxx shook his head, not sure whether to laugh or not. Too happy to hear her voice to be livid at what she was saying. “I don’t care. You are not allowed to die in front of me and then flirt.”

Tirion looked around at her surroundings, at what she could see that wasn’t blocked by a Titan next to her. She found herself lying on a bed, in a worn down wooden room. She winced as she
tried to sit up straight, both her rib and shoulder burning. Luckily, a pair of arms that were unwilling to let go of her were there to help.

“How long have I been out?”

“A little over a day.”

Relief washed over her, she thought she had been out for far longer than that. The trek through the dark realm felt like it lasted for months. Maybe she still had time. She was days ahead of schedule, and the shard was now a sudden priority. She had time, but moving was now too painful. The landing was too rough.

“Where did you go, Tirion?” Shaxx asked, slowly turning her soft face to face him. “What happened on that command ship?”

Two questions she didn’t want to answer, the concern on his face made it even more difficult.

“That grand Cabal said some things that held no basis in reality and kicked me off the ship. I then plummeted to the ground.” Trying to move while explaining led to slight dizziness. His arms slowly moved to let go of her and let her sit up properly, but one hand still held on to hers.

“Dominus Ghaul.” Shaxx stated, acid in his voice.

“They caged the Traveler, and then I lost my Ghost. Everything after that is a… haze.” She was bad at lying. Telling the truth would waste more time. Part of it was true, it was disorienting. Losing her Light and her Ghost went beyond losing immortality, she lost a friend, lost a part of her. It felt like Ghaul cut off her arm. She felt wrong, incomplete. She searched the area around the Tower for hours, to no avail. Tried calling out, but it was difficult without alerting more Cabal. Back then, she wasn’t in a good state to fend them off.

Shaxx trusted her enough to not ask questions. She’ll tell about it when she’s ready, and she didn’t need more stress put on her.

“Well, lucky for you Cayde decided to do something decent for a change.” Shaxx reached out for something just out of her sight, and carefully brought it to her.

It laid there in his large hand, charred and broken, but still familiar. She took her Ghost with a trembling hand, knowing that in that very moment she cashed in a lifetime’s worth of luck. Tirion examined it closely, there was still the faintest blue ring in his eye, flickering, holding on to stay alive. But, awakening him now would probably kill him. More reasons to investigate that shard.

“Wait, Cayde made it here?” She looked around some more, scouring every inch, a plethora of questions consuming her. “What is here exactly?”

“It’s a farm.” Tirion raised an eyebrow. “In the month since the attack, the Vanguard scattered. Survivors regrouped at this farm, and been trying to take it from there, with little success. Insult to injury was added when somehow Cayde got here.” Tirion has never heard him sound this drained, even after the busiest of Crucible days. She decided it was best not to tell that she was partly responsible for freeing Cayde, at least for now.

She just didn’t have the heart to let Nessus get obliterated.

At the very least, it was a relief that the chickens she has been hearing outside weren’t hallucinations. Questioning reality wasn’t anything she needed. Tirion still had questions, but they could wait, and could be answered by other people. Shaxx was struggling to keep his eyes open,
not having slept in days.

“You should get some sleep, Shaxx.” He shook his head, wearily, stubbornly. His eyes lidded against his will. “I’ll be back when you wake up. You’re not a Frame.”

Shaxx found himself too tired to argue, exhaustion consuming him. He wanted to stay awake and stay with her for a little while, but it had reached a point where he simply couldn’t. At least now he could sleep peacefully. The two carefully shifted positions until she was out of bed and he was lying on his back, and she made sure to grab her Ghost so he wouldn’t get crushed. She secured the little bot in her backpack, along with some armor someone had left next to the bed. The armor looked more like assorted pieces of fabric that could be made into proper armor, but it was better than what she was wearing now.

A hand grabbed hers to stop her from leaving, making her turn around. He clutched onto it as if it was a lifeline he was afraid of letting go of.

“Come back safe.” He mumbled. “You… you are completely impossible to deal with, but I love you, Hivebane.”

Tirion smiled for what felt like the first time in a month. That smile, the one that always filled him with warmth, the one that was the only thing in the world that was capable of disarming him. The smile she could easily control the world with.

“I love you, too.”

Chapter End Notes

☞ (OrDefault) ☞
The shard.

Walking in the real world was heavier, as now there was a moderate amount of pain applied to it that she had forgotten about. Her legs were fine, but breathing was a challenge with the broken rib. She gritted her teeth and focused her eyes on the shard. She needed weapons, which she could get from her ship, assuming that it hasn’t been picked clean. Absorbing the rustiness and all the moss of the farm could wait for another time. She’d rather not face that reality, thinking about reality was too frustrating.

How did they get diminished to this?

Tirion wasn’t going to let herself be a fugitive. She wasn’t going to let herself be a fugitive for the hundreds of dead Guardians she saw on her travels, nor for the innocent people that were killed by the Collapse. The dead deserved better than that. She saw one of them in passing, one of the Red Legion leaders. He donned all red, breastplate draped with dead Ghosts, wearing them as a necklace. The sight of it filled her with rage. She promised herself that the being that kills that monstrosity before she gets to do it will be burned alive. They’ll get none of her mercy.

That one was hers to kill.

Last time she checked, the cage they’ve been putting around the Traveler was halfway done. Rumors of a sun destroyer floated around. They had less than a month to fix it. No. She wasn’t going to let panic overwhelm her. Tirion was responsible for part of the hysteria, but only knowledge she had of this farm was finding out that it was a myth. Perhaps it was on purpose, so the Cabal wouldn’t find them. Everyone who fled was being hunted. Everyone who weren’t executed were being hunted. Tricking the world into thinking she was dead was the only way she could survive. Acting grand before it was time for her blaze of glory would have only made things worse.

At least that’s what she convinced herself.

As for Ghaul, he was just arrogant, borderline nonsensical. It was his friend that she had her sights on. Ghaul was just a pawn, and he didn’t know what he kicked off his ship.

She wasn’t weak.

She has been acquainted with the fear of death for a long time.

As for deserving the power she was given? Ghaul just showed ignorance with what he spat. No matter how many qualms she had with the Traveler, she understood its point. The Light wasn’t a gift for the worthy to wield it. It was a last chance given to a dying species. Humanity didn’t fall to their knees and beg for it, humanity didn’t sacrifice people, they didn’t conquer solar systems to show their worth.

Humanity just died.

Humanity was chosen because a song of their sun made the Traveler feel joy.
Ghaul simply didn’t understand that. The Cabal do not understand *simplicity*, the cabal do not understand that some things don’t have a pattern. They don’t understand that many things just happen without reason or a plan behind them. They don’t understand acts of *kindness*.

Everything must be engineered to perfection.

Difference between them and the Vex was simple: the Vex do not *feel*. The Vex do not have *morals*, whether good or bad. They just follow a pattern. They are unable to lose a war due to personal feelings or vendettas, unlike humans and the Cabal.

Once Tirion is done with them, then maybe the Cabal will see what it’s *truly* about, as she has no intentions to leave a single Cabal standing.

Becoming their Darkness was the only way to go. Annihilating them until the Traveler takes pity on them.

That was her *new* plan.

Tirion just needed answers first. Then, the Cabal will get what they rightfully deserve. She arrived at her crashed ship mostly unnoticed, praying that the insides of it would be untouched. Tirion only had a couple charges left of Alva’s stealth cloak. It wasn’t worth wasting it on this.

“She’s awake and--- Hey, Tirion!” A familiar voice shouted in the distance, and she muttered a curse under her breath. Would things be less annoying if she wouldn’t had sent some people to rescue him? She hurried up and opened the hatch to her ship; some items were misplaced, as if they’ve been picked up and put down again. Nothing more than that. *Small victories*. She quickly scrambled for a hand cannon and the bullets for it. Wasn’t her type of weapon choice, but for the last month she was left with little choice.

“Guardian! Where d’ya place your goliath?” The voice was now very close, and she peaked her head out to see Cayde, finding him standing there with his arms outstretched. “Hugs?”

“I don’t have time for this, Cayde.” Tirion holstered the weapon and reached for her trusty sidearm. Where she was going is dark, so she’ll most likely find more Fallen. The Hive had mostly retreated, so she didn’t need to worry. She needed *one* more weapon. Only assault rifle she had was mangled.

“No hugs. Alright.” Cayde sounded disappointed, peeking into the ship. He was almost heartbroken at the sight of the destroyed MIDA. His favorite part of overseeing her missions was hearing the sound of that beautiful gun. After a prolonged period of silence and her gearing up without saying anything, Cayde continued on.

“Isn’t it customary to y’know hug friends you haven’t seen in a month?” Silence still. “Speaking of that, what gives with that? Got any good stories to tell? You’ve got some impressive weaponry, there.”

Tirion shut the hatch with such force it made Cayde back away a couple of steps. There was no getting her ship to run, with the amount of fuel she wouldn’t even get the ship flying. Walking wasn’t an option. *Think.*

“I’ll tell you all if you can get me a ship that works. I need to get to the shard.” Tirion swiftly aimed her gun at the hooded woman walking up behind Cayde, and lowered it when realizing that it was a friendly.

“Leavin’ so soon? Not even a drink before you leave for the creepy forest?” Cayde said. “I might
have grabbed some ‘pain remedies’ for ya’ before we uh, left the Tower.”

“I need that shard, Cayde.” Tirion repeated, almost pleaded. It hurt to even speak, she wasn’t going to die a final death a second time. It’s a miracle in itself that she has survived this far without dying earlier. Some twisted force of nature brought her back to life. She wasn’t going to complain.

“If you don’t mind putting that gun down… There is nothing good in that place. It’s a dark, corrupted, forest. There is a reason it’s called a Dead Zone.” Hawthorne finally spoke. “Not a place you want to go poking around.”

Tirion rolled her eyes. “I’ve poked a Hive god’s dream realm with a rocket launcher, I think I’ll be fine.” She blinked a couple of times in confusion before continuing on. “Who are you to question my judgment?”

Cayde cleared his throat, quickly stepping in between the two women before it got heated.

“Tirion, Hawthorne. The reluctant leader of this whole farm ordeal. That feathery friend is Louis up there.” He briefly pointed at the falcon and then turned to Hawthorne. “Poncho, Tirion. Usually not this snappy. She’s kinda nice sometimes. But, I know I’m statin’ the obvious here, she’s under a lot of stress right now so whatever you do, do not stare into her eyes. Keep your distance.”

Cayde gave a thumbs up to Hawthorne as he explained it. “If worst comes to worst, just shout something bad about the Crucible, and Shaxx should get here in seconds to handle it. Callin’ it a sports arena usually works.”

Tirion found herself at a loss for words at the elaborate introduction. “… What?”

“Er… Nothing.” Cayde followed his own instructions and looked at the nearest chicken walking about, just to have something to look at, avoiding eye contact with the Awoken woman. When the silence got a bit too long, he attempted to whistle himself out of it.

There was never any point in arguing with a Guardian, someone with a status like her even less. Hawthorne has heard enough about that Guardian to know to not even bother. They will always run by their own rules. Heeding orders from a civilian was out of the question.

“You Guardians have a weird idea of a good time.” Both Cayde and Tirion nodded. “Ah, well. Louis and I know plenty about trusting your gut. So I’m not about to stop you. I got enough to deal with here.”

Tirion was about to take off out of habit, but she quickly stopped and turned around, realizing she forgot an important detail. The old Tower hangar wasn’t there. “Got a ship that I could borrow that isn’t filled with… questionably acquired… screw it. Bombs. My ship is filled with… bombs.”

There was no good way to explain any of it in that moment. But to be honest, they didn’t deserve an explanation. They were most likely smart enough to figure out that the bombs were disassembled.

“Check one of the landing pads. They might have something for you.” Tirion was gone halfway through the sentence, leaving behind a confused Hawthorne. Tyra wasn’t kidding when she said that the Guardian was always in a constant hurry.

“She uh, does that. You’ll get used to it.” Cayde said, watching Tirion dart over to the landing pads.

“Okay. I just can’t help but ask: what’s the story behind her and Shaxx? Back when he was helping
us out he seemed like too much of a hardass to even look at someone fondly. I think he almost punched Devrim for having a similar dialect.”

Cayde chuckled. “Remind me to tell the story once I get my Light back.”

“Why then?”

“No reason. Besides the obvious one: dying is more enjoyable when you have a little buddy to revive ya’.”

The ship took off, rather wobbly at first but then steadied itself and flew towards the shard.

“Makes me curious how she’s planning to shoot a gun with a broken shoulder.” Hawthorne said to herself.

Cayde laughed, preparing himself for the joke. “Probably the same way she netted Shaxx: She’s ambidextrous.”

Hawthorne didn’t even react and started to walk towards her post. “Oh come on, Tirion woulda laughed at that joke.”

When traversing through the old caves, Tirion felt loneliness like no other. Even after a month without her Ghost, she still found herself starting to speak only to remember she won’t get a chipper response back. She begged for more Fallen to show up so that the silence wouldn’t consume her, she would rather be back in the darkness.

Nothing could replace the commentary, the conversations the two had. She had absolutely no qualms with losing her powers, compared to the sadness she felt over losing a faithful companion.

The Fallen she met were part of a new faction, she couldn’t tell if she was much weaker or if they had gotten stronger and more agile. Perhaps both.

Worst part now was the pain. She decided not to indulge in any “Cayde’s homemade pain remedies” until after the mission, as she needed to be able to aim her gun.

Deep in the caverns, the shard rested, electricity flickering around it. It hummed to her, similarly to Omnigul except more ethereal, more heavenly. Something about this place felt like a harmonious dance between Light and Darkness. Tiny blotches of Light were on it, resembling eyes.

Taking Ghost out of her backpack, she gently held him up to the shard, they were given no response.

Nothing.

Not even a change of the hum, not even a change in the pattern of the way the electricity flickered around it.

Not even a slight change in the distribution of the glowing blotches. If anything, it felt like a mockery.

A silent treatment.

She wasn’t known for taking nothing as an answer. She has come so far and mysterious forces wouldn’t have jumped through time hoops to get her here for it all to just end. She touched the blotches of light, feeling it repel her fingers, as if the shard didn’t want to be touched.
Tirion put Ghost down on a large rock, where she wouldn’t step on him by accident, or crush him with her clenched fists as anger was slowly building up inside of her. She deserved better than this.

It wasn’t going to end there. She’ll make it listen.

“Prometheus, huh?” The Warlock asked the shard. “Punished by the gods for giving knowledge to humanity. Cast into the bowels of the earth. Eternal punishment, caged to a rock. Doesn’t that sound familiar?”

Tirion’s fingers grazed the surface, it wasn’t made out of anything found on earth. It felt like a rock, but smoother, as if it’s been mixed with paper. It felt alive. How could mere material feel alive, like a living, breathing thing? She let her hand rest on the surface, having little plans to resort to hitting it.

She was a Warlock, after all. Whether she wanted to play by some Warlock rules or not. She wasn’t a brute.

“I… I spent so long being angry at you. I still am.” Tirion said, voice shaky. The cave came with crushing sadness. “Humanity was fine before you got here. We thrived, we didn’t need the conquerment of the whole solar system to be happy. Then you came and we died because of you. All the suffering… it’s on you. You doomed us and you dragged us down with it.”

The hums around her became slightly louder, as if it was retaliating. Or maybe responding, but she couldn’t understand any of it. Just like humanity was the only one who seemed to comprehend the feeble concept of being happy.

She continued on. “But no matter how much I loathed you, I was the only one who fought for you. My actions speak for themselves. But you… You don’t have the right to still sit there dormant.”

The ground started to tremble as the humming now made her ears ring. She was either doing something right or doing something horribly wrong.

“Please, let me in. Give my friend back. You damn well know that I’m the only one who can get you out of this. You’ve got the wrong bird.” She closed her eyes, not sure what to brace for. “Please.”

Suddenly, silence.

The wind and the tremors died.

Silence the masters of the Void could only dream of.

It was done commuting with her.

A sudden burst of light and energy pushed her back from the shard until she was sliding on the ground, coughing at the dust that built up and gasping at the pain.

Everything felt hot in that moment. Searing, sudden heat. Then pain. Every sensation quickly got replaced by biting cold.

This was it.

Tirion lost.

When she opened her eyes, she noticed that she was no longer in the cave. She was back on the
Cosmodrone, or rather what used to be Cosmodrone she knows.

This world was full of color, the trees had bright green leaves. The world wasn’t rotten and rusty, lessened to a graveyard. The poles that held up the signs were made out of shiny metal and stood straight, and it held legible blue signs. The bridge extended as far as the eye could see, and on it were thousands of different colored cars. The exodus had just finished, people fighting each other for hopes of still getting on the ships. Ships that will never leave.

Tirion couldn’t hear anything, she didn’t need to be able to hear to know what was said, as she saw the panicking people in a stockpile. They all tried to get away, unfortunately none of them had an original idea.

Her body wasn’t her own, she felt like a wisp, flying freely.

A woman stepped out of the car, red hair enhanced by the setting sun. She clutched a familiar book in her hands. She swiftly climbed up on the roof of her silver car and simply sat down, looking at the sunset.

*Deep breaths.*

*Don’t panic. Panic is pointless.*

*It will all be alright.*

The ground shook, and boiling shadow started to consume it all. The woman tried to be so confident, fearless even. Looking at the Darkness, at death, in its eye and facing it is a skill that carried over.

Tirion didn’t understand why the Traveler showed her this, why it showed her its greatest shame, its greatest failure. The Traveler never meant to condemn everyone like this, especially not in this cruel way. There was something she needed to see, maybe to prepare. But all she saw was death.

The woman ran out of time as the darkness enveloped them all, showing no mercy. Everyone was treated equally and fairly, everyone died. Darkness didn’t discriminate. It will continue to not discriminate for the centuries to come.

She died in front of Tirion. She didn’t want to die. She was so scared despite the fearless appearance, she told about a broken promise. And then… she was no more. She ran out of time, along with thousands of others. There was so much fear condensed in that one moment, enough fear to shake the entire world.

Perhaps that’s what the Light actually was? Colossal amount of fear that manifested into something good?

Didn’t matter now. *Nothing* mattered now.

Tirion was stuck in the dark place again, back to wandering. Back to the infinite loop of two days repeating themselves. Warlocks were destined to get stuck in a loop of talking too much, anyway.

Falling to her knees, she found herself wondering if it was all a dream. Waking up, the shard, her Ghost. It all seemed to be too perfect. She was nothing but a fool for not realizing that her deepest wishes manifested themselves as an illusion to trick her.

But *why*?
This time around there was no one screaming at her, yet no light to follow. It was different.

Instead she heard faint whispers, pleas. A familiar voice, a *robotic* voice. Maybe it wasn’t a dream. But after the month of nothing but defeat, *hope* was a thing she no longer knew.

“Ouch…”

Out of habit, she closed her eyes to concentrate, to find out where the sound was coming from and stood up.

“Is it possible?”

She was getting closer now, at least she hoped. Hope was an illogical thing to rely on, as many Warlocks would say. But she wasn’t a typical Warlock.

“There you are!” The voice was also searching for her.

The sound was now inches from her, and she hesitated before opening her eyes.

“Guardian? Guardian! Eyes up, Guardian!”

*Was* it all a dream?

Shaxx slowly opened his eyes and rubbed the sleep from his eyes with a gloved hand, body aching from sleeping in his armor. It took some effort to sit up. None of it *seemed* like a dream. He could still feel his lips against hers from earlier that day, could still feel the joy when she woke up.

He looked around; the armor that was on a chair before was now missing, and there was a lone datapad left on the nightstand, vibrating slightly as messages kept coming through.

*Hi.*

Don’t worry if I’m not here when you wake up. I’ll be back by the end of day. Won’t tell you where I went because you’re you and you’ll say “Shard this, shard that, what about the Crucible? It all sounds like a Speaker’s tale.”

You know that’s true, so don’t even argue.

I’ll get the Light back. You asked me what could challenge me after Oryx, well.

Also, obligatory: *Hi, Cayde! Stop hacking in and reading things. Just because Haya stole your trashy romance novels doesn’t mean that spying on us is a good replacement.*

> ADDITIONAL MESSAGE RECEIVED, FROM USER ‘ACEOFHEARTS’

>> tell Tirion that SHE’S a trashy romance novel. also, give them back to me. i need them for a… friend.

> ADDITIONAL MESSAGE RECEIVED, FROM USER ‘THIRTYONE’

>> Nah. Am on my way back. Taking the long route. Ghost is very chatty. Have a lot to catch up on. And fall off cliffs for science.
ADDITIONAL MESSAGE RECEIVED, FROM USER ‘ACEOFHEARTS’

>> what do you mean nah--- at least give me the third book back! the second one ended with------
>> how to delete an outgoing message

Her Ghost? Could it actually be true, that she managed to get her Light back? He didn’t put it beyond her skills, but to have it actually happen was unbelievable. Shaxx chuckled silently at her words, before putting the datapad away. Tirion was known for doing unbelievable things, it has almost become her trademark. When told that, she will argue with you. Insist that it was all a walk in the park. Hindsight, she tells him. She refuses to realize how extraordinary she actually is. It was both a source of adoration and immense frustration.

Shaxx put his trusty helmet on before heading outside, getting greeted by the dark of night. He heard soft murmurs in the distance, slowly approaching. Two very familiar murmurs, which slowly took shape in the form of silhouettes.

“No… Little Light.” Ghost’s loud groan somehow covered up Tirion’s lively laugh.

“That’s still not funny!” Ghost complained, flying in front of her as if trying to stop her, doing his best at looking menacing by twisting his shell until he looked like he was scowling. She found a new shell for him; it was made out of smoky metal, with spikes sticking out from it. He did look quite menacing, but it only made her smile bigger. “Stop calling me little!”

“It has nothing to do with you being little. It’s from a poem.” Tirion explained, waiting until her very menacing little light moved away with a grumble and let her walk. “Come on now, it’s a nice poem!”

Reluctantly, Ghost let her talk. “Alright, then. What’s the poem about?”

She shrugged to stretch, wincing at her sore shoulder. “From what I remember, it’s about this strange star in the sky.”

“How original…”

“The story goes that the star shows its little light to a lone traveler in the dark to guide him. The traveler then thanks the star profusely, saying that he would be utterly lost in the darkness without the light it gave him.”

This time around, Ghost stopped to listen, curiosity filling its little blue eye. “Really?”

Tirion turned towards the shard of the Traveler, it was eerily glowing green in the night. There was something entrancing about the shard, having visited it and regained some of her powers only made it more mystifying. Corrupted beyond measure, yet somehow it used the corruption to make itself more powerful.

“No one knows what the star is or where it came from. Just that it’s there, watching over. Showing its little light to people that are lost. Half of the poem is questioning what it is.” She reached out her good hand as she told the story, almost trying to touch it from far away.

“What happened to that traveler?” Ghost pulled Tirion out of her haze. The Warlock let her hand drop and resumed her walking, a curious Ghost following her, not taking his eye off of her. “Did he survive?”

“I like to believe he did. So, no. It has very little to do with calling you little in the literal sense.” Tirion could swear she could hear a happy chirp come from Ghost. “Ya’ goof.” She added
They were at their destination, and she let Ghost take it all in. There was certain charm to the farm. Some mementos of the previous owners remained, such as old tractors and repurposed goalposts. The people who lived here were either recluses, or they abandoned this farm long before the Traveler came. She wondered if any of the people who lived there came back as Guardians, and if any of them managed to find their way back home.

“Am I… Hold on a second, am I hearing chickens?” Ghost asked, its little eye frantically moving back and forth.

“Yeah, it’s best to not ask questions about the chickens.” Ghost grumbled at her response. “Chickens can’t fly, Ghost.”

“Yes they can!”

“Not as high as you. Don’t worry. Little Light.”

Everyone was asleep, or at least trying to get some sleep. Hawthorne, along with Louis, was missing from her post. Cayde was probably drinking, and she will get him that drink someday soon. She hasn’t exactly had the chance to make acquaintance with the rest of the inhabitants. Most were refugees, some were fighters.

She noticed the lone figure looming not too far away. He was incredibly hard to miss. Titans have always been as subtle as hitting someone in the face with a pile of bricks. In Shaxx’s case, it was as subtle as the Twilight Gap battle.

“You always surprise me, Hivebane.” Shaxx greeted with a laugh as she approached him. “It’s a delight.”

“I know I promised to leave the decimation of the entire Cabal Empire to the others, but I just can’t help myself.” Tirion laughed, it was a sound he probably missed the most. She cut her laugh short, and looked around, almost in disgust. “That made me laugh, but I can feel the inconsolable crying coming on.”

Though when she looked up at him, he didn’t see the panic or sadness in her eyes. He saw gears turning, bravery. She let it slowly get replaced by anger, and she looked away from him, turning gaze back towards the shard of Traveler again.

She never found answers while staring at the Traveler. Tirion hoped and prayed for guidance back from it a while back, but after a while she just dismissed it as a dead ship. It just helped to have something to focus her eyes on when thinking. When she visited the shard, it became apparent that it was still alive. It was struggling to communicate, and she was struggling to understand its pleas.

A gentle hand landed on her good shoulder. For now, she just had to take the little blessings, focus on things she can understand.

“The Red Legion won’t be any trouble for you. What you have achieved so far with only your weapon and your Ghost is enough to make me believe in you. Frankly, the other Guardians have no excuse.”

Tirion smiled slightly at the words, but her eyes didn’t light up.

“At least I got my Ghost back. We’re just missing the other two parts of the Vanguard, we’re missing my misfits, and I miss my weapons and armor. We—“ Anger was building up in her voice,
taking a deep breath didn’t seem to help it. She muttered a curse under her breath as she turned to face Shaxx.

“What’s wrong?”

“You know what I saw when trying to escape the Tower? One of them wearing a necklace made out of dead Ghosts. God-slayer, Kingslayer, Cleanser of the Black Garden… Hivebane…” She sighed, it was one too many ridiculous names to list. “I could have easily been one of the casualties, my Ghost could have easily ended up hanging on that string. Death doesn’t care about your work history.”

Talking to him when he had that helmet on was always tough, so she looked at the ground. Taking the anger and unleashing it on the Cabal was what she should do, instead of ranting and waking everyone up. She didn’t need anyone be tired and overworked for this. People needed the all the sleep they could get.

“Don’t hide things from me. I need to know what happened in the Tower.”

His voice was almost frigid, frustrated. Tirion gestured with her hands towards the forest, and started to walk as she tried to get her thoughts together. Part of it was a haze, one too many injuries and a month without the Light scrambled her head. No, it wasn’t a haze, more like completed puzzle, where some pieces aren’t where they should be even though they fit, distorting the picture.

“I was on my own.” Tirion finally said. “I thought everyone else died. I thought you… I-I thought I could get as many explosives as I could possibly fit into a stolen ship and then go out in a blaze of glory, taking Ghaul out.” Tirion stopped to look at the water, look at the small reflections of the glowing moon dancing. Odd how in the most troublesome times, it felt the most serene.

“Can’t imagine what could have stopped you.” Shaxx said. “Your determination is difficult to break.”

She dreaded saying the words. “I heard rumors about some dumb Exo ruining Nessus. Dawned on me that if he survived, everyone must have survived. Got together with a couple of lightless Guardians and had them break him out. Then… nothing. Lost him. Alone…” She swallowed hard before continuing. “Alone again…”

Two strong comforting hands turned her towards him, keeping her from getting distracted.

“I decided that I needed to visit some place in Old Germany before I go out, visit… home. Then I ended up here, on an account of dumb luck and falling asleep at the wheel. That’s the tale so far.”

The arms moved, wrapping around her to pull her into a hug, holding her close. With one free hand he pulled off the helmet and dropped it, to be able to rest his head on top of hers. Shaxx thought that only she was dead. She thought that the whole world was dead. The Tower, the City, her Ghost, her Light, the Vanguard, her misfits, and even him.

He gritted his teeth. Shaxx owed that damn Exo a whole damn bar at this point.

But, he was still conflicted, a feeling he despised.

In her note, she mentioned a Speaker’s tale. There was one phrase that old Warlock kept repeating until it looped in the head of every Guardian that passed through the Tower.

_Devotion inspires bravery, bravery inspires sacrifice, sacrifice leads to death._
Tirion was the very epitome of that particular tale. She thought that the City had died on her and abandoned her, but was still willing to fight for it. She was prepared to die to save a world that has died on her. Shaxx admired that. Devotion such as that was what the greatest Guardians were made of, it was the reason why the Tower stood for as long as it did. It wasn’t some mythical protective light of the Traveler, it was the Guardians.

He knew better than anyone, with the countless months of fighting and dying over and over again alongside his peers to hold the Wall. The Traveler just turned away his gaze during those fateful days.

The confliction struck with the fact that Tirion was also someone that he dearly loved. The thought of praising her for going on a suicide mission felt wrong. Reprehensible, even.

“I’m glad that you made it out alive…” Shaxx whispered, settling on a somewhat neutral conclusion. “Only if more Guardians would be like you.”

He loosened his grip on her when she leaned back to look up at him, needing a change of subject other than her own wallowing and mortality of the world.

“Well. Speaking of that… How’s the Crucible, by the way? If you say that you have Lightless Guardians shooting each other to death…” She tried to make it come off as a joke, but the disappointment was prominent in her voice.

“It has become a solemn affair, but the Crucible thrives. It has been diminished to retraining both Guardians and people that want to tag along.” She noticed how he sounded slightly bitter, but he was the great Lord Shaxx, after all. “It will be back in full force once we get the Light back.”

Tirion feigned a frown, one hand reaching up to his medallion. “And here I was planning to leave some of the Red Legion unscathed so that the two of us could go on a Cabal killing adventure.”

It was very tempting. She moved her arms to put them around his neck, standing up to her toes, a smile finding its way back to her face.

“Only if the recruits could learn to fight by themselves. I don’t think some of them can even read.”

A chirp interrupted the moment, and her Ghost emerged. She wasn’t even annoyed. She wasn’t going to put him in the dark after what he just went through. “Sorry to interrupt, but I have a flood of messages coming from someone who keeps insisting that he’s not dumb and that he wasn’t ruining Nessus. Need your input.”

Chapter End Notes

Since I fail at posting chapters frequently, here is a long one aka Tirion goes trough all emotions in like 4 minutes.

Also Cayde's trashy romance novels are an actual canon to the lore thing.
There have been times I have feared the Darkness would consume us all.

But she -- she was strong.

So many Champions of the Darkness and she conquered them all. She is powerful. But not invincible. She has come so far, but there is farther still to go.

I know you are with us. I hear the echoes. Your voice lingers. Perhaps I can rest now without worry or fear.

Let me hear your voice. Just one more time.

Silence; still.

And silence still.

Nothing but silence.

Keep looking. Keep fighting.

“Guardian!” Tirion snapped awake Ghost’s words, removing her feet from the dashboard in slight panic. “We have reached Trostland. Ready to land.”

For all her talks about others needing sleep, she didn’t follow her own rules, until she once again briefly fell asleep in her ship. It helped to have Ghost handle the ship to avoid another crash and help her with landing it.

The dream had no images, just darkness. Darkness and voices. She knew who the voice belonged to but their identity was absent from her head, just out of her reach. She would rather dream of teeth and nothing else instead of this confusion, instead of being back in that dark place again.

She couldn’t tell if the weird dream was from exposure to the Shard, or the assortment of beverages she mixed for the pain on her way to Trostland. None of them worked, though. Some of Tirion’s injuries refused to let up, didn’t matter how many times she died and got resurrected or how much Ghost tried to heal her. Maybe it was some passive aggressiveness from the Traveler itself because she was mad at it.

Devrim quickly brought them up to speed, explained what has been happening. Last month has been a giant disarray for everyone, and the Fallen are as relentless as ever. The ongoing all-out war between them and the Cabal just made things worse. She didn’t mind Devrim. Despite him lying about having tea, he seemed nice. Though there was something off about him, as every time he spoke she expected him to call the other Cryptarchs degenerate schismatics.

She slowly walked on the old, worn concrete road. Patrolling by foot felt rather foreign. She lost count of the amount of times she tried to summon her Sparrow out of habit.

Making a conscious decision to stop clinging onto the past was becoming an exhausting chore. It was a chore she needed to do.
“Flowers…” Tirion whispered to herself.

Ghost looked back at her. Usually he was the one who was lagging behind, getting distracted. “Hm?”

“There are no flowers here. Just… weeds. According to what I’ve read, this place was known for its flowers.” Tirion picked up the pace quickly. Places to be. “Massive fields. Would love to restore that someday.”

She can’t say that she’s happy that the Tower is destroyed. But maybe it was the only thing that would potentially make the Vanguard and the Guardians realize that they should start rebuilding and moving outward, not be stuck in a prison-esque Tower. She knew far too well that once this is done, they will move back into the Tower and possibly let it all repeat itself.

She hoped for the opposite while knowing it was a losing battle.

Zavala will probably aim for the stars, leaving Tirion wondering how they can even think about reaching for the stars when their own planet is still in shambles, all these centuries later. Guardians wouldn’t even need to do half the work, as they have an endless supply of Frames. A lot of the buildings were still in pretty good condition, they just needed dusting and a bit of remodeling. All she knew was that the misfits wouldn’t be up for the job, as it wouldn’t provide enough adrenaline.

“I still don’t trust that dubious list of ingredients you have me to find. But, your call Guardian.”

Tirion rolled her shoulder, somehow surprised that the pain was still there. She won't last long. “I’ll do anything to get rid of this pain. It’s impacting my work. We can deal with the consequences once Ghaul is dead.”

Ghost scoffed. “You mean consequences that involve cold sweat, near death, nausea, and making the lives of everyone that cares about you miserable?” He was right, always right. But it didn’t help the war effort. She was given little choice. “I can see why you would be up for it.” Ghost added, taking Tirion aback and making her halt in her steps.

“Wait, what’s that supposed to mean?”

The odd silence from Ghost rendered the conversation one sided, and Tirion sighed in frustration. They’ll have time for that conversation later. She tried to get a sense of where she was in the dim ruin they just entered instead. Nothing about the place was charted. There were sounds of groaning, yelling, it all was muffled as if they wore a mask. Their swaying daggers sung, cutting the air. Waiting for her to make a move.

“Fallen.” Ghost whispered. “Was starting to miss those guys.”

Tirion’s response to that was a simple impatient grenade that incinerated most of them, others received a bullet. Fighting them went much smoother this time around with her Light back. There are very few problems that a few surgical grenades won’t fix. Ghost immediately started scanning one of them, suddenly curious.

“Strange. These Fallen aren’t wearing any house colors we’ve seen before.”

Tirion sighed, kneeling down next to one of them. “These ones have to be Uldren’s. And I’m not going to deal with it.” She said as she dug through the loot, trying to find something useful for her weapons and her projects. Maybe she could make a cloak like Shiro’s. Bracelets didn’t establish the same kind of dominance as a cloak does. Hunters always won the sartorial struggles just because of that.
“What makes you think it’s Uldren?” Ghost asked, moving onto a less charred Fallen corpse to scan. “Nobody has heard much from him in about two years. Why would he raise a Fallen army?”

“I found out that these Fallen use technology belonging to House of Kings. Heard he got himself tortured to infiltrate them. He’s raising an army.” She poked one of the Fallen corpses with her weapon. “Who else do we know that likes purple this damn much?”

“My apologies for cutting in, who’s this Uldren you speak of?” A neglected Devrim asked via the comms. It’s been a while since she’s been constantly observed like that, to the point where she forgot that he was listening in on them.

“Oh here we go…” Ghost muttered. This will forever be a touchy subject.

“Look. Awoken, due to whatever happened, seem to possess certain capabilities that go beyond humans and Exos.” Tirion reloaded her weapon and carried on. She still remembers that smug face of his, still wishes Ghost would have dropped the Gate Lord’s head on him. “His special ability just happens to be a massive ego.”

“I think Devrim is more concerned about putting a stop to these Fallen.” Ghost clarified.

“Well, I have no idea where Uldren is. Not like us Awoken have some sort of telepathy between us. Would have solved us a lot of problems when Oryx got here if we did.”

They mowed down a significant amount of those Fallen on their way to the mines, alongside dealing with a discussion between Devrim and Hawthorne about age. Those two didn’t understand why Tirion laughed at them. Guardians have forgotten the definition of aging and normal lifespans. In general, Guardians have forgotten what normal is.

“That elevator should take us to the top of the mines.” Ghost said, earning a slight glare from the Warlock. He knew of the superstition far too well. “I’m sure this one will be fine.” He did his best to not let out a nervous chuckle.

Just to prove a stupid point, Tirion held eye contact with her Ghost when she pressed the button to summon the elevator, not even flinching when a heap of rusty metal came crashing down and scattered dust everywhere. Even Ghost almost started coughing.

“What were you saying, Ghost?”

He turned away from her in an instant. “We’ll have to find another way up to Hawthorne.”

They traversed deeper into the mines, further kicking the hornet’s nest. Dozens of shanks and traps that Tirion destroyed along the way answered all her questions as to why they haven’t sent any Lightless Guardians or armed civilians to clear it out. Even she was having trouble with it.

“I have to ask. How did you even end up here? Did someone tell you about the farm?” Devrim suddenly asked as she was shooting at a Servitor that was preventing the second elevator from working.

“No. I just aimed for old Germany for a thing and passed out. Happy little coincidence that I ended up amongst friends, I suppose.”

“Old Germany, eh? What business did you have there?”

Tirion wondered if he was genuinely curious or just wanted to drill her for information for his own reasons. The timing of the question was rather suspicious.
“Wanted to have a moment there before I dumped fifty pounds of explosives on the Cabal.” With those words and the last bullet, the Servitor in front of her exploded with a mechanic screech and the power was brought back on.

“Well, I can see that you’re a woman of quite the extravagance.” Devrim said. “Well done with that Servitor.”

“Great! Maybe she can use her extravagance to get me my booster one of these days.” Hawthorne cut in, impatiently. The doors to the rusty elevator opened slowly but loudly, filling Tirion with dread.

“These elevators need to stop…” Tirion mumbled, slowly stepping into it. It wobbled slightly as it moved up, just adding to her nervousness. She took the time to reload all of her weapons, expecting a strange projection of Ghaul to be there waiting for her once she reaches the top. Elevators never led to anything good, especially after seven centuries of entropy added on top. To her surprise, only thing that was waiting for her at the top was a nice view and fresh air.

“No inner monologues about how peaceful the world looks from up here?” Ghost asked, noticing how Tirion barely batted an eye at it and kept on walking.

“Nope.”

“Huh. I was looking forward to them.”

“Yeah, I was about to start doing it but then I saw a Cabal snap the neck of a Fallen next to the lake right there, and I refrained.”

Tirion enjoyed the brief moment of peace on her way to Hawthorne, though. She was starting to doubt the elevator superstition she and her misfits have strongly believed in for years. The elevator either doesn’t work, or has a horror behind it in the event that it works. The lengths they kept going to avoid using them were always ridiculous. One of the last discussions they had before the Cabal attacked was if the jump down to the Hellmouth counted as an elevator. They never got to finish it because the comms went down.

It was a stupid and extremely childish thing to believe in, but they still hung on to it. Just like Lorcan hung on to the habit to purposely order the wrong food for someone he was mad at just to be passive aggressive. The Hunter only was extraordinarily charming and behaved well when enough Glimmer was thrown at his direction. “It’s an old Golden Age saying,” He would say. “If you’re good at something never do it for free.”

It usually earned a slight groan from Haya, wondering if the merchant benefits that Lorc’s charms get the group are really worth it. Then she would look at her newly purchased shiny gauntlets and forget about her annoyance towards the Hunter.

Tirion missed those stupid and extremely childish things. She missed them. She’ll get them back, but not before the Vanguard are reunited. She knew her misfits too well to not know where they are hiding right now.

“You made it!” Hawthorne said, eyes on the booster in Tirion’s hands. “Looks like Louis owes me money.”

The bird in question that Tirion wanted to have a stare off with was nowhere to be seen now. She swore that she has seen that falcon before, around the time of the attack. She was in no position to move then, didn’t have the strength to follow him. Plummetering from a Cabal command ship and
hitting the ground does tend to limit a person’s mobility.

Maybe things would have ended a bit differently if she would have fallen on a softer surface and found the farm earlier, instead of going on her own holy war of sorts. Things were different then.

She wondered if she would be able to go through with her plan now, after finding the farm. Deep inside she knew she could, she just wished on all stars that she wouldn’t have to do it. No one truly wants to die.

“Guardians… the City is lost.”

Tirion’s eyes darted over to the screen, not believing what she was hearing. The voice was unmistakable. A voice that she respected, held in high regard, but due to recent events, she also utterly resented that voice. Zavala was one of the kindest people she had the privilege of meeting, but she was better at holding a grudge than a Titan.

Tirion knew that he had no choice during the attack. No one could have predicted the outcome. He was still the one who ordered her to get to that command ship. He could have sent a dozen Guardians and gotten to the shield generator quicker than her and intercepted Ghaul. It was a simple job. She just didn’t understand. Guardians were better than this. Her misfits are the ones who Zavala should have sent to the command ship. They would have pushed Ghaul off of it.

When will they learn that placing all their hopes on one individual never pans out? Typical of a Titan to have no back up plans.

“If there is any Light left in the system, we rally on Titan. Be brave. Guardians… the City is lost…”

Zavala’s transmission started to loop again, but was cut off by Hawthorne snapping the console shut.

Tirion was too deep in her own thoughts to hear the conversation that went down between Ghost and Hawthorne. She just prayed that the busted up ship they gave her would be enough to reach Saturn. Despite her feelings towards Zavala, she had to go.

“You are not going to Titan!”

As Tirion already made her point clear about her dislike of Hawthorne questioning her judgment, she refrained from speaking and just started counting in her head, with clenched teeth. Whatever Hawthorne said or didn’t say about refugees and the City being gone, Tirion selectively didn’t hear it.

Hawthorne wasn’t calling the shots.

Tirion was. Tirion was the damned one to do the job. The Guardian didn’t need the added defeatist attitude. Hawthorne could do what she wants.

Once Tirion reached zero in her head, she made a conscious effort to start paying attention only to see an angry Hawthorne storming away, fingers gripping her rifle to the point of almost breaking it.

“Are you okay?” Ghost said, eyeing Tirion. “I expected you to snap at her, Guardian. What she said…”

It wasn’t even worth shaking her head over it. “Wherever caring about what Hawthorne has to say, I am completely past that right now.” Her voice was unusually calm, and she commenced her trek
down. “For all I care, I’m already on Titan.”

“Hawthorne believes that Zavala abandoned her and the survivors. I can see her point, but still…”

It took effort to suppress a groan. “Oh believe me, I’m angry at Zavala as well. I really enjoyed writhing in pain on the concrete for a week.”

“You’re starting to sound like Haya.”

“Haya *whines*, I *complain*. Get it together, Little Light.”

“Do you mind moving your concoction over so I can use the fire for my kettle?” Devrim’s sudden voice in the dark made her jump, one hand reaching for a gun. Tirion relaxed when she realized that it wasn’t a threat. “You dislike tea *that* much? You Guardians *truly* are savages.”

“Sorry.” Tirion moved the small pot away from the fire, as the remedy was pretty much done. Devrim sat down on the other side of the fire, letting his rifle lean on a tree. “I actually don’t mind it. Haven’t had tea in a long time, though. The better half doesn’t really care for it.”

Devrim chuckled, both at her words and what he witnessed a couple of days ago at the farm just before he left. “Ah yes, the Titan. I remember when Mark was able to carry me like that.” He said, stoking the fire. “That was some… years ago. But I suppose that mere *years* mean nothing to you Guardians. It’s all about decades.”

“To be fair, I’m still a fledgling.” Devrim couldn’t raise his eyebrow any more than he did. He has heard the legends. “I got resurrected some… four, five years ago?”

“Something like that.” Ghost confirmed.

“Maybe the fear of dealing with an endless life is already muddling my perception of time.” Tirion muttered, looking down at her little project.

“How old were you, when you… er, *expired*? If you don’t mind me asking, that is. It’s hard to tell with the…”

She laughed softly before he talked himself into a rut. She has gotten used to the funny looks, which resulted in experience in knowing that majority of them meant no harm. The City doesn’t get to see many Awoken, and they could be quite frightening. There aren’t that many left to begin with.

“28, give or take. I am roughly 632 now, *give or take*, if you count the years I was dead. My little light took quite a while to find me.” She looked over to her Ghost resting on a log who was withholding a comment, the one eye looking at the small fire.

“Well, I am not sure whether I should tell you to get off my property, or to ask you to scold me every time I complain about my own age.” Devrim joked, trying to lift the somber mood that had built up.

She glanced at Ghost again. It felt worrisome to have her own Ghost *deliberately* ignore her. He hasn’t behaved the same since the attack. That usual goofiness of his no longer felt *genuine*, and to add to it there was that comment he made earlier. Tirion silently begged him to not shut her out, not when they needed each other the most. She knew he could hear him, which made the silence sting even more.
Giving up, Tirion slowly finished filling the syringes, hands slightly trembling. Both in anticipation of a possible stroke, and finally getting rid of this unbearable pain. She had a lot of fighting left to do, and only after the first day she found the pain too much to handle. Ghost reassured her that in case a stroke happens, he’ll be able to restore her to a state before it happened. Though that particular conversation took place many months ago.

“I do hope that your little bubbly project is meant for the Cabal war hounds, not you... Right?” Devrim asked, eyeing her movements, own hands tending to the kettle as if they were on autopilot. She didn’t seem to care much for what he had to say. “That right there is one beautiful numb that you shouldn’t fall in love with.”

“I’ve done worse.” Tirion reassured him. “I can control it.”

Devrim scowled at the Warlock before shaking his head and continuing on with his own business. “Why can’t you Guardians find hobbies that make you happy? I hear knitting is popular this time of year.”

“Because we’re insane.” Tirion said bluntly, as she put the syringes in the box for later use. “At the end of day we Guardians are arrogant adrenaline junkies. No error tapping in our heads. If we see something that says ‘two plus two equals sixty’ we will act on it and weird misfires will happen.”

“Even I fail to see your point there, and I’ve been with you for quite some time.” Ghost said, as he finally rose up from his spot. It was time to leave for Titan.

“Point is that we survive.” Tirion gingerly stood up, box and supplies in hand. “We have the privilege to learn from those misfires and survive.”

Chapter End Notes

For those who don't get the Cryptarch thing:

Devrim and the Reef Cryptarch are voiced by the same VA and it bugs the hell out of me.
When everything has been taken from you, nothing remains to you. And when you roar into nothing, nothing sometimes answers.

You’re like me, aren’t you? You won’t settle for what you’ve been given. You heavenly little bird. That singing is a lovely gift.

I know you well. You want more.

My excellent little nightingale, I was betrayed. I have the great pleasure of inviting you to a court festival, where you will gain imperial favor by your charming song.

Go on, little nightingale, go on.

Wake up.

One was a voice of a kind man, a story teller. A quill moving against paper by the candlelight, gentle smile on his face in the dim room. He was an owner of limitless imagination, to the point where people suspected that he has witnessed magic. An old voice, one long dead, one who lived before all this. The other one was older, deeper. More commanding. Once a ruler of a great legion. A voice that once sat on a throne, but now that throne only remains in his dreams. The throne serving as a cruel reminder of the betrayal he endured. He was now drifting aimlessly, his life nothing but thoughts of vengeance.

“How are you feeling, Guardian?” Ghost asked as her eyes fluttered open.

“Like I’m about to throw up…..” Tirion slowly sat up on the small bed with a groan, but unexpected ease this time around. “The pain is gone, though.” She sighed in relief. She’ll take nausea over pain any day.

Ghost kept his distance, floating as far away as he could from her and keeping his eye on the destination, the little speck of light in the distance. She cast a quick glance at the screen in the ship, they will be landing on Titan in less than an hour. There was some fear that this journey would be for naught, but there is always fear.

They never got to continue their conversation. The departure from Earth was pretty wordless, and she needed every opportunity to rest. She looked at her little bot, wishing that she could read her thoughts as easily as he can hers. Both of them still had a long journey in front of them. They won’t be able to finish the journey if both of them break right there and then. They were the icons now, they had to be strong for everyone. This is why she preferred orders, preferred being a wrench.

She avoided a lot of weight on her shoulders by being a wrench.

Whenever she wasn’t a wrench she just slipped up and made everyone around her miserable. She needed to be kept in control, or else it would lead to stupid mistakes. But, she could fix this.

“How are you feeling?” Tirion asked, moving to the pilot’s chair in an attempt to get closer to him. She wasn’t sure exactly what he endured, if he was asleep for the last month or was frozen and couldn’t do a thing. She didn’t know which fate was worse.
“I’m okay. It’s just… it’s just another adventure!” She frowned at Ghost; he tried his very best to be enthusiastic, but he sounded frayed and frazzled. Every turn of the pieces of his shell a twitch instead of a smooth movement. He slowly turned to fully look at her, very well aware of the fact that she knew and disapproved of him feigning the sunshine. He knew that she didn’t abandon anyone on purpose. But, there was still a whole deal of pain. Being a Ghost didn’t come with a field manual.

“We’ll… we’ll be okay, right?” Ghost asked. “We’ll be okay and fix all of this, right Guardian?”

“Soon, yes.” Tirion leaned back in the chair, looking out the window with Ghost joining her. She wondered how many stars were no longer there. How many of them have been destroyed by Ghaul, Oryx and creatures that they haven’t yet encountered. She won’t let her own system fall into that category. She won’t allow a result where some pilot in another solar system would stare off into the night sky and wonder the same things.

“You know… I hate that farm…” She mumbled, allowing herself to relax, remembering why she adored moments in orbit. It was quiet. Nothing was quieter than space.

“Huh. I thought you would love a place like that.”

“I do, but… people are constantly yelling there, there are damn chickens. Shaxx probably sees it all as a competition as to who can yell the loudest.” Tirion tried to convince herself that she said the last part as a joke.

They talked as much as they could before Hawthorne woke up and they had to say their reluctant goodbyes. There was a war to win, and his philosophy on that was to only give up on fighting in a war when you’re dead.

That Titan was never good at hiding anger. He was unbreakable, but not immune to anger. Having her there helped to calm him down, helped to distract him, but she was still worried that she will come back to the farm and find one of the rookies hiding on the roof in fear from him. Shaxx would never lodge anyone into a wall himself, he preferred to use his words. Sometimes all he needed to do was to tower over people until they ran away.

He’s been doing his best to help around, to find out more via his Redjacks, to train both Lightless Guardians that had made their way to the farm and the civilians, but he was still powerless to do anything more. The anger never went away from his voice when they talked the other night.

Part of her felt like her being there fueled his anger, as the other Guardians had no excuses for lackluster performance in the war, considering how much Tirion and her merry band of misfits have accomplished with just a Ghost and some books.

She had trouble remembering how she got past that barrier of his. Either way, she missed him.

“I did hear him yell at people to relax just before we left.” Ghost said. “Can’t wait to see what happens once Zavala gets to the farm. Do you think Saladin survived the war?”

Tirion audibly shuddered. They didn't need a war on top of their existing one. “Don’t even joke about that.”

The strong smell of methane filled her nostrils once she disembarked the ship, followed by freezing cold stabbing her bones. A different kind of shiver ran down her spine as her eyes followed the line of filth on the old buildings, filth of the Hive. They had made Titan their new home. A large sack of sorts rested in the distance, large yellow eggs embedded on it, and Tirion
fought with all her might to suppress a curse. Was the science on this moon really worth it? She felt like the moon would be better off as additional rubble in the rings of Saturn. The Dreadnaught still rested in the rings, looking ever so innocent.

“I didn’t dare believe that you survived…” Tirion turned around to face the familiar voice. She was more relieved to see Zavala alive than she was angry at him. His armor was slightly scratched, otherwise unharmed. A grey-haired woman was standing not too far off, another Titan. She had to cast a snide look to her Ghost before obvious jokes were made. They had to behave. “But I’m afraid to inform you that you’re too late. The Hive have overrun Titan. I was wrong to bring us here. We lost too many lightless Guardians trying to get this station running.”

“I’m sorry for being dead for a month. Did you get it running?” Tirion asked, posing the question harsher than she intended.

“Yes. But now we have found ourselves immobilized.” Zavala motioned towards the old building. “We received an encrypted enemy transmission, and the only thing that would help us with decrypting it is in… there.”

She didn’t need him to say anything further. The Hive have nearly converted the entire structure into their own flesh. She knew that the inside of it will make the Moon look like a park for the children of the City. Tirion was already on her way to it before Zavala stopped her.

“I know you, and am quite familiar your accomplishments, Guardian. But without the Light, I cannot allow you to go in there by yourself. We will have to find another way.”

Tirion remembered that they haven’t broken the news to him yet. He still thought that she had no Light. Slowly she walked towards the edge of the platform, looking down at the violent ocean before turning to face him. She was going to be a doctor, so if worst comes to worst she’ll be able to resuscitate Zavala. Tirion gave a small wave to the Titan before letting herself fall backwards, off the platform down to the cold ocean.

Guardian Down.

In a flash, she came back. Engulfed in fierce fire, as wholly luminescent as the sun. Spikes of fire sticking out from her back, like wings. But, the little bird couldn’t fly. The flames died out in a couple of seconds, and judging by Zavala’s face, she made her point clear. Her Ghost wasn’t exactly amused.

“Really? Did you really have to be so dramatic about it?” Ghost asked, rolling one eye. “I think me telling him that we got our Light back would have sufficed.”

“I couldn’t help myself.” Tirion shrugged. “But yes, we got our Light back.”

Zavala struggled to decide if he should be surprised or impressed at her. “How did you manage that?”

“It’s best to not ask questions.”

“I see…” Zavala said, knowing that they didn’t have time for stories. “If the Light can find its way back to you, perhaps there is hope for us all.”

“So, what’s next?” Tirion asked.

“Our numbers will continue to dwindle. We can no longer protect ourselves, much less the survivors.” He stopped his pacing, and looked at his own raised fist. “And without the Light, are
we even Guardians anymore?” Zavala whispered to himself.

“Commander…” Ghost pulled Zavala out of his pondering state. “What do you need us to do?”

“We’re going to need you to secure an asset in the Arcology that will help us to turn the tide of this ‘war’ with the Red Legion. Without it…” His sigh was full of lament. “I don’t know what comes next.”

Once a place of science and wonder, a place of smiles, excitement, wonder, hope for the future. Now covered by the spit of the Hive and--

“New Pacific Arcology! The next frontier is you!” Ghost sang lively as the two traversed the moss covered ruins of the Arcology. They triggered the jingle once when they tried to find the right terminal for a map, and it’s been stuck in Ghost’s little head ever since. It reached a point where Tirion stopped sighing at it and just started to find it quite adorable. She assumed that Zavala stepped away long ago in annoyance, as she hadn’t heard from him in some time. Amanda took over the comms and directing.

They needed to go further down, deeper into Hive territory of the Arcology. There was little time for sightseeing. Tirion found herself smiling sadly at the Hive artifacts as they explored. Huritt would have lost his mind over all of this, made this his new home to study the manifestation of the Hive.

“We can do this…” She said to herself, trying to drown out the sound. Sound of worms, critters. Bugs crawling on her skin, fingers in her mind. Just that sound made her stomach turn. She stared down into the black hole in the ground, knowing that she had little choice. Five minutes. Just five minutes. It was always five minutes. The Hive had a pattern with their Thralls.

“Are you ready?” Ghost asked.

Tirion nodded and slowly traversed down, the odd rocks crunching underneath her feet. She wanted to throw up, but found some semblance of joy in knowing that she most likely won’t have to return to the moon after this. She just needed deep breaths and a steady hand.

They were coming.

The thralls were running towards her, groaning and clawing at the air, their groans turned into shrieks when they saw her. They couldn’t be reasoned with, the worst kind of enemy. They wanted to claw everything to pieces. The silence consumed her, she was back in the Hellmouth, the lantern was glowing bright not too far away. A goal. Could hear the others calling her over. Instinctively, she tossed a grenade before they could reach her, watching them burn to pieces and reality returned to her.

Tirion was afraid of them but kept forgetting that they were also afraid of her. She opened her eyes again when the sounds of water dripping returned, Tirion was back at the Arcology.

The rest of the Hive were easy to deal with. But the Thralls… The Thralls will always get under her skin, will always send her back. Disgusting creatures.

“Guardian? Guardian!” Her little buddy shouted at her. “Are you still with us? We lost you for a second.”

“I’m still here.” She confirmed, breathing heavily. She had no memory of killing all the Acolytes and an Ogre around her. The Hive had their ways to get into people’s minds. Their whole presence
was like poisonous gas.

“Alright. We’re almost there. Just a little bit further.”

Zavala warned them about radio chatter earlier, but Ghost didn’t care. Silence in a place like this would lead to a failed mission for Tirion. She needed to be focused on reality, something that keeps her there. They could handle all the Hive that they attracted with their chatter.

They entered a long forgotten elevator shaft, and she began steeling herself for bad news in that very moment. It all went as far as the eye could see.

“Goddamn it!” She swore, voice echoing. She carefully started floating down to a doorway, grip on her gun tightening.

“That curse can’t be real, Guardian.” Ghost remarked as she steadily floated down. “I’m sure we’ll be fine.”

“Might as well shatter some mirrors while you’re at it, Ghost.” Tirion said as she entered a remarkably clean crawlspace, unspoiled by the Hive. They were getting close to the residence of the CPU that Amanda wanted.

“You know, I never understood that superstition either.” Ghost said. “Do you think it was because people had expensive mirrors and didn’t want to break them?”

The steel underneath her feet broke off, and she fell onto a platform below. The whole room was too clean, too perfect, as if it was still the Golden Age. The CPU sat just on the other platform. It all seemed too easy. Nothing was ever this easy. She already cashed in all her luck with Cayde finding her Ghost. Reluctantly, she jumped over to the platform and slowly grabbed it from the socket. Within seconds the platform started glowing red, system roaring, warnings issued over the speaker, shrieking. It was hard to distinguish what was the Hive and what was the alarm system.

“What were you saying, Ghost?” Tirion shouted as she took off in full sprint towards the nearest door. Maybe Ghost jinxing them was the issue, not the elevators. Maybe it was all a childish thing to believe in, but she strived to make sense out of things.

“Well, there is no way the Hive didn’t hear that alarm.”

She ran as fast as she could, eyes searching every corner for an escape as the inaudible radio chatter filled her head. She had no plans to die until she tells this story to her misfits. Tanks. Without warning she jumped into one of them just before a hoard of Hive almost got to her, letting Ghost control the vehicle as she couldn’t take her hands off the device. He was a better driver than her anyway, and he knew what he was being punished for. She will have to talk with him about acquiring ownership of one of those tanks, as they were very efficient in obliterating anything that stood in their way, whether it be Hive or walls.

Things started to look greener and greener the further they drove, and Amanda was waiting for them. Tirion gasped when she looked through the window; it was like a small city, with more trees than she has seen in her life. Somehow, it all survived despite being surrounded by death, by the Hive. Green and life everywhere she turned.

Maybe that’s why they didn’t want to destroy the moon. These small patches of beauty were worth keeping, no matter the shell of pure Darkness around it.

“Things may finally be looking up for us.”
“Guardian… It worries me when you don’t talk.”

Tirion sat unblinking in the pilot’s chair as the ship stood still in orbit around Saturn. She hasn’t said a word since they found out what the encrypted message was about. Every inch of her wanted to manically laugh, but something stopped her. She thought that another dose might help her resolve the thoughts but it just disconnected her even more. At least the pain was gone again. It wasn’t enough to put her in a serene place where everything was perfect, that was the last thing she needed.

It would be so easy to just go over that edge.

There was bound to be another hero that could handle this, right? Was she chosen for this because she’s the only one insane enough to embark on this, was that the criteria the Traveler used? Not who was worthy, not who was skilled. Just those that had just the right amount of screws loose.

“Hello? Are you still here?” Ghost floated in front of her glowing eyes that looked right through him. “I need you back, Guardian.”

“Blowing up our sun if we resist…” She whispered. “That’s… that’s perfect. How do you even rationally react to this? Because I’m out of ideas!”

Ghost backed away a couple of inches when the shouting started, just in case. This new ship was too small for her to get enough momentum to throw things.

He nervously cleared his throat. “Oryx had a history of taking entire worlds, yet we beat him no problem.”

“Yeah, well. Just because I’m being stabbed to death right now doesn’t mean that I’m nostalgic for the time I was badly beaten with a steel pipe.” She didn’t mean to snap at Ghost, but she found herself having little control of her actions. Processing this will take more than an hour in space.

Using the last bit of good judgment that remained in her, she slowly and wobbly made her way towards the bed, knowing all too well that sleep won’t find her after the news she was just told. Her bones felt like they were made of some sort of gum, not being there to abide her orders to begin with. She laid on her back, staring at the metal ceiling, listening to the hum of the engine, the vibrations only adding to her nausea.

Damn elevators.

Tirion thought she was so brave, such a stunning example of what a Guardian should be with her plan. But, she would have doomed the system if she would have went through with her plan and her explosives.

That wasn’t the worst of it.

The worst of it is that the wrench throwers didn’t know what to throw the wrench at. So she was stuck waiting. It would be so easy to slip away from the world even further but she had to resist. She will have to add additional locks to the medicine cabinet in the ship. Having Ghost there to keep an eye on things and prevent her from deviating from the plan wasn’t enough.

She was stuck in that infuriating middle ground between bliss and the threat of Cabal blowing up the sun.

Limbo again.
Zavala wanted to attack it. No surprise. But only until the Vanguard are back together.

Nobody has heard from Ikora since the attack. Tirion had to convince herself that once they find her, everything will be okay. Or, at least as okay as things could be in this situation. Once the Vanguard are reunited, they’ll find something to throw the wrench at. Tirion repeated that in her head. Perhaps Cayde will know where Ikora is, and she owed him a drink. A drink that she ached for. She groaned when she realized that Cayde might not be at the farm when she returns, he wasn’t known for liking to be stuck. A lot of things were different, so maybe she’ll find him. Maybe he would have a change of heart.

Then there was a question as to why.

The Cabal wouldn’t blow up the Traveler until they have harnessed the Light. Word around was that they weren’t even close to figuring it out, as if someone was buying them time. Even with that they had days to disarm the Almighty.

“Well… I have some good news.” She mumbled.

“Really?”

“I think the good news here is that we’ve gone as low as we can go. Time to crawl up.” She croaked out the words, voice already raspy from the desperation to scream.

How can you go any lower than someone rigging up your sun to go into a supernova?

The comms crackled, catching both of their attention. It was an incoming call. And she was hoping for some much needed peace and quiet.

“Yeah?”

“Hey you two!” It was Cayde’s voice. At least he was still alive. “Ow! Son of a--” The sound of something short circuiting accompanied his pained shout. “Ignore that. You’ve been to the Vault and all, whaddaya know about Vex tech?”

“Cayde…” Tirion sighed. One step forward, one step to the side and one step backwards to fall into a Hive pit. “Where are you?”

“Um… still at the Farm? Y’know, enjoyin’ farm things. Kicking the ball. Just relaxin’.”

“So, the brave Hunter looked into her wide eyes as he—“ She began reciting one of the books and was cut off by more incoherent shouting.

“Shhhhh! Fine! Fine! I might or might not be on Nessus. I forgot my Vex teleporter here on my way out. Got sick and tired of Shaxx yellin’ something about needing a shard of a Willbr—“ Another crackle of electricity, another cry of pain. “Oh my cotton so-- Would you stop that!!”

There was a moment of silence before the sound of tinkering and metal spiders crawling took over the comms and Tirion buried her face in the pillow. It was like dealing with a child. No wonder the Vanguard didn’t like him leaving the Tower. Dealing with Alva constantly disappearing was easier than this.

“I’ll be the one to do it. What, may we ask, are you going to do with a Vex teleporter, on Nessus?” Ghost asked in Tirion’s stead.

“I got inspired by your plan. Enough waiting. Plannin’ to get up close and personal with Ghaul. Put
a bullet in his head. Then maybe eat a sandwich. Gotta work out a few kinks first. Fun fact about the Vex tech: not as intuitive as you would think.”

Ghost sighed, suddenly understanding why Tirion pulling her hair out. “Even if you manage to kill Ghaul, when the Red Legion leave a system, defeat or victory, they leave nothing behind.”

He felt completely hopeless arguing with Cayde by himself.

“The Cabal are bad guys who do bad things. Yes. I get it.”

“The Cabal literally leave nothi—“

“For the love of—“ Tirion lifted her head from the pillow as she cut Ghost off. “Hey, knucklehead! You know why I have sudden regrets about that plan? They have a weapon that can blow up our sun at the first sign of our resistance.”

“Hey, easy there—“

“Shut— shut the hell up, Cayde! You—“

“Nope. No pl—“

“Zavala is alive, and he needs you back!”

Suddenly, silence. She dropped her aching head back onto the pillow. Cayde gives, and then he takes it away.

“Wait…” The comms crackled. “Zavala said he needs me?”

“Yes…” Her voice was muffled but still heard.

“As in, you heard those exact words coming out of Zavala’s mouth?”

“Yes, we did.” Ghost confirmed, eyeing a Warlock who wished she hadn’t heard those words so she wouldn’t have to deal with this. She wondered if Ghost could transmat more pillows to her.

“Please tell me you recorded it!” Cayde almost broke the speakers of her ship with his excited shout, but received no response back. She didn’t expect anything less from Cayde. “Well, did Ikora at least hear it? You found Ikora too, right?”

“She wasn’t with him.” Tirion said. “No one has seen her. I need to find her soon, before Zavala head-butts the weapon pointed at our sun. Got any ideas?”

“Io.” Cayde answered without hesitation. “Io. It’s—it’s where she’d go to look for answers.”

“Thank you.” Tirion said, feeling like she just defused a bomb. “Did… wait… did you say he’s ranting about a shard of the Willbreaker?”

“Somethin’ like that. Stopped listenin’. What about it? Wasn’t that the sword Creepy was obsessed with?”

The sword. That she let him borrow. Damned elevators. “Does he want to have his other horn ripped off, too!?”

“Oh, I’m gettin’ back to the farm just to see this. Don’t start the fight without me!”
“Best of luck with that, because I’m going straight to Io.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the slow release of chapters. 😞; I feel so bad because I've gotten so many awesome comments and kudos for this story. I also read them all but suck at responding to them. The kind words really do mean a lot. <3
“… we used to play this game to test ourselves. The Exos wanted little to do with it. Me, Haya, Lorc and Kouhei would take a planet each and patrol. Catch was, that if one of us screws up, the stakes get upped for all of us. Let’s say I fail a jump on Mars and die, it meant that all four of us would have to stop using grenades for three hours. Then so forth and so on. While a minor inconvenience for Haya fighting Vex on Venus, it could lead to Lorcan dying horrifically to the Thralls on Mars. Then the cycle continued.”

Tirion told to the microphone while looking at the stars, both feet on the dashboard despite some earlier complaining from Ghost. Ghost will never be able to live what happened on Titan down. Ghost could deal with it.

“That’s quite smart. Good way to teach yourselves that one simple mistake could put your allies at a disadvantage. I like it.” Despite the comms crackling, she was still happy to hear Shaxx’s voice.

“We got so good at it we had to change the definition of a mistake. Lorcan running into windows on Cabal ships started to count.”

His voice boomed through the comms. “The Cabal are known for their damnedly clean glass. Either way, would love to see it in action.”

“You’ll get to, once this is done.”

“Where are you now?” He asked

“Almost at Io. I can see the Vex structures from here.”

Despite the owners being murderous robots, she always loved exploring Vex structures. Their creations were art, like a whole another world, a gorgeous incandescent hellscape. And she has always been their ultimate source of frustration. The Vex and Tirion were almost made for each other.

“We… I need to talk to you when you get back.” He paused for a second, sounding hesitant. “There are some things that I need to tell to you in person.”

“Is everything alright?”

“Don’t worry. Just don’t want to say certain things over the comms, with a certain sly bastard breathing down my neck.”

She was certain that both the aforementioned sly bastard and Zavala could hear her laugh at that.

“I’ll send you some leverage to help with that after this. Haya has read those novels that he likes out loud so many times I have them memorized.” She cast a quick glance at the clock. “Isn’t it getting late there? You should get some sleep.”

“Yeah. I will. Good luck on Io.”

“Goodnight, Shaxx.”

The call ended, and her eyes lingered on the console. At the end of the day for every horror this world presented there were two things worth fighting for.
“We’ve been through a lot together, but the strangest thing we’ve encountered so far is the fact that Shaxx has an inside voice.” Ghost paused for a second. “Don’t tell him I said that.”

“Did you also know that he once spent a month’s Glimmer on Golden Age fine china?” Tirion said, slight smug smirk on her face. “Don’t tell him that Arcite told me and that I told you.”

A sense of uneasiness consumed Tirion as they entered Io’s atmosphere. Something nagging at the back of her head, a tune, a melody. Music. Faint music, gentle violins. It was just low enough to get frustrated when trying to concentrate on it to decipher it.

Ikora was waiting for them, overlooking a structure. It looked like the only thing that the Vex haven’t gotten to.

“Of all the places I’ve been in all the years since my rebirth, this is where I return. The last place the Traveler touched. I came for answers. I stand here still with nothing.”

Seeing Ikora like that wasn’t pleasant for Tirion. She always looked up to her. Having the Red Legion rip that raw ferocity out of her was one of the biggest losses.

“I suppose you’ve heard about Zavala’s resistance.” Tirion said. She certainly didn’t hear it herself, as the anger about Cabal having a sun destroyed deafened her. Ikora scowled and shook her head at the question.

“What good is a resistance when you are the only one who would survive?”

“Alright, then.” Tirion sighed at Ikora’s retort. “Just point me in a general direction that needs a wrench and I’ll throw myself at it.”

Ghost quickly interjected. “I believe what she’s trying to say is: what are the Red Legion doing on Io?”

Ikora was too deep in thought to notice Tirion’s snark. “I believe this Ghaul creature knows the Traveler blessed this site. I believe he sent his Legion to find something they could never possibly understand. And I believe they will continue to desecrate all we hold sacred.”

Despite all of Ikora’s strength, she couldn’t keep the anger out of her voice. Tirion was ready to wash her hands off this. The inane Traveler worship could wait until the Almighty is no longer there.

“Save this place, Guardian. Do not squander this second chance.”

Tirion quickly drew her gun and turned around as the ground started to tremble; a fountain of white blinding light emerged from the planet, covering the sky. She was running towards it in an instant, watching the Red Legion ships emerge once the light dissipated.

“What is that?” Ghost asked, almost struggling to catch up.

“Energy!” Ikora exclaimed through the comms. “The Traveler’s energy! What have they done?”

Tirion picked up the pace as much as she could, taking out every Cabal she saw in her path. The base was her only focus, anything else was simply not worth of her attention. Hearing Ikora’s laments about it all made Tirion loathe the Legion even more. She didn’t think it was possible. Ghost could handle the talking, she needed to handle the speed. Reuniting Zavala’s fireteam was the priority operation. She needed to hold off all feelings until then.
She tried to convince herself.

As with many things.

But as with many things, it failed, as the sight in front of her petrified her in the spot she was standing.

They were staring at her. Little pieces of her beloved night sky, plastered of the stone walls. Almost mocking her. She failed. The rifts were singing at her, that melody that she thought she obliterated. Humming, whooshing. It all sounded so peaceful when she closed her eyes, but there was unspeakable horror behind it.

“Disconnect me…” Was the only thing she managed to whisper, every inch of her feeling like stone.

“Guardian---“ Ghost started

“Disconnect me from the damn channel, Ghost!” Reluctantly, Ghost nodded and did what she said. Tirion reloaded her gun, taking her time, making sure that everything was perfect. She could wait five more minutes. It will be easier to hear without yelling in her ears. “Let’s get this over with.”

The Taken were just as abhorrent as she remembered them to be. Their shrieks still hurt her ears. Shrieks that could be silence with the right amount of bullets. They had it worse than her, she was doing them a favor by putting them out of their misery. She got to experience a fraction of what they felt when they set out to kill Oryx, when she ended up being torn between dimensions. Hive, Vex, Cabal. No one deserved that kind of torture. Their whole existence is fear. Having every molecule of oneself changed to be controlled like a puppet, except your mind. You are still aware. Your movements are not your own.

Now they had no leader, and were most likely seeking the next one. Unless Oryx was still alive, but it was a thought Tirion could entertain later. Whatever it was, it needed to be contained on Io. There was no stopping them, just containing.

Maybe she was the one who drew them there. She will never be cleansed of all her adventures on the Dreadnaught. Of becoming Ascendant and staring right into the eyes of Oryx, then wielding a sword made out of the Willbreaker. It will never leave her alone. Part of her as much as her own heart was.

The Wizards came in threes, either a summoning ritual or a funeral. All she knew is that they needed to be killed. Maybe the reason they were felled so easily was because the Taken saw her as an ally, that they trusted her. Maybe it was just the sword logic. Something else came out of the portal, a Cabal this time around. Why do they even try? If she wanted to, she could take their throne.

Blue energy bubbled underneath her feet. She still wasn’t sure where she stood with the Traveler. If she trusted it or not, if she believed if it was alive or not. Maybe the shards were just severed limbs that still survived. She hated questions. Being an Awoken in itself was no different than being a question mark. Tirion knelt down to touch it, feeling the strange warmth radiate off of it. It was here when the Darkness came, helping. She had no reason to believe that the Traveler planned the Collapse.

“… as for you, meddling Guardian, I have a few choice things to say to you.” An unfamiliar voice said.
“Whoops! Sorry. Accidentally reconnected you.” Ghost said, before lowering his voice. “You were very lucky you were muted. This Asher guy... Should be fixed now.”

“What did I miss?”

“Ikora is going to Earth to rejoin her fireteam soon, and based on what I can translate from shouting, Asher now wants you to investigate the Warmind vault.”

“Déjà vu…” She mumbled as she stood up and started to walk towards the Vault. “Who’s this Asher?”

Ghost winced before speaking. “Once again based on shouting, he’s a Gensym Scribe. On our side. I think. Knows a lot about the Vex and based on the intricate vocabulary, he’s clearly a Hunter.”

“This I have to hear. Reconnect me to the channel.”

 “… Typical Titan idiocy. I’m sure he thought, ‘Ah, Ghaul has a sun-destroyer? I don’t need a plan! I’ll simply headbutt it!'”

Tirion started to laugh but it quickly faded once she realized what her Ghost did as a retaliation for making him deal with this, as petty revenge for the jinxing.

“That sounds familiar, doesn’t it Guardian?” Ghost said playfully, laughing to himself as he floated in front of her briefly, before intentionally starting to lag behind. Being mad at him was difficult after the recent events.

“I find it incredible that those myopic Red Legion ignorami did not realize they were drilling directly into a Warmind vault!” Asher muttered angrily.

“Doesn’t it?” Ghost repeated smugly, although he knew that she got the point.

“I am far less verbose than that, give me a break Ghost.” She said as she pulled a switch to turn on the power, but the drill refused to move. There was something about the vault that made the music louder in her head. They needed to find a manual override. For every Taken she killed in the base, she hoped it’s the last. She’ll have to consult Huritt about properly eradicating them once the time comes.

She couldn’t understand why the Vex were protecting the Warmind with their very lives. Dealing with the drill was relatively easy, as the Vex engaged war with the Taken.

“Will this be Grandpa or some other Warmind?” She asked, as Ghost scanned the console. She should really start paying attention to what she was actually doing instead of her own daydreams.

“Grandpa?” Ikora asked. “What Grandpa?”

Tirion was robbed of a response as Taken manifested around her, these ones were definitely not treating her as an ally. But as all things, they melted. For all their strength they were also senseless.

Even Ghost sighed, trying to not yawn. “How’s the scan going?”

“Poorly. The Almighty is inextricably bound to the harmonic resonance of the sun’s magnetic flux tubes.” Asher stated casually.

“… What?” The Traveler, for all its might, didn’t equip Ghost for this.

“So uh… a Golden Age grenade, then?” Tirion said.
“Precisely. Best way to disarm one is evidently to pull the ring out and pray!” Asher fumed.

Ghost groaned at all the commotion. What a world he was in, where the only evidence of an inside voice existing was a conversation with Shaxx earlier.

“It’s time I rejoined my fireteam.” Ikora said. “I’ll meet you whenever you are ready.”

For the first time in hours, there was silence. And then, the music returned. It was calling to her. No rest for adventure addicts.


"Channel J what? No! No, I hear nothing of consequence on any of my scanners, including this one."

“Wait, you hear it too?” Tirion asked. “I’ve been hearing it since we landed.”

“Just when I thought it couldn’t get any weirder. I bet I can track it down to the source.”

They spent a bit of time wandering, checking every cavern, before realizing that the music acted as a compass of sorts. She was about to call it quits with the day before she noticed that the device wasn’t SIVA, but something alien. A small diamond, playing music that entranced the Vex around it. Ghost quickly scanned the object, as if he was in a competition of who was more curious.

"There's a message encrypted in this music.” Ghost said to himself.” Got it. Some kind of quotation. 'Real things in the darkness seem no realer than dreams.'"

The message was definitely meant for her, but now the question remained from whom it was. Could it be Emma?

“Asher! Can you run an archive query for us?” Ghost called out, getting no response. “…Asher? Channel's down. I'll run the query myself.”

“You don’t need to run it.” Tirion said, following the music. “It’s from a tale… I can’t place the name but it’s old. Very old. Some tale about a son of an Emperor.”

They found another one, after killing a couple of Vex. Ghost speculated that it might be a time capsule, but Tirion knew better. They wouldn’t put tales like that in a time capsule. There was nothing to preserve.

“'Misdirected by accident or intent, intelligence can foster its own ecstasies of growth and decay.'” Ghost read. Tirion couldn’t place that one, but the quote seemed incomplete. Mashed together, merged. Context didn’t matter, the sentiment did. Tirion scratched the back of her head as she continued to wander.

"This one says, 'Once war has been undertaken, no peace is made by pretending there is no war.' What does that mean 'by pretending there is no war?' I'm not sure I like the new guy."

"It’s Grandpa.” Tirion said, no longer needing the compass of the music to know where to go. They needed to go back to the vault. “He’s basically telling us to not live in ignorance and stop daydreaming nonsense. That our own wishes can manifest.”

“I don’t think you should be calling an ancient Golden Age AI with a liking of orbital bombardment ‘Grandpa.’” Ghost looked up at the sky as he said that, readying himself for a
Warsat falling on both of them. Rasputin has been dormant for a while, locking himself out from
the world. If anything, that’s when people should be afraid. Rasputin had a history of shutting out
the world just before it ends.

The music was loud in the vault, maybe a reward for having solved the puzzle. It didn’t take long
until the Vex got in, and the music changed. A more desperate, panicked tune. Was he afraid?
These Vex felt enhanced, stronger. Tirion couldn’t tell if Rasputin was controlling them or they
wanted to get to him first. But there was no choice but to kill them.

“Why would Rasputin be here?” Ghost asked.

*Real things in the darkness seem no realer than dreams.*

The quote echoed in her head. Rasputin knew. He had the answers. Answers that she refused to
face.

*Real things in the darkness seem no realer than dream. Misdirected by accident or intent,
intelligence can foster its own ecstasies of growth and decay. Once war has been undertaken, no
peace is made by pretending there is no war.*

He knew.

“I found another one!” Ghost shouted and she ran over to him, they needed to get out, now. It was
all wrong. Everything flashed red, *pain*, feeling like she’s been electrocuted. “That music, it hurts!”
Ghost winced.

“Let’s go!”

“Give me a moment!” The music died, but the message was received loud and clear. “There.
'Never ask for anything! Never for anything, and especially from those who are stronger than you.
They'll make the offer themselves, and give everything themselves.’”

Emperors. Talks of darkness, talks of an invitation. Her dreams. The war will not end with Ghaul’s
defeat. Rasputin was just giving her advice, preparing her. Teaching her.

*My excellent little nightingale, I was betrayed. I have the great pleasure of inviting you to a court
festival, where you will gain imperial favor by your charming song.*

*Go on, little nightingale, go on.*

All that was left now was to wait for the festival to begin. There was a lot of work to be done until
then.

“Please tell me I didn’t miss the fight!”

Shaxx raised an eyebrow under his helmet. “*What* fight could you *possibly* be talking about?”

Cayde looked around, trying to find something or *someone*. A certain redhead was missing from
the place. All this travel back for nothing. Maybe it’s best not to tell Shaxx that Tirion knows that
he lost her sword *just* yet.

The Exo shrugged instead. “Never mind, false alarm. Thought I saw a certain Warlock. She owes
me a drink.”

“Has she talked to you about where her fireteam might be?” Shaxx asked as Cayde was about to
leave. He’s heard the stories, all he knows is that they’re alive, at least. But she hasn’t told anything more. If they could get her fireteam to join the cause, they would win the war in minutes. They figured out how to kill Oryx for good in less than a week, this would be a vacation for them.

“Nope.” Cayde answered bluntly. “Wait… you’re telling me that Tirion is keeping secrets from people? Wait, don’t say anything. Lemme guess. Next thing you’re going to tell me is that she’s blue!”

Someone clearing their throat made Cayde awkwardly turn around and wave at the confused Warlock. He wasn’t getting that drink now.

“Cayde!” A deep voice shouted from above. “Are you still here?”

“You don’t need to check on me every five minutes!” Cayde yelled back at Zavala, taking the opportunity to bolt upstairs from the awkwardness. He also had a Vanguard meeting to attend to.

“Not really relevant where my idiots are…” She muttered. “I was gone for a couple of days, the roof is still standing and Zavala is still alive. Am I sure I have the right Shaxx in front of me?”

He chuckled at her words, before following her. Zavala and he haven’t had a chance to talk yet, much less employ violence. Even the Cabal attacking the Tower couldn’t put a dent into that problem.

That one room was still unoccupied, and still undiscovered. They tried their best to be subtle when they tried to slip away. The most incriminating witnesses were away at a meeting, so they had little to worry about.

Once the door was locked, Shaxx took off the helmet and grabbed her by the waist. He leaned in and brushed his lips against hers.

“I missed you…” She murmured against his lips.

The kiss was gentle, soft, and hesitant, even. But even when Tirion reciprocated the kiss, something didn’t click. Something wasn’t there. He noticed it as well, as he pulled away with a resigned sigh and leaned his forehead against hers. Eyes tightly shut in frustration.

“What’s on your mind?” Tirion whispered, feeling his hands tighten on her waist before he let go of her and backed away, choosing to grip the edge of the nearest desk with a grunt. Eyes burning holes into the old wood, hands almost snapping it. He thought it would be easier now that she was here, it always helped to have her there. She stood still, leaning against the wall, patiently waiting for him to speak.

“You ask me that…” Shaxx began with a deep sigh. “We’re at war, and you and the Vanguard are the only ones that seem to take it seriously.” He muttered, not looking up from the desk. He couldn’t keep it in anymore, as the once suppressed anger was now making his hands shake. “A part of me dies to see these recruits care so little, they have absolutely no excuses. Hawthorne doesn’t even care. Apathy on the front lines leads to wavering, wavering leads to tragedy. Waver, and the enemy will take this!”

Without warning, the desk went flying towards the nearest wall before she could react, the loud collision almost fragmenting it. It was the first time Tirion was glad that he didn’t have his Light.

“Merely fighting for just vengeance? We’re past that. We are in need of righteous infliction of retribution!” He yelled, shaking the entire building, breathing heavily. He finally looked at her. The anger in him started to slowly fade away when he saw her wide eyes staring back at him, and
it got replaced with remorse. Tirion’s gaze slowly traveled to the broken desk behind him, the dust was still dancing around it.

It could have been so much worse than just that broken desk.

He was right. But on the other hand, they were doing the best they could. She wasn’t going to fault him for being angry, but what else could she do?

“Tirion…” He whispered, watching her push herself off of the wall. “Wait…”

“I’m fine.” She glanced at him briefly, before continuing to walk to the other side of the room. “I get what you’re saying. But with the Vanguard together, we’re past the hard part. I’ll inflict the retribution with my own two hands if I have to. We’ll find more people that care.”

With a snap of her fingers, she lit the candles on the nightstand, warm light illuminating the room. Her own hands trembled slightly. She faced a hive God and lived, she wasn’t exactly scared. Certainly wasn’t the first time it has happened. Just as with everyone else, no one was angry. Just afraid.

“I am ecstatic about the fact that I went through six months of mental torture for the Taken to still be here, to conjure something new.” Tirion couldn’t stop the flood once she opened her mouth. “The Vex won’t go away. The Hive have taken over Titan and are trying to summon another god. The Fallen are under new leadership by an incompetent egomaniac! On top of that, we have the Red Legion with a sun destroyer. I am someone telling me that SIVA is back away from a total mental collapse! Everything has gone to damn hell!”

The fire that was once in her fingertips slowly spread up her arms as she shouted.

“I can’t shut any of it down! I can’t! I can’t shut it down which means is that these innocent people will never be safe!” Her voice broke, and the flames simmered down and sheet her body drop to the bed. “I can’t protect them. I feel the same pressure just as you do. To be better, to train my team to be better but…” She took a deep shaky breath. “It’s relentless. Like a damn hydra. I don’t know…” Shaxx joined her side, surprised that the flimsy bed held both of their weight.

He has never seen her cry.

She was always so strong, damn near invincible. Even in the darkest moments, she got stuck in a pit of angry thinking but never shed a tear. She tried to hide it by obscuring her face with her arms by burying her hands in her hair.

Gently, he grabbed one of her hands and pulled it away from her head, but she still hid her face, holding her breath.

“I need to go…” She whispered, springing to her feet but a hand pulled her back. “We can continue yelling at each other later.”

Before he could call out her name, she pulled her hand out of his grasp and walked out, slamming the door behind her.
“How sure are you of this plan, Guardian?” Ghost asked as she entered the destination in the ship’s console. Tirion was done waiting, and she’ll die if she keeps on going with this pace alone. The shakes were already bad enough.

“There’s huge chance we’ll die horribly and violently by Cabal hands, but… this plan is solid.” Tirion stubbornly cleared her throat to get rid of the thickness in her voice. “The alternative is emptying the entire medicine cabinet into my veins.”

“Wow. That’s… that’s an ultimatum.”

She will be able to pull this off. She needed her dysfunctional family. The Vanguard will be planning and coordinating with each other for a couple of hours, time wasn’t an issue. If everything goes right, they won’t notice that she is gone.

“Activating stealth drive and turning off the comms. We’re on our own now.” Ghost said, looking over at her. She had her ways to put barriers around her, barriers that he couldn’t breach. They had to fly slowly to avoid being detected, hours of maddening silence in front of them. Silence and her pretending that a lone tear didn’t escape her eye.

The Vanguard owed her to not yell at her for what she’s about to do. She reunited them, and was the only reason they haven’t lost the war again. If she can pull this off, they’ll get even a bigger advantage. Problem was that the plan was risky, reckless, based on out-of-this-world timing and them cooperating with her and each other. The last part was the biggest problem. They couldn’t cooperate on food, much less war.

But they were damn good combatants. Some of the best Guardians she knows of. Plus, Haya was holding Cayde’s books hostage, and he won’t calm down until he gets them back. It would be at the cost of Tirion no longer having leverage on the Exo, but he deserved to have them back after everything.

“The Traveler…” Ghost gasped, moving closer to the window. “What are they doing to it!?”

The cage around it was almost complete, just giving her more reasons to hurry up with her plan. It looked like it was covered in soot, its light smothered. She still didn’t know what it was for. If they wanted the Light, why trap it? The Cabal were brutes, but they weren’t lacking intelligence.

The Tower didn’t look recognizable anymore, rubble to the point where it didn’t even trigger any memories, making it that much harder to navigate once she landed on it, engulfed in the last charge of the stealth cloak she borrowed from Alva long ago. Rebuilding it all would take more time than she has been breathing.

Nothing was out of the ordinary to the Cabal that were patrolling, they were searching every inch of the rubble for leftovers to put a bullet in. The Cabal had their guns, their battle strategies, their brute force, but they lacked one important thing. They didn’t know her, they couldn’t get into her head. They didn’t understand her. Tirion could hear the hum, the secrets that were hidden by her misfits around the Tower, and she had the knowledge of what her team would resort to. She knew that without a ship, only way out of this was a lift.
There was a reason they had their reputation, there was a reason they could take down gods. Ghaul was no god, but they were still the only ones that could *shatter* him. Tirion followed the distorted music, an old song they always used as a marker for their adventures, set to a frequency only their Ghosts could hear.

She slowly passed past the illusion of the door after entering the frequency to unlock it, trying not to raise any alarm, only to get greeted a hail of bullets coming her way, shot by a panicking hand.

*Guardian down.*

“Holy sh-- Lorc!” Haya slapped the Hunter on his shoulder, almost sending him flying from the old couch. “Ya douche! It’s a Guardian!”

Ghost quickly revived her, and Tirion was greeted by a mass of cheers and confused gasps once she materialized. Slightly *drunk* cheers. The Hangar Lounge. Their own little place that they conquered, partly due to Haya’s old, old, *old* Dark Age habits. It looked mostly untouched, and the holes in the walls looked like they were caused by the misfits themselves. Weaponry and armor, both of Cabal and Guardian, was scattered across the floor, doors in the back were trip mined. They had built their own little fortress.

Just like the Dark Age, with their own kingdoms and forts.

They survived because they couldn’t find a reason to die.

“I guess I deserved that.” Tirion dropped her body onto the couch next to Lorc, who no longer had his gun. The somberness was hard to miss. Alva was holding a Ghost in her metal hands, looking down at it, almost in prayer. It floated weakly in the air when she let go of it. Huritt was next to her, for comfort. Kouhei was unchanged, with arms crossed and anger on his face. Haya seemed to be the only one who was *somewhat* alright.

“No, you didn’t.” Haya said, looking around the room starting with the other Titan. “Kouhei stabbed us, Lorcan is friends with us just for the Glimmer, I joined up so I could find another friend, you left us to rot for a month. Everyone gets *one*.” She playfully glared at the two ‘innocent’ Exos as she said that.

“Alright I’ll be the one to do it…” Lorcan slurred the words out, and pointed at Tirion’s Ghost with a bottle. “*How* the *shit* exactly?”

“Hey!” Ghost growled.

“A shard of the Traveler and pre-Golden Age mythology.”

Huritt immediately snapped to attention at her words. “They’ve found it?” He gasped.

“Yeah.” Tirion nodded. “And don’t swear in front of Ghost!” She warned.

Lorc shrugged, sliding down until he was laying on the couch, spilling beer all over himself and the couch. Haya grunted in disgust audibly. “Our Light is gone, so…” Lorcan tried to balance the bottle on his gray chestplate with shaky hands. “We’ve been uh, *drunkering stuporing*. Been fun.”

“It’s worse than that.” Kouhei said, not being able to withstand the Hunter slurring any longer. “We have no ships, little ammo left, no Light and I find myself agreeing with Lorcan. We’ve been in a turf war with the Cabal.”

“Hey!” The hunter glared at Kouhei. “Shush. Drink time.” Lorcan’s words were barely
understandable slurring, as he tapped on the bottle with his free hand. The bottle was subsequently snatched away from Lorcan’s hands by Haya, who put it behind her seat. He wasn’t done. The Hunter tried to roll down from the couch in an attempt to get it back, but was stopped by Haya’s foot.

“I’m so glad you’re here because we’re running out of Glimmer to throw at him.” Lorcan gave up the struggle when he heard Haya’s words, and returned to the couch. Or at least, attempted to climb it but decided not to bother as the floor was more comfortable. “And I miss my Hammers. Why are we still here?”

Tirion got right to the point. “I have a ship in orbit. We have found a way to restore Light, kind of. Too complicated to explain here. I’m here to bring you back. On my own orders.”

She saw Alva’s head jerk up from her Ghost, those eyes widening in hope.

“She’s telling the truth.” Ghost added. “I could transmat all of you to the ship and take you to EDZ. But…” Tirion was averting her gaze from him. “Guardian, something to say?”

“Damn it, I knew there was a catch!” The hope fell from Haya’s eyes as she opened up another bottle. Maybe Lorcan was right. Maybe the answer was an alcohol stupor, a radio with white noise, and drawn curtains.

“The catch is that the Cabal have a sun destroyer that needs disarming.” The misfits were barely phased by the news. “Right now I’m half torn tendons and half homemade opiates, not really in shape to finish this mission by myself. The Vanguard are antsy and I need a drink.”

Haya sighed, almost disappointed. “Sure, why not.”

“That’s it?” Ghost asked.

“A sun destroyer sounds more fun than a Glimmer deprived Lorcan.” Haya shrugged. Lorcan opened his mouth to say something, but only a burp came out, to disgust of others. Tirion really hoped that the new powers also cured hangovers, because she’s going to need them as soon as possible. She stood up, thinking about how she’ll get all six of them in her tiny ship. Something told her that there were bigger problems to worry about than that.

“In order to get out of here we would have to disable the invisibility field. We’ll have seconds.” Huritt explained, tapping something on a datapad with Alva. “We don’t have enough ammo to fend off the Cabal. They’ve… they’ve been executing everyone. I don’t think there are any other Guardians left in the City.”

“I’ll take care of that.” Tirion said. She owed her team to make sure they got out safe. She heard them patrolling outside, each of them almost shaking what remained of Tower to its core. With a deep shaky breath she looked through the scope, eyes centered on the little laser dot. “I’ll count down from six. When I reach three, you disable the field. Ghost, you prepare to go to orbit.”

“Are you sure this will work?” Asked Haya. “There are at least a hundred of them there and five and a half of us.”

Tirion had to be sure, for her team. Another slow, deep breath. Another double check that the rifle was loaded and actually had bullets in it.


“I am.” The Exo confirmed.
“Alright.” Tirion whispered.

“So, how sure are you of this plan?” Lorcan asked.

“Pretty sure. We’ll survive or we’ll die.” Tirion reassured them.

“If you could put it into percentages?” It was Haya’s turn to procrastinate.

“About 30/70.”

“In what kind of percentile measurements?” Tirion sighed and rolled her eyes at the Exo’s question.

“In…” She lowered her gun and turned to the team, confused. “In what kinda percentile measurements!? I… I-I don’t know! The normal ones! Now…” Impatience was slowly replacing the fear.

“Look… I’m a Hunter…” Lorcan started with a hiccup accompanying his words. “But even I’m pretty damn confident there is no such thing as percentile measurements.”

Huritt scoffed. “It’s a frabjous term we Warlocks use. You wouldn’t understand.”

Tirion groaned, clenched her teeth and waited for a couple of seconds. No more bickering came for a while, and she slowly returned her gaze to her weapon sight.

“Frabjous is our term, by the way.” Lorcan just had to get one final thing in. “You wouldn’t understand the term! Claiming our goddamn terms, I can’t believe you!”

“I swear if you knuckleheads don’t shut the hell up you I’ll leave you behind.” She spat. “Ghost, are you ready?”

“I am. Waiting for the countdown.”

She waited a couple extra seconds in case they wanted to continue the argument. Just in case. She understood why they procrastinated, if the timing goes wrong all six mighty heroes will die.

“Six… Five… Four… Three.”

The field slowly dissolved with a light crackling noise, exposing them as the illusion of the door and most of the room withered away. Ghost immediately locked for orbit.

“Two…” The first of the Cabal showed their heads in the doorway, but were quickly staggered by a couple of bullets. That death alone most likely alerted the whole Tower. She tossed a burning grenade and took the opportunity after that to reload her rifle.

“One…” Her voice was barely heard over the rumble as more of them ran to the room, the grenade slowly fizzling. All it took was her missing one shot, and a Centurion was charging at them.

“GO!”

She wasn’t sure what happened after that. Transmatting was always disorienting.

Tirion opened her eyes, expecting to wake up in the library again, but she breathed out a sigh of relief when she found herself in her ship, with all five of the misfits next to her, all of them had their Ghosts in hand, and some books and bottles.
“That’s bullshit!” Lorcan muttered. “Claiming frabjous as your own word… how do you even—” Lorcan’s accusatory drunken ramble was cut off by a weak punch in the face, by none other than Kouhei. The hunter fell to the floor, and the snoring coming from him indicated that he was alive, at least. When questioning eyes fell on the Titan, he just shrugged and sat down.

“Old habits?” Tirion asked.

“Believe me, I tried to wait until we got our Light back.” He explained himself. “You didn’t have to put up with him for a month.”

“Oh, I’m not complaining.” Tirion said as she sat down on the pilot’s chair and set the course. “He swore in front of Ghost.”

“We went from Atheon, to Crotta, to Oryx, to SIVA… to a farm.” Haya stated, grunting as she dragged the snoring Hunter behind her by his feet. She could carry him without a problem, but getting his obnoxiously long cape covered with mud was perfect payback.

“Mind the chickens.” Tirion said, watching a wide-eyed Alva stop in her tracks to look at the Warlock. The small Exo was almost bouncing in excitement. Tirion couldn’t help but slightly giggle at the sight. “Fine. Alright! They’re behind the shed, next to the Redjacks. Have fun!” The small Exo took off in full sprint towards the shed, startling some refugees in the process. She slowed down once she reached the shed and started to sneak, doing her best to not scare off the animals. Tirion will make sure to tell the Exo about the horses later.

“She will find joy in anything no matter the circumstances, won’t she?” Haya smiled, dropping Lorcan on the ground. He mumbled something incoherent and turned over to his side, dirtling his armor even more.

“How did you all survive in there for a month?” Tirion asked, starting to walk with him towards the shed. He has grown quite protective of the two Exos by the looks of it.

“We had conquered a big part of the Tower. The Cabal didn’t know we were there, just that they were dying one by one. We’re too weak to do anything else besides survive. That’s how.”
“Fair enough.” Tirion said. “I am proud of you five for not re-enacting Crot’a.”

No comment came from Kouhei, as he leaned against the shed and crossed his arms, almost cracking a smile at the sight below him. Alva was carefully petting the chicken, trying not to hurt it with her metal fingers. It playfully pecked her back, earning her trust.

Tirion smiled at the sight in front of her. Haya told the truth, the little Exo can find joy in anything. Alva is the one who has went through the most out of the six of them, but she always managed to be in high spirits. Tirion admired that, wishing she would have a fraction of that. The ability to not fall into anger or despair no matter how much the world around you burns.

She tried to remember which one of the chickens was Cayde’s. He really needed to start putting adornments on his pets, perhaps miniature capes. Whatever he was planning to do with them, she didn’t have time to ask. Nor did she really want to know.

But, as much as Tirion would love to sit and watch it all day, she had work to do.

“There is an old house half a mile west into the forest. Tell the others and meet me there in about 20 minutes.”

“Sorry I’m late!” Haya apologized as she entered the room, the only one missing. “Cayde saw me, screeched, and ran away. Confused me for a while. Saw Zavala, then I started to run away.”

“Oh…” Tirion whispered, sinking into her chair. “I haven’t exactly told the Vanguard that I was going to get you.”

Haya burst into laughter as she sat down on an old wooden chair. “You snuck into a Cabal occupied area to get us out without telling the Vanguard about it? That’s sweet.”

“Yeah… that…” Tirion frowned, starting to brace herself for the yelling that is to come. “I didn’t really think it through. Anyway…”

Haya stood up quickly to her feet to make sure that the door was locked before returning to her seat as if nothing has happened. “How do we get our Light back? Do we just walk up to the shard and touch it?”

“I just… yelled at it.” Tirion shrugged. “Said something about being the only one who saved it over and over. Maybe it has to do with worth? I’m a bad Warlock, I don’t know this stuff. Either way, to begin with, I only need two of you.”

Alva immediately shook her head, not wanting to be a part of it. She was an expert at stealth, but this mission needed brute force.

“I’d rather stay here and help study the shard, if you don’t mind.” Huritt said.

Tirion turned towards the other trio. “I don’t mind. Anyone else?”

Lorcan was uncharacteristically silent, arms crossed, hood covering his eyes as the candlelight stung too much to look at. Haya volunteered a little while ago, so it only left two.

“I nominate Haya and Lorcan.” Kouhei finally spoke. “If it’s about a trial of being worthy, I wouldn’t pass.”

“What?” Haya scoffed. “What makes you think that Lorcan is worthy and you’re not?”
The Hunter sighed and shook his head. “I can see that I am the punching bag of this team.”

“You know what I mean, Lorcan.” Haya’s words barely budged him but she carried on. “What? Do you think the Traveler remembers the Reef Wars, Kouhei? I was a Warlord, yet I’m taking this chance!”

Kouhei already said what he had to say, so he remained silent. There was no point in repetition. Haya sighed in defeat, looking over at Tirion as a call for help.

“Lorcan, are you in?” Tirion asked. “Could use your bow. Hammers and bows always worked perfectly together.”

He thought about it for a while, uncrossing his arms and removing his hood, immediately flinching at the light. It was either fighting or drinking, and he couldn’t take much more of the latter. At least fighting out there will be somewhat cathartic, having first hand witnessed what the Cabal have done.

“Fine. Sure. Shall we waltz in the shard’s direction?”

“There are ships you could borrow.”

Lorcan instantly stood up, and Haya went right after him, saying something about how she’ll take care of him and they’ll be back in an hour. Hawthorne sent a message a couple of minutes ago that Tirion should look at, gears were already moving. The difficult part was done, now, to battle.

“Where do you want us three?” Kouhei asked.

“Wherever you want, for now. You can try going to the shard if you want. I’m sure the Vanguard have jobs for you. Zavala is itching to yell at me as it is.”

“You went to the Tower without authorization?!”

“She did! I love it! I am so proud!” Cayde beamed, laughing to himself. “Almost brings a tear to my eye!”

Tirion wasn’t nearly as amused as Cayde. “I got my team back. Not my fault they decided to camp at the Tower.” Tirion kept her posture straight, hands clasped behind her, something she learned from Ikora. A sure sign that the world is about to end is when she is collected.

“You should have told us before you went, Guardian.” Zavala growled. “If your reckless mission would have failed, it would have endangered us all, both Guardians and civilians alike. It would have killed you, and it would have ignited the Almighty.”

“You don’t understand you, Zavala.” Tirion sighed. “I am known for taking risks, you’re shocked and angered by my methods. If not with my methods so far, tell me where do you think we would be?”

“You alone are enough to win this war. Your fireteam is an appreciated addition, but risking your life and winning the war over them was going too far.”
“But the team is still here…” Cayde sang. “All hope isn’t lost, everything is great now, let’s go! We need to break what’s his face now on his what’s his ship!”

There was no point in arguing. The less yelling the better. Hawthorne already briefed her about the plan, about Thumos and how they need to use his ship to get on the Almighty. That’s all she needed to know. She also got a message from both Lorcan and Haya that they passed the test and their powers were back, and now they were just shooting each other in the EDZ to test their powers, and additional complaints from Devrim. All that was left for Tirion was just getting to the EDZ. Zavala will have calmed down by then.

“I’ll see you in the Dead Zone.” She dismissed herself, ears still ringing from all the yelling in the past few days. There was one more thing she needed to take care of before leaving.

They left things rather strange. It was just too much piled on at once, for both of them. She was sure that he would have been much angrier with her if she stayed and cried, instead of coming back from defeat and doing something productive. No matter how reckless and stupid that productive thing might be.

She found him in one of the shacks, overlooking the inventory by himself, others most likely too scared to bother him. “Hey, big guy!”

The fact that Shaxx greeted her with booming laughter took her aback. Tirion wasn’t sure what she expected, but she didn’t expect him to laugh. She almost expected him to continue their yelling match.

“You don’t know when to quit! I love it!” Those words were enough to put a smile on her own face. “They tried to nail the coffin shut, but you lot just won’t stay down.”

Tirion backed away a couple of steps, convinced that this was some strange clone and not actually him.

“You don’t have anything angry to say about me going back to the Tower?” The news already had spread around the farm, so she had no plans to sugar coat it.

He shook his head. “I still don’t know if you’re very brave or very foolish. Asides from that.”

Relieved, Tirion walked up to him and wrapped her arms around the Titan’s big frame, and the arms reciprocated immediately, hugging her to him tighter and almost lifting her off her feet, still laughing.

“I didn’t mean to yell.” Tirion murmured into his chestplate. “Fighting for peace and a City without fear is difficult when your deeds get undone.”

“They aren’t getting undone. The Cabal are almost annihilated and the Hive will run out of gods, all thanks to you.”

Shaxx raised a fair point, peace was in their grasp. It didn’t mean that Tirion was happy about facing Taken again. But it all made moments like this just so much better.

“There was something you wanted to talk about? I have a moment.”

The Titan tried to not tense up at her words, not wanting to worry her. But her ear was pressed against his chestplate, he couldn’t control his heart.

“Just that winning the war is one thing and there is absolutely no point in fighting to repel the
Darkness and win if you don’t have an actual future to fight for.” He continued, slowly and hesitantly, voice as soft as he was capable of. “I never put much thought into it, until recently.”

Tirion turned her head to look up at him, at the helmet that she both hated and loved. It did a good job at hiding the fear in his own eyes. Her stare was piercing, but the fright came from another place entirely. Maybe it was too soon, maybe it wasn’t the right time, but it was the right moment. He wasn’t going to let the maybes deter him. They were meaningless. After all of the recent events, he needed her to know.

“I wanted to tell you that I cannot think of anyone else I would rather spend my future with.” He said as he tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, watching her eyes widen when the words sunk in. “I want you in that future, Tirion.”

"I--"

Just when he dropped his hand and was about to reach for something in his pocket, Tirion’s Ghost appeared with a whoosh next to them.

"Ghost!” Her voice was a mere high pitched yelp.

“I’m sorry!” Ghost exclaimed sincerely, moving around frantically. “I wouldn't be doing this on purpose! I’m so sorry! I tried to hold him off as much as I could but Zavala is getting really agitated. He’s on his way and wants you on the ship now.”

“Now?!” She shouted out, and they pulled away from each other when they heard some scuffling dangerously close.

“Yes, now, Guardian!” Zavala commanded, clueless about what he walked into.

Shaxx was cursed.

Absolutely cursed.

Chapter End Notes

Kinda forgot I had tagged this as fluff so...
“Considering your bedfellows, what’s in front of ya’ now shouldn’t be that dangerous. \textit{Relatively.}” Cayde said.

“It’s not that bad. Been quite nice, actually.” Tirion smiled to herself, not aware of what she’s about to get herself into. “I did almost die from a collapsed lung, once. That’s as dangerous as it gets.”

“Well you do— oh.” Cayde suddenly stopped himself, the realization dawning over him. “\textit{Oh!}”

“That is irrelevant to the mission. Get to that base.” Zavala cut in, and Cayde’s chuckle filled Tirion with dread. This was going to take a moment. A long, \textit{painful} moment that she will not live down.

“You’re tellin’ me you \textit{never} had that happen, Zavala? Not even in your younger days? \textit{Why} do I even ask this? \textit{Why} am I \textit{still} speaking?”

“A collapsed lung? Of course. Who hasn’t?” Cayde audibly snorted at Zavala’s remark, while Tirion was petrified in embarrassment. “The daggers of the Fallen are very dull now compared to how they were back when the wall was getting built.”

“Oh no. Oh \textit{no}… \textit{please} stop!” Tirion itched to remove her helmet, as it now was very hot with it on. They also had a Cabal facility to storm and a carrier to board. “That’s not…”

“I’m surprised that it hasn’t happened to you, Cayde.” Haya decided to chime in, with a wink that could be heard in her voice. “All that \textit{metal} must weight quite a lot.”

“Alright, \textit{stop it}!” Tirion snapped.

“Oh, I never said that it hasn’t happened to me.”

“This conversation is \textit{over}!” She did her best not to burst any eardrums with her stuttering shout.

“Don’t worry, Guardian. This is just an elaborate test about walking down aisles.” Cayde ‘reassured’ her. “I should bring this up with Saladin to have somethin’ to compare to.”

Tirion groaned. “\textit{If} either one of you continue on with this, I \textit{will} kill you.” She incinerated a Psion that was standing in her way to strengthen her point. \textit{Of course} Cayde heard the whole conversation. They needed to have that drink soon. She also knew that keeping a secret was the worst kind of torture for him.

“There are things that could help with that.” Haya was almost anticipating a sword through her spine when she said that. “Not really talking about \textit{pillows}, more lik--”

“\textit{Shut-the-hell-up}!” Tirion found slight relief that Lorcan was too busy laughing in the distance to contribute anything to the conversation.

Zavala’s deep sigh filled their earpieces. “Do I want to know what this… \textit{conversation} is actually about?”
“No!” Tirion shouted back at Zavala.

“Yes!” Haya and Cayde shouted even louder, at the same time. Maybe it all would had been easier if she just would have left one of them on Nessus and other in the Tower.

“Ahem…” Zavala cleared his throat. Entertaining this Guardian ludicrousness wasn’t anything that he had scheduled. “Holliday, what’s your status?”

“Still a couple clicks out, Commander. This girl’s heavy.”

Even with Lorcan trying to get himself to stop laughing, they ripped through the Cabal effortlessly. Only thing that hindered them was Haya’s insistence that all doors could be opened with a punch. Silliness aside, it was good to have them back. It would have taken her three times longer to do the mission by herself. The joking around helped lift the weight on her shoulders, helped to distract her from destructive thoughts.

“You got us a tank?!” Ghost exclaimed, catching the attention of the trio.

“You got them a tank?! How come I never got a tank?” Cayde’s complaint wasn’t one that needed an answer, but Amanda still obliged.

“You know you’d just break it.”

“What’s the holdup?” Zavala interrupted the chatter, as the Guardians didn’t move.

“Haya, do you mind?” Tirion asked, motioning towards the tank.

“Well… sure? Why can’t Lorc drive it?”

The Hunter looked up from his knife, wincing at the light reflecting off of it. “Uh… I have to keep a certain level of alcohol in me in order to not die from withdrawals.”

“Same here.” Tirion shrugged as Haya transmatted herself into the Drake. “I swear we are professionals, just not right now.”

It wasn’t that Tirion didn’t understand the urgency of the situation. The only thing she selectively ignored on the channel were Cayde’s constant pleas for a tank of his own. She knew what was at stake, but she had to take measures to make sure things get done efficiently. The end results always spoke for themselves. Haya cleared the path with the tank, Lorcan and Tirion followed after, with several attempts on Lorcan’s part to try to stand on the Drake and shoot from it with his gun. He was surprisingly good at keeping his balance on it.

They made it out of the tunnels without further trouble, managing to be somewhat professional. The carrier was in their sight, preparing for liftoff. A stabbing shiver ran down Tirion’s spine as the Cabal shielded the carrier, enveloping it. It all felt too familiar.

“Wait—see those generators? We need to take them out if we’re going to board that carrier.” Ghost said and Haya was already on her way, with a Lorcan finally finding a perfect place to sit on the tank. “For some reason I’m starting to feel a faint sense of déjà vu, Guardian.”

Tirion shook her head out of it and picked up the pace, clearing out some Cabal that wanted to blow up their tank. Refraining from commenting was difficult. She wanted to talk with Zavala about it, about that one order. She already angered him enough with her little adventure, and even more so with some of the tomfoolery of the misfits. But there was more to come. There was always more to come.
They had one generator down already, one to go. Haya was having too much fun with the tank, despite Lorcan’s audible complaints that she should leave some of the Goliath tank standing for his own projects.

“The ship’s about to launch without us!” The tailpipe of the carrier was blown up by a rocket from the tank before Ghost finished speaking. “Or we could do that!”

Haya and Lorcan were still driving in circles with the tank, not a care in the world, as the Hunter organized a bet with the Titan as for how long he can stand on it without falling off, shouting something about pre-Golden Age bulls and bars.

“Alright you two.” Tirion said, the tank stopping in front of her inches before she got run over. “We can continue the fun later, we have a bad joke to make.”

Haya got out of the tank with a slight frown. “Thing could use more seats.”

“I’ve got the blueprints of it on my Ghost already.”

Haya crossed her arms at the Hunter. “Are we going to have a repeat of when Saint asked you to ‘calibrate’ a Goliath tank?”

“What do you call a 300 pound gorilla that asks you to fix a tank?” Lorcan asked, without missing a beat.

“Um, extinct?” Haya guessed, not understanding what Lorcan was getting at. “I… what?”

“You call him sir.”

The three proceeded on to the carrier, much to Zavala’s approval. It was very convenient of the Cabal to try to launch without closing their front door. The two women almost had to drag Lorcan away by force, as he was on a mission to scan every Cabal vehicle he saw on the carrier.

“Your target is Thumos the Unbroken, one of Ghaul’s chosen. The key codes to his ship are your ticket to the Almighty.” Zavala informed them through the comms. “Hawthorne had a run-in with him while you were off-planet.”

Tirion decided to keep her objections about letting non-Guardians engage the Cabal to herself. Additionally, she and Hawthorne started off at the wrong foot. Tirion can’t say that she has anything against the renegade, just people that interrupt her business. There hasn’t been time to get to know her.

“They’re known as the Blood Guard for a reason. I’d tell you to be careful, but…” Hawthorne paused, sadness in her voice, but she quickly picked herself up. “That didn’t help the last team I sent out.”

“Don’t say it…” Haya mumbled to herself, not aware that the others could hear.

“Find the command deck, and you’ll find Thumos the Unbroken.” Zavala said.

“Don’t do it…” Haya mumbled again, ignoring Lorcan trying not to snicker behind her.

“And you’ll break him.” Hawthorne added, and coincidentally a gun got thrown right across the room, hitting a shield of a Phalanx. Lorcan gave up suppressing his laughter, and Tirion couldn’t take it anymore.
“What are you two doing?” Tirion asked, watching the Titan punch down a Phalanx with Lorcan gunning down another Cabal while laughing.

“You wanna…” Lorcan started between fits of laughter. “You want—I’m sorry, I can’t.” He cleared his throat and tried again. “You want to take a break, Haya?”

A cling of her Hammers echoed through the carrier, the sound alone staggering the enemies. Her movements a burning flurry as she threw the Hammer of Sol, hitting the Hunter straight in his stomach. The Hunter’s limp body was ablaze, taking out some Cabal and their Warbeasts that were unfortunate enough to stand behind him.

Sigh. Guardian down.

Lorcan’s Ghost revived him and he quickly rolled away and disappeared in a stealth cloak, the hammer that fled past him missing him by a hair’s breath. The carnage was finished in a couple of seconds, leaving no enemies standing in the area as Haya relentlessly chased the Hunter and the Cabal ended up being collateral damage.

“Hm. You didn’t need to have Lorcan for breakfast.” Tirion made sure she was far away, hiding behind a console she was scanning before she said that and Lorcan’s proud cackle was heard all across the EDZ. Tirion wasn’t proud of her own words, though. It was just fun to agitate Haya sometimes.

“Nah, let’s not poke her.” Lorcan said, jogging up to the console Tirion was looking at. “She might cause some abrupt appearances of sinkholes with her Hammers. Can’t have that.”

“Damn right I will!” Haya muttered, finger itching on her rifle’s trigger as she joined the two.

“It would make breaking news!” Lorcan ran off at full sprint towards a doorway as a platform got lowered, swiftly avoiding bullets. She blamed her missed shots on the physical pain Lorcan’s words caused.

“I hate. Both. Of you.” Haya followed Lorcan through the doorway above.

“In case it needed to be said, I’ve got the map. Let’s find Thumos.” Ghost said, and it was Tirion’s turn to jump and join the other two. “Let’s do some breaking and entering.”

Tirion didn’t mind participating in the fun now and then, but she shuddered at Ghost’s joke. “Is that what Lorcan hears from his Ghost all the time?”

Everyone knew very well that Lorcan’s Ghost was just on a permanent sighing schedule, with the occasional passive aggressive comment and delayed revives, sometimes giving him the wrong weapons and capes that were slightly the wrong color.

She was a bad influence on Tirion’s Little Light.

Ghosts always talked with each other, often engaging in fun competitions as to who had the best Guardian. A lot of the times it is concluded that Ghosts that have Hunters as their Guardians should be at the very least honored the most, as they have to put up with the most. Especially Ghosts of Nightstalkers, Guardians who consider the whisper of the Void to be their one and only true friend.

“You should be careful out there.” Hawthorne knew that at this point her advice was void. “The
team I lost to Thumos, they were good people. Some of my best.”

The two others weren’t that far away, warily traversing through the halls, treating every step like the next will lead to getting ambushed by an Ahamkara. They were professionals in combat, at least.

“Our Guardians can handle it, Hawthorne. It’s what we do.”

The Warlock was surprised to hear Zavala say something fond about her team after the things he got put through. However, Hawthorne just scoffed.

“It’s what you did. Last I checked, without the Light – you and me? Not so different.”

“Well…” Lorcan started just before they went through a door. “Zavala and Tirion are blue, you’re a beautiful poncho. Shaxx is a helmet.”

Haya rolled her eyes. “I am so done with you…” She pushed him right into the room behind the door, but Lorcan retaliated by firing a Shadowshot, trapping the Legionary and his Warbeasts that were in the room. They were dead before Hawthorne could react to Lorcan’s joke. Laughs died down as the door shut again, leaving Lorcan trapped on the other side.

At least they could shoot things very well.

They didn’t have time for these problems. Even Tirion would admit that.

“We are going to make Zavala develop a drinking problem, aren’t we?” Tirion sighed, looking for another way out. The sound of gunfire distracted her. “How are you doing in there?”

“There are vents everywhere. Try punching it and crawling through it. Race to Thumos!”

They found the said vent instantly, and Haya was surprisingly hesitant to punch it open, almost procrastinating. The race was cut short as they met the Hunter on the other side and continued their adventure of senseless violence against the Cabal. Maybe Lorcan’s question long ago about whether the Guardians were the bad guys held some merit.

“To answer the question…” Tirion said once the commotion calmed down and they were free to move on. “You are a normal human. We, even without the Light, are turbo-violent undead.”

“Oh man, wish we had Kouhei here for this.” Lorcan said, not laughing for once, sounding almost scared.

“Humans can be vicious as well. Being undead shouldn’t matter. We’re all the same.” Hawthorne persisted with her point. To her, anyone who was willing to pick up a gun and fight was a Guardian.

“I remember reading something about humanity in a Golden Age archive, it could be bent the other way to fit Guardians.” Tirion scrunched her face, deep in thought as she tried to remember the words.

“A Guardian is someone who no longer knows how to suffer with the other and for others. We don’t know how to suffer for the sake of truth and justice; don’t know how to suffer out of love and in order to become a person who truly loves.”

She didn’t give Hawthorne a chance to respond by opening the door to the hangar, where a battalion of Cabal were ready to greet them. The Cabal were throwing everything they had at the
trio to protect Thumos. Amanda’s backup was hardly needed, but it helped to serve as a distraction. It was easier to kill a Cabal when it wasn’t shooting at you. Thumos was right on the other side of the door.

It will keep twinkling, and beings will continuously thirst for its Light.

And they will continuously, almost mindlessly, defend it.

Being a Guardian was all about fighting, fight to survive, fight those who want to conquer the Traveler for themselves. She had no qualms continuing it.

At least for now. At least until her home was safe.

Chapter End Notes

A lot of people called Zavala dumb in the last chapter, but the way I see it is that he was just angry and didn't necessarily care about anything else but the mission. Tirion did mess up quite a bit.

And honestly these shenanigans might make things worse, because Fireteam "We Are Professionals I Swear" has been unleashed.

A bit shorter chapter, but the next one will be hella.

<3

and there will be fluff I PROMISE.
“Don’t get mad, but… I am going to bail before you fly off into the sun.” Lorcan said. “I’m not really into breaking and singing to the sun much.”

Tirion really hoped that he would tag along just for the comedic effect, and the stories told. “No worries. The City will need all the help it can get.”

“Guys, get this.” Haya tried to catch their attention. “Got a message from Huritt. He went to investigate the Shard, and got a burning *sword* he can summon.” The Titan almost sounded jealous, slightly pouting as she told that. Flaming Hammers just weren’t enough after all these years.

“What?!” Tirion groaned. “Why didn’t I get a sword? What the *hell*?”

Lorcan knew something felt very wrong when they were fighting Thumos, but he couldn’t place his finger on it then. Now he knew it was because she was using a rocket launcher instead of a sword that she loved to use. It threw off the entire dynamic of their teamwork.

“What… did you *do*… to your *sword*?” He asked slowly. He always liked that sword, on more than one occasion tried to steal it without success, even with Alva’s help. It was crafted with excellence he has never seen before or since.

It also set things on fire. *Disintegrated* them.

Perfect combination, for all he cared. If he could fuse four of them with his drone, he would be the happiest Guardian in the system.

Tirion sighed. “Shaxx lost it and I’m kind of mad at him, if I’m going to be honest.”

Haya winced, suddenly stopping. “The sword? The sword that we had to get fragments of Oryx’s sword for? The one we killed Darkblade for?”

Tirion nodded and Haya threw her hands up in the air, not knowing whether she should laugh or cry for both of them. The Titan finally settled on a sympathetic laugh and continued on with the trek.

“He will have to *propose* to you now to get out of *that*!” Haya said it as a joke at first, but the sudden silence and Tirion picking up the pace cut her laugh off short. “Wait… *did* he propose to you?”

“Oh, *look*!” Tirion pointed to something in front of her. “The base is over there!” She was unable to keep a straight face, adding to Haya’s newfound curiosity and annoyance.

“Tirionna!” Haya fumed, knowing that the nickname always gives Tirion chest pains.

“We have a ship we need to steal!” The Warlock’s voice was almost singsong.

The Titan grunted. “Don’t you *dare* not—”

“Ikora, we made it to the base!” The Warlock had the smuggest grin she could muster when saying that, earning Haya mouthing a curse at her. They won’t be able to talk about it as long as they were
connected to the channel.

It was the little things.

“Good. You know what to do. That ship is the only way we can get you to the Almighty undetected.”

The trio couldn’t fight for more than two minutes in silence. They tried, they had a strict deadline in front of them. For a Titan, Haya did have a problem with trying not to talk. The huffs and the headshaking became a bit overbearing, just adding more fuel to the fire.

“I honestly thought you never liked the idea of it.” Tirion said once some of the fighting had calmed down. “Weird to see that you’re so invested in my personal life.”

Haya shrugged. “I don’t like the idea of it. Life is too short for that kind of sappiness.”

“You’re… you’re a Guardian, Haya.” Tirion had to stop herself for a second, going over what Haya just said in her head. “And you stole Cayde’s trashy romance novels.”

“And you’re being a total sap with all of it, Tirion. I’m happy for you, but it’s sappy.”

Tirion laughed at that. “I won’t apologize for being happy with someone.”

“Well, I’ll be happy if the event involves shooting heavy ammo in the air.”

Lorcan snapped to attention when he heard Haya’s words. “We could reverse engineer a Fallen Walker for that.”

“What the f— No, no! You are not reverse engineering any Fallen or Cabal artillery for it!” Tirion said, finding relief in the fact that there was only one more door left between them and the ship they needed to borrow.

“Is a Hive tombship okay?” Lorcan asked, already deep in thought about how Hive ships worked. Lorcan never paid much attention to when it all was explained to him.

“Good grief…” She muttered under her breath. “This is why I don’t tell things to you guys.”

The Hunter pitched another idea. “We could repurpose the Dreadnaught! Aren’t we throne holders now or something according to Huritt?”

They were being absolutely hopeless.

“Don’t you two have hobbies?” Tirion wondered just before she opened the door, and the two briefly looked at each other and shrugged. “Anything that doesn’t involve planning explosive nuptials on ships with worms that eat Light?”

“Killing Lorcan.” Haya answered bluntly.

“Salvaging aliens to build things that will kill me, hopefully.” Lorcan said.

“Like it or not but you’re all we got in terms of amusement!” The Titan punched open the door, jumping straight into the breach behind it, picking off the turrets one by one before moving onto the other Cabal, Lorcan following after. Tirion wondered if this is what happens when Guardians have been alive for far too long. Lorcan was about half Haya’s age after his first resurrection, but the number was still significant.
Mentally, the two of them were younger than Tirion.

She ran straight toward the ship as the others worked, letting her Ghost out to scan it. “Cover me. I need to figure out how this works.”

“Protect that ship!” Ikora shouted, reminding Tirion that they were still on the comms. Luckily for her, all Ikora cared about that the mission was done and not absorbing random chatter. But Tirion was sure that once this is over, questions will be asked that she doesn’t want to answer.

Tirion has never been to Mercury, aside from a handful Crucible matches. She has heard stories about it, but the planet being strictly locked down and being the source of a lot of missing Guardians gave her little reason to go there. There was of course the mystery, but the whole solar system was equally mysterious.

And now the Almighty was attached to it.

Haya had a history there, and bringing her along was worrying. The Titan had a century’s worth of unfinished business on that planet. It all had to be done quickly, little time to search around. There was a chance that they were already too late to disarm the Almighty. No matter what, Tirion will not refuse help, or a replacement, in case things go wrong. Going up there alone and injured was just outright stupid. It’s always good to come prepared, and Haya could handle it. Underneath the goofiness, there was a truly capable Guardian. Tirion hasn’t slept since Io, and the pain was slowly creeping back in, like frostbite biting her skin.

It was pain and consequences for outrageously dumb yet necessary decisions to survive this far. Could she have gone another route? In hindsight, probably. Hindsight was also always rose colored. In this case, she will remember little of it. Helped to have the misfits and Ghost by her side to help with reports she’ll be buried in soon.

Ghost still didn’t know why he couldn’t heal her old injuries, and he was getting increasingly frustrated about it, feeling increasingly helpless. The wounds and bones weren’t healing by themselves. He’s been watching her go down a very dark road because he couldn’t do what he was made to do, to protect his Guardian, and ensure that she doesn’t die. Tirion reassures him that it isn’t his fault, that it could be either from the Traveler being caged or a vendetta it has against her. Her words still didn’t diminish the feeling of complete helplessness.

But, they were almost done. He finished scanning the ship, just when the trio took down an Enforcer with their combined powers. It was almost too easy. “The key codes work! Get on board!”

Lorcan holstered his weapon and took out his own Ghost, who was avoiding to look at him, grumbling. It still donned an old pink shell, small sparkles around it.

“Are you being serious? Look, I’ll build you a friend once the Cabal are gone! With flame turrets!” The Ghost turned to him slowly, grudgingly searching for his ship in the sky. “I’ll head towards the City, join up with the Redjacks.”

“You sure you don’t want to join us?” Haya asked. “I’m sure we can find a shady spot for you.”

He shrugged. “I don’t tan well. Won’t get discounts if I get mistaken for a Red Legion armor piece, you know?”

The walks between destinations didn’t have anything that could get the Titan to stop thinking, and now they had a brief moment to rest during this flight. The Cabal ships weren’t the fastest which only added to the agony. A lot of Titans weren’t mindless brutes who only had the word punch in
their vocabulary. A lot of them punched because it kept all the thoughts at bay.

“Are you alright?” Tirion asked a pacing Haya. “Things got intense with Lorcan. I know that you weren’t angry just because of the damn puns.”

Haya frowned, trying to get her head in order. Damn Warlocks, seeing through people. Wizardry. Only now things were finally hitting her.

“These news, about this Almighty what, using Mercury as fuel? You don’t think that they…” Haya gritted her teeth with a frustrated sigh, and decided to look out the window.

They were a family that kicked her out, but still her family. She knew them all, still remembered their names. They were the ones that took her in, forged her in the fires to be the Guardian she is. If not for that, she would have been publicly executed by the Iron Lords, her Ghost just dust. The Sunbreakers saw that deep inside she had no interest in bloodshed and tyranny, just that she owned a strong heart.

They were strongest Guardians she has met.

Another Guardian she held close to her heart was the reason her family kicked her out, also a victim of that cursed planet.

“I don’t know, Haya. I’m sorry.”

Haya shook her head at her own inner debacle, resilient. “If there is anything that would make Saint show up is something to bash his head in. I’m sure that Ouros and the rest managed to evacuate, but Saint could never tear himself away from a fight.”

She was almost trying to convince herself. There were so many casualties. So many senseless deaths because Guardians relied on their light during a simple Strike to survive and thought that they could confuse the enemy. During a Crucible match when Shaxx suddenly stopped speaking, and some participating Guardians weren’t getting up after getting shot. Most of them figured out what was going on before the announcement was made.

Chaos was system wide when the Cabal attacked. At least those who died at the Tower knew what killed them, some embraced it with open arms and a smile, not letting the Cabal see them suffer and take pleasure in massacring them. Many Guardians died clueless, away from their home and all alone. Broadcasting out their cries, hoping that someone would hear them, as no one was contacting them. Some Guardians were responsible for killing their best friend in a friendly skirmish, and will have to live with it until their final death.

Nothing was certain when it came to the casualties.

Even the strongest fell.

Haya could see how Tirion struggled how to break the news, they didn’t have time to conduct a search mission. That the priority was disarming the Almighty and taking back the City with everything they have. The Warlock wanted to help, but the problem has always been time, even if you have the privilege of eternal life.

“I don’t want to scour the planet, goddamn it! Just to see if he’s there.” Haya pleaded. “And if he isn’t… Then we move on and take back the City. Run with our usual shenanigans until then.”

“Fair enough.” Tirion said, getting a brief grateful smile as a response. But, Haya needed a change
“Have you heard from the others?”

“They got their Light back. Dad Titan and the kids are joining Shaxx.”

Shaxx has always been able to handle himself, having the misfits join him was even better. They’ll be able to protect each other or topple the City on the Cabal. A win either way. She wanted to call him, but outgoing signals would lead to the mission failing. Something else about what Haya said stood out more, though.

“I’m sorry… Dad Titan?”

Haya sighed. “Back at the Tower, he was teaching the Exos how to use a machine gun and smiled when they succeeded.” She sat down on the floor, even the memory being too much to handle.

“Actually freaking smiled. Still disturbed by it.”

“Huh…” Tirion struggled to deal with it herself. Her world seemed to be filled to the brink with Titans acting all kinds of strange. “And to satisfy your twisted curiosity, we… didn’t get a chance to conclude it, I guess.”

“What? Why? Come on!”

Tirion rubbed the back of her neck. “I infuriated Zavala with what I did, and he had little tolerance for the fact that I haven’t left for the mission yet, so we were interrupted. He doesn’t know anything.”

“Pfft… Titans.” Haya muttered to herself, being all too self-aware. “Wanna get back at him?”

“I’d rather not.” Tirion looked out the small window, watching as they slowly approached their destination. The Titan had no time for business in that moment and pouted, crossing her arms. Her thought process was as swift and unstoppable as her Hammers.

“Zavala has this word generator thing for Strike names, Alva and I have found a way to mess with it.”

It was tempting. So very tempting. “Let’s not.”

“Oh come on! Just think of one. One dumb name to slightly ruin his day. Just a little bit, just enough so it’ll bug him the whole day.”

Tirion knew that the Titan wasn’t going to budge. At least this time around the suggestion wasn’t to send Kouhei to break someone’s legs. “Fine, put down something like… ‘Babydog’?”

“Babydog!?”

“Our Fireteam’s name for the longest time has been ‘The Bad Guys Don’t Care What We Call Ourselves, Do They?’, we never really excelled in naming things.”

To her surprise, Haya was laughing, her Ghost working ahead of her. All Tirion could hope for is that none of the six of them will be present for that strike. “We always excelled in shenanigans.”

Pain.

All she remembers is pain, remembers never getting warm.

The blindness, the feeling of desperation and being lost like a small child. Yelling about how this
The mission was asinine, goodbyes in her earpiece that she chose to ignore as she simply didn’t have the strength to address them. The anger, the loathing towards the Cabal. They were persistent at first, but she noticed how they got more and more scared of the cleansing fires that annihilated them. They fought bravely, honorably. Holding their station until the very end. Tirion could respect that.

Then, explosions, as the Almighty finally fell. Both of them escaped, and Haya set off immediately to join the attack on the City.

Only other thing she could remember was a split second, a split second of being immobilized by fear and astonishment as she stood in front of the sun and fiery rain crashed down upon her.

Nothing besides that. All she knew was that the mission was done successfully.

Head blank, vision still speckled with yellow and white. Didn’t matter how many times she blinked, it wouldn’t go away.

The world was cold around her, body trembling. Fear consuming her once again as she dug through the cabinets of the ship, finding nothing. Cursing, double checking. Triple checking. She had another one, somewhere. She was sure of it.

The Almighty was now destroyed, the worst was over, she kept reminding herself.

The destination was set, they were flying towards the City to finish this. But whether they could do it remained a whole other question. On the bright side, they had five backup Guardians. The priority was taking down Ghaul.

“Guardian…” Ghost whispered as she threw the empty box to the other side of the ship.

“Damn it!” Tirion shouted, unwillingly falling back onto the hard bed, aching all over. “I thought I had more!”

Tirion was doomed from the start.

Perhaps she was brought back by mysterious forces just to get this far, because she was the only one who was insane enough to do the job. It’s a known fact that everyone loves a story where the hero dies in the end, a hero whose death inspires others to fight for vengeance. Ghaul was powerless now. The combined forces of Guardians could take him down, anger on top of that would only make them stronger.

Maybe that was her purpose. To make people stronger with her courage. But the courageous ones are the once who challenge the world, and the world has to either break them, or kill the unbreakable ones.

There was strict radio silence ordered, no calls to Earth or anywhere were a possibility. That might be the worst of all. She just wanted to hear Shaxx’s voice. He had a skill with words to the point where he could make mountains rise up and fight.

Ghost grumbled, knowing her thought process. She wasn’t dying. Then there was that promise he made to Shaxx. He flew overhead until he was eye level with a shelf. There had to be something, but granted, he wasn’t the best at finding things. They didn’t have several centuries this time around. Transmatting anything to her right now wasn’t an option.

Not even the Traveler knew when the last time she slept or ate anything was.
Ghost knew her pretty well, though. She never kept food in the ship, because of many incidents and Glimmer wasted on new ships, and this ship was borrowed. So that was out. Always too busy to sleep when on missions, only sleeping when her body can’t handle being awake anymore, so getting her to sleep wasn’t an option just yet either.

There.

Determined, he launched himself into one of the water bottles. Not enough to hurt himself, just to get it to move slightly. Ghost kept on nudging the bottle until it fell into her lap below, startling her. The little triumphant spin he did when his mission turned out to be a success got a weak chuckle out of her, and he received back a small pat on the head.

“Thank you.” She smiled, and almost emptied the entire bottle when she drank it. “How long until we arrive at Earth?”

Ghost had no motivation for verbally negotiating with stubborn workhorses in that moment, so he just head-butted her shoulder. Words very seldom worked against Warlocks.

“What…” He nudged her again, a little bit harder this time, trying to get her to move. “What are you doing, Little Light?”

The blanket next to her disappeared into blue sparkles for a second, before it re-appeared on her. It took one more nudge to get his point, and she laid down on the bed, incoherently mumbling. An involuntary yawn escaped, and her eyes shutting by themselves made it difficult to argue that she didn’t need the sleep.

Another bottle fell, almost hitting her head and she heard a soft gasp. “I’m so sorry! I—I mean…nothing. Silence.”

Chapter End Notes

But yeah Shaxx, where IS my sword?
Simplicity

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Darkness.

Once more.

It wasn’t weighing her down this time around. It was welcoming, no longer actively pushing her away. It embraced her kindly, like an old friend, or like a parent’s loving embrace. For sure this place was a valley of death, but it all felt like home now. A place where the world wasn’t turning. It just made it all that much harder to find the will to leave it. It kept sucking her back in.

“You are still out there. I never doubted you.”

A voice. She wasn’t alone this time around. Tirion knew exactly who it was. It was the one that she couldn’t save.

“Where are you?” Tirion called out into the nothing, trying to find the source of the familiar voice. “Is it really you?”

“I’ve been hearing good things, Guardian.” Said the old voice. A small speck of light was moving in the distance, but it was out of her reach. She couldn’t get closer no matter how much she ran towards it, as if she was running toward a mirror.

“You have shown me and countless others how to not be afraid. Your mind… curious like no other. A curious mind is a violent thing—always at war with the unknown. And itself.” He chuckled sadly. Both of them knew what happened.

“You shouldn’t be here.” Tirion whispered.

“Perhaps. But, I have dreamt of beautiful and terrible things. I’ve lived my life to the fullest. I have no qualms with leaving now.” It was as if he was right next to her, but she could see him moving far away, the mask still shining in the endless darkness. He was on his own path, one that she shouldn’t follow. A path that she should’t follow.

“Even when the Darkness is still persistent, and we haven’t won the war?” She asked.

“Darkness endures. It will always do so.” He told. “It claws back from the pit to threaten us again and again. Each time it returns, it grows stronger. It hungers, it feeds on our fear. It will always be persistent.”

“I’m so sorry…” Tirion murmured. It was as if he could read her mind.

“I do not fault you, Guardian. The power of the Darkness can seem compelling, alluring. But, the Light will always overcome it.”

Closing her eyes helped, she could feel his presence next to her, as if he was walking right next to her. No echoes existed in this realm, only voices of the doomed and the dead. Only way to get there was to either die or let the darkness consume you. She didn’t know which category she fell under.
“I think it might be too late for me.” Tirion said. “I let it all consume me, just so the damn pain would go away.”

“You have not. Not yet. Your Light shines even in the darkest of nights, it’s why I feel confident leaving the world in your hands.” He reassured her. No matter how many times she ran through it all in her head she saw more darkness than Light in her. Maybe perhaps this dark realm was of her own creation.

“The Light is many things. It lives in all places, all things. But in these trying times, it is our most potent weapon. It gives us strength. Test that strength, and you will find it has no limits.”

“But, how?” She asked the void, opening her eyes to find him standing in front of her. The mask on his face was shattered, the old Warlock robe torn to almost shreds. “I don’t know how to do this.”

“You do. You have always known. Shine your Light, and give the Darkness no place to hide.” The Speaker said. Maybe it was just that simple. He knew the dangers of convincing a Warlock that the concept of simplicity exists. “All you accomplish will inspire. And in that inspiration you will find strength. Be brave, be kind. For all of us.”

With a content sigh, The Speaker turned away from her to face the dark. At last, he was ready to go.

“Please, don’t go.” She pleaded, reaching out to him. By the time her hand almost touched him he was already gone.

“Goodbye, Guardian.”

Next thing she knew was that she was falling, abruptly woken up as something shot down her ship. Ghost reacted quicker than her, and transmatted her and her guns to the roof of a nearby building so she wouldn’t die a fiery death. He wasn’t confident in his reviving capabilities with the Traveler caged up like that.

“Guardian! Are you still with us?” Zavala’s voice in her ear didn’t feel real. The darkness she was in just before felt less like a dream. The Speaker was gone. Even with all the qualms she had with his speeches now and then, his death left a void in the world. It probably won’t ever be filled.

Tirion couldn’t take her eyes off of the Traveler. It almost spoke to her, struggling in its cage. Something was stirring deep inside of it, something that even the oldest of Guardians can’t remember. She continued on down, barely knowing where she was going, almost on autopilot.

The City was in ruins, but not without a chance of redemption. Most things in life could be rebuilt, the Cabal weren’t one of them. Humiliated and demoralized they were throwing kill boxes at the Guardians, funneling them in. What got Hawthorne to help out with disabling the barrier networks was one of the few things Tirion will never understand.

Guardians were fighting alongside her, some with their Light back. She assumed that Huritt has been talking to some select Guardians about a pilgrimage to the Shard. No surprise that he wouldn’t share the secrets with the Vanguard. The relationship between the misfits and the Vanguard has always been tense. All of them had at least one excuse as to why they preferred to have Tirion as a proxy. Huritt was the only one who loved Hive knowledge more than resentment.

Even if the Vanguard knew about the powers of the Shard they would have been too stubborn to make the trek to it, especially Zavala. It’s all about proving a point.
Tirion saw little purpose for resentment in that moment, as the Vanguard’s cries for help were getting desperate and they could barely keep their position. Ghaul’s command ship was docked to the Traveler. He was obviously getting desperate. Having emotions is the biggest cause of lost wars.

“Ghaul found a way to drain its Light. It’s the only explanation.” Ghost said. “Guardian, we have to stop him. If he takes the Light—“

She didn’t need to get reminded of it all. “If he takes the Light then he will become a Cabal Guardian. What he doesn’t know is that the Traveler might have given us eternal life and powers, but it didn’t grant a cure for stupidity. We can beat him either way.”

“…they just shot off my arm!” Cayde yelled in her ear, proving her point. They’ll be able to win no matter what. The Cabal were near-extinction, similarly to how humanity was all those centuries ago. But the Traveler would never turn his gaze to a monstrosity such as Ghaul. He can take the Light for himself all he wants, obtain the powers of a god, but he will remain a mortal. Mortals have just one fatal flaw.

“Ikora, Cayde.” Zavala began. “If we don’t make it out of this alive… know that I’ve never been prouder to be part of your fireteam.”

If it weren’t for a Turret shooting at her and distracted her, she would have frozen in confusion for a couple of minutes. They were making speeches?

“If we have to die, at least we’ll die in the shadow of the Traveler, old friend.”

“We’re about to die, and you’re still making speeches?!” Cayde shouted at Ikora and Zavala, voice a mixture of pain, panic and annoyance. Maybe it was just because he wanted to be up there and fight Ghaul himself.

They were going to be just fine. General rule of the world is that if you’re confident that you’ll die, you won’t. Death has a tendency to sneak up on someone, not giving people a chance to make a speech.

Tirion got there just in time, just as a Cabal was about to strike down Zavala with its blade. Ikora used the last of her strength to kill it. The Vex teleporter activated after Cayde’s usual method of repairing things, which included applying brute force by hitting it a couple of times with his good arm.

Just because they won’t die doesn’t mean they will survive it without a couple of scratches. Perhaps it was rude to jump into the teleporter straight away without hearing the Vanguard out, she didn’t care.

Tirion died last time she embarked that ship. All Ghaul would have to do is to push her off again, but she’ll come back this time around.

Ghaul didn’t understand nor embrace the fundamentals of being a Guardian. His imminent downfall was simple. The immortality, and the fact that all he actually needed to do to keep the Guardians distracted from the Traveler was to draw a glowing circle somewhere on Venus. Easily amused adrenaline junkies, stubborn, willing to wage wars with each other over the fact that the circle has to do something. Lorcan told her that once, before luring a whole fireteam of Guardians to a poorly drawn circle in the Plaza.

It was of course, more complicated than that. The world was more complex than that.
Ghaul just simply didn’t understand it. He wanted to use the Light for his own gain without understanding that the Light simply is. He couldn’t understand the simple parts of it.

There was just one more person she needed to speak to before she ends it all. It took a minute to reach him. She hoped it was because he was trying to stop the misfits from killing each other instead of the other alternative.

“Hi, big guy.” Tirion said, hearing sounds of battle on the other end. “Having fun down there?”

“Remind me to bring your team along the next time I feel like brawling.” Shaxx laughed to himself. “Had to tell them to relax because the Cabal were getting scared and we were running out of things to fight. Marvelous. Could teach the rookies more than a few things.”

Tirion was glad that they haven’t accidentally killed each other yet, and the City was still mostly standing. They won’t be able to restore it if it’s just rubble. One step closer to a happy ending. But more often than not they turned their guns on each other.

“How are you holding up?” He asked, voice suddenly soft. “I would tell you to stay safe, but… you are you.”

“Death keeps putting his hands on me and I keep breaking his bones. I’m on the command ship, and no, you can’t have it.”

This cursed ship won’t be left standing if she has a say in it, too much pain on it. Things couldn’t get worse from there, so she took her time walking through the corridors. “I love you. You know that, right?” Tirion didn’t mean to make it sound like a final tragic goodbye. She was coming back from this. Whether the world liked it or not. What would the Vanguard do without her? They needed the wrench.

The words made it all just so much harder, but it also gave her the motivation to survive.

“I love you, too. Truly. I need you to come back alive from this. Don’t… don’t die on me again, Hivebane.”

Tirion bit her lip, one trembling on the elevator switch. Reality was that she was weak, too weak. She felt cold underneath the layers of armor, barely in control of the shakes. Worst comes to worst, one of the misfits will step in.

She didn’t want things to come to worst.

“How do you think I am?” Tirion joked, trying to shake herself out of it. “Just had to get one final death out of the way. I’ll be fine. Just… say something perfect, something I can steal.”

That low, almost strained, laugh she loved was more than sufficient.

“Show Ghaul that nothing can stop you.” If there was one person in the galaxy that was perfect for that request, it was Shaxx. “They’ve battered your body, but they could not harm your soul. Now, crush him!”

The comms cut out with a static as the elevator rose to her doom.

Familiar Arc energy crackled around the Titan as he ran, uncaring of what or who was in front of him. If it was a Cabal, then they needed to be destroyed anyway. If it was a Guardian, then their Ghost could resurrect them and they’ll have a story to tell about how they got punched by the great
Lord Shaxx. He had one destination in mind, and nothing, not even his aching limbs will stop him until he’s there.

Tirion was on the command ship when the Traveler retaliated, the command ship that the Light disintegrated along with Ghaul when it broke free of its shackles. There was a brief moment when everyone thought that the war was lost, for good this time. When everyone gazed upon the projection of Ghaul declaring a new age.

He was right, to some extent.

Having the Light back be damned, Shaxx has done fine without it for the last two months. He would rather have her alive than the Light back. He gazed upon the Traveler, now shattered and broken, but alive.

Bits and pieces of the Immortal and the cage orbiting around it.

But she…

“You just had to agitate him by quoting Oryx at him, didn’t you?” A chipper robotic voice said. “Not to say that he wasn’t already agitated, but really, Guardian?”

“Pffft. He talked too much. Both of them.” Tirion said, throwing her broken helmet away. “Since when aren’t you a fan of unconventional warfare?”

“Well, I am! But I am not a fan of rude unconventional warfare.”

“Manners flew out of the window when he flew in.” Tirion rolled her eyes. “He thought he could take me? I encouraged the new warrior of Light to come for me. I have taken entire gods, he wasn’t worthy to face me and all that damn nonsense.”

“Well, if it will help our next threat, I have everything Ghaul said categorized and—“

Ghost suddenly halted in the air mid speech, and Tirion followed his gaze. The world around her stopped mattering when she saw Shaxx standing in the distance, and before she knew she was running towards him, into his outstretched arms.

They collided into each other, with enough force to almost topple him over. He wrapped his arms around her, lifting her off her feet, refusing to let go of her. She’s been wondering when the moment everything pays up will come. That all of the fighting, blood and sweat becomes worth it. Simple moments like these came pretty close to that moment, made it worth fighting for.

“We did it!” Tirion cheered into the furs of his pauldron before he put her down on the ground. He laughed as he looked at the broken Traveler again, oh the laugh that she loved so much.

“Glorious, is it not glorious?” He sighed contently, returning his gaze to her. “And they say that there is no beauty in vengeful annihilation.”

Tirion chuckled weakly, struggling to stand. “You sure know how to compliment someone.”

The long overdue bag of bricks tore open above her, and it all dropped down on her, stripping her away of the remaining adrenaline as her vision became nothing but static. Strong arms were there to stabilize her when she lost her balance, arms that never left.

“Are you alright?”
She shook her head, managing a weak smile. Just rationalizing the past few weeks was exhausting. “I… I just took down a Dominus infused with Light. I haven’t properly slept in days, and suddenly I am too weak to walk.” She said the last part playfully, leaning into him. “Want to help out with that?”

Tirion laughed as he gathered her into his arms and started carrying her effortlessly, one hand supporting her back and the other her legs. There were some stares and teasings along the way, but all Shaxx had to do to shut them down was just stare at them. They always scattered. He underestimated the distance he ran on the walk back, and by the time they reached the others she was already asleep in his arms. Ghost was constantly there to reassure him that she was still alive.

The Vanguard and some remaining Guardians set up a camp in one of the intact buildings, celebrating the victory and wondering about their next move. Everything turned solemn when Shaxx arrived there, as concerned stares and gasps consumed the room.

“She isn’t…” Cayde couldn’t even finish the sentence, barely able to look at her. “Y’know…”

Her Ghost perked up from where he was nuzzled in her hair.

“No, just asleep.” Ghost answered for the hundredth time, sounding drained himself, and nested deeper into her hair. He could always transmat himself out of it. The sigh of relief from the Vanguard however, shook mountains. They had built a makeshift hospital of sorts for the injured, and it didn’t take long for Shaxx to find an unoccupied room with a bed.

They could finally rest and breathe. Planning where they would go from there could wait for sunrise. Some Guardians were stationed just outside of the city, just in case the Cabal attempt to retaliate, even without their leader.

“How long has this arrangement been going on?” Asked Ikora, who has been lurking in the doorway, carefully watching them both. So much for breathing. Very few things have escaped Ikora’s gaze, this was one of them for the longest time. They were good at hiding it before, and Cayde didn't want to die.

Shaxx shook his head at the question. “I do not need your approval, Rey.”

“Oh, I’m not here to offer disapproval, Shaxx.” She said, calmly. Always almost terrifyingly calm. “Matter of fact, I was curious as to why the old Tower wasn’t punched to the brink of collapsing before the Cabal got here. Guess I have my answer. She’s obviously good for you.”

He scoffed, turning to face Ikora who was still standing in the doorway, as collected as ever. “You seriously believe that I would have set the Tower ablaze myself if it weren’t for her?”

“You don’t?” Ikora answered his question with another question. It was a good question, though. He’s the one who has been taking enemy ships and vehicles for himself.

“Fair enough.”

“Well…” The Warlock was getting ready to leave, as her curiosity was satisfied. Plans for the future had to be conducted. “Treat her well. Or alternatively, just remember what happened the last time you tried to fight a Warlock. She has long surpassed most of us.”

Tirion found herself in an unknown room. The walls were the color of cool metal, the tiny bed she was in was soft, so she definitely wasn’t at the Farm. She continued to look around to find a unique
helmet resting at the foot of the bed, and its owner sitting in a chair right next to the bed. He had his arms crossed and head tilted forward, asleep. Still fully armored from the day before.

Always looked so peaceful yet so threatening at the same time, that one. He along with all Guardians deserved and earned all the sleep he could get. The Cabal were still a threat, but they wouldn’t dare to try to touch the City again. Shaxx’s Ghost was already on it, and the Titan snapped his eyes open. The almost panicked expression was quickly replaced with a smile when he saw her awake.

“Morning, Hivebane.”

“Hi…” Tirion croaked out, reaching out for his hand. “I had a weird dream.”

Shaxx smirked. “Did you now?”

“I dreamt about the Cabal attacking the City and disabling the Light, the Hive were summoning more members of Oryx’s family. The Vex were fine, though.”

Tucking that one loose strand of red hair behind her ear has become muscle memory. “I’m afraid it wasn’t a dream.”

“I’m glad.” She said, as he gently caressed her cheek, subconsciously tracing the swirls of light with a gloved hand. “Because in that dream you said that you want to spend your future with me.” Tirion hadn’t forgotten about the conversation. It was a hard one to forget.

“I did.” Shaxx grabbed her hand and gently pulled her up into a sitting position so he could sit next to her and wrap his arms around her, bed almost budging, before brushing his lips against hers. "Never got to chance to finish that thought."

“Did you mean it?”

He involuntary froze at the question, pulling away. He thought he had it all rehearsed. Nothing was ever predictable with her.

“Of course, but… I am not quite acquainted with these kind of things. Truth be told, I never really cared about it. Until recently.”

That nervous and anticipating smile of hers somehow made it all just more nerve-racking. Usually, it filled him with confidence. But this wasn’t anything he usually does, not by a longshot.

"Really?"

The Titan continued. “It's not a thing you see often. I er, consulted with Tyra about how they did it before all of this. In-between curious laughing, she mentioned something about rings.” In the corner of his eye, he saw that smile grow bigger for every word he said. Shaxx tried his best to hide the slight shaking of his hand when he pulled something out of his pocket, picking off where they left off a day or two ago. Between his fingers was a ring, made out of shiny dark orange metal, with small intentional ridges for decoration.

“I…” The tremble finally conquered his normally stable and confident voice, and all it took was laying his eyes on her. “All I know is that, despite the things you do, I have no plans to start hating having you by my side and…”

Screw it.
“… Marry me.”

Chapter End Notes

CONGRATS SHAXX YOU DID IT
“Alright. I’m bored and Tirion’s not here to stop us, so.” Haya sighed, chucking away the gun she was disassembling and assembling over and over. “Please elaborate, both of you.”

“The Hive are much more tenacious than us.” Huritt said. “They have a more articulate culture than we do, and a more complex language.”

“You didn’t let me finish my point!” Lorcan raised a finger to silence the Exo. “We are better at killing.”

“You need smarts to kill p—“

“Culture and knowledge doesn’t mean a thing! This isn’t a jab at Warlocks, it’s just a fact.” Lorcan cut the Warlock off. “Once Oryx saw that we kept on getting revived, don’t you think he sat up and shouted ‘Sweet mother of Akka, what the fuck is this?!’. We don’t need smarts when we can terrify and confuse them. That’s the best battle strategy.”

“That’s a dumb battle strategy.” Haya muttered, giving up in finding amusement in the discussion.

“If it’s stupid and it works…” Lorcan smirked and tapped on his head with a finger.

Haya rolled her eyes. “If it’s stupid and it works, it’s still stupid and you’re lucky. And I sound like Kouhei, so… I’m going to reassemble this gun to shoot myself.”

“That’s a alright battle strategy.” Haya muttered, giving up in finding amusement in the discussion.

“Psions are incredibly intelligent, yes? Does being intelligent stop bullets traveling through their heads?”

It was fair question when he rephrased it, and even Haya shrugged. “Well, I’m a Titan, so I’m going to ask the only question that matters.”

“Yeah?” Lorcan felt the oncoming victory for the argument.

“Can I punch it?”

“She gets it!” Lorcan cheered to the Exo that was no longer paying attention. The laughter died down however when the Hunter frowned as he looked at the empty chair next to him. Kouhei and Alva were helping to rebuild, Huritt was writing reports about Hive and Cabal activity because someone had to. Lorcan and Haya were helping out in their own unique ways.

They haven’t heard a word from the remaining one in almost a week.

“I miss Tirion. Having Huritt argue back isn’t fun.”

Haya leaned back into the couch they stole for their new den. “She would be proud that we’ve done fine without her to supervise us, though.”

Huritt scoffed, completely flabbergasted by the claims. “You agitated Emperor Calus. Then, Lorcan created glowing spray out of Fallen technology, and used it to draw runes on the ground of the City for his own amusement. How is that fine?”
“Hey! It was for the kids of the City.” Lorcan explained himself. “Watching Guardians fight over a glowing thing is always hilarious.”

“It caused panic.” The Warlock said.

“Maybe. But, it made the kids laugh, Huritt.” The Hunter was already exasperated. “Would you rather tell them that their parents won’t ever be found? Because you are free to do so!”

“Alright, enough.” Haya interrupted as she got up. This argument was going nowhere, and since Tirion wasn’t there to stop it someone had to. Usually, Tirion is there to stop them before they reach this stage. “Lorcan, come with me.”

The Hunter followed the stomping Titan, knowing that the alternative might be worse. Both him getting left behind with Huritt and letting Haya wander off by herself late in the night.

The City won’t be restored in a day, but they were on a good path. The old Tower was deemed unrepairable, but everyone knew that it was just a bad excuse. They wanted to build something in the Wall itself, a new Tower, closer to the City. A more welcoming place for the people down below, a fresh start for everyone.

It took exactly 30 minutes after the idea was proposed for the misfits to create a betting pool, for how long it will take until the relationship between Guardians and civilians are back to what it was before the attack. Guardians being a touch arrogant about everything, and civilians living in a city where they have no control over anything. Both sides were too stubborn to blur the barriers and understand each other.

Guardians themselves couldn’t settle feuds between each other, much less settle feuds between them and ordinary humans.

“Why do you still need a proxy, Haya? Can’t you talk to them yourself?”

“The proxy is needed to prevent violence.”

“Why? Don’t think you ever told the story.”

“The story is that a while back we wanted to defend the City on our own terms and Zavala had a lot to say about it. Osiris and his damn bird getup was there, and…” She sighed, stopping her autopilot. Realizing that she has no time nor desire to relive the memory.

It was what it was.

At least she had no qualms with Cayde.

“I’m really worried about Tirion.” Haya admitted. “Vanguard might know something, maybe they just sent her out on a secret mission.”

The two continued on, navigating through the tents and rowdy crowds. Things won’t settle for a very long time. No one could sleep peacefully quite yet.

“Sure that’s it.” Lorcan said, knowing what a chore it was to convince a Titan of something, not being surprised by the inevitable head shake. “Wait, you can feel concern?”

There was always hope, she told herself. “When we were on the Almighty, she was completely out of it.” Haya told. “I’m not sure if she was high, or just lost all the fight she had in her. But she wasn’t there. I’ve seen it before.”
It was scary, looking behind her shoulder and seeing the Warlock being entranced by the sun, frozen in place. Her Ghost had to yell at her to stay in the shadows, had to guide her to darkness when she was blinded by the light. She was barely able to stand upright half the time, and the reason why she did an incredibly reckless thing to rescue her fireteam became apparent. She couldn’t do it without help.

All the Cabal she killed was just muscle memory, Tirion was completely in her own world during the fight.

And then she disappeared.

The great hero didn’t even attend the victory party at the Farm, mumbled that she had some business elsewhere. Disappeared without a word like she always does. One of the few things all six of them had in common. When life hit rock bottom, it was time to flee it. For them, the world has always been tangible and moldable. They were convinced that they were the ones who made the world fickle, that they could bend the world.

Still cocky misfits, after all these years.

As with many things, the misfits didn’t care about anything around them unless Glimmer was a part of it. They upheld the apathy until the messages they sent her kept getting actively blocked.

For now, the Vanguard and other inhabitants of the old Tower were camping in one of the buildings of the City. It wasn’t much, far less glamorous than the Hall, but it did the job. They had access to electricity and orbital communications to run their operations.

“There you are.” Ikora said as the two entered the Vanguard room. “We’ve been looking for you. You are very proficient at hiding.”

“Uh-huh…” Haya crossed her arms, looking around apprehensively, pale eyes searching for an Awoken that she didn’t want to talk to. “… Did you send Tirion off somewhere?”

“That’s one of the things I wanted to address with you.” Ikora said. “We haven’t seen her since the day after Ghaul was killed.”

“Oh, right. Yeah. Been meanin’ to tell you. I got a message from her.” Cayde spoke up from where he was leaning against a pillar, twirling a gun, almost sulking.

“You’ve talked to her?” Ikora turned to the Exo. “Why haven’t you told us?”

“Must’ve slipped my mind…” Cayde muttered. “It was days ago, and her exact words were and I quote…” He grabbed a datapad and quickly tapped on it to bring up a file. He raised it high in the air and started reading. “Uh… ‘I’m going on vacation, getting drunk, and you all are leaving me alone. So, suck that.’ Word. For. Word.”

He discarded the datapad carelessly into a nearby shelf and returned to twirling his gun spiritlessly. The knife that’s usually on his hip was stuck in the wood of the shelf, next to two bottles. One was acidic green, other one was brown.

The Titan was a couple of steps ahead all of them, though. There was only one person left that definitely knew what happened to her.

“I’m going to kill him…” Haya murmured to herself before whirling around and bolting through the door. “I am going to kill him!” She shouted this time around, loud enough for the whole City to hear.
And Huritt was berating Lorcan for causing needless panic.

“What… what just happened?” Cayde stopped twirling the gun to hold it by its handle, head jerking back and forth for threats. “Him? Who’s him?”

“Well.” Lorcan clicked his tongue. “Haya is on a warpath again. It… happens.” He staggered backwards slowly, listening for the sound of clanging armor outside.

“Lorcan?” Ikora stopped him.

“Yeah?”

“Since she won’t check her messages, tell Haya to come talk to me once her warpath is over. I have some news for her, about the Sunbreakers. I’d prefer to say it to her in person.”

It didn’t take the most cunning of Guardians to pick of that rare hint of glumness in Ikora’s voice. But, it wasn’t Lorcan’s arena, and he was already distracted.

“Ha!” Lorcan couldn’t stifle the laugh. “That’s funny, tell another one!”

“Excuse me?” Ikora raised an eyebrow.

“Look, I really have to go but…” He opened the door and peeked out briefly, relieved that he still saw her. “At the risk of getting vaporized: you’re the last person she wants to talk to.”

Finding Titans in a large crowd was never a problem. Sprinting Titans more so, as they always parted the sea of people and left a convenient trail of fire to follow. The Hunter was lagging behind because he had to spend some time reassuring restless people that a raging Titan shouting about murder is nothing to worry about, this time only.

He found her running up the stairs to the Wall, their new planned settlement. For the workers, angry Guardians running around was just part of the job description.

“Any gun is better than your skills at damn close quarters, you—” Haya stopped her shouting when the only thing she found was Frame typing on a console, with numerous weapons and Cabal helmets behind him. It was very barebones still. Unplugged monitors were leaning against the wall across from him, along with an assortment of fabrics. Boxes filled with weapons and armor blocked off the other path to get there.

Tirion wasn’t the only one who was missing.

“Yes…”? Arcite perked up, optical sensors following the approaching Hunter behind the Titan. They were friendlies. Nothing to shoot. Good. “Looking to lay waste to something?”

“Shaxx.” Haya spat, simply. “Where is he?”

“Lord Shaxx departed for a mission five days ago. He said that he needed to fix something, with explosions. I’m not jealous. Really.”

Haya gritted her teeth. Damn Frame was lying. They always were. At least it was just one this time around, not a thousand. With guns. “Why didn’t he take you with him?”

“I’m not allowed to leave.” Arcite said. “I’m needed here. Someone has to oversee the Redjacks and rebuilding while Shaxx is gone.”

“I thought you Titans were all about punching.” Lorcan said, approaching the pile of Cabal helmets
and the weapon boxes while taking out a knife from his holster. He couldn’t pass this opportunity of pilfering.

“There are times when a subtle hand is better than loud explosions. He said that this was not one of those times.”

“What…” Haya whispered to herself. “I don’t follow. Where is he so I can kick his ass? Why does he have explosives?”

Arcite shrugged. “I can’t speak for him. But, in the Crucible, I would celebrate good things by shooting heavy ammo into the air. I can’t do that here. Maybe that will help you?”

Lorcan carefully picked up one of the helmets, flipping it over and sighing in relief when he didn’t find a rotting Cabal head in it. “This is a weird hobby. Should we steal one?”

“But to answer your first question, Titan…” Arcite continued. “Shaxx said that if Cayde-6 asks where either one of them are, I should tell that Hunter to check the Hellmouth. I wasn’t given instructions for anyone else.”

“Either one of them…?” She repeated to herself before gasping as it all sunk in, memories of a previous conversation she had with the Warlock surfacing. “Those lazy shits!”

“… what?” Lorcan almost dropped the red and white hand cannon he was inspecting, startled by her sudden raised voice after a peaceful moment.

“Those two lazy shits!” Haya’s louder attempt at clarification just confused the Hunter even more. “Running away and getting hitched somewhere instead of fighting and helping rebuild.” She sighed, frustrated about all the legwork. “Alright, we’re done here. Whatever! I miss my couch.”

Lorcan had an armful of weapons in his hands, looking at Haya like a child who has been caught stealing candy.

“Really?” She sighed.

“Not like he’d notice!”

“You can have two.”

“You sound like Tirion.” Lorcan whined, putting everything back except a hand cannon and a sidearm. “And I know just the place for a rune.”

“A rune?” Haya asked, following the Hunter out and down the metal stairs.

“You just need to see it!”

The misfits have known about her and Shaxx before the two knew it themselves. It was hell to figure out, cost them a lot of Marks, but in hindsight, it didn’t take much.

All they had to do was look at how he treated others outside of the Crucible. He always gave advice to the recruits, always talked to them. Had lectures. There are more things Guardians need to learn than what fits in a ten minute Crucible match. He had his fair share of complaints towards him as well. But at best, he was detached from them. Growing emotional attachments to Guardians that can barely take out a Dreg in a dying world was low on his priority list.

At some point a Warlock came along.
Shaxx’s head never perked up when people other than her talked in the Hall. He didn’t try to stand extra straight when others talked to him. His fists on his hips were never loose when talking to others. How his gaze never lingered on the stairs when others walked out of the hall. The helmet did little to hide it. How when she and Lorcan played their little game of salt management, Shaxx struggled to hide his slumped shoulders, and his hands started twitching for a different reason. It ended as soon as the salt game ended.

How suddenly he stopped lingering around the Hall during the nights, because he was in a hurry to be somewhere every night.

A man falling in love is a complicated thing. If he’s a Titan, it adds an extra level of difficulty. There is a lot of denial, twice the stubbornness, but the heart will always do what it wants.

Tirion wasn’t exactly oblivious to it, but she wasn’t delusional either. It was the great Lord Shaxx, the one who loves murder more than anything else. She didn’t know that he was capable of it. Until Oryx died.

It has been an amusing ordeal to watch for everyone. And, everyone needed something that puts a smile on their face during those dark times. Even with the Traveler awake, the dark times hadn’t ended. There was still a lot of fighting left to go.

“What… what the hell is that?” Haya grimaced in disgust at the can Lorcan was shaking, putting a sleeve over her mouth. Whatever was inside of it, its smell transcended the metal can. It smelled like rotten corpses, like strange chitin. Like Guardians returning from a mission on the moon that haven’t had access to clean water for a month.

Like death, rot. Fallen promiscuity, perhaps.

“An experiment?” Lorcan simply said, as he sprayed a strange rune on the concrete ground of the City. The substance was glowing green, like the blood of the Hive.

“Now I understand what Huritt was saying.” She cringed. “If you want to get stabbed again there are better ways to do it than to summon Crota, Lorc. Too soon?”

The Hunter rolled his eyes. “While I was doing stuff on Titan I got inspired by the Hive and Fallen… and…” The Hunter stood up, admiring his handiwork. “Honestly, Tirion usually stops me before I get to this stage, hell if I know where to go from here.”

Haya followed him to a balcony of a ruined building not too far away, where he already had some chairs and bottles ready. They will be coming soon. It hasn’t failed, so far. He also needed to polish the technique. Plenty of birds with just one void arrow.

“Did’ya find Tirion?” A voice shouted, no attempt at being covert. The duo looked below to find a Cayde looking up at them.

“Yeah we did.” Haya shouted back from above. “She’s being a lazy shit. She’ll be back soon.”

“When she gets here, tell her that she owes me a drink.” Cayde said. “Oh, and Haya, right?”

The Titan took a deep shaky breath. “Yep?”

“Ikora wants to talk to ya’. Somethin’ or another about Sunbreakers and magistrate mantles. Gettin’ really restless about it.”

Haya hoped that the swill that barely tasted of alcohol in the bottle would kill that sudden poison
underneath her skin. She won’t let it get to her spirit. “Nope. Don’t want to.”

“Just because Ikora is calm and collected now doesn’t mean that she likes ‘nope’ as an answer and —” Cayde stopped himself, noticing something on the ground. “Wait, what is that?”

“Oh, her spirit.”

“Here we go!” Lorcan chuckled, watching a couple of more Guardians flock to it.

Two Warlocks and a Titan joined Cayde’s side. One of the Warlocks kneeled down next to Cayde, examining the rune very carefully, frowning at Cayde who touched it without regard. Nothing happened. One of the Warlocks jogged off to retrieve something, but the lone Titan didn’t have time for it as he brought out a sidearm. When the Warlock yelled at him, the Titan brought out a grenade launcher to show her that it could be worse. As they were arguing, Cayde was busy trying to carve it out, much to the horror of the Warlock.

“What does that rune even mean, Lore?” Haya asked.

He shrugged. “Hilariously enough it means Guardian.”

“You’re an idiot.” Haya shook her head with a smile.

Lorcan burst into laughter. “It’s goddamn clever!”

Chapter End Notes

So in other news I created a tumblr blog (which I’ll be polishing up and all) for more things related to this story.
crystal-lina.tumblr.com

crystalina was taken. :|

Not exactly sure what I’ll put there, maybe some missing chapters and fireteam shenanigans and whatnot. Ask me stuff.
“What…” A faint voice bounced in the dark, little spikes penetrating the Warlock’s brain, commencing a dance to the vibrations of the quietest of sounds. The light from the dimly lit doorway pierced her eyes, and she shut them as soon as she opened them, flinching. “Tirion?”

The Warlock tried to speak, but the only sound she managed was a low groan into the pillow. The footsteps were closer now, hurried, just maddening the spikes in her brain.

“Holy hell, you’re making the Collapse look beautiful. Where have you been?”

Tirion pulled the blanket over her head, pretending that the world wasn’t there. It was too soon for the world to be there. It was no longer about ten more minutes, it became about ten more hours.

“Leave me alone, Haya.”

“Budge over!”

“No.”

Tirion could tell that the she didn’t listen by the way the bed shifted weight, and the Titan almost crushed her legs by sitting on them. “Smells like ass in here.” The blanket cocoon that held a Warlock didn’t budge at that statement. “Wanna talk about it?”

“No.”

“Fine, then.”

Haya leaned back until her back was against the wall, twiddling her thumbs as the Warlock laid there unresponsive. The small room could teach the Cabal a lot of things about chaos, as it was in a complete disarray. Broken weapons and materials scattered on the ground, dents on some of the weapons matching the large dents on the walls.

Just as she was about to stand up and leave as the situation was evidently hopeless, Tirion’s Ghost wordlessly flew right in front of the Titan’s pale eyes in a stubborn attempt stare her down with his own light blue one.

The sight resembled a lone Dreg trying to stare down Oryx.

It took some convincing to get the Titan here, and he was prepared to work even harder to keep her from leaving. Someone had to talk to the Warlock. Preferably, someone that had the strength to carry her out of the borrowed room with force. Ghost didn’t have arms, and transmatting her required her cooperation.

“Fine, you adorable bastard…” She whispered to Ghost before looking at the lump of blankets that held Tirion, struggling to find the words. “We uh… we agitated the Cabal Emperor when you were gone. He has an invitation for you.”

Tirion nested herself deeper into the bed at the words. “Just tell me if I should be angry at you or not, because I don’t have the soberness or time to figure it out myself.” The muffled response was
“Well, we haven’t exactly read the invitation yet. It’s long winded and arduous as shit, so we’ve left it to you.”

“Huritt could have helped you.”

The Titan shrugged. “Well, we left it to you because you are married to someone who is long winded and arduous as shit.”

Married.

What a world that would be.

Tirion slowly pulled the blanket off her head, relieved over the fact that the door was now closed to block off the light. The cold air hit her face as she peeked her head out, messy red hair bigger than her pillow. The bed provided a decent place to hide, but not a good place to breathe. She desperately needed both, though.

“How did you handle Twilight Gap?” Tirion finally asked.

“You know the story. I handled Twilight Gap like a true damn Titan.” Haya boasted before letting her hands drop, as she quickly realized what Tirion was actually asking. She should have figured it out sooner. “That’s a fucking lie. I handled it by having no emotions outside of a manic craving to keep feeling nothing. Well, back then it felt like a lovely, just fucking lovely, feeling of peace.”

“What happened after?”

“They uh… they thought that I left with Osiris, so I wasn’t branded a deserter for missing the war. For a little while, at least.” Haya flashed a smile before continuing. “Two weeks of wanting to die after that made me realize that I would rather repeat that instead of dealing with Titan politics.”

It was a relief to hear that Titan politics were so insufferable even Titans themselves didn’t want to deal with it.

“How do I stop thinking about it?” Tirion whispered. ”How do I make sure to keep myself away?”

“How long?”

“Since the attack. The distributor died, then I had to improvise.” Tirion grunted in pain as she sat up, head feeling like a sack of sand. She shook her head until the dark room stopped resembling a Taken infestation. “The Vanguard want me to write reports about every single hour of the war that I witnessed but I can’t remember half the things that happened.”

The Vanguard. She was convinced that they are after her head by now, as she cut contact with them for a week. She still owed Cayde that drink, but there were too many errands to run before she could. Tirion never meant to abandon him.

Just another thing to add to the endless list of insults to being a Guardian.

“Afraid to tell you, but, prepare to live the next couple hundred years with a loose end in the back of your head. It will never go away.” Haya attempted to explain. “It becomes about distractions. Saint helped me a lot with it but… Lorc was a wakeup call for me.”

Tirion snorted. “What? I have to hear this.”
“He’s a total *idiot* and I hate him, but he’s my best friend.” Haya sighed. “It was Saint’s crusade, yadda, uh, hundred bat outta hell Guardians annihilating the Fallen around the City. You’re the history maniac, you know it all.”

The Warlock raised an eyebrow. “*Lorcan* participated in it?”

“Not really. Once the dust settled, I felt this *tap* on my shoulder and turned around to see this Hunter staring wide eyed at me, wearing only the flimsy clothes his Ghost made him. He had *just* arrived to the City.” Haya chuckled at the memory. “He was this… this little pesky ass newly risen annoying Guardian who’d be like *‘Excuse me, I think you’re really badass!’*”

“It sounds like something you would run from.”

“He was so sweet, I just didn’t have the heart to tell him to fuck off.” Haya laughed before stopping herself. “Why do you think I would run from it?”

“You’re not the best with *anything* that resembles children. Except for the Exos.” Tirion didn’t mean to laugh, but the visualizations of the young Hunter made it hard not to.

Haya scoffed, slapping the Warlock on the arm. “I’m good with those brats!”

“You told a kid once that it rains because the Traveler is crying, probably because of something the he did. Then he started to cry.”

“It was an iso—*shut up.*” Haya rolled her eyes. “*Anyway.* That pure amazement in Lorc’s eyes made me realize that going back into my cave and getting tweaked won’t lead to anything. I’d rather make sure this dipshit doesn’t die. Nobody else wanted to show him around. Saint left soon after, so…”

“You did a good job.” Tirion said as she stretched. Haya was right about everything, though. Also, it was a matter of time until Tirion gets evicted out of the apartment judging by the mess around her. It was time to move. She had to face the world at some point. “Guess I should get out of here and make sure that the dipshit world doesn’t die.”

“*Why* are you looking for a purpose when you’ve got the Lord and the Hero of The Damn Light status?”

Tirion sighed as the smile from hearing the story fell from her face, the hint of motivation she had to get out of bed suddenly slipped out of her reach. She hoped she could procrastinate with this subject slightly more. “Titan politics happened.”

“…*What*?”

“Became evident that he’s more in love with what I have accomplished.” She whispered, finally giving in from Haya’s intense stare. “He loves being amazed by me more than he loves me. You should have left that letter to Huritt.”

“*Wait, what*?”

“None of your business.” Tirion tried to lay down and pull the blanket over her head again, but was stopped by Haya tugging at the blanket.

“Well, I’m your friend.”

“I thought that Saint was your friend.” Tirion didn’t realize what she spat out without thinking until
Haya loosened her grip on the blanket. “I’m sorry… Don’t want to talk about it.”

“Wait…” Haya started. “After all of this, you don’t consider me a friend?”

“I do, but didn’t you join this merry band because you wanted to find Saint?”

“I did. I still do. I wanna punch Osiris as well. I’m still your friend. You jackass.” Haya hissed. Luckily, Tirion didn’t have to respond as someone barged in through the door, closing the door as quickly as he opened it. With a quick hum that acted as a greeting as he tried not to stumble on the obstacles on the floor, Lorcan pulled up a chair to sit down on and propped his feet up on the bed.

“Welcome to the City’s group therapy session.” Haya said to the Hunter. “How can we help you?”

“Yeah… Hm.” Lorcan started, confused, opening and closing his mouth a couple of times as he tried to find the words. He crossed his arms to uncross them, then to rest his chin on his fist. His eyes were wide, but not in amazement and wonder like in Haya’s story. “I… just got back from the Crucible. I have some critiques that I want you to forward because I’m not talking to him.”

“Shaxx has it already set up?” Haya asked. “That was quick.”

“He doesn’t like wasting time.” Tirion murmured, rubbing her eyes.

“Yeee-aaaah…” Lorcan took a deep breath, brows still furrowed. “I think Shaxx’s craziness has reached a point where now he can only just shout at the top of his lungs.”

“That’s his problem.” Tirion groaned as she forced her limbs to move out of the bed until her feet rested on the floor. Progress.

“No, screw that.” Haya interrupted. “I want to hear this. What did he do?”

“Making us fight on a flying Cabal capital ship flying around Mars wasn’t enough, apparently…” Lorcan explained. “And… If he’s already shouting at you, don’t question his shouting and I’d rather deal with the Cabal Emperor than do that again. What the actual hell?”

A perfect distraction had presented itself, something impossible. She didn’t want to deal with anything that has to do with the City for the time being, too many people talking, too many regulations about gun and Light usage.

Too many unspoken rules.

Too many games.

Too many friendly suggestions about how she should behave to achieve the optimal morale in the area. That’s what they molded her into. If she walks out frowning and people see her, they will think that the war has gotten worse despite Ghaul being dead. Bad result, panic will ensue. Too many demands.

She’d say that she wants to be normal, but what is normal to a Guardian?

It all was a challenge in itself, but Tirion had another test in mind. One that didn’t involve too much of too many.

“Then let’s do it.” Tirion said, looking up at both at them. “Let’s kill the Cabal Emperor. Don’t care how, just let’s kill him. To hell with it.”

“… What?” Lorcan whispered.
“That’s how we conquered the Vault, wasn’t it?” Tirion asked. “We’ve derailed. I miss when we were just six bored idiots. We went into the Vault because we were selfish and we wanted treasure, there was no saving the world about it.”

“The Vanguard aren’t gonna be happy about it, we can’t just—“ Haya’s stone cold expression cracked mid-sentence, and she started to laugh. “God-the-hell-damn-it, couldn’t even act about that. I’m in.”

“Lorcan?” Tirion looked over the Hunter, who was already halfway to the exit, leaving dust behind him.

“Contacting the kids and Kouhei as we speak!”

“Well. Urgent business.” Haya muttered as she stood up. “We got a new den, by the way! Repurposed one of the Cabal structures. Meet you there in about an hour. Follow the music.”

“Do I want to know what the urgent business is about?” Tirion asked.

“Nothing. Just want to shoot some Guardians to start a conversation.”

“Where?”

“The Crucible.”

“Oh no.”

“Oh, yes.”

“You have formidable skills in battle, Titan.” Shaxx said. “I’ve recorded your last Crucible session for the rookies. They could learn a lot from you.”

*Titan politics.*

Haya had *just* enough time for this game. Bulls poking bulls, making sure that neither of them will throw a punch. Tearing down the new Tower before it’s fully built wouldn’t be beneficial, but after everything she heard she was only willing to wait until the new paint was dry. She made sure to not stand right underneath the Hydra’s head that was hanging on harness before speaking.

She never understood the point of war trophies.

“Well, in a different world, wouldn’t we had made great friends?” Truly feigning a semblance of sincerity was difficult for Haya.

“Don’t let commendations go to your head.” Shaxx shook his head before returning his eyes to the monitor. A new team was gathering for the next Crucible match, the time limit just adding to her fun. “We wouldn’t.”

“Oh, not even in a different world?” She still wanted to know his reasoning. “I thought I was a favorite in the Crucible.”

“I respect your skills both on the field and in the Crucible, Titan. I never thought that I would see the Light of the Hammers in the City again. More so, in such capable hands.” Shaxx started, with the other Titan not being bothered to soak up the praise because there was *always* more coming. “But, tell me: how come you are *here* and not with the Sunbreakers?”
“Because they kicked me out.” Haya said, without hesistation. “Actually, no. The magistrate was always graceful. They were just very insistent that I was no longer welcome in the Order.”

Shaxx crossed his arms. “I don’t remember seeing you during the Gap.”

“I wasn’t at the Gap in more ways than one. Didn’t feel like it.” Haya sighed. “Don’t pretend that you didn’t read the records about me. Are you threatened by the war deserting trouble child, Lord Shaxx?”

“Not at all.” Shaxx said without hesitation. “Lowlife dregs don’t faze me. Neither do deserters of the war. You disrespected your order by not fighting. It’s a Titan’s job to lead by example. Come back once you’ve shown improvement in that.”

The harsh response didn’t make Haya move even an inch. She expected it. “Would you rather live with the image of a thousand Guardian corpses in your head for the rest of your life, or would you have never been there in the first place to witness it?”

Finally, she got him silent, as he looked at the ground for a brief moment. “That’s what I thought.”

“If the world was up to your course of reasoning, the Fallen would be ruling the system.” Shaxx stopped her from leaving. “Someone needs to be there to get that terrible image etched into their mind in order to win a war. That’s what we’re here for.”

Haya scoffed. “Well. I can see why she left you.”

Shaxx’s helmeted head darted back to the monitor after she said that, her slow words being daggers on purpose.

*She won.*

“On your way, Guardian.” He dismissed her through gritted teeth.

Didn’t stop her from poking the bull a little bit more. Punches thrown suddenly not a case of concern. She started bugging him for a reason.

“I don’t know what the hell went down between the two of you, but… she’s fading away, Shaxx.”

Haya raised her hands slightly to stop him from speaking. “Get the hell out of here with a speech about how Guardians owe you respect and should address you with a title. This is about a mutual friend. What she has won’t be fixed with a re-declaration of love. But…” She shook her head and took a deep breath before continuing.

“I believe that that woman is some sort of Vex freak experiment that escaped. Her existing, and the things she has accomplished, doesn’t make any sense. And if you find that someone, that someone who’s existence doesn’t make a lick of goddamn sense to you, you hang onto that person.”

Exhausted by her own speech, Haya tried to look for any sign of reaction on the other Titan, only to find nothing. Only other option left was violence.

“I have an entire Crucible to officiate.” Shaxx finally said. “And you need to stop wasting time while the world is burning.”

“Okay, fine!” She was about to turn around to leave, but halted. “By the way, Lorc stole your shit. Are you sure you’re officiating things hard enough?”
“It’ll take us a couple of days to get through all this…” Huritt sighed. “It’s all so fascinating, though. I don’t understand why the Emperor would share this kno—you’re all distracted by Haya actually reading something silently, aren’t you?”

“Wait… hold on a minute.” The Titan raised a finger after swiping something on the datapad. “Ghaul’s motivation to kill all of us was because he was upset because he was ridiculed due to his albinism?” She scowled in disgust.

“That’s all you got from that? I believe it’s more complicated than that.” Huritt said.

“No, it isn’t.” Haya jerked her head up at the Exo. “Just because you were subjected to ridicule and torment doesn’t mean that it gives you the right to kill people, or that it makes you worthy of the ball’s blessing. Poor me, pour me a drink. Can we revive Ghaul so we can kill him again?”

“I think that’s what the Consul prayed on.” Tirion said. “Find someone beaten down by the world to manipulate them. Make them into a weapon of fear and hate.”

“I never let anyone make me into a weapon of fear and hate.” Haya spat.

“Your albinism is self-inflicted, though.” Huritt pointed out.

“It was a Warlord thing and does it really matter?”

Lorcan audibly winced at the image. “It was a Warlord thing to bleach your… uh… everything?”

“Ghosts could cure the blindness. Bleach, tattoos, piercings.” Haya recited. “That’s how we told each other apart. We had no intent to use the Light to save the world, just to serve ourselves.”

“Uh, I think… I think you just proved Tirion’s point.” Lorcan said.

“Can we move on?” Haya rolled her eyes, returning her attention to the datapad as she kept on reading.

“Er…” Huritt’s metal eyes darted from the Titan, to the Hunter, to the Warlock. “It doesn’t sound like he wants us to kill him.” He tried to get the conversation back on track despite the tenseness of the room. “He wants to reward us, offer us true power and a place by his side.”

“It sounds like a trap and he’s going to die anyway.” Tirion muttered. “I have no interest in working for or with the Cabal Emperor.”

“But what if he’s right?” Huritt pondered. “He seems to be on our side. He just wants death. Not ours or his, though.”

“And how many Guardians have gone down the same path for power only to end up dead or insane?” Tirion argued, while Lorcan’s finger twitched from resisting to urge to point at Kouhei next to him. “Calus is smart, he knows what he’s doing. He knows that Guardians will do anything for treasure and a promise of truth behind everything. Especially Warlocks.” She whispered the last part out. Everything the Emperor wrote felt like as if he had told the words to her once before, as if he was once in her head.

“Forget weapons and power.” Haya looked over at Lorcan. “Lorc signed up to kill Malok just so that he would get a weapons discount.”

“No comment.” Tirion shook her head, skimming through the white text on the blue surface, trying to find something. “Does anyone know when this ‘world eater’ is set to arrive?”
“It can’t be too far now. We should keep an eye on Nessus.” Huritt said. “I still think that we should let the Vanguard know about this.”

“Hilarious…” Haya whispered to herself. “This is our thing. Why the hell do they keep calling our things Vanguard ops?”

“I guess they want to protect their image. Them calling it a Vanguard operation sounds better than six bored idiots did it.” Tirion speculated, shrugging.

“Their image?” Haya gasped. “What image do they even worry about? The Tower was taken because they failed spectacularly. People have lost faith in the Vanguard to show them the way. Some Guardians planned a friggin’ coup!” With her words, she threw the datapad away, watching it slide on the table before falling to the carpet on the other side. “Whatever.”

“Wanna talk about it?” Tirion repeated Haya’s earlier words, watching the struggle on the Titan’s face for a moment before she stood up and bolted for the door, Tirion following.

The two of them walked in silence, the Titan slouched and hiding her face as they made their way past the crowds until they reached a place without the commotion. She was restless, brain thinking quicker than her limbs could act. Leaning against the wall was uncomfortable, so she decided to slide down until she was sitting on the ground, heavy armor clanking in the process.

Tirion joined the Titan once she was sure that Haya was finally satisfied with where she was sitting. “What’s up?”

“Lorc was right.” Haya muttered, running a hand through her hair. “They… the Warlords used fear and hate on me, to pressure me into becoming the way I am, to become one of them, but that’s not the point, the point is—” The Titan groaned in frustration, resisting to pull out the hair that was in her hand.

“You don’t have to do this, if you don’t want to.” Tirion told her, but Haya stubbornly shook her head.

“That kid that I made cry… He told me I looked like Ghaul. He thought I worked for him.” Haya said. “During the war, the Legion pricks sent out these pictures of that pale monstrosity to tell people who was in charge now. His parents weren’t there to teach him better.”

“Did it really bother you that much? Doesn’t sound like you.”

“It didn’t bother me. It… Goddamn it, maybe it did.” She admitted, letting her hand drop. “Being compared to a mass murderer just because we’re both pale and have fucked eyes bothered me. Whodhave thunk.”

“You’re nothing like Ghaul, Haya.” The Warlock reassured her.

“I’m not saying I am. I did it all to myself to gain a rank, to prove my worth. Ghaul was born like that and was cast out.” Haya laughed sadly. “That rank doesn’t mean anything now, though. They’re dead. Thanks Saladin, and your merry band of fuckups.” Haya raised an invisible glass in the air for a toast.

The Titan looked over to Tirion when solemn silence fell on them again. “Do you ever want to go back? Reverse it all, back to how you looked like? Unawaken yourself or whatever? I know that you didn’t have a choice in it all, hell knows how much Kouhei repeats that.”

Tirion’s eyes were wide because of a whole different reason as she watched the Titan talk. “You…
“You talk more than usual.”

“Just answer the damn question!”

Tirion laughed as she leaned her head back against the red wall, she has never been asked that question. The answer was obvious, though.

“No.” She answered. “It would be like taking Lorcan’s tools away, or taking Huritt’s Hive research away. It would still be me but, with a missing piece.”

Haya frowned as a loose blond strand of hair fell in front of her eye, and she blew it away until it her vision was no longer obstructed. “I miss my brown hair.”

She finally relaxed as she looked at the skyline, the descending sun making it look like it was on fire, the city washed in an orange haze. She couldn’t take her eyes off of it, having forcibly constantly tear her eyes away from it all. But the view felt like home, she knew the perfect word for it once. Wanting to return to a home that is no longer there.

“I can talk to Ikora for you.” Tirion offered. It was only fair. “She’s now messaging me about it, because you have blocked communications.”

The Titan shook her head. “I already know what she’s going to say.”

“Then why not get it over with?”

“Because I have never let anyone police when and how I should mourn.” She explained. “It’s my thing. It’s not their business to control. Damned if I let any Vanguard adjacent touch that.”

“Fair enough.” Tirion said. “But we’re still going to have to have a very long and awkward meeting with the Vanguard, whether we like it or not.”

“Why the hell?”

“Because the six of us are a potentially hostile world power with no real allegiance.”

Haya returned her eyes to the sunset with a barely audible laugh. “Just like old times!”

Chapter End Notes

Yay, a new chapter. I had to take some time to build some continuity and build up the characters and set a course for what I wanna do with them for Curse of Osiris.
“Hey, you.” Tirion greeted the Hunter who was laying on the concrete bridge of the new Tower, legs up on a railing and not taking his eyes off of the night sky. He halfheartedly raised a hand to acknowledge that the Warlock was there. Normally, she would be surprised at Lorcan being at a loss for words. But not after what all of them just went through. She sat down beside him, glancing at the shattered Traveler, silently questioning if it was right to use her Light to warm herself.

“I… I woke up this morning and spent the first 40 minutes of my day standing in the shower trying to make sense of everything.” Lorcan whispered before shaking his head. “I haven't made any progress. Then I went back to sleep. Woke up an hour ago. How did your first stroke go? Didn’t get many words in on the awkward flight home.”

“I’m trying to work backwards…” Tirion said. “Before I passed out, Haya yelled at me because she thinks that it’s all my fault and I almost had to fight her. Kouhei yelled something about going to the Reef and left. The Exos ran off to the Farm. The Cabal emperor has robotic clones of himself. And we’ve all been lied to regarding what we know and what the Speaker has told us. And we almost died!”

“Well…” Lorcan chuckled. “Glad that’s all cleared up.”

“I didn’t think that things were normal before all this.” She bit her lip. “How did we manage to make it all this much worse?”

“I know. They took our Frame, too. Also, telling the Vanguard about this should be fun. Watch it trickle down and see all Guardians suddenly realize that none of this has any purpose.” He sighed into the sky in annoyance. “Now we’re aligned with Calus. When does it all end?”

“You’d think with the Traveler awake now, things might start looking up.”

“My first reaction to it waking up was ‘Whatever, I’m hungry’. Things won’t change.”

“Don’t get me wrong, I know how you feel, Lorcan. And how all of this has made it all worse.” Tirion said. “You want to survive, and you want to fight. It’s in your blood. But… but you just can’t bring yourself to have the effort to live. In a sense of if a Gladiator was running towards you, you would just accept it at this point.”

“Exactly.” He whispered “You feel that too?”

“Comes and goes.”

Lorcan’s sigh was barely audible, a shaky one. “It never goes away for me. Just as I got comfortable with the Light existing it all gets flipped.”

They laid there in silence for a moment, just looking at the stars. The noise of the new Tower was slowly dying off as people finished their work duties and retreated for the night. They were making good progress around the parts, the bazaar was ornamented just enough so that merchants could open up shops. It was starting to look like home now, for most of them. The best way to differentiate a new recruit from a seasoned Guardian was not by their armor and skills, but by how they looked up at the destroyed Tower. Both had wonder in their eyes. The new ones wondered how it was living there, the old ones looked at it with a sense of forlorn wonder, filled with longing.
“It’s just overwhelming.” Lorcan broke the silence and looked at the Traveler. “If we’re not fighting for it then it means that— yep! The Traveler is a necromancer, and we're its undead horde. We obey it unfailingly.”

“I think you can be more if you choose to be more. In theory.”

He shook his head slightly, both of them knowing that it was easier said than done. “Everyone I know has something to strive for, something to fight and die for. Haya wants to find Saint. You are the Guardian savior Saint kept on raving about, and who needs the devil when you’ve got the Lord? Huritt has his Hive addiction. Kouhei is trying to invent new ways to brood.”

“What about Alva?” Tirion asked when he went silent without addressing the whole gang.

“I think she’s the only one who has it all figured out. I really think she’s the only one who has reached her goal and can truly be happy. She doesn’t want to tell us how she figured it out, though.”

He knows that Alva still remembers. It wasn’t ignorance of what happened that resulted in her being carefree. There are some knives she doesn’t take kindly to, and she makes it clear by shooting them out of people’s hands. There are some things even fourteen memory wipes can’t erase.

“How old were you when you died, Lorcan?”

“Eighteen, according to my Ghost.” He chuckled sadly, looking at his bright pink Ghost examining some boxes. “Not sure if it was a joke or not. She can be a bit of a princessy comic. Only thing I had on me besides the armor she made me was a piece of rusty metal with the words Lorcan 1923. Haya thought it was fitting to take that as my name.”

He reached up a hand to take something out of his many chest pockets. The round piece of rusty brown metal was filled with holes, with some of the letters etched into it still visible. He gently stroked it with his thumb, lost in thought.

“I just feel dissociated.” He let his hand with the metal piece rest on his stomach. “This world doesn’t feel like the world that I’m from. Now it just got all that more confusing. Wish I never boarded the Leviathan. How do you Warlocks live with these constant questions?”

Lorcan’s words sent a pang of guilt through her. She got him into it, just because she wanted to escape the world. “Different in what way? You mean that everything is in ruins?”

“No, not really.” He shook his head again, trying his hardest to get his head in order. “I don’t remember that big ball in the sky. Everyone seems to. Everyone talks about it. It drives me nuts. If the Cabal know of it then it must mean that it’s real, right? That we’re not drugged or something?”

“What do you remember?”

“I’ve had this recurring dream every night.” He started. “It’s middle of the night. Dull green uniforms, soldiers. I think I was one of them. I think I was a mechanic. We were mourning a thousand dead as the voices on the radio argued about whose fault it was.”

He had his eyes fixated on a particular star in the sky, and continued telling the tale. “Flares in the distance. Orders to fire at the ships, despite having no training. I couldn’t tell who was firing, I just started to run.”

“Go on…”
“We were under attack, and I knew that there were people who needed help. We couldn’t take down the planes. The black death would be going for an area with innocents. That’s what I thought the Darkness was at first.”

“Black death?” She asked.

“That’s what they called themselves. I think. I don’t know. I couldn’t outrun it, I couldn’t get a word in. It destroyed the bridge I was on, the street, the buildings. Everything. Ruthless. It sounded a lot like Cayde’s description of the Darkness but that wasn’t it… It was different.”

Lorcan swallowed hard before continuing. "And then I died. I don’t think anyone ever found me.” He whispered, afraid that if he speaks loudly his voice will break.

“I think… they didn’t even give me a proper funeral, or even noticed that I was missing. Or even knew my name.” He sniffed quietly. “They just abandoned me there, as they did with many others. They… they forgot about me.”

“I’m sorry, Lorcan.”

He scoffed “Now they claim that this AI arrived here, helped us terraform everything. Claiming that it brought on science, peace, and a Golden Age. I never understood that. I always thought they were wrong. All I remember is hopelessness. After a while, I just accepted it. Screw it. I was told that I was going to live forever, might as well live in the rabbit hole.”

Finally saying it all out loud to someone else didn’t make it easier to understand. He tilted his head back to look at the shattered Traveler. Most of his life as a Guardian has been questioning what’s real or not. If he’s wrong, then he’s the insane one. But if he’s right, it meant accepting pain. That the pain he and his peers suffered before has been erased and forgotten, replaced by the glorification of the Golden Age. That’s all the people around him cared about. Golden Age this, Golden Age that. The Traveler this. That’s the only thing they cared about from the past.

The world forgot.

Tirion tried to remember the number he mentioned earlier. Might as well use her history knowledge. “1923…”

“I’ve ran that number through the archives. Nothing particular. Can’t run it again because the archives were destroyed.”

“Could that be the year you were born?” Tirion asked herself. “There is nothing that says that the Traveler only revived those that died to the Collapse. Add 18, that would make it 1941. That’s… what, eighty years before the Traveler?”

“What’s so special about that?” Lorcan suddenly sat up as it all fell into place. “Wait, is that the year I died?”

“According to the Archives the Traveler did study human history extensively. Perhaps it knew that all of this was going to happen, and searched for—“

“I don’t bloody know anymore!” Lorcan groaned into his hands, cutting her off.

“—if I’m right…” Tirion continued and gestured towards the Traveler. “Whatever its motivations might be, it did remember you, Lorcan. It brought you back.”

Lorcan slowly lowered his hands from his face after a long moment of thinking. “How was the
Golden age?"

“Pretty much the way you described it.”

“I mean… was there war? Did people use the Traveler’s knowledge to annihilate each other?”

“You’re asking if you and the men alongside you died in vain back then?”

Lorcan shrugged. “I mean… it would have kinda sucked if they did.”

“Not according to the archives. There were some unethical small experiments now and then, but nothing on a massive scale.” She told. “People were happy for a few centuries. Humanity collectively focused on inhabiting the whole solar system. Must have been quite the sight.”

“Happy…” He whispered, still looking at the stars. “That’s good enough for me.”

“I think all of us are going through a crisis of faith after boarding the Leviathan.” Tirion said. “We six are the most superb and successful Guardians that have set foot here. We have transcended such things as fighting for the Light, fighting to save the world, and keeping the world in order.”

“That’s an extremely Warlock way of saying ‘we fucked up’.”

“I fucked up. I was the one who dragged you guys onto that damn ship.” Tirion muttered.

“We fucked up.” Lorcan corrected her. “We’re not the Vanguard. We take credit for our glorious failures.”

She should have never attempted to change the story. The emperor was never supposed to die. She embarked on an adventure for beautiful golden swords and rich banners and his crown, and a powerful ally. To tell him to let no one know that he has a little bird who tells him everything and is at his bidding. The power that he spoke of, the power beyond their feeble Light, could be something that they will need soon.

She decided that secrecy was the way to go, it was a mutual agreement. The Vanguard or other Guardians couldn’t find out about anything the misfits did, anything they heard and said on that ship. Then there was that Frame, but it only seemed to behave suspiciously around her fireteam. But how long until the Vanguard themselves send other Guardians to explore it, what then? Calus still lives.

One too many questions, even for her.

Let the end begin.

“Emma.” She whispered.

“What?”

“That’s what my name was. I got my new name from a road sign. Route 31.”

“I know that Haya’s name used to be Abigail. Haya was her grandmother’s name.”

Tirion grimaced. “The thought of someone referring to her as Abbie disturbs me greatly.”

“Yep!” He laughed.
“You’re still not talking to me?”

As a response, her little companion flied away from her to rest on the messy bed wordlessly.

“Ghost…” Tirion pleaded. “Please.”

Still no response, as he just turned away to not look at her anymore and avert his attention to the rough texture of the grey wall.

With a resigned sigh, she got her bearings of the small room. Opening up a window was a start. The mess on the floor was mostly weapons and dirty armor. Cleaning up and sorting things was significantly harder without Ghost to assist her, even if it was just for a chat to help pass the time. Functioning weapons were placed on the desk, broken weapons in a somewhat neat pile in the corner. There was little that could be done about the dents in the walls, but she figured she could just blame the Cabal somehow. Or perhaps throw enough Glimmer at the situation and pray.

There was certain poetry in a Warlock throwing weapons at walls when faced with confusion and distress. Does the Traveler enjoy this? Seeing its horde go through a constant crisis of identity?

The broken weapons withered away into blue sparkles in front of her, Ghost’s doing. She caught a glimpse of him turning back to look at the wall, pretending that nothing happened.

She has slept enough for an entire century, but she still sat down on the bed right next to him.

“Thank you.” She said as she grabbed a datapad, dreading every tap on it only to find it broken. Another casualty of her fit.

“Did you really have to smash everything?” Ghost asked as he rose up to be able to speak. “Usually it feels good to see you smash stuff. I thought that you were going to smash me.”

“Never.” Tirion reassured him. “I had a moment… that was all.”

“Normally it takes a Hive god to get you to have a moment like this.”

“Just getting it over with, that’s all. Oryx’s sister will probably be here soon. Won’t have time.” She jested. “How many people require my presence?”

“Let’s see. Ikora wants to talk to you about Haya and the reports you’ve been neglecting, Zavala wants to talk to you about Strike operations, Cayde wants a drink, Hawthorne wants to talk about clans.” Ghost listed.

“Is that all?”

“Not in the slightest.” He said. “How’s your memory?”

“Still gaps.” Tirion told. “Besides becoming a Thanatonaut I’m at a loss as to what to do.”

“What do you remember?”

“Bits and pieces. I only remember the initial attack clear as day, the thralls on Titan. The Taken on Io, Rasputin. Smashed tables, getting my fireteam together.” She recounted. “I remember briefly staring at the sun, then a flurry of colors. I still haven’t worked out what went down with Ghaul. Makes for an interesting report for the Vanguard, doesn’t it?”

“Let’s keep the Thanatonauts a last resort. I’m sure it will come back to you soon. But –”
A knock on the door prevented Ghost from continuing to list the responsibilities Tirion shouldn’t be procrastinating with. She found a certain thrill in being her own free rebellious agent, the responsibilities forgotten as she was already heading for the door, and Ghost remembering why he was angry with her. Whatever provides adrenaline to a Guardian.

“Alright, I’m still mad at you.” Haya stated the second Tirion opened the door. “You owe me for that Calus stunt. Let’s go. No questions asked. But you’re a Warlock so, go ahead…”

“Where are we going? It’s the middle of the night.” Tirion never liked surprises, especially surprises that came from her misfits. She wanted to fight and be productive for once, but she had no desires to blow up a planet.

“To hijack a strike on Io.”

“We’re hijacking strikes now?” Tirion crossed her arms in disapproval, though the idea was the most sensible one she has heard in a while.

“No, we’re hijacking that bigass Vex building on Io.” Haya explained. “The Vanguard have a fireteam set to explore it in like a week or two. We can beat them to the punch if we leave in the next couple of hours.”

She shouldn’t.

She really shouldn’t.

Tirion didn’t want it all to come down between choosing between her friends and the Vanguard. She didn’t want to entertain nor encourage the war against the Vanguard her fireteam is trying to start. But it was all so very tempting, unlike all the alternatives. And it could be bent once Zavala asks questions. We took initiative was a more preferable term over we stole your things.

“Let’s go.” Tirion said, heading for her weapons to arm herself.

“What?” Haya sputtered. “What happened to you being responsible and talking us out of doing dumb shit?”

“Um…” Tirion latched her trusty scout rifle to her back. “I did a lot of dumb shit to the point where I ruined my relationship so why not just embrace my tendency to do dumb shit?”

“Proud of you!” Haya smirked. “Got another one we could hijack on Nessus after this. Cabal have been drilling and they’ve uncovered something.”

“Drilling?” Ghost wondered to himself. “What could the Red Legion possibly be drilling for?”

“Don’t care.” Haya shrugged. “We’ll get to kill lotsa things. You ready, Tirion?”

“Don’t you think that the Red Legion drilling a planetoid is a source of concern?” Ghost asked and backed up so he could look at the both women. “Either one of you?”

“Uh, don’t look at me, I just annihilate things.” Tirion finished gearing up and started walking towards the door. “If they’re dead, who cares what they’re doing?”

Ghost sighed. “Why is the Ghost the reasonable one now?” He muttered to himself as he followed her out.

“There is an expectation for Guardians to be reasonable?” Tirion asked. “Never mind, don’t answer
that. Who else is joining?”

“Lorc’s on board.” Haya robbed Ghost of a counter argument. “Let’s go grab him at the Tower-wall and get the hell out of here.”

Tirion found herself fighting muscle memory on her way to the new Tower. It was in the wall now, not high up. You needed to climb stairs to get there, not use a ship. The unfamiliarity of it all was uncomfortable. The night felt wrong. There were no little familiar nooks she could hide in and look at the Traveler, and the Vanguard were scattered all across. There was no order or reason. She understood why Haya wanted to get out as quickly as possible.

There was no home to be found here. Distractions were home, now.

“I hate this place.” The Titan whispered as they climbed the stairs. “There are too many people here. They shouldn’t be up there.”

“Who?”

“The people. The normals.” She explained. “We shouldn’t integrate.”

“We had civilians walking around back in the old Tower. You didn’t have an issue with them back then.”

“That’s because they respected our space. Now they’re just wandering around, asking when the last time I stood atop of the wall was. One of them called Lorcan a Warlock.” Haya scoffed. “Surprised you haven’t said anything about it, considering the power your smile holds.”

“The only thing I have to say is that we’re out of touch with reality.” Tirion said. “You can’t expect someone to sympathize with you and understand your situation when they have no idea what it’s like.” Tirion continued before Haya could answer; “Goes for both sides. I’m not going to use my power to exile people just because I don’t understand them. Most of them don’t have homes. Deal with it.”

“You know that Zavala called Hawthorne a Guardian, right?” Haya’s words stopped the Warlock. “There. You can’t deal with it. He turned to her, smiled, and called her a Guardian. I mean, he’s not going to kill you. Not ever. You're too valuable. But, if you give him a quick short, sharp, shock he won’t do it again.”

“And what the hell is that supposed to mean?”

Haya resumed the trek up the final set of stairs. “There is no handholding. Guardians are Guardians. The civilians are civilians. We’ll never get along. And there is Lorcan. What the hell is he doing?”

Lorcan hasn’t moved since she last saw him over an hour ago, except now he was futzing with a device. A metal ball of sorts that glowed blue in the crevices, slightly resembling a Ghost but much bigger in size. His Ghost had given up on words when talking to him, and only resorted to rolling her one eye and misplacing his tools.

Tirion went over Haya’s words, wondering if it really will stop just at hijacking strikes. Why can’t Titans just talk out their differences? No Guardians know how the next war will be fought, but all of them know that the war after that will be them fighting themselves.

“So… You pick this thing up, and you have a goal to get to, and if you touch the floor you die instantly?”
“Yep.” Lorcan confirmed Haya’s guess, and she tossed the ball back to him.

“What’s wrong with you?”

“I’m a Hunter.”

“Are you alright?”

“I’m… I’m a Hunter. Hell no.” Lorcan locked the box with the ball and stood up, ready to join the fight.

Tirion didn’t hear much of the rest of the conversation. Lorcan was smart enough to lock it in a box and prevent civilians from getting their hands on his tech, so she didn’t have to worry. Not that she worries about him. Instead, her eyes were focused on a familiar red and white flag flailing in the distance.

“You two go ahead…” She said, interrupting their conversation that she wasn’t listening to. “I’ll meet you on Io, I won’t be that far behind.”

She needed to talk to him. Since her misfits are planning to stand a new adventure, this was as good time as it will get. If things go sideways more than they already have, then she’ll be able to move on. If not, there will be something to look forward to.

Vaults. What were the vaults doing next to Banshee’s station? What were they doing between Rahool and Shaxx? Where was the warmth of the Hall when she went to approach him? Those were simpler days.

“Hey…” She said softly, catching his attention, his grip on the datapad almost shattering it. “Can we go someplace and talk?”

Shaxx discarded the datapad with a grunt before leading her silently to a storage space a bit further away. Too many curious eyes and ears around. Just the way he walked away got people curious. More people in the Tower meant more ears. More ears meant more mouths to talk about everything.

Maybe Haya had a point. Worst part about this integration was people gossiping about things that they don’t know they shouldn’t be gossiping about. Though, a lecture about Guardian politics would take longer than majority of the civilians can live.

“Speak.” He said harshly once he removed his helmet and made sure the door was securely closed.

“That’s all you have to say?”

He shook his head, avoiding her gaze. “You left without a word and didn’t speak to me for weeks, and your associates are thieves. What do you expect me to do with that?”

“I had my reasons to leave, Shaxx. You were the one who doubted. I was ready to say yes.” She whispered. “You answered my question quite clearly.”

“Which one? When you asked me if I was proposing to you or the Hero?”

She nodded, his exasperated sigh making the wait for the answer worse, she knew the answer.

“Of course it was you.” He said, surprising her. “Even I have trouble putting what you are into words, describing the beacon of hope that you have become.”
There she was. Back on the pedestal. “Don’t. I can’t handle the pedestal speech right now. Not right now.”

“It’s not a pedestal speech. I’ve seen many Guardians with the same status. I’ve never seen anyone who cares about the world as much as you. No one with such an equally endearing fascination with fairy tales, and no one who could get me to wear a damn Festival of the Lost mask.”

His smirk that had built up dropped alongside his gaze. “But you left. You keep leaving, and it’s not to fight the Darkness. That’s one thing that’s an infuriating constant with you. And the way you do it looks frighteningly easy. I doubted the fact that the feelings were reciprocated.”

“If I didn’t love you I would have stayed. I had my reasons to disappear, reasons that I didn’t want to subject you to.”

“Then there is the distrust…” He reached for his helmet, eyes on the door.

“It’s not about trust.”

“Then what?!” He growled.

“I messed up. I don’t even remember half the war!” She breathed out. “It hurt too much. I thought it would be over when I reunited with my Ghost, but he couldn’t heal me. I made mistakes that worked back then but it all retaliated on me. I barely won the fight against Ghaul.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I didn’t want you to watch me almost die again. You needed to focus on rebuilding.” She explained, slowly stepping closer to him. “I thought you would hate me. My head was ruined, I thought that you only loved whatever is on that pedestal.”

One of his hands slowly reached up to cup her face when she got closer, fingertips embedding themselves into her hair. He tilted her head up, eyes traveling her face for a while, looking for any sign of deception. This wasn’t anything they could settle with a short conversation. They leaned into each other, only to stop. She could feel his warm breath against her lips, the warmth of his hand on her face. Just for a second, everything seemed to be alright.

“I can’t…” He whispered, his lips almost grazing hers.

“Then go.”

“I can’t do that either.”

She was the one who had to move away, feeling his hand slide out of her hair as she headed towards the door.

“I and my thieves are taking initiative to clean up some Vex.” She said, hand on the button to open the door. “We should be back soon. Room 31 in one of the beat up complexes if you reach a decision.”
“Good to have you back.” Zavala greeted Tirion as she walked up to him, every step intentionally slow. “I see you’ve been taking initiative on Io and Nessus. Impressive work.”

Correcting Zavala’s liberal use of the word initiative was a tactical decision. “Thank you.”

“Asher Mir sends his regards to the Fireteam that defeated Brakion. May I ask how did you come across those missions?”

Tirion tightened the grip on her wrist behind her back, praying that her rehearsed words will come out somewhat smooth. “Curiosity and my duty for cleaning up the world.”

“Am I correct in assuming that you didn’t know that Brakion was responsible for augmenting Asher’s arm and his Ghost?”

“I had no idea.” Tirion shook her head, several conversations with Haya already scheduled. She didn’t know about Asher’s relation to the Pyramidion. But she still had to withhold information from Zavala to prevent a war, despite hating having to lie to him. “We were just curious in the same way we were curious about the Vault of Glass a couple years ago. I’m sorry if it happened to clash with your strike operations.”

“I see.” Zavala turned back to the railing, one of the dozens searching for answers by looking at the Traveler for guidance. He believed her words, the speech she spent rehearsing throughout both missions.

“You’ve been doing excellent work, Guardian, in case it needs to be said. I was… far more spirited back when I was younger, back when I helped build these walls. Looking at your fireteam in action reminds me of those days…” His light blue eyes trailed the now broken wall, not letting himself to get too lost by turning his gaze to Tirion. “Would you write a tactical report? I’d like to study your methods.”

“I’ll give it a shot. I think it all just comes down to comradery and knowing exactly how the Guardians next to you operate.”

Zavala nodded to himself. “If only we had someone like you back then. If only…”

“I was under the impression that you did.” She said. “I struggle to place myself in the same rank as the other legendary Guardians. It also makes it difficult for me to find the will to improve myself when I know that all that were better than me are now dead.”

“Standing here right now means that you get the opportunity to learn from the dead.” Zavala pointed out. “You can be the agent of change. For all of us.”

“There are too many dead and too many different reasons for their deaths.” She sighed. “Only constant is that the Warlocks go insane before they die.”

“And despite all that, you have shown great progress in being the outlier.”

“Hopefully my team will be able to keep it together until the next threat shows up.” Tirion said. “I’m not afraid of gods trying to kill us anymore, I’m afraid of what happens when adrenaline junkies run out of things to shoot.”
“I don’t think you have anything to worry about. I see the ferocity of Saint-14 in your Titans, the spirit of the Six Coyotes in your Hunters, and the wisdom of the greatest Warlocks in you. Don’t doubt yourself.”

And the ferocity of starved Archons with explosives when there is no battle. She thought to herself.

“Haya was Saint’s friend, she taught Kouhei a lot, too. I’ll forward the compliment to her.”

Zavala looked over at the Warlock, brows furrowed. “Friend of Saint-14? Where did she learn the way of the Sunbreakers?”

“The short story is that she was next to Osiris when he tried to broker a contract with you.” Tirion explained, watching Zavala’s eyes fall. “She chose the life of a deserter instead of trusting Osiris enough to leave with him.”

“We can fight a thousand Fallen and Hive but nothing can protect us against the stupidity of our youth.” Zavala whispered to himself.

“I’ve been meaning to talk to you about it.” She said. “She knows that the Sunbreakers are dead. I need your help.”

Zavala was the last resort to talk about this, but someone had to help her. Tirion found herself missing the Titan that could stand tall and carry herself with ferocity while at the same time not leaving her couch until she absolutely had to. This new Haya, the one that has become a slouching punch-crazed hunk was unfamiliar.

“The Sunbreakers hate the Vanguard because of that meeting. They… they hate me. I assume that it extends to Haya.”

“Sadly, it does. She won’t talk to you, but I need something.” Tirion pleaded. “Haya is my friend, and I’m afraid of what she’ll do right now. We don’t need more angry Titans we can’t control. After all I’ve done for this City, I could use some help. Just this once.”

Zavala was deep in thought for a moment, Tirion’s words opening the floodgate of memories of mistakes made in moments of peril. It all seemed so long ago.

“Shortly after Oryx arrived in our system, I sent out a Titan to seek out the Forge.” Zavala started. “The Sunbreakers opened a gate to Mercury to escape the Vex, many of them fell. I can send the recording of the mission to your Ghost, alongside the last text transmission from the Sunbreakers during the Legion’s attack. And…” He sighed woefully. “And a personal note, should she choose to read it.”

“Thank you.”

“We will need the flame the Forge holds to weather the oncoming threats. I hope that she will be by our side.”

“Did you know that Brakion was responsible for turning Asher into what he is?” Tirion didn’t even bother to properly greet the Titan when she found her sitting on some pallets, overseeing two Hunters. The workers chose to stay as far away as possible, raising questions how much the Titan disrupted their work.

“Nope.” Haya responded nonchalantly without pausing with her weapon tinkering. “Why? Are you asking if I feel sorry for him?”
“Why wouldn’t you?” Tirion asked as she sat down next to her, only to get rolled eyes in return.

“I’m sorry, why should we feel sorry for Asher?”

“I’ve dealt with him enough to know that he has reasons.” Tirion said. “He knows his Ghost is in constant pain due to Vex conversion. And he knows he is slowly dying as the Vex convert him into a Goblin. It sounds like hell.” Tirion’s explanation barely put a dent in Haya’s resolve.

“Well, I don’t have time for that shit in any capacity.” Haya turned over her rifle. “I understand why it would be hard to deal with, but that doesn’t justify his behavior.”

“Fine. Humor me, Haya.”

“Asher is just lashing out at the world over a problem which is entirely his own fault.” Haya looked over to where Alva was kicking a purple ball around a level down. The ball was much bigger than her head, looking like it alone could knock her over. “Look at Alva. Unlike him, she’s in no way responsible for what happened to her.”

The Exo kicked the ball over to Lorcan, who quickly dropped the circuits he was tinkering with to kick the ball back. The two continued to run all across the courtyard, angering some civilians that just wanted to talk to each other. At least these Guardians weren’t involved in recreational Tower jumping.

Haya continued. “Alva was created and then thrown into the waking nightmare of her existence, entirely by external forces until we found her. She has never taken it out on the world, and she has had every damn opportunity to.”

“You know what happened to her?”

“I know enough to know that the big ball didn’t do a background check when he recruited any of us.”

The little Exo silently gasped as the ball changed its color into a green one, causing a small competition between her and the other Hunter to figure out what more could be done with it, much to distress of the innocent bystanders.

“Aren’t we all ultimately lonely and incapable of changing our own fates, as Guardians? Our fates are pretty sealed.”

“No.” Haya said. “Some of us can try, especially Asher. He’s too proud to do it. We’re more than just an undead horde. I don’t care what you say, Tirion. We’re people.”

“We’re certainly not normal people.”

The Titan groaned. “No, we’re not. I know that you’re not that much into Traveler worship, but I’ve been around longer than most.” She stared at the shattered Traveler. “It hasn’t changed since I was revived. Besides the… blowing up part. It will continue to sit dormant for another five centuries. It’s not alive. It’s time for us to move away from it and become our own things, past being a Guardian. My patience is wearing thin with being a Guardian right now.”

Finally, something the both of them could agree on. Tirion was in no mood to continue the conversation.

“This needs to stop, though.” Tirion turned to her. “All of it.”
“And what are you going to do about it?”

Giving a slight nod to her Ghost to stand by resurrection, Tirion continued. “I’ll call you Abigail every time you lose it and decide to start wars against the damn Vanguard.”

Haya’s fingers tensed up on the rifle with an audible crunch, cracks slowly forming on the shiny metal. “How much did you pay Lorc to tell that to you?”

“Nothing. Which is the same amount I paid Zavala to get me to forward a message to you.”

Haya took a deep breath and loosened her grip on the gun to examine the damage, watching the broken scope fall off and roll down to the lower levels until it finally stopped at the Postmaster’s booth. Some shards of metal and glass were stuck to her skin, the pain from it not yet registered in her brain. The Titan tried to shake her hand to get rid of it, to find little success.

“Tirion is right.” Ghost said. “Zavala wants to make peace. You would do much more good if you would settle it, teach the others. The world needs the Sunbreakers. You being one of the original ones—”

“What is the message?” She cut him off, although with a lack of harshness in her voice.

“None of my business to know the details.” Tirion said. “It’s a big file, so you’ll have a lot to read. I won’t send it to you until you’re ready, so just give the word.”

Haya holstered the broken gun on her back as she stood up and hopped off the pallet, already having a place in mind. “Send it to me.”

“Are you sure?”

Haya nodded. “It’s about time. Wanna kill an annoying Cabal in the EDZ afterwards?”

“Only if we don’t hijack the plan from the Vanguard.”

“That depends on what’s in the message.”

“You did a good thing for Haya, you know.” Tirion looked up from the report she attempted to write to look at Ghost. “That, and I’m glad we won’t have to see Zavala’s rage if he finds out about the Strike hijacking. I’m sure he would have understood, though.”

“I hated lying to him.” She frowned before she returned her attention to the datapad. “But, we need each other. Telling the truth would have torn it all apart.”

“Do you think Haya will forgive him?”

Tirion shrugged. “I have no idea. I don’t need her to forgive him, just calm down. Kouhei is still missing and… has my job seriously become shepherding Titans?”

“We shoot bad guys now and then.”

“And then forget about shooting bad guys because this report is going nowhere.” Tirion grunted as she deleted an entire paragraph of nonsense on the now repaired datapad, and started over.

“Let me help you. I remember.” Ghost flitted to her side, to be able to look at what she was writing. “Nothing between the attack and waking up at the Shard, though. I think I was dead.”
Tirion smiled and lightly tapped him on one of the spikes on his shell. “Sorry. Again. I’ll always wake you up, Little Light.”

“Had a nice dream, though.”

“Did you now?”

“Everyone was there, and everyone was so small, even the Traveler, and—“ Ghost’s ramble was cut off by a soft knock on the door. “…really?”

“That must be Haya.”

“I’ll get it…” Ghost grumbled as he made his way towards the door, out of pure habit. Being alive, bringing down barriers and opening doors. The only gifts he ever asks for.

“Ghost and Guardian collection agency welcomes you to the Titan shep— Oh—I…” Ghost’s sudden nervous gasp caused her to turn around to look at the door, to find a familiar armored figure standing in the doorway. “Hi, Shaxx. I’ll…” Ghost dug his head for an excuse. “I have some defragging to do. When you scan too many things and you… The Vex are— I’ll go.” Ghost instantly disappeared with the nervous laugh.

“Ignore Ghost…” She whispered with slight embarrassment, putting the report away as she stood up. “I know what you want to say judging by how you linger in the door way.”

“I wouldn’t have come all the way here if it was for that.” He slowly walked in, closing the door behind him. The helmet felt stuffier than it has felt in years, and the small apartment didn’t have the breeze of his new station. He reached up to take it off slowly, feeling her eyes on his fingers adding to the sudden anxiety. He looked down at the old helmet in his hands, finding no guidance from it.

“The way we left things off… I know that I haven’t been the best Guardian, let alone anything else…” She spoke softly. “But this whole chaos… is not worth throwing away what we had.”

“Tirion…” He stopped her, tossing the helmet away. “Stop.”

“Annihilating the Red Legion doesn’t make me a good Guardian. Not with the other things I have to deal with.”

“Yes it does, and it makes you impossible to deal with.”

She couldn’t tell if he was joking or not, watching him step closer to her. “What can I say? I’m terrible at my job. Some Cabal are still alive and the Hive are summoning things.”

It shouldn’t had taken until there was visible anger on his face to realize that she should be taking this seriously.

“You’re doing this on purpose…” The anger faded away once he noticed her slip up for one second and let herself smile.

“I’m seriously beginning to doubt the efficacy of it because you haven’t shut me up yet, or smashed a table in anger.” She looked down at the desk she was half sitting on. “Alright. Sorry. Old habits. I—”

Lips pressing against hers didn’t let her finish talking, just turning the sentence into a muffled gasp. She both hated and loved how he could disarm her that easily, how he had no issue to make her
knees buckle. Shaxx pulled her closer in as she reciprocated the kiss, not minding the pain from his medallion cutting into her.

“You can just say that you don’t like when a Warlock talks too much…” She laughed into his lips.

“I just don’t like it when they’re being annoying about it.” He whispered. “You’re being annoying.”

“If you kiss everyone you find annoying, we need to have a talk.” Tirion laughed harder when he pulled away, not being able to stop herself. “I’m sorry… I—”

Laughing because she was truly happy was a feeling that she thought was lost, the kiss destroying a weight from her shoulders. The laughing made her look like a crazy person, perhaps she was, but she didn’t care, leaning her forehead against his hard chest plate as she tried to make herself stop.

“You are completely ridiculous…” Shaxx sighed contently as he watched her, reaching up to grab her by the arms to push her back, to get a good look at her. “Yet, I still love you. I don’t understand why.”

“It’s not a Titan’s job to find answers to questions.”

“I guess so.”

He picked her up by her legs, moving her to her small bed. His own hesitancy to sit down was hard to miss.

“You’re worried about something…” Tirion said once he finally joined her side.

“I had a lot to think about when you were gone. Last time we talked… You said something about not remembering the war.” Shaxx recalled. “Will you forget more things?”

“I don’t think so.” Her words didn’t make him relax, even when he searched her eyes. A ‘don’t think so’ never reassured him. He preferred facts, actions. Not theories or loosely bound ideas. “I remember everything that has happened since the war. It was just trauma combined with too many hits to the head and too many things happening at once. I’m fine now.”

“I’ve seen one too many Guardians fall down that pit. One too many leave the City and never come back. I hate when you leave without a word.” Shaxx told, grabbing one of her hands tightly. “I don’t want you to be one of them. You have work to do, a duty… you disappeared without a trace once and returned to die in front of me.”

“I’m here now. It’s all alright.”

“It’s not alright….” He muttered. “None of this is. Nothing. You were dead in my arms. Your heart stopped beating and there was no Ghost to resurrect you, I was powerless to stop it. For all the good the Crucible has done, what does it matter if I can’t…” Shaxx stopped himself with a sigh, irritated with himself. “I don’t ever want to go through that again.”

“I’ll always come back. No matter what.”

“You can’t promise that…” He whispered. “You simply can’t promise that. You promised that you wouldn’t die on me. Holding you onto that isn’t exactly fair to anyone, however. I don’t know. I never know with you.”

“I know what I promised. But, I’m here now.” Tirion reached up to touch his face, caressing his
cheek with her thumb, his gaze following her hand until it found a place on her face. “Just gives us all the more reason to make the most of it.”

Fair enough.

Shaxx leaned in to capture her lips. This kiss was much slower than the previous, but not enough to be painstaking. Taking his time until she was laying down on her back, with him hovering on top of her. Both of them had fine-tuned the technique to remove his heavy armor long ago, hands instinctively searching for the little nooks, not stopping until there were no barriers between them.

It was different from the usual passion, different from the intense need to let off steam after returning from a heated mission. It was deeper than it has ever been before. It was not laced with fervent need for pleasure, but with need, with affection. The need to tell her things that words were inadequate for; how he needed her, to show her how she’s the only thing that makes sense in his life, despite how little sense her existence in itself made. Vex experiment, miracle of the Traveler, an anomaly, whatever she might be, it didn’t matter. He loved that Warlock, and she loved him.

Once they were both spent, he wrapped his arms around her, letting her lie on him. Tirion listened to him breathe as she drew small circles on his bare chest, feeling his hand stroking her back. Only thing that mattered in the world was confined to the room.

“I was going to be a doctor, before the Collapse…” Tirion said, catching him off guard with the sudden statement. “Whenever I just disappeared without a word I was digging around the EDZ, trying to find out who I was.”

“You never told me.” Shaxx was fighting the weariness that was slowly taking over him, anything to hear her voice.

“I don’t know why I didn’t. I should have.” She admitted. “That arena of yours, Memento. That’s where I lived. I spent the week after Ghaul’s defeat there. The Cabal had left it alone.”

“Explains why I could rarely use the arena to conduct Crucible matches.”

She laughed softly. “And there are some things that I’ve done, that I’m not sure if I should tell you, or anyone. I haven’t told the Vanguard.”

“Try me.”

“We conquered the Leviathan.” Tirion told hesitantly, before laughing to herself. “The six of us, me and my rag-tags. We boarded the Leviathan to kill the Cabal emperor thinking it would lead to something cool. It was a big ‘so what’.”

“Your Hunter can’t keep a secret.” Shaxx said. “I had my suspicions. Hunters value fashion over common sense.”

“Which one?”

“Lorcan. There were some concerns about a possible cultist sighting due to his armor.”

Of course there were. She thought to herself before other concerns consumed her head.

“Wait, that’s it? No anger about boarding it without informing anyone?”

“Being angry about good things done in a way they don’t like is the job of the Vanguard.” He mumbled. “Every threat that enters the system leaves big ships for me to take. I’m happy to hear
that the Cabal are no exception. I’ll have the Redjacks up there tomorrow.” He hugged her closer to him, letting a yawn escape. It wasn’t a bad way to end the day.

The world wasn’t going to let the day end, as loud pounding on the door almost caused both of them to jump out of bed, and almost shook the entire building.

“Tirionna!” The woman shouted outside of the door, and Tirion placed a finger on her lips to silently tell Shaxx that no words should be spoken. “Open up. Cabal. EDZ. Zavala overseeing.”

Tirion whispered a curse under her breath, praying that the door was locked. Either she never locked her door or Haya had a key, Tirion didn’t know which. The footsteps receded, but the Titan wasn’t done yet as the small datapad on the nightstand lit up with an incoming call. It was so close to being a good day.

“Where are you?” Her voice said through the speakers when Tirion answered. “We have a Strike to get to.”

“I’m in the Bazaar.” Tirion lied, the first thing that came to her head, the sounds of running on the other end giving her time to write a story in her head, while ignoring Shaxx smirking next to her, curious to see how she’ll get out of the web.

“I’m at the Bazaar now. Don’t see you.”

"Umm... I’m by this big tree...” Tirion floundered, lightly slapping the Titan next to her who was about to make it worse by laughing.

“What tree?!”

“No, never mind. I went back to Rahool, had an Engram...” She stuttered. “No, I went left—you— Nope, that's not you. Text me when you find me, I'll be cooking dinner.”

Tirion hung up the call by tapping every visible surface on the datapad before throwing it away out of her sight, and Shaxx allowed himself to chuckle when the device hit the ground.

“At least now you know what happens when I try to lie.” She buried her face in his chest, feeling the vibrations of his laugh. “I love your laugh, but stop laughing.”

“I thought I could never find something that was more adorable than the Red Legion escalating the war.”

“Cute. Really cute.” She moved her hands to be able to rest her chin on them, looking up at him. “I might have to actually marry you, now. We would have to move to a place no one knows of, so you couldn’t make fun of me.” Tirion joked.

“Well, then.” Shaxx grabbed her as he sat up, pulling her into his lap. “Wouldn’t that be something?”

“Could do it tonight.” She wrapped her arms around his neck. “Sight unseen. The Factions are about to arrive, so I’ve heard. Will be much harder to pull it all off when politics get involved.”

“Fine.” He pulled her closer and kissed her. “Let’s go.”
Before The Dawning

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“We should get back soon…” Tirion giggled into his lips as she rolled on top of him.

“I see no rush.”

“Work starts in two hours.”

Shaxx chuckled. “Some of the rookies could use the field experience. The ones that can’t handle it won’t even try.”

“Mhh-hmmmm…” She kissed him again, feeling his large hand travel her back until it stopped. His fingers slowly unravelled the ribbon on her Warlock robes until they loosened. When she pulled away for a moment, his hands started to work upwards, towards the collar. Gently pulling it down to expose her neck and bare shoulders, a finger caressing the old white scars.

“You sure we killed enough Fallen?”

He rolled on top of her, one hand deep in her hair and other to support himself so he won’t crush her. “We have enough bullets left if we haven’t.”

Shaxx stared into her eyes, stroking her cheek with his thumb. Both of them focused on each other and the sounds of the night, the water next to them. Moments like these were still unfamiliar and strange, but they felt right. She always kept surprising him. No matter what she did. Everything from subtleties to killing gods.

She didn’t even need to pull him in, all she had to do was smile and his lips were back on hers.

There were no qualms with letting go and losing track of time, though both wished that it was more than just for one night.

That was until Tirion found herself sprinting through the streets of the City, because she was late to a fireteam meeting and Guardian responsibilities. The running undoubtedly attracted a lot of unwanted attention to their den, but relief was found in the fact that only six people in the System knew how to open the door. To most, it was just a Cabal structure that they didn’t have the resources to move yet. The misfits were working of several cloaking techs to prevent getting evicted, as it was just a matter of time. She hoped that she didn’t forget to reassure the people that she was running because she was late, and not because the City was under attack again. Maybe it was time to pick a helmet because even as a blur she was getting too recognizable.

Word had spread about them and their little club, only a matter of time until people know where the club lives. Then they will have even bigger problems on their hands.

Tirion was about to unleash a string of words to apologize for being late when she barged through the door, but the sight infront of her made her forget everything. Lorcan and Haya were caught in an awkward stand-off. The Titan’s finger hovered over a particular spot on the datapad she was trying to stare down, and the Hunter’s eyes were stuck on her face, scowling.

“Just open it.” He said.
“Shut up.” Haya muttered for the sixtieth time. Lorcan finally had enough, and tried to reach his hand out to do it for her to only get it quickly slapped away, like putting a hand in the jaws of a defensive beast.

“It’s been hours.” He sighed, and noticed a disheveled Tirion looming next to the door, watching them both. “Hey, look who’s finally here! Only six hours late!”

“Huh. Was the big tree next to a beach?” Haya asked, eyeing the Warlock as she sat down.

“What...?”

Lorcan laughed at the sight. “You look like a place Vance-his-face would build a shrine to Osiris on.” He said, as Haya tugged on a strand of Tirion’s hair to see dirt and sand fall out of it. Tirion cursed as she tried to shake the dirt out of her hair, only to notice that her armor was covered in it too.

“So that’s why there were no Crucible matches this morning…” Haya said as she watched the spectacle.

“I…” There was no point in lying to them, or keeping the discussion going. She gave up with trying to get rid of the dirt when she realized she would have to take a bath in an ocean to get rid of it all. “If we’re done with that, what did you need me for?”

“I need you to put a Rift down.” Lorcan explained. “Huritt’s busy.”

“Why? Are you planning to blow something up?”

“The other kind of Rift.” Lorcan drew circles in the air with his finger to illustrate what he was talking about.

“What other—“

“It’s Ouros’ final words.” Haya cut the discussion off. “And Lorcan is being a dumbass about it.”

It wasn’t often that Lorcan showed frustration or annoyance at anyone, especially for free. Normally he was the one who caused annoyance, intentional or not. But, after sitting for hours watching her like that, digging his brain for ways to get her to move, trying to help his friend, even he had to draw a line.

At least Tirion was now there to watch over her, no matter how late she was to the party.

Titans were hopelessly stubborn, to the point where legends circulated that the Wall is just their stubbornness that was manifested with the help of a Warlock. Hunters had no attention span. It all made them great partners in crime.

“Whatever.” He grabbed his rifle as he sprang up. “I have a point to prove in the Crucible.”

“Don’t piss off Shaxx. I’m the one who has to deal with him afterwards.”

Lorcan just waved a goodbye to acknowledge Tirion’s request before slamming the door shut behind him.

”I...” Haya began, only to shake her head. “I didn’t mean to do that.”

“He’ll understand.”
“I don’t think he will.” She whispered, eyes still on the blue glowing screen. She finally retracted her hand to put it on her lap. “You’re smart. What’s the deal with not speaking ill of the dead?”

“It’s disrespectful.”

“What does it matter?” She said. “I… We lost a bunch of extraordinary Guardians during the war, and I don’t know why we did.”

“I don’t think there is any divine reason. The Red Legion wanted something.”

“That’s not it. Even without their Light they were strong enough to hold off the Legion. We five were strong enough to hold them off in the Tower. I’m so pissed at Ouros right now.”

“She couldn’t possibly have been responsible for what happened. Not for the Legion, not anything.”

Haya shook her head. There had to be a reason. There just had to. “I begged her to not trust Osiris, no matter what. I told her that she shouldn’t go to Mercury. That defiance was the final nail in me getting kicked out of the Order.” She lightly tapped on the datapad with her nail. “First thing I hear from her in the recording is her shouting about how she shouldn’t have trusted him. Why do I feel guilty?”

“That’s hardly your fault. It’s not anyone’s fault. You were one of the few who tried.”

“I know but, I can’t stop thinking about that whole meeting, before they left with him… She definitely knew that it wasn’t going to end well.” Haya finally tore her eyes away from the blue screen to look at Tirion. “I think that, maybe for just a moment, that by kicking me out she gave me an opportunity survive. I took that opportunity.”

Haya shut off the datapad and tossed it into her backpack. She wasn’t ready for it after all. Ouros’ words in the recording were words said when she was alive, Haya wasn’t ready to taint that yet. Wasn’t willing to call the recording the voice of a dead warrior.

“I don’t know what to do.” Haya whispered, rubbing her eyes. “I want answers from Osiris, but that’s a lost cause.”

“I think you should pick up the mantle.” The Warlock suggested, without hesitation, but Haya remained as steely as ever. “There are a lot of new Sunbreakers around because of that Shard, or wherever they come from. They could use the guidance, and it would honor the Order.”

“That sounds like a terrible idea.” Haya said, dismissively. Not the right time to think about any of it. Too many hours wasted staring at a blue light, to the point where the world was blue. “I need a damn distraction. Got anything?”

She knew better than to keep poking Haya. The Titan will be ready when she’s ready.

“Fine. I’ve got hunting trip, of sorts, for you.” Tirion had the perfect idea in mind. “I need those books you stole from Cayde.”

“Why?”

“I need to give them back to their owner.”

Haya groaned as she sat up from the couch. “Fine. But you’ll owe me. I prefer the novels about the normal people, anyway. Short lifespans add a lot more bitter sweetness to it. Cayde has bad taste.”
Tirion let her curiosity take over her before she had a say in it. “Is that so?”

“It’s kinda boring! There is no suspense around it. One of them goes to fight the Hive, it’s always the Hive, and in a surprising development the Guardian returns after getting revived by their Ghost fifty goddamn times.”

“Really.”

Haya reached up to retrieve the books from the tallest shelf, as if they were put up there on purpose because even she had trouble reaching them.

“It’s better when it’s about the normal people. There is heartache when one of them goes to war, as a bullet is fatal to them. Even without a war they live for like thirty minutes. There is actual intensity, and uncertainty and—“ She stopped herself when she turned around with books in hand and noticed Tirion trying not to laugh with a hand over her mouth. “Shut the hell up!”

Tirion caught the books that were thrown at her just in time, laughing the whole time despite Haya’s endless complaints.

“I’ll make sure to find you a pre-Golden Age book for you for the Dawning.” Tirion said.

“You didn’t hear any of that!”

There was a sizable hole where the roof of the bar used to be, and what remained of the bar smelled like mold and rain. A certain bot was missing from the corner, rendering the room unusually quiet. The first of the snowflakes made their way in only to melt before they hit the ground. The record was skipping slightly, fighting harder than any Guardian with the needle to play the old song smoothly.

The place still felt familiar, despite it being half in ruins.

“Hey!” Cayde held up his glass in the air as he cheered. “Been a minute since I’ve had a drink with my favorite Guardian! How ya’ been?”

“It has been a minute.” She placed the box on the counter before taking a seat on the rickety barstool. “Sorry. Things got disoriented. Only now things are cooling off.”

“All is forgiven. Ya’ might owe me a favor or two.” He eyed the very intrusive box on his counter.

“Watcha got there? Aww, did you bring me an early Dawning gift? You didn’t have to!”

“I…” She had trouble saying it without laughing. “I found your trashy romance novels.”

Cayde was about to harshly criticize her choice of words about the books until he saw the other item in her hand, words caught in his throat as he watched her hands put it down gently. It was a small wooden box, with an ace burnt onto the lid.

One that he instantly recognized. Maybe he hasn’t forgotten everything.

“I wanted to save this for tomorrow, but thought today was appropriate. During the war, I took a detour to fulfill a promise. It took some digging.” She watched his metal features sink as he slowly pulled the box to him, one metal finger gently stroking the symbol. He didn’t even notice the small scratches the action left on his counter. “Do what you want with them, just… don’t forget about them again.”
“You’re… you’re good, Guardian.” Cayde cleared his throat as he placed the box on top of the books, quickly regaining his composure. “Thank you. And I didn’t get you anythin’.”

“Well. You didn’t ruin my wedding. That’s a start.” She grabbed a brown bottle to pour herself a drink in a glass whose cleanliness shouldn’t be questioned. “That’s more than I could ask for, considering the track record.”

After a moment of silence that never happens around Cayde, she looked over at him to find him frozen, mid pouring himself a drink. He snapped back to reality when his boots started to feel suspiciously wet and the counter looked suspiciously green and glossy from the corner of his eye. He quickly muttered something as he tried to clean it up with his sleeve, realizing that it was a bad idea far too late, and started scrambling for anything that resembled a towel.

“I shouldn’t have said that…” Tirion whispered to herself, lifting up the stack of books to save them from the wrath of the poisonous looking drink. Once the books were secured, she downed her drink as the chaos ensued around her with Cayde trying to form a coherent sentence and trying to soak up the alcohol with some documents.

“What?!” He finally shouted, scaring off some innocent bystanding birds.

“Nevermind.”

“Can I tell Amanda?”

“No.”


“Absolutely not. Not even my fireteam knows about it. If the Factions hear—“

“It’ll be fine!”

“— Them having a simultaneous stroke that even Ghosts can’t fix won’t be fine. They’ll try to take advantage.”

“They’ll be fine!”

“Cayde… I’m about to draw the Taniks card on you.” Tirion said. “Don’t tell anyone.”

“Fine, fine.” Cayde sighed, leaning back until the barstool stood on only two legs, drink in one hand and holding onto the counter with the other so he wouldn’t fall backwards as he rocked back and forth. “I guess I owe ya’ for that, too. Since you killed him twice and all. Man, I need a notebook to keep track of these debts…”

“I don’t want to draw that damn card for this.” She said. “I know what Taniks did. I just really need you to be quiet about it and I’m in no mood to do your chores. Get someone else to do your patrol beacons.”

“Andal woulda drawn that card himself.” He looked down at what remained of his drink. “On me, that is.”

“You’re not an idiot, Cayde.” She tried to catch his attention. “Zavala and Ikora might be trying to host a Cayde Is The Second Best party all the time, but you’ve done more than most as of late.”

That caught his attention. “Keep goin’…”
“Thanks for finding my Ghost.” She got right to the point. Appealing to his ego wasn’t a priority for her.

“No problem, Guardian. I found your Ghost…” He reached out to bring the small box back to him, on the now dry counter. “…you found my *ghosts*. Where is that little rascal? Miss the little buddy.”

Ghost immediately materialized right in front of Cayde’s face, almost making him fall off the chair he was goofing around on, as the chair fell forward with a loud thud. “Don’t call me *little.*”

“He doesn’t like that.” Tirion gently grabbed Ghost by one of the pointy ends of his shell to bring him back. “Little Light is fine.”

“Does he think that he’ll be more useful with a larger chassis?” Cayde asked.

“Zavala put the idea into his head a while back.”

“I’m sorry for wanting to be more efficient.” Ghost mumbled.

“Well, that’s not necessarily true. Big—“

Tirion jerked her head to Cayde’s direction to cut him off. “Cayde!”

“*Hm?*”

“Don’t scar my Ghost.” She mouthed at him, whisper barely audible.

“You mean he has n—“

“*Don’t.*”

“Oh, speaking of that! Not likin’ things and stuff…” Cayde said, hesitantly. “I kind of invited Ikora and Zavala to this *thing* earlier. They want to have that usual congratulatory awkward thing they do. Gotta get it over with. The ‘*Great job being a hero*’ party.”

There was no need to be a smart Warlock to decipher his ramble. “What you’re saying is that you’ll need to be much more drunk in order to not spill anything.” She looked down at the puddle of alcohol on the ground. “In both ways.”

“Yep! Let’s gets started.”

The sun was already setting, tinting the Traveler a faint orange. For every day that passed, the debris around it seemed to lessen, adding to the debates about the Traveler’s current state. Decorations and lights for the Dawning festivities were in boxes, ready to be set up tomorrow. Extra guards were around, presumably to prevent Guardian tampering and other pranks that would prevent the event from going smoothly. The guards, the untold heroes of the Tower.

The civilians appreciated the help of the Guardians most of the time, just not in the way the help was executed. While to a Guardian it might make perfect sense to use solar grenades to light some candles in a place they can’t reach, it scared the normal people. Same goes for incidents where Stormcallers attempt to get a generator running by hitting it, one of the few times Warlocks resort to violence and not rational thinking. For a Guardian, using Arc abilities to make a device that uses electricity work sometimes defines as rational thinking.

Civilians were also advised to be extra wary about any and all gifts given to them by the Guardians. A simple looking sweater was *never* a simple sweater. They were also told to never ask
about how the sweater was made.

The snowball fights, with the strengthened abilities of the Guardians, were the source of the most
dread for everyone living in the new Tower. It did inspire quite a lot of dissertations about
Guardian behavior. The trajectory of going from dancing, to a friendly competition, to
disintegrating fellow Guardians was one to be studied for ages.

“Good, you’re here.” Shaxx said once he saw Haya descending the metal pipe, an alternative route
to him that one too many Guardians liked. Haya was one of the few that walked on it, instead of
using it as a slide. “An apology is in order, Titan.”

“Um…” She looked around, seeing no sign of the Hunter, or signs of his larceny adventures. The
amount of Cabal helmets, while still a bit terrifying, seemed to be the same as before. It had to be
something about the Crucible. Talking to a helmet-man was infuriating in all situations she could
think of.

“Lorcan might be under my wing, but I am in no way responsible for what he does in the Crucible.”

“Lorcan is one of the best Hunters I’ve seen in the arena, but this isn’t about him.”

“Did… did I chip your horn or something?” She guessed. “I think I was high around the time you
lost it, so I’m sorry if that was me.”

“No. If that was the case I would have never let you work alongside the Redjacks before the war. I
have to apologize for what I said last time we talked. It was out of bounds on my part to call you a
lowlife Dreg. That’s all.”

This was new for Haya. People apologizing, people admitting their wrongs. Not only that, but
people realizing their wrongs in such a short period of time. Usually, it takes two centuries to come
somewhat close.

And then, at some point, a Warlock leads them to Mercury and they die.

“You weren’t wrong, though.” Haya shrugged. “I can see how running away from wars would
make someone who wants to win angry.”

“Only reason I think your actions were foolish is because I know you could have handled the
fight.” Shaxx said. “I’ve fought alongside Sunbreakers before. I have always admired them. I know
for a fact that they wouldn’t let ineptitude into their order.”

“Who fought with you?”

“Liu Feng was one of the most memorable ones, out of all the Guardians. She could hold her own
even next to me.”

Haya resisted to chuckle at that self-confidence. How does Tirion live with that?

“The crafty one…”

“I’m sorry?”

“Liu Feng loved to forge weapons and armor. If you thought that she was great in battle, you
should have seen the arguments that happened when Ouros found out what kind of names she gave
the things she created.”
“I think calling her skills great is a disservice to what I saw.”

“I’m worse with words than she was.” Haya joked. “But… I couldn’t have handled the wars. You didn’t know me before Tirion and her god and god wannabe summoning ass came along. She has a habit of being the odd one out and changing people for the better.” She trailed off in her ramble.

Shaxx chuckled silently. “Can’t entirely disagree with that last part.”

“Yeah, well. She urged me to pick up the mantle, to teach the new generation of Sunbreakers. By the looks of it I’m the last one adjacent to the original order, so the mantle is rightfully mine.” Haya sighed, realizing how ridiculous it sounded. “I think. I don’t know how it works. I punch, therefore I am, pertundam whatever ergo sum.”

Tirion told her that phrase once, it has stuck with Haya even though the Titan has little grasp of what it means.

“It would be quite honorable, and we’re in need of something like that. The Sunbreakers is an order that shouldn’t be allowed to be lost to time, or should be left to rot. Your skills and knowledge would be fit for the task.”

“You think so? Are we officially done with the whole ‘I think you are a bad excuse for a Guardian for deserting’ thing?”

“No.” Shaxx shook his head. “We are not. But, I want you to prove me wrong. You are given a chance to reprimand your failures and do something good. Only a fool wouldn’t take it.”

Haya nodded and moved her gaze to the Traveler, the sky much darker than it was just a minute ago. Not nearly enough daylight nowadays to think.

What would Ouros say?

First, she would laugh in her face. The thought of this problem child ruling her order would be too bizarre to get angry at. Anyone usurping her, greatest warrior or the whiniest recruit, wasn’t even a thought in the back of her head. Not after she worked so hard to make sure that her Order will never fall.

But, she wouldn’t want it all forgotten if she falls. She wouldn’t want it to be reduced to a disorganized group of rookies who can’t wield the Hammer without tearing off their limbs. And sometimes, there is no choice and no other way to get what you want. Ouros would want her legacy to be led by someone who has no doubts nor fears.

There was little time for fear after all the missions with the dysfunctional fireteam. When they’ve seen the worst of the enemies, and the darkest sides of Guardians.

If by some means Haya wasn’t qualified, she’ll do her best to get herself there. She owed that to the Order. It was no longer about choice, but about an obligation that she had to fulfill. Much like the Forge itself. It was never done out of choice, it was done because someone had to.

Maybe it was finally time to act her age. It will be a tough learning process to reach that point, she knew that much.

“Should I be worried…?” A familiar soft voice cut through the winter air, pulling Haya out of her thoughts. “You two aren’t planning to break anything, are you?”

Haya smirked at the confused Warlock whose glowing eyes were darting from Titan to Titan in
“Depending how you look at it, yeah. The Dawning is tomorrow, so...” Haya grinned mischievously. “I wanna knock out three people with one gift, if you catch my drift. Talk to him for me, won’t you?”

The Titan was gone before Tirion could come up with an appropriate response, focused on her search for the Hunter. It wasn’t the first time Haya alluded to that, and every time she does it Tirion questions more and more if she’s serious.

“I promise that somewhere underneath there is a decent Guardian.” Tirion shook her head, and looked back at Shaxx. “What did she really want?”

“She told me about you encouraging her to lead the new generation of Sunbreakers.” Shaxx told, urging her to follow as he walked away from his station.

“I think she’s capable. Even with some of her obscenity.”

Shaxx grabbed her hand once they were briefly out of sight, one of the few warm things around.

“I think my wife has some great ideas.” He smirked underneath his helmet. “Would also make my job easier by honing the rookies. A part of me dies when I see some of them fall over backwards when they summon the Hammer.”

As much as the Titan hated to take time off and not working into the night, the Crucible was going through a much needed maintenance for tomorrow, and he had her. The two carefully made their way to the living complexes, away from many ears and eyes, Tirion realized that the biting cold was the only thing that kept her awake. She wouldn’t trade anything that has happened the whole night for even a second of sleep.

“I was roped by Cayde into have a drink with Ikora and Zavala. You don’t have the right to complain about your job being difficult.”

“Very well. I can see how that would be bad.”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was supposed to come out days ago, but due to work related traveling I was stuck in a place with no internet. Majority of this chapter was literally written by hand in a literal passenger’s seat and only got cleaned up just now.

We’ll get to Curse of Osiris content after the Dawning.
All creatures of the dark have a weakness. But to find it, you had to look for their biggest strength.

They were always interchangeable.

The Cabal had their shields and their brute force. The Red Legion has made it easier for the Guardians. In order to defeat them, all you had to do was to shoot the center of the shield until it retracted, and then the Centurion would fall after a couple of well-placed shots. Some Guardians may choose to dance instead, prompting a stream of requests for intelligence that lowered the guard of the Cabal. Both strategies yielded the same result.

The Hive had their Sword Logic, and at any given time it could be used against them. Many scholars might say that the only reason they killed Oryx and his son was because the Guardians learned how to utilize systematically weaken the Hive, and they believe that the fireteam that killed Oryx were fools.

The Fallen were just like the Guardians, but the City will never admit it. They won’t ever admit that the only thing that sets the Guardians apart from the Fallen is that the Traveler hasn’t left them. Scavenging, wanting justice and answers, wanting the death of those that were chosen by the Traveler while they themselves were abandoned. Letting jealousy and rage consume them, refusing a truce. Justice trumped reason.

The Vex rely on time, without realizing how easily their own experiments and simulations could be turned against them. But, that’s a tale for another time.

Even Guardians had their weaknesses. Their Light is a fickle thing.

No matter who you fought against, they had something. Something physical. Something that you could hold on to, to use to outsmart your enemies. Whether it be ancient knowledge or disarming a Fallen with a well-placed punch in order to shoot them with their own gun. There was always a way as long as you could grab on to something.

There is nothing to hold on to when you’re falling to your death.

The mixture of fear and peacefulness resulted in a sensory overload which didn’t allow her to scream, no matter how much she tried. She didn’t know if she wanted. The sounds of the buildings tumbling in on themselves and the gunfire were drowned out by the wind whooshing past her ears. The disorder around her filled her with guilt. She couldn’t fight off the Cabal, she couldn’t pull people out of the rubble. No Light to turn to, no gun in her hand. All she could do was just give in to the hopelessness, to succumb, to stop flailing her limbs and to let herself fall. Nothing more could be done.

Maybe that wind was one final mercy.

It was exactly what Ghaul wanted, that a burning city would be the last thing she ever sees. That the heartbreak of realizing that she let her City die would kill her before she hit the ground.

Tirion gasped loudly as she sat up in the bed, hurriedly untangling the blankets around her legs so that she could move freely and get her bearings. The darkness around her wasn’t the pavement...
getting closer to her, but just a dimly lit, warm room. She repeated her usual routine in her head, reminding herself where she was, ensuring herself that she was safe and sound.

“It’s alright.” Shaxx whispered, being careful so he wouldn’t startle her. Tirion turned her back to him, moving until she was sitting on the edge of the bed with her feet on the ground to convince herself that she was on solid ground and unmoving.

“I don’t understand why you never wake me…” She whispered, resting her head in her hands.

“You have to live it out.”

“I don’t know what to say to that Crucible answer.”

“If you get woken up in the middle of it, you’ll remember the dream very vividly. It’s not a ‘Crucible answer’.”

“Found that out via trial and error?”

“You could call it that.”

The dream slowly withered away as she focused on her breathing, so did the fear. Replaced by the realization that the war was now over, and Ghaul was dead. The weight on the bed shifted and a comforting arm found its way around her.

“Hey, look at me.” He turned her slightly, but still keeping her feet on the ground. “What did you dream about?”

“That I was falling, off Ghaul’s ship when he kicked me off after talking too long.” Tirion told. “Don’t know why my brain wants me to relive the moment I felt the most helpless.”

His eyes traveled down to the scar on her shoulder, tiny specks of light collected and dancing on that particular spot, as if they were trying to heal it with all their might. Now and then, they separated from each other, only to attack the spot again, with more aggression every time the cycle was repeated.

“You never told me where you got this scar.” He gently caressed it with his thumb, unsure if it causes her any pain.

“There are a lot of things I haven’t told you. My brain hasn’t either until recently: still recovering after losing the Light.”

“Tell me.” He pleaded once she looked at him.

“I barely survived that fall. I shouldn’t have survived that fall. My mind was still alive but I was trapped in a dead body.” Tirion recollected. “The Cabal prioritized executing Guardians over making sure that the dead were dead.”

“When did you lose your Ghost?”

“He got shut down once the Light went away. We got separated in the fall.” She closed her eyes to be able to remember better, to piece the fragments together. “I saw these faces hovering. Human faces. They noticed that I was still breathing and dragged me off to the sewers. That’s where it started.”

“What did?”
“They... they pumped me with a lot of drugs. Liquid Ghost, they called it. They were claiming that
it could heal you like a Ghost, but if you separate yourself from it you will die.” What she said
didn’t surprise the Titan next to her. “They gave me ingredients, instructions and syringes.
Anything I’ll need.”

“I’ve heard of that.” Shaxx told. “Kicked out numerous Guardians out of the Crucible for abusing
that junk.”

“I can tell you that it didn’t enhance performance.”

“It made them worse.” He admitted. “I told them to not come back until they’re clean. There are
better ways to chase a bliss than that.”

“How many came back?”

“Most of them. The others were never seen.”

She sighed. “Those people in the sewers, they already knew the fate of the world. Dulling it all,
ending it in bliss and recruiting as many people as they can before the dark wind was all they
knew.”

“I have a difficult time having sympathy for those people.” He said. “But at the end, I can
understand them.”

Both of them knew that the reasons those sewers existed was due to Guardian failures. Their job is
to uplift, to fight threats. If the civilians feel that life is too suffocating, they haven’t done their
jobs. Even one existing was too much. The attack was a special occasion.

Their faces were blurred in her head, voices warped. As if the world didn’t want her to remember
them.

“They saved my life, either way. No matter how they did it or what we think of them. The war
wouldn’t had been won without them, and I don’t even remember their names. And, it was my
fault that they died.” She whispered the last part, ashamed. Telling it all was easier than she
thought it would be, but the weight of the guilt compensated for it, more than enough. “Psions
inevitably found us and unleashed fire. They got three shots in my shoulder before I took them
out.”

“And the others?” The question felt unnecessary, but the silence forced him as she sat there,
immobile.

“They didn’t even care.” Tirion said. “They saw the Psions, but they didn’t need a radio to provide
the noise to drown out reality.”

Tirion remembered the Psions breaking in. It started with a few soft knocks, and then they started
breaking down the door until the doorframe was bleeding red. The docile people around her saw
the Psions. They reacted, looked the Psion deep into their eye, fully knowing what was going to
happen but making no effort to stop it.

She didn’t understand.

There was nothing to commemorate them with. Nothing to remember them by, no names to put on
a memorial for those who died in the war, and no names to think of when wishing it would have
ended better.
And she lived.

Strong arms pulled her in, as words were no longer viable. “You’re here now.”

“I am.”

“What the hell are you rummaging for?” The twentieth sigh from Tirion was the one that wore out Haya’s patience. The sound of the Warlock searching through the boxes was fine, it was the constant grating sighing that got to her.

“A knife and alcohol. Pure alcohol. Maybe some pliers.”

“A what and a what?” Ghost asked, flying in front of her from where he was resting on a nearby cabinet. “Guardian… What are you doing?”

“I have a knife.” Lorcan pointed at his silver knife with the screwdriver he was holding.

“I need a smaller knife, with more precision.” Tirion was about to move to the next box but got distracted by the snickering behind her. “What?”

“Smaller knife, more precision.” Lorcan laughed to himself, earning a friendly shove from Haya. “Oh come on!”

“You could have done better, Lorc.” Haya said, suddenly very invested in watching Tirion dig through the boxes.

“You try it!”

“Gee, Tirionna. How big is that knife that it makes you want to search for a smaller one?”

“Why are you suddenly not interested in hunting for big knives?” Tirion clapped back, but with a sparkle in her eye.

“Are you judging me and my knife hunting hunts?”

“No. Just don’t polish any knives on any of these couches.”

“Ew…” Lorcan grimaced.

“Do I want to know?” Ghost asked. “I don’t, do I. I don’t.”

“Well, when two Guardi—“

“Well, I’m going to need more alcohol if this conversation continues.” Tirion shut the final box, not finding anything she came there for, not even a hidden flask for guilty pleasures. She didn’t want to look at Lorcan’s tool drawer, knowing that she doesn’t have enough disinfectant for anything in there. “Ghosts can’t drink, Haya. Don’t scar my Ghost.”

“Mine has tried.” Lorcan said in between his tinkering, all the talks of Ghosts reminding him that he needed to pick up the pace on the work on his drone for a certain someone. “But that was a ransom situation.”

“On behalf of all Ghosts everywhere…” Ghost sighed, giving up on the thought and looking over at the Titan and what she had in her hands. “Why do I have a feeling we shouldn’t leave before we know what that booklet is about?”
Haya glanced up at Ghost from her reading. “Oh, this? Just some letters.”

“… about what?” Tirion asked slowly.

“About that we should behave during the Dawning. Which starts today. We got this letter like a month ago but, priorities.” Haya explained, already hearing the follow-up question in her head. “We didn’t do anything but half of these warnings are inspired by us.”

Tirion took the papers from Haya’s hands, with surprisingly little struggle. “We’d like to inform you that jumping off the Tower is not an appropriate way to travel to the City. Don’t give anything edible to the civilians unless it’s been screened.” She continued reading; “Hunters who wish to make friends are not advised to write their contact information on their knives. What is this?”

“I think that’s them subtly saying that Hunters just shouldn’t attend.” Lorcan said.

“A seminar has been opened for Titans regarding proper tool usage. Using all and any Light abilities to dislodge anything is strictly prohibited.”

“Why were you looking at me when you said that?” Haya looked up at Tirion only to find her eyes on the paper. “That’s all Titans. Every single one.”

“Damn Warlocks…” Lorcan muttered. “Getting that special treatment.”

“There is an entire clause for Warlocks. Uh… Warlocks are prohibited from using their Arc abilities to jump start any and all devices that require electricity, including weapons. That happened once.” Tirion rolled her eyes. “Any and all solar grenades do not make a suitable replacement for fireworks. Usage of Radiance is strictly prohibited... No, I’m done with this.” She handed the papers back to Haya, but Lorcan managed to snatch it.

“What are the other Hunter ones?” He asked, eyes scanning the paper.

“We don’t have that much time.” Tirion joked. “Most of them are about abuse of stealth cloaks.”

“Don’t get me wrong…” Haya started as she read the endless list of rules over Lorcan’s shoulder. “Whoever wants to take advantage of Alva can personally square up and fight me… but I hate her for having an entire page dedicated to her. Ruined the fun for all of us.”

“Where is the little ball of mischief?” The Warlock asked. “Don’t see either one of the Exos for more than a minute at a time.”

“They’re in and out of the Farm, helping out.” Lorcan told. “She really likes playing with Cayde’s chicken.”

Immediately after having said that, Lorcan hurriedly picked up his tools and his unfinished drone to put it on his lap. The force of Haya springing up from where she was sitting and vaulting over the couch was a blur that alerted Warlocks both alive and dead, and she was gone out of the room. The weight of both Lorcan and Tirion on the couch prevented it from getting tipped over. Just barely.

“… his what?” Tirion asked, choosing the calm approach, placing the small table back that Haya kicked over in her hurry.

“Cayde has a chicken, I think he calls it Colonel. A literal chicken.” Lorcan took his time clarifying the issue, as there was no reason to hurry. Knowing Haya, Cayde was already drowning in snow and deaf from her shouting. “Coulda have phrased it better, I think.”
“This makes me miss Kouhei.”

“Yeah. It’s weird to not have a sack of brood next to us.” Lorcan said, carefully putting things back where they were before the emergency move. “At least he’ll be back soon. Got a message from him.”

“I hope that he has news about the Reef. Haven’t heard anything from them since the war.”

“You know that he has a daughter who lives there, right?” Lorcan stated. “More like a great-great-great-granddaughter at this point, but still.”

“I… didn’t know either of that.” Between not knowing where the Exos are half the time and not knowing details like that, Tirion couldn’t help but feel like a bad leader of her team. “He isn’t prone to sharing much.”

“There was a bonding experience in the Tower, after the attack. He apologized for the freakout, there was talking.” The Hunter explained. “At one point he was a decent hu– er, Awoken being.”

“I have to ask. How drunk did you get in order to get along like that?”

“It was a kind of laying on the couch, one hand on the wall, one foot on the floor, swallowing every ten seconds kind of drunk.” He told. “For both of us.”

“Huh.”

“Yeah. It wasn’t pretty.” He twirled his screwdriver between his fingers, thinking about where to go as for some reason the drone wasn’t flying yet. “At least we were able to fully put it all behind us.”

“It only took Cabal annihilating the Tower…”

“You’re surprised?”

“I should be.” Tirion shrugged. “Anyway. I need to make sure that Cayde is still intact, and I didn’t see anything about breaking into a hospital in those papers.”

“The what now?” Ghost repeated himself.

“I need to do a thing.”

“A what thing?!”

“You’ll see.”

“Can I join?” Lorcan shouted as he watched her walk away.

“I need subtlety.”

“Oh come on! I think my favorite part of our group is the emphasis we have on subtlety.”

“I really wish you would check with me before getting insane ideas.” Ghost berated her as they walked through the blindingly white halls. “Remember the good old days, when you going after a Gate Lord was the thing that had me most worried?”

“I think we’re two Hive gods past that. See it as a Dawning gift for your Guardian.”
“What Dawning gift?!” Tirion pulled Ghost back in an attempt to shush him after she entered a storage closet. “What Dawning gift?” Ghost whispered this time, watching Tirion enter something in a device in her hand.

“Alva gave me more charges of her stealth cloak, and the hologram tech.” The crackling cloak consumed them both and hid them from sight. “They won’t know we’re here.”

“Why not just… ask the staff?” He whispered.

“Where is the fun in that?”

The two have been through a lot together. Ghost could say with absolute certainty that this was going to be one of the toughest days, and it was just morning. Forcing himself not to speak as he followed Tirion amounted to a big part of what made the day difficult. It was uncomfortable not knowing what his Guardian was up to, considering the influences around her.

“Guardian…” No questions were answered as Tirion activated the hologram tech in front of the small window on the door so that no one could peek in, and locked it. “Even the neural symbiosis is failing me on this one. Did you do something?”

“Scalpels, disinfectant, pliers, some cotton balls. Also, get out of my head.” She listed as she quickly found everything she needed and more in the cabinets. Taking it and running away wasn’t an option. Well, it was. But she didn’t feel like explaining it to anyone who asked questions. “Gifts. Plural. I have Cabal tech in my shoulder. I’m pulling it out, with my teeth if I have to.”

“Are you sure you know what you’re doing?” Ghost asked as she sat down on the chair and adjusted the mirror until it was focused on her shoulder.

“At some point I knew. I hope that at some point I knew.”

“To be fair, that’s the exact thing you said when you picked up a gun for the first time.” He said. “Look where we are now…”

Ghost kept on reminiscing, but she couldn’t hear it. His voice drifted further away from her as the world around her warped and changed, until there was nothing but the dark again. The room as cold as the metal in her hand, a room that felt like a second home. She wasn’t alone this time around.

“Owens?” A male voice called out in the dark. “Oweeeeeens?”

“What is it now, Axel?” The woman looked up at the man, slight annoyance lingering in her green eyes.

“I thought you fell asleep on me.” He explained.

“I was just trying to tune you out.”

Axel frowned, looking down at the cadaver between the two of them. “I just… I just don’t understand these people. In the damn slightest.”

“What people? People who donate their body to science?”

“No. That I get. Even with the ball flying around. But this fellow had a family and a full life.” Axel told, watching her make a careful incision into the man’s shoulder. “Then, he goes outside and gets shot. Comes here, gets told that it’s a fixable thing, then says ‘Nope! I’m good!’ and plunges a
syringe in his heart. Why?"

“Did anything happen between him getting shot and him plunging the syringe into his heart?” She asked.

“His family visited. Looked all sad and suspicious about it.”

“And they never claimed the body?”

“Nope.” Axel shrugged, flipping through a notepad, struggling to read it in the dark room and not wanting to put it under Emma’s light. “Hey, at least he signed the ‘feel free to do what you want with my body’ waver. Good for us!”

“The wife probably did it.” She said and returned her attention to the task at hand.

“Plunged a syringe into his heart? No. Too many people saw him do it.”

“I meant shot him.” Emma clarified. “The syringe in his heart comes off as symbolic.”

“Why shoot his shoulder?”

“Probably wanted to wound, to warn. Not to kill. He maybe did something bad, wife shot him, came in here, he got heartbroken over the fact that she left him. I don’t know. I want to practice in silence.”

“Huh.” Axel sat down on the chair on the other side. “This makes for bad practice, though. A procedure like this would bleed a lot more on a living patient. And is hardly ever necessary.”

“Well. The dead talk a lot less.”

Axel was unphased by her words, watching her gloved hands as she worked. “If you like silence and the dead so much, why not become a coroner?”

“I have my reasons.” The explanation was enough for him. ”But, if – hypothetically – If I was planning to be one, would you be surprised?”

“Actually, yes.” He said. “You’re weird, Owens. Really weird. But you’re not coroner weird. Those people are on a different plane of weird.”

Emma tried to keep on working, tried to find the first bullet, but her vision became blurred as her mind started to wander elsewhere, Axel’s words ringing in her head, begging to be examined and overanalyzed. There was no shutting off her brain.

“I’ll bite.” She looked up at him. “What makes me so weird?”

“Alright.” He snapped the notebook shut and put it aside. “Do you ever watch those ancient zombie films?”

“Jesus Christ…” Concluding that the conversation was a waste of time, she was about to return to her project.

“Do you?”

She shook her head. “I don’t see a TV outside of this place. I only watch the news then to keep up with what the ball has been doing. Don’t have the time for anything else.”
“Well. That’s one of the things that makes you weird.”

“Is this a ‘what would you do in this situation’ questionnaire, then?”

“No. More like me knowing that if the scenario happens in real life, you’d be the smart zombie yelling orders at the other zombies. I just want to be on your side when it happens, because humanity will have no chance.”

“Okay. I’m sorry, what?” She gotten used to Axel’s tendency to go on and off long tangents and non-sequiturs over the last couple of months of knowing him, but this was the first time she got confounded by what was coming out of his mouth.

“And don’t get me started on the fact that you read books in two different languages.”

She scoffed. “German is more detailed. I like to compare notes.”

“Well. Either way, I’m kind of terrified of your powers.” Axel said, his gaze wandering down back to her gloved hands, and the pieces of metal she was holding in one of them. “You removed the bullets from his shoulder and you barely looked at what you were doing.” He leaned in closer to get a better look at it. “And you didn’t obliterate anything of note. Pretty impressive.”

She put the bullets in a metal bowl, listening to them clang as they fell into it. “Are you actually impressed, or are you hoping that flattery will get me to find you once the zombie apocalypse comes?”

“Both.” He grinned.

“I’ll make sure to remember.” She laughed under her breath.

“I’ll make sure to remind you!” He grabbed the bowl with the bullets on his way out, leaving her alone in the cold room.

“Guardian!” She snapped her eyes open, noticing that reality didn’t look that much different from the vision. “Are you okay? You zoned out for a moment.”

“I think I had some weird Awoken thing happen.” She tried to move, only for a jolt of pain to stop her. She completely forgot about the wound in her shoulder as she tried to figure out what she just saw. “Ow...!”

“I think I can help.”

Blue light swirled around her body until the wound was fully closed, not even leaving a scar or pain, or evidence that the procedure was done. The bullets rested on a small table next to her, covered in blood.

“Ghost, is there a directory of all Guardians somewhere? With pictures?”

“There used to be. Not sure how much of it survived the war.”

“Hm...” She readjusted her robe, deep in thought. “I need to find someone.”

“What are you planning to do with the bullets?”

“I have to make sure they don’t have any tracking things in them, but… maybe make them into a necklace.” She watched Ghost scowl in slight disapproval. “To commemorate it all.”
“You know what they say about normalcy and Guardians…”

The Hangar was filled with sounds of giggling, both restrained and in-between incomprehensible words. The shivering Hunter tried his very best convince people that he was just casually crossing his arms, and definitely not hugging himself for warmth. It was difficult to find people who didn’t witness the incident, but it was easy to tell them apart. Those that weren’t present weren’t laughing, but they very quickly found out about the newest source of comedy. Rumors spread fast around the Tower.

Cayde also was one of the few that could help her with her newest problem. There was a reason she dreamt what she dreamt, she needed to find him, Axel. The one she made a promise to find, despite not knowing if it was a genuine promise.

“Oh this snow?” Cayde said to one of his confused Hunters. “I was just defending a civilian from it.”

Tirion decided not to ruin the moment, and lean against the wall, out of sight to see how Cayde will dig himself out of the whole where his reputation once was. The Hunter next to him didn’t look like he believed the Exo, so he continued spinning.

“Lotsa snow collected in the bazaar rooftops, was about to fall on one of ‘em… dropped my ramen, swooped right in, there was a big celebration about it, shoulda been there!” He explained, accompanied with arm gestures of the said swooping.

The other Hunter rolled his eyes and walked away, map in hand, leaving a sighing Cayde behind.

“You!” Cayde called out once he noticed Tirion. “I just gotta ask: what’s with you and crazy Titans? Do you have an entire warehouse of them somewhere, do they come to you?”

“I’ve been asking that myself…”

“Yeah, I guess saying ‘crazy Titan’ is a bit redundant.” He said. Cayde silently gasped as he noticed some remaining snow on his shoulder, and quickly wiped it off. “Look, I didn’t do anything!”

“I know. But there were innuendos and there is little that can be done once Haya’s on a warpath.” Tirion explained. “She’s not crazy, just protective.”

“Electric snowballs.” He muttered as he shook some snow out of his glove.

“There is some on your head, too…” Tirion lied for her own amusement, and he immediately lifted up his hand to get rid of the snow he thought was there.

“She didn’t have to threaten to hit off my beautiful horn!”

“You deserved it, and you know it.” Amanda said as she walked by to retrieve one of the many tools Cayde ‘borrowed’ from her. “Stop whining.”

“So, nothing happened between you and Alva?”

“I just asked her to look after Colonel, we’ve been hittin’ it off…”

“And I guess Haya told you that if you hit it off with her the wrong way, her foot will hit off your
“Yeah, and—“

“And then he told her that the only thing he did was show Alva his chicken, then the snowballs started.” Amanda shouted from her station, trying not to laugh.

“Amanda! You— you just talked yourself out of your Dawning gift!”

“As if you had one to begin with.”

The laughter from the mechanics around the hangar made the sting worse for the poor freezing Hunter.

“Well. By the looks of it you already provided a pretty good gift, no better gift than bringing joy and making people laugh.” Tirion smiled, knowing that the reason that he hasn’t walked out of the hangar yet is because he will slip and fall if he moves. “I actually didn’t come here to laugh, I actually need your help.”

“Will it end with electric snowballs getting thrown at me?”

“No. Not as far as I know.”

“Fine.” He said, reluctantly. “I guess I still owe ya’ a Dawning gift.”

“I need a directory of Hunters. I need to find someone, someone I used to know.” She said. “I don’t know his new name, only how he looks like.”

“Have you ever considered makin’ things easy for yourself?”

“Never.”

“I’ll see what I can do. Think the archives were destroyed, but if you send me a list of everything you know about him, I could see if I can work somethin’ out. What’s so special about him?”

“I don’t know, yet. I think I made some time conflux angry once, and it’s coming back to bite me.”

“Don’t ever claim that you don’t keep things interesting.”

Haya was throwing a snowball up in the air and catching it, slight Arc energy circling around it and keeping it intact. There was nothing in the rulebook about infusing snowballs with Light, and nothing about throwing it at Guardians.

There were loopholes in everything.

“Put the snowball down, Haya.” Tirion said slowly, watching the Titan freeze. “I’m pretty sure that you traumatized Cayde.”

“He’ll be fine. He deserved it.” She caught the snowball again, but this time around it sizzled and melted in her hands. Tirion leaned on the railing next to her, figuring out her next move. “Winter reminds me of home. Well, not home, but... The Warlords. We were up north, never-ending snow, hence the... this.” She gestured to her face briefly, where there was no difference between the color of her hair and the snow on her head.

“So all that talk about not blaming the world for your own actions…”
“Oh, I’m not blaming the world.” She knelt down to gather up more snow, the arc energy at her fingertips again.

“Do you miss those days?”

“Eh, not at all. I just think it could have ended better.” She started throwing it up and down again, as if she was testing it. If it is unsatisfactory, it gets tossed away, melted. All evidence of it existing erased. “All of them were assholes, without a doubt. But hell, one of the Iron Lords was a former Warlord. How many Guardians would we still have if it weren’t for that stupid war?”

“You sound like Shaxx.”

“I kind of get his point, with what he does.” She sighed, watching another snowball melt in her hands. “I’ve been thinking about the whole thing, picking up the Sunbreaker mantle.”

“And?”

“I’m… I’m probably the least qualified to do it.” Haya said. “I’m not a teacher, not a damn leader. I don’t even know where to start.”

“You’ve done pretty well with Lorcan.”

“I guess. But here we’re talking about a battalion of people who can throw flaming hammers, not one Hunter with a screwdriver and a dream.” She laughed softly as she perfected her new snowball. “Do you know why his Ghost is completely sick of his shit, by the way?”

“I figured it was just because Lorcan is Lorcan.”

“No.” Haya laughed softly again. “I was the one who taught him how to shoot a gun. I gave him a simple hand cannon to start off with. He aimed, pulled the trigger, and hit his forehead with the recoil, and shot off half of his Ghost.”

“Ouch…” Tirion’s Ghost winced. “I wonder if there is such a thing as preemptive karma.”

“She still hasn’t forgiven him. He decided to patch her up with some pink fireproofing material he found lying around. It kind of stuck.” Haya told. “Then he started tinkering, found his true calling in life. Soon enough, Saint noticed his talents and consulted him about restoring a Fallen Walker and… things went downhill.”

Tirion noticed Haya frown at the name, suddenly stopping fiddling with the snow. “Even with all of that Lorcan ended up a master marksman.”

“Yeah. Somehow.” She whispered, only evidence that she spoke was the cloud that formed around her. “Those are the days that I miss. Before the Hive got here, the trouble we would get into. I miss Saint.”

“We’ll find him.”

“Maybe that’s where we should start. Need to organize a trip to Mercury. Can’t pick up the Sunbreaker mantle without the Forge.” Haya said, as she looked over the City. The craters were still there, but the people were now more powerful than what created the craters. “Saint would have revered you. Couldn’t be quiet about a damn Guardian savior coming.”

“I don’t know if there is anything to revere in me.”
“You did this.” Haya nodded towards the Traveler, the Traveler who was watching over their thriving City.

“We did this. The six of—”

Tirion dodged the snowball coming at her just in time with a small yelp.

“Ghost, cover your ear. Tirion; fuck off.” Haya muttered, rolling her eyes.

“What?”

“Fuck off! It was all you and you know it. For the love of—” Haya grumbled, a fresh snowball already in hand. “Get your self-deprecating boner in check because it’s starting to creep us all out.”

Tirion blocked the next snowball with her arm. “There are kids around, Haya.” She snickered out the words, even though she was serious.

“Well, it’s an important life lesson I’m dealing out.” Haya cracked a smile as she started rubbing her numb hands for warmth, not wanting to use her Light abilities when she couldn’t feel her hands. “Maybe I am qualified to teach.”

“Tell me, Guardian. Why do you enjoy studying history?” Tyra unexpectedly asked Tirion, who was waiting for the Exos. The farm hasn’t changed for the most part, sans Dawning decorations. She could see the appeal in spending time there, but it wasn’t a place for the Guardians. It was the dream of a new City for the civilians. They deserved as much.

“I just want to know as much as I possibly can, I guess.” Tirion said. “I want to know what came before all this, so we have a reference point for rebuilding.”

“I see.” Tyra said. “Are you sure it’s not for any other reason?”

“I am.”

“Remembering the past is a good thing, fighting to preserve it is an even nobler task. There are a lot of things you can learn from it.” She frowned before continuing. "But, clinging on to it is harmful. Things won't be the same again, lost people and buildings won't come back.”

“You say that, with undead around you.” Tirion joked. “We died once and were brought back to life by a mechanical frame given life and consciousness by… paracausal space magic.” She struggled the words out.

“Hey! I’m right here.” Ghost complained.

Tyra chuckled. “You jest, Guardian. But I’m telling the truth.” The old Awoken said. “Traveler knows how much I want to hear Skorri’s singing just one more time. Overhear her fight with others about how long it’s taken for her to write the Iron Song.”

“I wish I would have met her. All of them.”

“They would have admired you, but hated you at the very same time. You would have been a constant source of anger, pushing them to be better.” She smiled as she said that. “Saladin would agree with me, while also claiming that the Iron Lords would have done a better job handling the Red War.”

“Did he make it out alive?”
“Yes. Efrideet as well.”

“I’m happy to hear that, but…” Tirion sighed. “I might have to plan a vacation, soon. Very soon. I heard that Mercury is nice.”

“Don’t underestimate them, Guardian. Titans are fully capable of turning over a new leaf.”

“Yeah… I don’t think they are.” She scowled. “They are, however, inventors of the ‘Consensus for Making Grudges Last Longer than They Need To’. Because that’s constructive.”

“Have faith, it could be a Dawning miracle.”

“I’ll do my very best.”

Tirion gave Tyra a small wave as a goodbye before setting out to find what she came here for. She understood what Haya meant by the Tower being too crowded, the peace of the Farm felt almost overwhelming. It’s not often that things feel that calm, that normal.

“Alright! Come on, you knucklehead.” Haya put the little Exo down on the ground from where she was sitting on the Titan’s shoulders, and Huritt was following her not too far after. His face was down in a book he found around the farm. “We need to go home.”

“Could we make a couple of stops?” Huritt stopped the Titan. “We need 30 Phaseglass Needles, 30 Datalattice… um… some Dusklight Crystals.”

“For what?” Haya asked, unconvinced by the Exo’s coyness. “We have a lot stocked up back at the City.”

“Dawning gifts.” Huritt elaborated, and Alva nodded alongside him. “We also need Wizard capes and some Vex materials. Some Servitors, too. For their Ether.”

“You’ll have to ask Tirion.” Haya saw the Warlock standing there watching the three of them, trying not to interfere. “I’m all for it. She’s the naysayer.”

“I am not.” Tirion defended herself, not realizing the irony. “Only when you want to restore ancient siege machines.”

“It won’t take long!” Huritt argued his point. “We can have half the list done before sunset.”

“What’s on the list?” It was difficult to ask the question without feeling like she made them sad, or disapproved. But she had to make sure, as she didn’t want anyone being set on fire. He put the book down with his notes attached on a nearby wooden table, and traced the neat writing with a metal finger.

“We were thinking bandanas for Amanda, a Ghaul stress toy for Zavala, a book for Ikora, a cape for Colonel, lozenges for Shaxx. We have some others, but can’t do them all today.”

“Lozenges?” Haya repeated. “What’s that?”

“A cough drop, for sore throats.” Tirion explained, then sighed when she saw that smirk on Haya’s face, trying not to snort. All that effort for the Exos, the Titan told herself. “Get it over with, Haya.”

“Who do you think I am?” Haya feigned a scoff. “Being a bad influence on the young…”

“All of this sounds very thoughtful.” She told the Exos, ignoring Haya. “I’m sure the Vanguard will be happy. What do you need help with?”
“Killing Fallen and what remains of the Red Legion, to start.” Huritt tore off parts of the page that had the instructions and handed them to the other two Guardians. “We’ll take care of the rest.”

The box rested on the desk in the apartment, opened but its innards untouched. The new private quarter were less glamorous than the one back in the old Tower. Tirion half expected Shaxx to renovate the old apartment and stay in the Tower. But if her misfits could move on from their hangar lounge, so could he.

“Hey!” Tirion’s red hair was barely visible past the snow on her head, a result of the snowstorm and her still getting lost in the new Tower. “Got stuck killing Cabal. How were the rookies today?”

Shaxx’s eyes followed her, watching her shake off the snow, the missive he was working on forgotten. Along with half of her question. “The rookies are at that stage of their learning curve where they understand the Crucible enough to make their own decisions, but they don’t realize why they may be bad.”

“Oh…” Tirion frowned when she noticed the untouched box next to him. “You didn’t like the gift?”

“It contradicts with my rule of not eating anything the recruits give me. I appreciate the sentiment, though.” Shaxx said, and then suddenly realized what she was trying to say. “Was it from you?”

“From the entire team, actually. Alva and Huritt came up with most of it, I just killed things for it.” She hoped that he acted grateful when it was presented to him, at least. Tirion slowly unwrapped one of the lozenges, then put one between her lips, not breaking eye contact. “You could make up for it.”

She saw it, how for a split second his eyes darted down to her lips and he bit his own lip before regaining composure. He knew better. There were reasons he had that rule. “What’s in that?”

“You could try guessing.” Tirion half laid down on the desk, using her elbows to hold herself up, and leaned closer to him, hands covering the missive he was writing. She, however, made the mistake of touching the tablet with her tongue, feeling the cooling sting of ether consume her mouth as she started coughing in disgust. Maybe, just maybe, she should have overseen the process of making them. “I think it’s glass and Ether…”

His deep laugh managed to drown out her coughing, which was slowly receding as the weird mixture of what shouldn’t be mixed actually worked after the initial sting.

“Stop laughing at me!”

“I’m not laughing at you.” He lifted up a hand to cup her face, smirking.

“Well, it works. Nothing to worry about.”

“Is that so?” He pulled her in, moving his hand to the back of her head so he could properly kiss her, turning her and grabbing her by the legs until she was lying on the sturdy desk. He pulled away for a moment to look at her, moving his arms until they were wrapped around her.

“What is it?” She asked after a long period of silence, of him just admiring her and thinking about something she didn’t know of.

“I should have just kissed you when I opened the door.” Shaxx’s voice was low, reserved just for her. Only person who not only teaches him how to let his guard down, but the only one to witness
“When you came over all that time ago, with that drink during the Dawning.”

“I liked your speech.” She said, relaxing in his arms. “If anything, I shouldn’t have said anything. Managed to break every single promise.”

“That’s on the Red Legion. And oh, you gave them vengeful war.”

“How romantic…” Tirion smiled. “I think I have a cohesive report on my fight with Ghaul now, if you want to continue.”

He chuckled for a second, before the room turned silent and he returned to his thoughts. “You are doing what I can’t and saving as many as you can. Nothing I can say about you will ever be adequate. I should just have kissed you.”

“Doesn’t mean you should be quiet.” She whispered as he leaned his forehead against hers. “I still like listening to you. Maybe one day I’ll get you to sing.”

“I never sing…” He brushed his lips against hers, lifting up a hand to touch her soft face. “I love you.”

“I love you, too.” Words were muffled by his lips, only sounds she heard were those of of interfering and meaningless things being pushed off of the desk falling to the floor. It all could be replaced. “Happy Dawning.” She murmured, and he deepened the kiss.

Chapter End Notes

I hear the fireworks right outside so I guess it's time to publish a Christmas chapter.

I will probably edit this later but it's way past the deadline.

Thank you all for the overwhelming support on this fic. Sorry for not having a consistent schedule, but damn it, I will wrap it up even if it takes until 2019.
"Nope. I’m not talking to Hawthorne for you...” Lorcan saw no difference between what Haya was asking him to do and being asked to swim in the sewers. He would prefer the sewers, as he can always get new armor to get rid of the stench. Perhaps he’ll find some Glimmer and treasures other Guardians left behind there. “That’s your thing.”

“Come the hell on, Lorc!” Haya begged, exasperated and desperate. “I’ll pay you in Shards.”

The Hunter feigned a laugh before turning serious. “No. Hell no. No amount of Shards will be enough. Why not ask Tirion?”

“I did. She approves of the clan idea, but also told me that she’s happy to listen to Hawthorne’s anti-Guardian spiel only if she sure as shit is given something to shoot afterwards. Except more Warlock-y.”

“And?”

“She ran away. Ikora needed something.”

“Shit.” Lorcan sighed. It had to be done. “Rock, paper, scissors?”

“A year’s worth of Shards.” Haya offered, and figured by the fact that Lorcan didn’t look up from what he was tinkering with that the offer wasn’t satisfactory. “Lorc. Please. I’m running out of ideas that will end with her bird being alive. I have standards.”

“Hawthorne’s not that bad.”

“You helped us go down some dark-ass dungeon in the Dreadnaught to kill an axe Hive abomination for just a 100 Marks, what the hell are you talking about Hawthorne not being that bad?”

“Alak-Hul wasn’t condescending about us Guardians and chose to silently slam-slice us into pieces instead?”

“Fine.” Haya gave up, grabbing one of Lorcan’s screwdrivers to attempt to patch up one of her broken guns. Using them as a shield to stop the bullets hasn’t worked out yet. But what are you supposed to do with a gun once you run out of bullets? The answer was simple for a Titan: pummel your enemies with it until it breaks, and then resort to your fists.

“Remember when Saint asked me to fix up that tank…” Lorcan whispered, suddenly setting his screwdriver aside to observe his work. “I don't remember what we were doing but, out of nowhere, he just shouted ‘Does anyone know how to fix a Fallen Walker?’, nobody answered. He then laughed and said ‘Well, if anyone does, please tell me because I don’t know either and I have a misbehaving tank’.”

“Then he found you. Even if you had no idea what you were doing.” She smiled at the memory.

“Just because I don’t know what I’m doing, doesn’t mean I’m not gonna do it. Gorillas and all, too.” He shrugged. “It was all just a ruse as he went on this philosophical sermon about how Fallen
Walkers don’t actually walk.”

“He loved his eccentricity and his pigeons.”

“I found an obliterated Fallen Walker the other day and I uh… It got me thinking. About a lot.” He pressed a button on the device he was working on, making it buzz and place a red flickering dot at the other side of the room. “If you can keep Tirion from finding out until I do something about it, I can talk to Hawthorne.”

Lorcan’s offer was already forgotten, replaced with memories, stories, regrets and questions of better times. Lorcan made the Walker walk, just because he could. It all went down as one of the last things he didn’t charge for.

“Do you miss him?”

“Saint?” Lorcan asked. “Yeah. Who doesn’t? You and he practically raised me into not accidentally shooting myself and my Ghost. And Saint was… well, Saint.”

Haya laughed under her breath. “Need we say more…”

“I never got to thank him, though. Over the months I knew him. Didn’t expect him to disappear.” Lorcan said. “Half of what we did when we set out to kill Aksis were things I learned from him. Fallen stood no chance, SIVA or not. Still the same damn things.”

“I noticed.”

Lorcan nodded. “Look, I’m willing to talk to Hawthorne because it would give us a chance to teach others. But, I don’t want to talk to her because she doesn’t understand any of it. She doesn’t understand us.”

“Pfft. Who cares if she understands? She’s like twelve years old. She doesn’t even deserve to understand it.”

Gentle footsteps cut their conversation short, as a Warlock made her presence known in the den. The distress and confusion was evident on her face, she looked at the floor trying to think.

“Osiris…” Tirion whispered.

“What?” Haya blurted out, dropping her broken gun.

“Ikora’s hidden found Osiris’s Ghost, Osiris in extension.” The Warlock explained slowly, still trying to understand what she was saying.

“What?!” Haya rose from the couch to face Tirion. “Sagira? Are you serious? Is he here?”

“No. Just his comatose Ghost. Ikora wants us on Mercury. Well, me. But I managed to convince her to let me bring you along, if you want to.” She explained. “It’s supposed to be serious, the less the better. Could get Lorcan to tag along, if he wants to.”

“Nope!” He immediately refused. “Still too close to the sun.”

Wordlessly, Haya started gearing up the plates of her armor on the fabrics she was wearing, struggling with every clasp due to frustration. She kept telling herself that there will be a time and place to unleash that anger, once she stands in front of him. Only asking for an easy time to gear up, so that her armor wouldn’t fail her due to a stupid oversight.
“Anything you can tell me about Osiris?”

“He’s a shithead.”

“That’s blunt, Haya.”

The Titan shrugged at Lorcan’s observation. “Well, he is a shithead! I agreed with the proposition he made to Zavala, but otherwise he is still a shithead.” Haya spat. “Instead of fighting in the war he decided to mess with the Vex and took my best friend with him. So yes, he’s a shithead. Any other Warlock inquiries?”

“Tell us how you really feel, Haya.” Lorcan was the only one in the room that could make that joke without dire consequences.

“Oh, the City isn’t ready for how I really feel.” She hissed as she secured her chestplate and moved on to her pauldrons. “Too many good people are either dead or missing because of him.”

Tirion understood Haya’s frustration, but regrets about bringing her along were already setting in. But, she owed her. Going by herself and not telling Haya would tear things apart. “I need your word that this isn’t going to interfere with the mission.”

“That depends entirely on Osiris. I’ll meet you at the Hangar.”

“The Lighthouse…” Haya stared at the tall structure in front of the blazing sun. “I participated in the Trials so many times, hoping that every time I got sent here to claim the reward I could find something.”

“Following regulations and not just exploring Mercury doesn’t sound like you.”

“I tried. The Sunbreakers barred me.” She told Tirion. “I saw some of them, now and then. They were under strict orders to not talk to me.”

“Find it hard to believe that they hated you just because you didn’t trust Osiris.”

“There were some other unconventional things that I did.” She started walking towards one of the warp gates, looking at the decorations hanging around her with a sense of familiarity. “Makes me wish that I was a less of a shithead myself back then.”

“What exactly did you do?”

“Snuck out a lot by myself, befriended Saint. Dared to teach myself how to be a Striker. I loved my family, they treated me well for the utter fuckup that I was. But, I didn’t love the clergy mercenary aspect. Come on.”

The two of them continued, making their way through the nearest warpgate, with Haya in the lead. The Vex ahead of them were quicker, building their own bridges to gain an advantage. They weren’t that interested in the two Guardians. A relief to them, but most likely bad news for anything that wasn’t a Vex.

“You seem to know your way around, Haya.”

“I was here once or twice. For general Sunbreaker things.” She summoned her Hammers once the Vex decided to show up, melting their frames before they had a chance to think about realms of possibilities and their cursed headache inducing timelines. “I wish I could forget.”
Haya jumped into one of the Vex cannons, Tirion following soon after. The Vex were persistent, but not smarter as they fell to their Light. They haven’t seen a Sunbreaker in a while. Haya stopped suddenly, jumping up on one of the floating rocks to look over the field.

“You see that pillar, the one that looks like a second Lighthouse?” She lifted up a finger to point, and Tirion nodded at the hard to miss structure. “An hour or two walk from it, and you reach the Forge.”

“We can’t take detours right now.”

“I know. I’m just sightseeing for places to throw Osiris in.”

Tirion crossed her arms, never sure if the Titan was joking or not. “I know that saying that you’re angry doesn’t even cover it, but at least try.”

“Throwing him? I was planning to shoulder charge him into the fire.”

“Haya. No.”

“And why not? You know what he did! Osiris should be held responsible!”

“Try to talk it out, even if you have to yell.” Tirion tried to help. “If you kill him—“

“What? Are you going to ask me if I kill him how am I different from him?” Haya scoffed. “Well, for st—“

“I was just going to say that Sagira will revive him.” Tirion cut her off. “We’re Guardians.”

“Oh.” Haya whispered before pulling her gun out. “Whatever, then!”

The comms crackled once they decided to move on. “I’m so pleased Osiris has brought you to me, his most faithful servant.” Brother Vance marveled over the comms, but the sound of Haya biting the inside of her cheek drowned him out.

“Considering how you revere a man who questions everything, I am surprised how well your faith serves you.” Ikora spoke, not noticing the tense silence that built up.

“The Vex are at my door, Osiris has not returned. Faith is all I have left.”

“I wish I had his faith.” Haya whispered, ensuring that she had opted out of the comms beforehand. There wasn’t a way or enough Shards or Glimmer to make her listen to what was being said by Vance without ires getting invoked. “More schmucks that Osiris left behind once they have served their purpose…”

“I don’t understand what kind of Guardian leaves his Ghost behind.” Tirion said. “Leaving people, I somewhat get. But your Ghost?”

“No Guardian leaves their Ghost behind. You just don’t do that. No matter what happens. Knowing him he just tossed her away, thinking that he’s immortal.” She growled, eyes on a big, blue triangular portal. “Some people are multi-faceted beings capable of anything within their means. I’d rather have Zavala call Hawthorne a Guardian any day compared to people calling Osiris one.”

“We’ll get him.”

“I don’t assume that it will be as simple as walking through that weird gate.”
“That’s the gateway to the Infinite Forest.” Ghost explained. “A place from which no one has ever returned. Not even Osiris.”

“I’ll make him return.” Haya fumed, taking off in sprint with Tirion by her side to annihilate anything that stood in front of the gate. The hammers were summoned in Haya’s hand by instinct once she saw the Gatekeeper. There was no time or desire to play with her prey before killing it. This was personal.

“Descendants? I haven’t seen them since we raided the Vault.” Tirion remarked, flipping over the half-shattered Vex corpse with her feet.

“I think they’re just screwing with us now.” The Titan said. “They know us.”

“If they know us, then…” Tirion slowly walked up to the entrance of the forest, sticking out one hand in front of her, feeling the Forest actively reject her. There was little point in trying to repeatedly run into it. “Then they won’t let us in. I think Sagira could help.”

“Osiris preserve us!” It didn’t matter that Haya had Vance muted, as she could hear him through Tirion’s earpiece. “You have his Ghost? Sagira? Please—please – bring her to me!”

“Anyone else concerned about that Vex from different timelines are converging on Mercury?” Ghost asked, following his unresponsive Guardian. “That’s bad, in case you didn’t know.”

“I’ve seen worse.” Tirion said. “I don’t even care. If the constant Hive gods can’t take us down, I highly doubt this current Vex fad is going to.”

“You jinxed it…”

“I didn’t jinx it.” Tirion retorted to her Ghost.

“You totally jinxed it.”

“I didn’t.”

“Look, if we go up to the Lighthouse, and we see that the Vex have recreated Oryx, you’ll owe me a new shell.”

Tirion slowly turned Ghost until he was looking at her. The steel shell looked mostly unharmed, the spikes still in their place. It has done a decent job for its purpose, should she say so. “What’s wrong with your current shell? Could get you a new one if you want.”

“I saw Sagira. She’s going to cause a new shell fad. I don’t want to be left behind.”

Tirion opened her mouth and closed it a couple of times, at a loss for words and questions. It was better to just get through the warpgate up to the Lighthouse as quickly as she could. Ghost has never expressed an interest in fashion before. Without a doubt, he has started new fashion trends, but never cared.

“It’s been redecorated…” Haya mumbled, spinning around. There were more books there than she remembers, less treasures, less strictness. As if Vance cleaned up the place in panic.

“Thank you.” Vance sighed in relief when he sensed the presence of the two women. “I don’t know what I would have done if Osiris hadn’t sent you to me.”

Haya realized just how much it echoed in the place when her scoff was louder than she intended.
“We need to revive Sagira.” Tirion ignored Haya, as she was already busy examining some strange machine. “We need your help.”

“We, the Followers of Osiris, can help you. We have a hidden temple on Earth. Take Sagira to these coordinates.” Tirion heard the sound of the warpgate behind her, as Vance continued on rambling while he raised the curtains. She didn’t even remember if she bothered to say goodbye to Vance as she exited the Lighthouse, to find Haya sitting on the edge of the beige stone platform, legs dangling. Pale eyes fixated on the sun.

“I… I want to kill Vance.” Haya muttered, fighting an unwinnable battle against the dust that wouldn’t stay out of her hair. Despite all the arguments with her and Tirion about how helmets are properly rated, she preferred not to wear them unless there was no oxygen.

“Hard to miss.”

“But, I feel sorry for him. I…” The Titan groaned, shaking her head. “I don’t know what to feel. This planet makes me nauseous. Is it even a planet?”

“Let’s go to EDZ instead. We don’t have to stay here.”

“Is it weird that I want to stay?” Haya asked herself. “It’s like being addicted to the pain you get from being kicked in the stomach repeatedly. You know it’s going to hurt yet you intentionally seek it out.”

“I think that explains why I can’t let other Guardians save the world.”

Haya smirked. “Welcome to the second meeting of the Guardian therapy session…”

“Hm…” Haya waited for the inevitable discomfort to appear on Devrim’s face as she stared him down. “You remind me of a friend I had.”

“Do I now, Guardian?” Devrim’s reaction was surprisingly blasé; Guardians telling him that he reminds them of someone has being an integral part of his daily routine.

“He had lots of tattoos. White as snow hair, scrawny. Liked wine. On his walls mostly, but still.”

And the comparisons the Guardians made never made sense to him. Perhaps the Light did something to their eyes, making them see him differently? He could never figure it out. Other Guardians refused to offer information. Maybe it was something with his voice?

“Well, I can’t imagine that scrawny men would be fit for a woman of your… er… stature.”

“Don’t punch non-Guardians, Haya.” Tirion came up right behind her, luckily Haya was still trying to decipher Devrim’s words and not reacted besides her mouth being agape.

“That would be unadvised indeed.” Devrim said. “We don’t have little robot friends to keep reviving us. We are also worse at dancing.”

“Well, Ghosts are not robots.” Tirion immediately corrected him. “You can do your thing as much as you want out here, but don’t ever call a Guardian’s Ghost a robot. That’s like calling Haya old.”

“I was younger than you when I died, Tirionna.” Haya finally snapped back to reality.

“Does it matter how old we were when we died?”
“I’m not a Warlock, don’t put this thinking stuff on me!” Haya muttered as she hopped down to the lower level of the church, ready to go.

“You Guardians have interesting questions.” Devrim looked down his scope, tracking a running Dreg. No one still knew where the new Fallen had come from, or what they were doing. Silver lining was that bored Guardians were always willing to help, even at the smallest leads.

“Do you have anything against us, Devrim?” Tirion knew Hawthorne’s opinion, but never asked the question of Devrim. “I am just curious.”

“I don’t. Wouldn’t be out here doing what I do if I did. I think you have done a lot of good, but I also think it’s time for a new City.” A lone Guardian got to the Dreg before he could, and he lowered his gun again, to turn around and look at Tirion. “Perhaps we can take it all back, you know? Perhaps the Farm can be a new City.”

“I like that idea.” Tirion smiled.

“Really? I didn’t expect you to support it.”

“I mean, we’re out of touch with reality. You can’t expect someone to sympathize with you and understand your situation when they have no idea what it’s like.” She said. “But I would like to learn to understand it.”

“Could say the same thing about you, Guardian. Keep doing what you’re doing out there.”

She liked talking to Devrim, but there was a job to do. Haya was already bored down below, twirling a Fallen rifle she had found.

“Where to?”

“Ghost?” Tirion turned to her little companion.

“The coordinates Brother Vance gave us are just beyond the village.” He followed his Guardian and an impatient Titan.

“Hawthorne’s scouts investigated the area during the Red War. There is no temple there.” Long-forgotten Ikora’s voice crackled through the comms. It always took Tirion off guard.

“And what does Hawthorne know?” Haya scoffed.

“Hawthorne has been invaluable to the Vanguard, Haya.” Ikora knew that her words won’t do anything to Haya. “And you six should consider her clan idea, to recruit and expand.”

“Why? Because you want more of us causing trouble?” Tirion asked, partly as a joke.

“As of late, the only thing your actions have achieved is made you six come off like you are some elite clique that likes to brand people outsiders for no reason. Think about that.”

“I…” Tirion blinked a couple of times. “Okay?”

No further intel came from Ikora as they traversed through the village. Tirion liked her fireteam’s suggestion, to take some Guardians under their wing and train them. She still had to talk to Shaxx about it, if she could get a list of his recruits. But she didn’t understand how Ikora got the impression that they were a clique. If anything, they were a family. Adding seasoned Guardians into it wouldn’t work out. Yes, maybe they were branding people outsiders, but they had a good
reason for it. There was a reason they worked well together.

“Oh, look! Fallen Walker and…” Haya sighed, lowering her gun at the sight. “For the love of shit…”

The Hunter latched himself onto the Walker’s back, using everything at his disposal to pry off a part from the Walker’s head. They both knew that there was a reason he did it while the Walker was still alive. As he was about to slip, he stabbed the Walker with his knife, using the knife as a handle to keep himself steady.

“Is that Lorcan?” Tirion took out some Fallen around her as she ran towards him. “What is he doing?”

“Hey, dipshit!” Haya shouted, throwing Lorcan off guard as he fell off the tank, a metal Walker part secured in hand. Just as the Walker’s leg was about to crush the poor Hunter underneath, a hurled Hammer set the Walker ablaze, buying him time to roll away into safety.

“Ow…” He winced through winded breaths, hugging the metal part in his arms. “Thanks.”

Haya immediately helped Lorcan up, and the Hunter wobbled for a while until he felt less sick, readjusting to stable ground.

“Lorcan…” Tirion began.

“I can explain.”

“What were you doing with that Walker?”

“I needed the Walker’s _Friend or Foe_ sensors.” He explained, knowing how it all sounded. “I have no good excuse now.”

“Do they even _need_ friend or foe sensors?” Haya wondered. “Aren’t their friend or foe sensors ‘if it’s not a Fallen, shoot it?’”

Lorcan raised a hand, ready to engage in an argument, but stopped himself. “Actually, you might have a point there.” That was the only explanation he was willing to give. “I could be doing much worse things than this, let’s be honest.”

“Just…” Tirion sighed, there will be time for this later. “Just keep it out of the City.”

“Oh, I will. As long as I’m sure that it’s hostile. Twilight Gap wasn’t fun, was it?”

“Wanna punch things with us while you’re here, Lorc?” Haya asked. “Might find a new Walker, if you need one.”

He transmatted the part he was holding onto his ship. “As long as you don’t drag me off to Mercury.”

The tunnels were nothing but rot, and according to Ikora it was a test for the followers to Osiris. Haya was surprisingly silent, focusing on killing everything that moved in her way. Or perhaps as usual, she had everything muted. She could claim all she wants about not wanting to think and just be a brute, but the façade was slowly falling without her realizing it.

“I don’t think we even need to disarm these traps, I think we can make our way around them.” Lorcan was already running towards the red lasers, mid Tirion talking, as he only heard part of the
sentence. “Not like that…”

Sigh. Guardian down.

“Hold on!” Just proving that he should be paying his Ghost, he brought her out less than a second after getting revived. “I have an idea.”

He mounted his sparrow and drove off, right into the lasers. No casualties this time around, as several explosions were heard further and further away, followed by roars of angry Fallen. They found a group of them, already entangled in Lorcan’s tether, waiting to be killed. The Guardians were happy to oblige with a liberal rocket or two.


“That’s what faith in Osiris gets you.” Ikora said. Only then Tirion knew that Haya wasn’t listening. She was looking forward a rare moment where the two Guardians agree on anything. Maybe some other day.

“I know where it is.” Haya whispered, running towards the tower.

“How?” Tirion asked. “Were you here before?”

“I… knew this place. A while back. Don’t ask. It’s in the basement. You need to climb up, there should be an elevator shaft that leads down.” Haya was never a fan of stairs, as he jumped up on the higher platforms, punching down a Captain once she climbed up. “What do you think this elevator will bring?” She asked once the other two had caught up.

It was a rhetorical question, and all three of them jumped down one by one. Finding out that they were too late was barely a surprise, as the only thing that greeted them were cultist corpses. For every one they found, a Haya whispered a curse. This was just a fraction of it all.

“Let me take a closer look at that device.” Tirion let him out to examine what it was that peaked his interested. It was a tablet, of sorts. With a slot shaped just like Sagira. Did Osiris know that this was going to happen? “This is heavily modified Vex tech. I’ve never seen anything like it before. Let me try something.”

“Be careful, Little Light.”

“You’re the not careful one!” He joked. “Wait… something’s happening. What is…”

Blinding light, warped voices. Ghost’s shell shivered in the air, consumed by white lights until there were two yellow spikes of light sticking out of him.

“… going on?” A female voice finished the question, followed by a flurry of questions and accusations that Tirion was too confused to hear.

“Wait… where are we? Who are you?” Sagira fliled around, trying to figure out the Warlock, a Warlock that wasn’t hers. Lorcan carefully backed away until he was in the shadows where she couldn’t see him, but Haya still stood still. “Wait, I know you. Both of you. Especially you. Haya, was it? I find it difficult to remember much about you because it got overpowered by what you said to my Guardian last time we talked.”

Haya shrugged. “Fuck your Guardian.”

“At least you used less verbs this time around. Either way, we need to get going. We’ve gotta get to
Mercury.”

That fear in Tirion’s head set in again, that loneliness. Someone was missing. How didn’t Tirion expect this, after all of Haya’s rants? Maybe she told the truth.

“Where is my Ghost, Sagira?”

“Don’t worry about him. We’re… sharing right now. He’ll be back.”

Tirion had no choice but to trust what Sagira was saying, for the time being. A bigger storm was coming now. A storm she couldn’t stop, and it had little to do with the Vex.

“At least now Sagira’s with a more competent Guardian.” Haya muttered. "Congratulations!"

“’Competent?’ That’s a new word for you. You should hang out with this Warlock more. Might be good for you.”

“I’ve got a lot of new words for you and that imbecile, Sagira.”

Lorcan was shaking his head in his dark corner, eyes wide, like a cornered animal. When he saw Tirion’s nod that he was free and that she thinks that she’ll be okay, he disappeared into the stealth cloak, quickly but ungracefully making his way out.

“What did Osiris ever do to you? How can you be so angry at him not fighting in the war when you didn’t either? There were people that needed you and you left them behind just the same.” Sagira glanced down to Haya’s clenched fists, the solar energy twirling around them. The Titan was angrier than she remembers, something that was thought to be impossible. "Pot calls the kettle pale, Haya."

“Can’t see the world past your own damn obnoxious spiky ass Ghost shell, can you?”

“Are you two done?” Haya answered Tirion’s question by disappearing into blue, already in her own ship, away from it all.

“We can continue this family reunion later. Osiris needs our help.”

Chapter End Notes

I never really liked the idea of our Guardian being BFFs with Ikora, to be honest.
“Nice ship, Guardian.”

“Don’t, Sagira.” Tirion said. “I can’t.”

“It’s been a while since I’ve seen the insides of a ship.”

“I can’t. I physically can’t with any voices around me that aren’t my own right now.”

“Is this about your Ghost?” Sagira asked. “I promise, he’ll be back. It’s not the first time I’ve done this.”

“It’s not about my Ghost. It’s about the yelling.” Tirion closed her eyes and leaned back in the pilot’s chair, hoping that she’ll be able to tune her out.

“She started it.”

Hoping never worked, though. “Haya lost a lot of people she cares about, and holds Osiris responsible.”

“Wait, what? Osiris for all he did and all of his ego I’ve had to put up with, never killed anyone!”

“You don’t have to pull the trigger to be responsible for someone’s death.” Tirion said. “She just wants closure, a reason. Justification. For all she knows, you two have been camping out on Mercury and not doing anything.”

“Well, we didn’t. We traveled a lot, looked at a lot of ominous rocks and examined even more killer robots. We’ve been protecting the rest of us from the Vex while she hasn’t changed.”

“I’m not the person you need to tell that to.”

Agreeing with Haya was a tough task.

*Understanding* her was easy. She was driven by pain and a goal to find a reason for everything. Things couldn’t just *happen*, they had to have a reason behind them. The trinket next to her had to have a purpose. The weapon next to her *had* to be repaired.

It wasn’t comparable to Warlocks, where they want answers and knowledge and try to inject logic into everything.

A person dies. A Warlock concludes that the person was stabbed and succumbed to the wound. Then, they move on.

For Haya the actual *cause* of death didn’t matter. The Fallen didn’t kill that person. Whatever or whoever led them to the Fallen killed them.

Brakion didn’t take Asher’s arm, his own stupidity did. Tirion didn’t lose a part of her because of Oryx, the Vanguard were responsible for it. The Sunbreakers didn’t die because of the Red Legion, Osiris put them there. The Cultists didn’t die to the Fallen, they died because they believed in Osiris.
It always ended with Osiris. The scapegoat. To Haya, it made perfect sense.

It made perfect sense because a world where there is no reason behind anything is a terrifying one to live in.

Agreeing with her and putting up with her anger was harder. Haya was Tirion’s friend, and the Warlock wanted justice as much as anyone for those who were wronged. But was it right to support what could be misguided anger? Tirion was never told was Osiris did, what dangerous things he has said to get himself banished. No one wanted to tell her, and the books about him were impossible to find. Unbiased ones, of course. If there was a desire for bias, Vance was glad to satisfy the need.

They’ll meet Osiris soon, and truth be told she was scared of what Haya might do. She should have been sterner, told her to not even think about summoning the Hammers once they meet, or demanded that she should discard her guns at the first sight of him. Told the Titan that the she will find no answers, just a shouting match.

But then again, Tirion knew little of how Osiris was. Maybe he’ll be the calmer one, but there was little that could calm Haya down.

Especially if Saint is not present.

Tirion has heard the legends and the tales, stories about the most beloved and the greatest Titan who ever lived. Both over exaggerated stories from Cayde and campfire tales from Lorcan and Haya about slightly incorrect usages of Fists of Havoc and a tether or two, involving glass rooms and battalion of Fallen.

She sometimes gets jealous of that friendship that she never got to see. How Haya valued the friendship she had with Saint above any other ones, how she only seemed genuinely happy when she told the stories of before Crota arrived, when it was just them against the Fallen.

Tirion thought that the Titan was joking about having been friends with Saint when they first met. Very few that lived during those days were still alive.

Made her think about how all of this began. The six of them have accomplished a lot.

Tirion found them in the slums, one by one.

They lived there not because they were banished from the Tower, but because they refused to live there, because of their own reasons and fears, and rules that they didn’t want to follow.

Lorcan was the first. He knew who she was and her status after shutting down the Black Garden, despite her numerous attempts to quell the rumors and the tales. It was only in his nature to exploit that for his own gain. Tirion never fell for it, didn’t see much in him. He looked young, maybe the same age as her. His dark red hair was crudely cut, making her wonder if he gave himself a haircut with Fallen blades during a hostage situation. Not much to remark when it came to fashion. He insisted it was pique Hunter fashion, though.

It led to Haya, his friend. Tirion almost thought that she was going to die that day and that the Hunter led her to a trap.

The Titan towered a good foot above Tirion, donning old mercenary armor with worn Sunbreaker sigils on it. Blonde, almost white, hair and skin as equally pale, making the blood on her cheek all that more striking and intimidating. Her eyes were the scariest. Pale purple eyes, edges of the irises distorted and scarred. Specks of deep brown still visible in them, small windows to a world that
once was and can’t be visited again, serving as reminders.

The fear was subdued when Lorcan made a joke about eye doctors, and Haya – jokingly – almost hit him with a chair, and then apologized for Lorcan being insensitive. In her own unique way.

Huritt was the next one. Barely able to fight, his gun skills being a danger to the City. He was fascinated with the Hive, but the City had no books about it. Field research was an impossibility and his own Ghost wouldn’t let him go and fight. Tirion promised him that she’d be able to get him into the Tower’s library. Haya threw him into the Crucible later on, being with him every step of the way and lending him her favorite assault rifle.

And that’s how they found Kouhei. No one knew who he was, and he spoke only when he needed to. Aggressive in the Crucible, using it to fine-tune his Defender skills. Every control zone had a Ward of his protecting it. For a defender, he was talented at scaring people out of the Crucible. Touch his Ward to attempt to hurt those inside it, and you’ll become food for his next one. Some thought that he was a disgraced soldier from the Reef, others claimed that he was actually a new brand of Exo. The mystery and the need of a good Defender got him recruited into the group, and Tirion didn’t mind to have someone like herself in the band, just as she was figuring it out.

Alva was the last one. Possibly the most important one. Their little troublemaker.

They found the frightened little Exo in the middle of the night. A small blur at first, hiding in the food stalls after the merchants had left for the day, leaving nothing behind to steal. Her first iteration of her hurriedly made stealth cloak required the wearer to constantly hold down a button, but it was a task she couldn’t uphold due to the pain.

Tirion was the one who noticed the shivering blur just before it revealed what it was concealing. Part of her leg was missing, nothing but a tangle of wires and sparks of electricity below the knee. Tirion spent an hour trying to calm her down, inching to her to reassure her that she will not be harmed under their wing. The group noticed that she couldn’t talk, neither could her Ghost. They communicated with handwriting at first, until Huritt made a communications device for her Ghost and in extension her, all based on Golden Age Exo technology. Lorcan crafted a new leg for her using weapon parts and Fallen parts he salvaged. The two Titans kept a watchful eye out, in case someone wanted to hurt her again. The people responsible eventually paid the price.

That moment was the first of many where they felt like a family. They had their ups and downs, a disagreement that separated them for a year. But they always found each other. Taught each other, complimented each other’s strengths and weaknesses.

At the end, Tirion felt like she was fighting her hardest to find reasons to disagree with Haya and her anger. She knew she would act the exact same way if she would get put through what Haya has been through. If someone one day would come to whisk them away from her, and then later she would find out that her friends died, the ones responsible would be in for a world full of hurt. The same could be said for any of the six of them.

She just wanted the yelling to stop.

“This is so weird.” Sagira complained, sighing in boredom.

“What exactly is?”

“Oh, nothing. Just the silence. The endless silence. Osiris created these reflections, copies of himself. Made so he can explore multiple pathways in the Infinite Forest at once. There was a tonna talking.”
“He what?”

“You’ll see once we get there.”

“You really make him sound like an egomaniac.”

“Don’t worry. He is.” Sagira flew in front of the window to observe the stars. It was still unsettling to Tirion to see her Ghost’s shell be used for this. “Huh. The stars look just like in the simulations. Thought I might feel something by looking at the real thing. That’s disappointing.”

Tirion finally had enough, and rose from the pilots chair to search through a box. There had to be something. It was too weird.

“Are you really sure you’re a Warlock, Guardian? No comments about the stars? How they’re meant to invoke feeling, while at the end just being meaningless and a distraction from our purpose?” Sagira’s accent changed towards the end, as if she was imitating someone.

Tirion found what she was looking for without further trouble, underneath a pile of different treasures in the box. It was a dull copper shell, one Lorcan passed to her, followed by her own Ghost begging her to take it out of his sight. Was not his color and didn’t match his eye, but she still decided to keep it as a memento. Tirion rolled the shell towards Sagira’s general direction.

“Change.”

“Why?”

“Because you being in the shell of my Ghost disturbs me. You happen to be in one of his favorite shells.”

“Fine, fine. Whatever. Don’t look.”

The talking didn’t stop when they landed on Mercury again, but Sagira wearing a different shell made the talks more pleasant. She still greatly missed her own Ghost, and couldn’t help but wonder how well he would get along with Sagira. Tirion knew that Sagira stealing his shell put a giant dent in any chance of the two Ghosts becoming friends.

“Haya thinks that Osiris threw you away because he believes that he’s immortal and that he wanted to prove a point.”

“Oh, don’t underestimate him, Guardian. He does think that. But that’s not why he did it.”

“What do you think?”

“We were in a simulation, and just before he threw me he said that the ugly big guy can see my Light, and that he was doing this for the both of us.”

“Ugly big guy?” Tirion had to ask, as there were too many creatures of the Darkness that fit that specific description.

“The Minotaur. Coulda been a Hobgoblin. I was bored that day. Do you know how many simulations we’ve ran? One of them burned part of my shell.”

“Why throw you and hope that someone finds you on the other side, though? Or, even hope that it will end well? Seems riskier than just walking out of there.”

“Exactly! Why would a Warlock put a switch next to the door he wants to open, when he could put
the switch on another planet deep underground behind a series of traps?”

“No comment.”

“Either way, Osiris saw something in the Infinite Forest, and it terrified him. Nothing terrifies him. We need to find him.” Sagira stopped for a second when she noticed the Titan waiting right next to the entrance. “Oh! And there is our best friend!”

If Haya heard the little remark, she didn’t make it show. She was too busy fidgeting with a red metal ornament in her hand. Always something.

“Be prepared for anything.” Tirion said. “Don’t fight, you two.”

“Only if there are Vex to distract me.”

The gate welcomed her this time around. Tirion didn’t know what to expect on the other side, but she didn’t expect tunnels. Endless claustrophobic dark tunnels, broken simulations. No Vex attacked them there in the traditional sense.

“I’ll ask it. What did Osiris do to get himself exiled?” Tirion broke the silence of the dark caves as they explored. The fight was coming either way, might as well instigate it and give it a jump start.

“Haya, wanna take this one?”

“Not in the slightest. Why?”

“For fun.”

Haya sighed. “What is this? Say something positive about someone you hate damn chairs-in-the-circle meeting to build relationships?”

“You know why.”

“I agreed with Osiris, Sagira.” Haya admitted, without any hesitation. “Most of what he said was common sense. One leader is a dictatorship and the Traveler brought a lot of bullshit to us.”

“Then why are you doing this, Haya?” Sagira asked. “Why did you say what you said? If you understood what we’ve been doing, you woulda followed us. Why didn’t you?”

“Because Osiris thinks that ‘protecting the world from the Vex’ is a blanket excuse for being selfish, leading people to their deaths and saying dumb shit.” She explained. “Maybe it’s his version of collecting trinkets, but, you know, instead of trinkets it’s dead Guardians.”

Sagira silently gasped at the harsh words. “That’s not fair, Haya.”

“Yeah well, since you have all this Vex simulation time traveling ordeal, find Kabr and lecture him about fairness.” Haya gestured around the dark cave as she spun until she was facing Sagira next to Tirion. “I yelled at Ouros to not go with him because I found out about him diverting resources and good people, good Guardians, towards damn rumors. That’s why. Sometimes I’m not a punch-crazed lunk. Ouros is also dead.”

Kabr. Tirion knew that name, and knew why Haya’s face was now filled with regret because of what she blurted out in her little fit. “Is that why you insisted to find the Vault, Haya? For weeks?” Tirion asked, slowly.

The only choice the Titan had was to embrace it. She wasn’t Cayde, didn’t have the ability to spin
herself out of a hole of lies. “Yeah. It’s also why I insisted to carry the Aegis. I was the only one who knew how to use it. Oh, and I also robbed that rug store.”

“You told me that you didn’t know *anything* about the Vault, or the artifacts in it.” The long dark and endless caves gave her little reason to stop talking. “What else have you lied about?”

“I only knew what Pahanin told me when I ran into him, a long time ago. I didn’t know anything about *specifics* or how the Vex work. I didn’t *lie.*” Haya said. “Pahanin wasn’t exactly coherent, Dredgen Yor didn’t help with his recovery.” Haya made a shooting motion with two fingers as she said the name of the disgraced Titan.

“Are you going to blame Dredgen Yor on Osiris, too?”

Haya shook her head at Sagira’s question. “No. Dredgen just decided to be dumb when it was very important to not be dumb. *That’s* on him. His Shadows’ deeds are on him.”

Finally, they found a room that looked slightly different from the rest, a glowing red ring before a strange cube. It was Guardian instinct to get in the ring.

Sagira looked around worriedly. “Osiris has to be there *somewhere.*”

It was also Guardian nature to shoot strange cubes if nothing happens after standing in a circle for too long, freeing a beam of blue light and something else.

“Sagira!” A voice called out. A figure of a man was floating in the air, glowing a radiant gold and flickering in and out of time. “You shouldn’t be here. And you’ve brought someone new with you. And… Haya. Hmph.”

“Hi!” Haya said, smugly. “Hey, if Lorcan was here he’d say that the Warlock bird rampant nicely reflects a Warlock’s r—”

“I’m a friend of the Vanguard.” Tirion interrupted Haya on purpose by introducing herself. “Haya’s here for the comic relief.”

“Osiris sent you away for your own safety, Sagira. Your presence here puts everything at risk.” The reflection said.

“Well, guess what? He *needs* me.” They continued chasing the reflections as they conversed amongst themselves. Talks of expanding timelines, talks of danger, talks of sending word because Sagira has returned. “Where is the real Osiris?” Sagira demanded to know.

“You cannot go to him, Sagira.”

“What?” What did he find? What’s so bad that it could scare Osiris?”

There were not enough hours in one day, even with all of infinite reality to explore.

“Alright!” Tirion groaned, impatiently. “I don’t know if it’s the exposure to Haya, but *this* has worn my patience thin I don’t even care, I’m angry about this *everyone* is coy about *everything* ordeal. Let’s get moving.”

The Reflections and Sagira were none of her business and interest, to the point where she started physically running away from it. The platform appeared underneath her feet just in time after she jumped into the smoky green abyss. The Vex didn’t take kindly, appearing en masse. They were just toying with her, though. If they wanted her dead all they would have to do is to get rid of the
platform, and let her fall for all eternity. She was in their world now, at their mercy.

They couldn’t learn from her if she was dead, she was too valuable to them. She knew that by fighting and using her Light she was helping them, but they were in her way. Tirion wished them a good luck with every bullet she fired, knowing that they haven’t made much progress in simulating the Light.

She reached a pillar in pristine condition with a triangular portal, small white cube shapes hugging the stone. Almost as if the Vex were struggling to simulate it, something that they hate.

Yellow grass was on the other side of the portal, violet flowers sticking out of it.

Life.

“If you are so eager to learn, I will show you where it all began.”

Uncertainty and apprehension crept up on her, every step of hers was slower than the one before as she walked up to the portal, preparing herself for what might be on the other side.

Tirion lowered her gun, loose fingers almost dropping it, while feeling the grass on the fingertips of her other hand.

The land of life and beauty, the purple and blue skies, the dancing clouds and the red trees, the bright blue water coursing in a nearby lake… it all got quickly plagued by sorrow.

They will never be able to go back to this. No matter how much they fight and no matter how many seeds they plant to try to replicate it. Beauty and life has never felt so hopeless. The Traveler was resting behind a mountain, life coursing through it. Small blue lines pulsing on the white surface, and it has never been more alive and will never be.

Hopelessness has never been so beautiful, rather.

“ Mercury, untold centuries ago, before the Vex arrived.” With the Reflection’s words, small explosions appeared on the fields, pillars descended and corrupted it all. It converted the planet into a machine in days. The whole solar system would have suffered the very same fate if not for the Traveler stopping them. The Vex weren’t driven by sorrow or anger, or any feeling. They just were. “Here the Vex planted the seed that became the Infinite forest, and its Mind, Panoptes. It’s purpose to reshape reality for the Vex. And only the Vex.”

“I remember when the greatest threat to us all lied in the Black Garden.” Tirion realized that she traded away people being cryptic for the Vex becoming more vengeful. “The Black Garden comes off as a retaliation.”

“One and the same, Guardian. We know you, you were the one who shut it down.” The Reflection said. “All this started with a single Vex. Will it end with the arrival of a single Guardian?”

The reflection opened another portal, prompting her to move on no matter how much she wanted to stay in the transcendence. If it weren’t for Haya’s loud footsteps behind her, she’d think that the Titan decided to leave long ago.

“Now I see why he’s made so many new Reflections.” Sagira expected a comment from Haya, a joke or a yell, but it never came. Not even a quip. The Titan picked up the pace, almost running at the portal on the other end, recognizing something at the other end.

“Tell me, Guardian. Were you there when the Traveler woke?” The Reflection didn’t wait for the
obvious answer. “A living Traveler changes everything. For good and bad.”

“I don’t think that the Traveler is alive.” The thought was said out loud absentmindedly. “I… It’s nothing compared to what we saw in the simulation of the past.”

A memory lingered at the back of her head, blurs and inaudible voices. Just out of her reach. A shell of a person sitting in a chair. Shattered just like the Traveler.

“Alive or dead, many things have been set in motion, Guardian.”

Tirion couldn’t tell if Haya was in a hurry, or realized that she couldn’t mute someone who was talking next to her and decided that the sounds of Vex dying worked to drown out all the talks about Osiris predicting the future. She was waiting by the final pillar. Worn down, shattered at the top with red lights, like blood, oozing out of it. A constant hum ringed out of it, a call. Sagira and the Reflection were unbothered, either used to it all or the message wasn’t for them.

“This is what it looks like when we fail.” The Reflection said. “This is the future the Vex want.”

The dark world felt like home to Tirion. She couldn’t tell why. Maybe it was due to her familiarity with battle, that the unrelenting Darkness is the only world she knows of. Millions of Vex were staring at her down below, surrounding their dead sun on the horizon.

“This was before you. You shut down the Black Garden, you are the key. You can stop this.”

“You hear that too, right?” Haya whispered to Tirion. “That humming, from the rubble?”

“Yeah.”

It was a home she felt unwelcome in, as the creature rose from the depths and cut the conversation short.

Panoptes.

She just needed to see it for the pieces to be dropped into place.

They knew her. They actually knew her. That’s the only thing that echoed in her head as Panoptes summoned shielded Hydras to shoot at the both Guardians, but their primary focus was on the Warlock. She took the opportunity the moment she saw the portal, making sure that Haya was right behind her. The yelling returned, but this time instead of arguments it was irrelevant warnings that she already was aware of.

They knew her. The bastards knew her. Crawling in her head, running yet another test. The Vex had no word for coincidence, everything was calculated and everything was brute forcing solutions to fit someone into a pattern. They wanted to see how she would react, they knew that they won’t be able to kill her there, neither did they want to. Panoptes was only missing the three glowing eyes. They didn’t know that she was no longer afraid of Oryx, however. Didn’t. That has changed. New timeline has started. The obsession with finding patterns in everything was a logical explanation, and the Vex thrived on patterns. Nothing but the pattern. They got every detail right, as far as their technology would allow them to.

“Are you two even listening?!” Sagira shouted once they were standing on the sands of Mercury. “This is bad. Really bad.”

“I need to go.” Haya muttered after making sure her own Ghost was unscathed. “You two go ahead. If you get back to Mercury I’ll be here but I need to go.”
“You saw the dark future! We need to look past this, and work together. All of us. – the Guardian, you, me, Osiris, Ikora.”

“The Guardian has a name, her name is Tirion.” Haya bellowed. “She’s more than capable of surviving anything, but you should see this as a practice run.”

“Practice run for what?” Sagira asked.

“Learning people’s names is a way to get attached. You feel this thing called guilt if they die.”

“Osiris blames himself more than enough, Haya. You don’t need to add to it.” The Ghost’s words didn’t stop Haya from walking away, eye darting from Haya getting further and further away and the Warlock. “Talk to her!”

“She’ll be fine. She’ll be here when we get back.” Tirion said. “We don’t even need to go to the City.”

“We still need Ikora’s help.”

“We need a map.” She corrected Sagira, getting to orbit. “The Vex know me. The Vault is no option. The closest thing to the Vault is the Pyramidion. It’s also a place where they can store data. We already killed all the threats in it.”

“You didn’t tell me you were a Vex expert.”

“It’s common sense.”

Tirion set the course for Io, slower than she wanted to. Ghost usually helps her a lot so she doesn’t have to worry. Only thing to do now was to put her feet on the dashboard and pick up a book. That memory refused to leave her head, begging to be scratched. There was no time for detours, she said it herself.

Only if her Little Light was there, so she could bounce it off someone. Have someone to distract her from the fact that the Vex are in her head, the all-seeing. Were they doing it to actually frighten her, or were they actually running simulations about the Hive? Or did they take inspiration from one of the biggest threats?

“What do you and your Ghost even do during these long flights ‘cross the Solar System anyway?” Sagira was eyeballing every single item Tirion had stashed away in the small shelf next to the chair. “Gotta tell you, Guardian. Not a fan of this whole silent treatment. Not even Osiris does that, the embodiment of evil according to some. Most of our time is spent in Vex simulations.”

“We talk.”

“Well, pre-Golden Age books about… human brains?” Sagira grunted. “Ugh… not a good conversation starter.”

It was a longshot, but Sagira could be more right than she thinks. Tirion grabbed the book, almost hitting Sagira in the progress and started carefully flipping through it. She had restored it on her free time, the text at least. The black and white photographs couldn’t be salvaged, unfortunately. Much to the dismay of a certain Cryptarch in the Tower. The names of the people still remained underneath the broken pictures, giving her a lead if she wished to pursue it.

“Where are you…?” She whispered to the old, dusty book.
“And Haya doesn’t think that talking to books is weird? I’m revoking her right to judge people. It’s gone.”

“I’m trying to find something.” Tirion tried to allow her muscle memory take over. It was somewhere in there. “It’s about the Traveler.”

“What do you expect to find in a book written before the Traveler arrived?”

“Seeing the Traveler alive in the simulation of the past triggered some weird memory, don’t have the time to figure it out now.” Tirion said. “I remember reading about this procedure. It had to do with severing connections in the human brain.”

The leaps in Tirion’s logic didn’t fill Sagira with any faith that the Warlock knew what she was doing or where she was going. “Guardian, this is serious. We can’t afford Pyramidion to be a bust. We should consult with Ikora. Fighting against time is serious.”

“Ikora will say the exact same thing about Io. But…” Tirion sighed. “Just… listen. Failure was success back in those days. The procedure left people in a broken state. Their body was completely functioning, blood was going through their veins, but the person was gone. Just… gone.”

“You have a very weird definition of success.”

“The failure was that it dulled down people, essentially erased them. The inhumanity. The success was that they needed those people to be dull.” Tirion summarized the old text in front of her. “Beside the point. But, it makes me think of the Traveler. How it was full of life back then, and now… it’s just docile. Sure, it works. It provides us with Light. But, it’s not there. It’s no longer terraforming, or fighting. A fate worse than death, really. For anyone. Intelligent AI, sentient being, a deity, human, Awoken, Exo. Doesn’t matter.”

“Be careful now, Guardian. More heretics like that and the Vanguard will exile you.”

“I’d like to see them try.”

Chapter End Notes

The way I see it is that the Ghost itself is the little black ball, the shell is there just for the protection from Guardian shenanigans.
“I know that you don’t need reasons to let the Vex take over it all but… Saladin is here.”

“Thanks for the moral support, Lorcan.” Tirion joked. “Haya caught you up?”

“Yeah. She’s on the other line. *Saladin is still here!*” He repeated hurriedly, lowering his somewhat fear-filled voice.

“I thought there were no Iron Banner tournaments planned.”

“He’s uh… *decorating*. By force, it looks like.” Lorcan sounded way more nervous than usual, and got interrupted by something incoherent. “This just in, tournament’s in two weeks.”

“Alright. What’s going on at the Tower, Lorcan?”

“Arguments. Yelling. *Hell*. Shaxx went on a rant about how Saladin is an uncertain old man who can barely use a microphone.”

“I can’t say I have any advice to give on how to prevent them murdering each other. Didn’t need that before.”

“Yeah, but that changed because Shaxx has a *gun* now. Saladin has a flaming axe, remember?!”

“He won’t use it.” She reassured him.

“Oh, I know of some *other* gun he will use. All that pent up tension and anger…” Haya cut in on the comms of the ship. “*Oh shit. Are Ikora and Sagira listening?*”

“Not Ikora. Sagira is to some extent, but she’s confirming some theories with Ikora. I have you two on speaker. *Behave.*”

“Ugh. This is a minefield from *hell*, isn’t it?” Haya grunted.

“Why does it *always* come back to this? And how did you even figure it out?”

“You two aren’t even trying.” Haya pointed out. “He keeps using that quiet ‘*I wanna kiss you*’ voice when he talks to you and the ‘*I will throw you at the EDZ myself if you keep wasting time*’ voice with everyone else.”

“And that’s all very great. But I… uh… *I’m* kinda alone here.” Lorcan said. “Kinda *terrified*. Kinda stranded between boxes on the second floor. Kinda think that they will kill me if they see me. They started arguing, I panicked, and climbed on this weird metal thing.”

Tirion withheld a snort. “I’m almost at Io. Can’t really turn this ship around right now. Doesn’t Zavala have any strikes for you to escape to?”

“I and the Exos went on one earlier. Zahn finally showed his face. There was an *elevator*. With a *tank*. Then there were Cabal beasts. Came back to bloody *this!*” He whisper-shouted.

“They won’t attack you.” It was difficult to not find Lorcan’s odd distress amusing. “You were trained by Titans, why are you so afraid of them now?”

“In Titan speak, what does it mean when a Titan gives an arena with a giant Cabal drill to another
Haya’s laugh filled the speaker. “It’ll be okay. Just run.”

“I can’t talk my way out of this!” It hurt to admit.

“You can run your way out of this.” Tirion said.


“Look, I have to go, you two.” Tirion laughed, Io in her sight. “Best of luck with the box camping.”

“Yeah, same.” Haya yawned. “I need to be angsty somewhere else on Mercury. This spot is getting boring.”

The line fell dead as they all hung up. As much as she hated the world being on the verge of annihilation again and her being the only one to fix this, she appreciated the timing. She’ll have to remember to reimburse Lorcan somehow for putting up with all of it.

“Well, Ikora agreed with you, about the Pyramidion.” Sagira reminded Tirion that she was still there. “She almost commended you.”

“I almost made the sun explode to save my friends.” Tirion recalled. “Almost getting a commendation is progress.”

“Huh. I never knew of that kind of loyalty with Osiris.” Sagira mumbled, and then rolled her eye. “Ugh, exposure to Haya is dangerous. Let’s go.”

Io was as beautiful as ever, as long as you didn’t look at the ground. Vex, Cabal and the Taken were still feuding, as if doomed to do so for an eternity. Guardians were having too much fun with shutting down a Cabal drill nearby, distracting everyone else from anyone noticing the Pyramidion opening. She didn’t want ten curious Guardians intervening.

The goal of the Vex was to whittle down everything to its simplest form. There was beauty in the destruction they caused. Despite being laced with vertigo, confusion and madness, their creations were breathtaking. If it were convenient, Tirion would spend a lot of time in the Pyramidion. The perfect place isolated from the madness outside, while dense with madness inside.

The Vex were no longer having fun. Impossible to keep secrets from them. She had almost gotten used to having Haya by her side melting everything that moved.

Tirion didn’t know if someone cleaned up Brakion’s remains or if this was a different instance. Asher gave the three of them a slight rundown about the basics of the place, how it’s a hellscape of infinite change. It was difficult to pay attention over Haya’s constant angry sighing and cracking knuckles when Asher was talking about complex Vex science.

A conflux appeared where Brakion once stood, making her wonder if the Vex finally gave in and gave it to her.

“The map’s not here. I don’t understand…” Sagira said.

“How about a map for a map?” Tirion suggested.

“Wait… I think I found exactly that. Coordinates for a node in the Infinite Forest.” She told. “Time to go back.”
“I’ve been tracking this weird signal I found while you two were gone.” Haya said. “My Ghost actually picked something weird up in the humming, in the dark future.”

“Did you make any progress?”

Haya shook her head at Tirion’s question. “It’s like a piece or something is missing. Kinda how you have something behind a glass window that you want and you keep running into the window.”

“We will never let Lorcan live that down, will we?”

Haya laughed, as she entered the Forest. “Nope!”

“We’ll be entering a combat loop by the looks of it: a simulation of the recent past when the Cabal attacked Mercury. The Vex must be testing an alternative outcome.” Sagira informed them, her words causing Haya to wince.

“They can’t simulate the Light, Haya. I don’t think they can simulate Guardians.” Tirion didn’t know if her reassurance helped. “If we find any Guardians in here, they’re probably real.”

“I know… thanks.” Haya flashed a small smile. “If they could simulate us they would self-destruct.”

“Imagine them simulating us… The six of us.” Tirion cringed, embracing the chaos of the endless walk to the pillar and the simulated Vex and Cabal in their way. “I don’t think they have enough references for all the alcohol they would have to simulate.”

“Hey! We stopped drinking when Ghaul died!” The Titan argued. “The Traveler exploding sobered us up and we’ve realized we kinda haven’t felt that in about fifty…ed years.”

“How many years?” Tirion asked, grinning slyly.

“Shut up, Tirionna.”

“Not to crush your dreams, but the Vex can do that.” Sagira pointed out. “At least in one instance. They were able to simulate the Vault of Glass.”

“We wouldn’t have conquered the Vault without Kabr’s sacrifice.” Tirion clarified. “The Vex possibly can’t simulate that. Light is one thing, Guardians are too unpredictable.”

“Explains why all the simulations have failed for the Guardians. Hey, Haya. Maybe Guardians chasing after rumors started by Os—“

“Don’t tell me that because I’ll punch you in the face if you do.”

The Cabal on the other side didn’t get a chance to notice what killed them or to impress the Guardians. An unspoken competition happened when Sparrows got simulated until they were at the node, cutting the enemies shooting at them with their speed. Until an Archival Mind stopped them in their tracks, destroying the both sparrows.

“That Minotaur is going to be trouble.” Sagira said, but Haya was already charging towards him with her shotgun.

“We killed Atheon.” Haya yelled in-between shots, only to get flung to the other side of the room as a Valus descended from the sky and instantly killed the Minotaur. “Er… Tirion killed Ghaul.” She got up to her feet, finishing reloading her gun to go for a second round as Tirion provided
support with solar grenades.

Haya’s battle strategy to the tricks of the Valus, which involved yelling insults, didn’t make the lasers retract. Sagira was not amused at the two Guardians trying to give the Valus very obscene nicknames, either. Or comparing to how this particular Valus ranks against some other Cabal that had a tendency to use rockets. Regardless of that, the job was done before the Valus could steal the map from them.

To no avail, as Panoptes remained elusive as ever.

Another failure.

They kept racking up.

“I need more processing power. There are Vex Minds on Nessus that might do the trick.” Sagira said.

“We have Lorc on Nessus, he can do it.” Haya insisted, interrupting a Tirion who was ready to go to Orbit. No seconds to waste. “He escaped the Titans, and now he’s making it up to Failsafe for accidentally trapping her in a Vex hellhole because his Ghost is in love with her.”

“What? I can do it!” Tirion reassured her. “Also, what?!”

“Haya’s right. We’d save a lot of time if we would skip all the travel.” Sagira said. “He better be good at his job.”

“He’s a total prat but he’s my best friend.”

“I—“ Tirion tried to interrupt.

“But if he can’t find a processor he’ll craft one for us.”

“Haya—“ The Warlock almost had to run to catch up with the Titan who was heading for the exit, the world becoming a blur. Blinking didn’t make it go away this time. Fighting against time and manipulators of it made her forget the passage of time. “What are you doing?”

“Tirionna, you look like hell.” Haya stated.

“I can sleep in my ship.” Haya angrily shoved the Warlock into a nearby Vex teleporter, which put them right next to the blue gate. “What is going on?”

“I’ll contact Lorc. Keep whining and I’ll transmat you to the Lighthouse instead of letting you walk there.”

“I’m fine. Taken War was worse. It’s been only two days since I sle—“ Tirion watched Haya bring out her Ghost, glaring angrily at the Warlock as she did so knowing all too well how much Tirion hates unnecessary transmatting. “Fine.”

Dreamless sleep, for once. No visions, no darkness. No weird voices reaching out to her in the dark. As if someone allowed her to just skip a moment in time. Vex made her paranoid about sleeping, about being unconscious. Thoughts of possibilities of them stealing her when she was sleeping. Inescapable. Was it all out of their hands?

“How long have I been out?” Tirion murmured.
"A couple of hours." Haya sat down across from Tirion on the cold rocky surface. At Haya’s insistence, the Warlock found a corner in the Lighthouse to catch some sleep. Her body ached and hated her for it, but her head appreciated it. “They have made some progress. Uh… talks about going back to when Panoptes’ algorithm was created then go forward in time and… does that make any goddamn sense to you?”

“I think I was planning to cut into people’s brains for a living, not to be an expert on algorithms and its effects on time travel.” Tirion mumbled.

“I was a drunk.” Haya boasted sarcastically. “A drunk soldier but a drunk is a drunk.”

“How much do you remember of the past?”

“The first Risen remember a lot. Got revived before our brains could fully die. Didn’t stop a lot of us from acting brain dead, hence why there are few of us left.” Haya looked down at the ground. “I had a large family. Couple brothers and sisters, good parents. Nothing to really complain about. But I was still an asshole to them. Enlisted in the military to get away and punch some things.”

“Haya, if you have any knowledge of the Collapse, it would be invaluable.”

Haya scoffed. “On the day of the Collapse I snuck out of the outpost to a party. I don’t think anyone there even knew that they were dying. People were too high or drunk to notice anything. Woke up some time later with everyone dead, and a tiny companion.”

“They could have gone out worse ways, I suppose.”

“I… I don’t really think they could have.” Haya said. “I was one of those people. You could have the entire world yet if you are addicted to being an asshole then you’re addicted to being an asshole.”

Tirion laughed under her breath. “Eloquent.”

“You get my damn point!” Haya said. “None of them were partying because they enjoyed life. No matter what you do and no matter how much you fight for their happiness some people will be like that.”

“People get their gratification from anywhere they can.”

“Yeah, I suppose we had fewer options before we were given powers that allow us to set people on fire with our hands.”

“We figured it out!” Sagira interrupted the moment. “And we need to go immediately.”

“What’s the plan?” Tirion asked.

“We go back to the moment that led to Panoptes and get the algorithm before the Vex create the forest, run time forward, and use that data to find its location in the present.” The Ghost explained, stunning the Warlock in confusion. “I’ll do most of the work, you do the shooting.”

“Well, as long as we’re sure as shit given something to shoot…” Haya muttered, helping Tirion up.

“Don’t worry. The Vex are at their most vulnerable where we’re going. The simulation will be well defended.” Sagira explained. “The point in history where you invent a reality engine? There is nothing more important.”
“Well defended also means them having a defensive subroutine.” Tirion said. “They already know that they can’t defeat us by shooting at us.”

“Tirion, how the hell did you manage make killing a lot of Vex sound not fun?” Haya complained when they were on the other side of the gate to the Lighthouse. “Knowing that they have no chance against us ruins things.”

“Just… pretend?”

“Not the same! Going to have to summon a Hive god to feel something again.”

“They’ll still be reacting and trying to block whatever we do.” Sagira said. “Be unpredictable.”

Back into the past again.

Tirion wondered how far the simulation actually extended, if it was just one area or the entire solar system. Finding herself looking at what was beyond the Traveler, Earth. The Vex never seemed to be that interested in her home world, being busy with other things. The Forest could be used for much more by Guardians. To perhaps go back in time and see how the world used to be. There had to be something, the trillions of simulations can’t be all of places the Vex care about. All the knowledge that could be retrieved. She’ll have to come back to it all once Panoptes was dead to investigate, or maybe just to rest. Even fighting felt peaceful in this past.

But when things were too peaceful, it meant that it harbored a hidden chaos.

The Root Mind did a good enough job to pull them out of their boredom, despite time wanting to crush them. Tirion didn’t understand why the Vex let her kill them. The Mind put up a good fight, but they’ve fought stronger things through the years. The Vex had all the reason to decide that they no longer wanted the intruding Guardians to exist.

She just didn’t understand. The biggest insult to a Warlock, an unresolved question. Why were they showing some kind of mercy to her? She didn’t wish to join Praedyth, but he was given a harsher punishment for a much lesser crime.

“We did it!” Sagira exclaimed once the Mind fell. There was nothing about the plan that Tirion liked. Perhaps it hailed from her not quite understanding it. Them getting the map hasn’t been a possibility yet, an action which the Vex will not take kindly to. Maybe a way to defeat them is to create so many timelines that they run out of room for simulations?

It was getting tiring. Constant trying and fighting, under the realization that the Vex were always ahead of them. Ahead of them and more powerful. They were capable of erasing Guardians, to assimilate them. Why haven’t they done that to her yet, she wondered. They had all reason to. Maybe she was too valuable of a toy to them, playing with fire as the toy could destroy them. But they also had the upper hand if they would get bored with her.

“Bingo!” The Ghost cheered, attempting the scan. “Scanning… isolating Panoptes’ patterns… overlaying onto the map…” She mumbled. The data tree in front of them expanded, the beginning of the end.

“Aaaaaaaannd… got him!” Sagira sang. “Panoptes always end up in the same coordinates. It’s over. This is how we beat the Vex.”

The lone Reflection was flying around the tree. “I’ve detected a change. A new Future. I will inform Osiris.”
“We need to go…” Tirion breathed out. “We need to go now!”

Her words were useless, as Panoptes materialized in the air. It was over. Sagira shrieked out in pain and panic as Panoptes pulled her out of the shell, slammed the ground with his metal claws, and the world was no more.

Sounds of yelling, shouting. Clanging of hammers, followed by more cursing. The noise pulled Tirion out of the darkness. She found herself back on Mercury when she painfully opened her eyes. Her brain felt as if every cell has had metal flowing through it for hours. She stood up with a wince, trying to make sense of the world and understand where she was.

Panoptes took Sagira, which meant…

“What are we?” The robotic voice asked, and Tirion almost cried with joy. “Mercury? How did we get back here?”

“Welcome back…” She breathed out a sigh of relief, as Ghost continued his ramble which she didn’t dare to interrupt.

“The last thing I remember we were in the EDZ, we found that device and then—WHAM!”

Tirion quickly pulled his old shell out of her pocket, always with her. He’ll be mad if she lets him stay in the copper shell too long. “Oh, I feel so strange. Like someone’s rearranged all the furniture in the house. Except the house is my brain.”

Ghost’s talking and her own joy at seeing him again tuned out the mayhem that Haya was trying to use to get the door open. “Sorry.”

“All right, look. I never thought I’d have to ask this, but—who else has been inside my head?!”

“Sagira.” Tirion explained, throwing the shell high into the air and watching Ghost switch back to it, the old copper one falling to the floor. “Wasn’t by choice. She was insistent about it.”

“So you’ve been busy. Correction: you’ve been busy without me. I don’t know what to feel about that…”

“It wasn’t by choice!” Tirion apologized again. “Sorry.”

“Damn it, Tirion! Come help me!” Haya shouted at the Warlock, out of breath and strength. “We need to open this gate!”

“I can’t open it.” Ghost said. “We need backup.”

“No!” Haya shouted, gathering her Light for the hundredth attempt. “We're doing this on our own. We've always done things on our own.”

“We need help.”

“Help adds a damn delay to all of this. If Panoptes kills Osiris, we won’t be able to find Saint!” Every word was a punch on the gate, every punch weaker than the previous. “And if anyone is going to kill Osiris, it’s going to be me. I owe that to Ouros!”

“Only possible way I know of opening this gate is using Void Light.” Tirion said. “We need to call Ikora. Lorcan won’t come here even if we pay him.”
Haya’s desperation was fighting to influence Tirion, but someone had to be calm. “Why can’t you do it?!”

“I can’t.” Tirion sighed.

“You could control the Void!”

“Because I haven’t been back to the Shard since the first time I went there. I’ve found artifacts to help me restore my old powers but I haven’t gotten around doing it. Solar’s all I’ve got right now.”

“What the hell…” Haya hissed, and kicked the gate one last time just in case. All it did was flash white, uncaring. Not knowing what to do with herself, she let her legs give in until her armored body dropped down to the ground and she was sitting down, elbowing the gate with last of strength. “You go ahead. I’ll wait.”

Ikora shared the refusal to allow them to come this close to victory and fail. None of them knew what happened to Sagira, if she was alive or dead. Osiris was doomed to die either way if they don’t open the gate. If they don’t open the gate, the world will die. They had to put their differences aside.

Only waiting remained as time was against them now.

Tirion sat down next to the Titan, listening to the soft screeching of the twirling gate until it became soothing.

“So… if the world would still be at stake and Osiris wouldn’t be on the other side, would you have tried to annihilate this gate?” Tirion asked her.

“Nope.” Haya answered, bluntly. “Saving the world and being the damn Guardian of Guardians is your job. My job is to clean up after Osiris.”

“You can’t dedicate your entire life to cleaning up after him.”

“I can dedicate my life to making sure that people won’t die in vain because of some dumbass egomaniac. And I can get a lot of Glimmer from it.” Haya said. “Osiris takes the impossible ones, and somehow finds a way to kill them. He takes those the world cannot break, and lures them into their deaths. Goddamn it, we as Guardians are going extinct. We can’t afford this mess.”

“Do you believe that Saint suffered the same fate?”

Haya closed her eyes, drowning herself in the noise of the gate, trying to pretend that the question that needed to be asked wasn’t asked. But it kept echoing in her head. “Don’t ask me that.”

No words were uttered after that, not even by Tirion’s Ghost who had an entire novel of questions. They waited patiently, just watching the Cabal and the Vex kill each other until Ikora found them. It was almost a chore to get themselves motivated to win the final battle ahead, as the sudden wave of sorrow was too heavy. Ending the Vex was a simple thing, compared to what Haya set out to do.

There was no time for greetings or to catch up. Ikora floated up in the air, charging the Void energy around her.

“It took Osiris years of study to find a way to open the gateways. We don’t have years, so…” The purple energy consumed Ikora, and she shot a burst of Void energy into the Gate, tearing it open by force. It was time to move. “It’s open but unstable. Go! I’ll hold it open for as long as I can.”
Fighting Panoptes gave Tirion a chance to see a fraction of what happens when the Vex get truly angry. They were no longer passive and uncaring, but throwing everything they had at her. Legions of Hive Thralls, wizards, Fallen. More of their own. But when they saw that it wasn’t working and she was still standing, they attempted to erase her. Evidently a last resort.

Feeling the hold of Panoptes in her mind made her think of falling. The same hopelessness mixed with a semblance of peace. They were fighting something that was truly unstoppable while Guardians were slowly going extinct. The Vex only have the pattern. Hoping that she didn’t fit into that pattern was pointless, because they would just cut her away. Tirion knew that no matter how many she kills they will come back. Their red eye and their cold march will always be ruthless. The saying went that the ones who mourn their inevitable death will be sent to an early grave. Comfort was found in the fact that there were people out there who wouldn’t allow that to happen.

What she thought she would never see is Osiris helping someone. Considering Haya’s rants about him. Distracting Panoptes just at the right moment, and helping the Guardians. It was more shocking than the possibility of being erased from time.

It was one vengeful shout that changed it all once Panoptes finally fell. A shout that made the Vex and their indomitable future irrelevant and their purpose understandable by comparison.

“And give me back my Ghost!”

Haya frowned as she listened to the echoes of Osiris’ voice. It was impossible for her to hallucinate. That concern and vengefulness for a sentient being was nothing that was ever said with that voice, not in the presence of her or anyone she knew. The reunion of Sagira and her Guardian and the congratulatory speeches that Tirion didn’t absorb were cut short when he saw the Titan standing there.

It was too late to prevent the war. A war that both of them were figuring out how to start. After all these years, she still looked the exact same and not a day older. From the scars down to the armor. It looked freshly forged, but was adorned with the same trinkets and markings like the last time he saw her. He knew that she still thought that he was the devil incarnate.

“Haya… I hoped that my reflections were mistaken when they told me that you were here.” Osiris said, watching her gaze search for something around the forest, for someone. Ticking time bomb in her throat. “Not enough cursing was echoing through the Forest.”

“Where the hell is Saint?” She turned her sunken gaze to the Warlock.

Osiris knew the answer to his own question before he even asked it. “Why would Saint-14 be here, with me?”

Haya’s soft gasp was a shiver. An offending one to her. She didn’t want to be weary for this battle.

“You… You don’t know, do you?” Haya whispered, and the anger contorted her face as she took a step towards him. “You don’t even know!” Her shout at the top of her lungs made the gold plates underneath her feet vibrate, it staggering Sagira while Osiris remained still, guilt and sorrow in his own eyes, barely visible with the red mask on his face.

Haya continued, as Osiris refused. “Saint was my friend. He loved you, and believed in you despite all the shit you’ve pulled. And this is how you pay him back? This? Not even knowing that he has gone missing searching for you? He selflessly dropped everything he had for you. Everything! He left behind the City he loved with all he had, for you!”
No words were needed to convey it all for the Warlock, and Sagira shook her little head. “You can’t blame yourself for every missing Guardian, Osiris.”

“For him I can.”

“Nothing can stop that old Exo. Probably lecturing a Vex?” Sagira tried to figure out if it was the right time to joke or not. “Titan lectures – long speeches, occasional punching.”

“Not on this planet and not with this shtick drek. Most of your cultists are dead. The Sunbreakers are also dead. Guess who led them here? And now you try to take Tirion? You don’t even know her name, do you?”

“Haya—“

“I’m not done!” She snapped in his face. He had spoken too much, written too much. Became the embodiment of it. Vance talked about him too much. “If you so much even look at any of my friends, or ask them to do any favors for you without me being there, I will find out, and I will crush your Ghost with my Hammers. No more, Osiris. The job is done. Leave my sense of belonging alone.”

“Very well. I can respect that wish.” He wasn’t done either; “But, shout as much as you can and as much as you want. Blame whomever you like. You still think you’re more important than you are, with that self-absorbed need to look back on things without feeling wronged. If it weren’t for who I shoved and for what I did and said, you wouldn’t be alive to shout because the Ve—“

“And of course it’s about you and your damn suffering and sacrifice. Vey iz mir, Osiris!” Haya interrupted his speech which was steadily increasing in volume, rolling her eyes. Pot calls the kettle pale. If it weren’t for her and Tirion, Panoptes would have done much worse. And it was said that Titans were the ones who built walls to be shouted at. “Ani ayefa...”

“Zeh lo meshane.”

“I’m...” Tirion spoke up, reminding them that she was still there and had witnessed the meltdown. “I’m going to go...”

“Tirion...” Haya attempted to stop her. She didn’t want to be angry at her friend.

“You can handle it. You two have run out of words and I won’t understand half the talking because you’ve switched to another language.” The Warlock shrugged, slowly backing off. It was their argument, and not hers. Least she could do is respect it. “I’ll be right outside.”

“If you love your Ghost, it’s for the best to go, Guardian.” Sagira said. “My translation module is still recovering from the last argument these two had. Take care of her, Ghost.”

“If she’d let me.” Ghost said, and returned to Tirion’s side.

The battle didn’t feel quite over just yet. At least now she could enjoy the walk through the forest, at least for now she could go home. The two other Guardians had their Ghosts now, there was little worry about them killing each other. She wanted to go home, and the conversation she walked away from is going to take a couple of hours. There were more important things to do.

“Can I just say that I’m very happy that Haya is on our side?” Ghost finally breathed out a sigh of relief.

“Yeah.”
“I thought that you were scary…” Tirion cast her little companion a look. “You are scary when you fight. Haya is scary just by being Haya.”

“I’m just tired…” Tirion mumbled, slowly making her way to the exit.

“Want to place bets for how long it takes for Shaxx’ Redjacks to storm the Forest?”

“Might take a while. Saladin is in town.” She said, and shook her head. “Who am I kidding, he’ll probably convert a simulation into a Crucible arena today just to spite Saladin.”

“Oooh! We should play some Crucible next! I’m feeling lucky!” Ghost sang. “Good idea, right? You’re welcome! Wait, why did I just say that?”
The flight home was an interesting one. She got no sleep in her ship as catching Ghost up with what happened while he was ‘asleep’ was a priority, and all the apologies that came with it. He started to understand after a while that she had no control over what happened, and bitterness got directed towards Sagira.

A dark night shrouding the lit up City welcomed her back. Only people that were awake were the guards at their posts, talking amongst themselves and keeping each from falling asleep during the long night shifts. Going from the heat of Mercury to the cold of Earth was too big of a contrast to find reason stop and enjoy the cold trying to bite her skin.

She wasn’t home quite yet.

“Hi…”

Shaxx instantly pulled his Warlock into a warm embrace, strong arms overwhelming her. Home. She closed the door behind her with her leg, preventing more cold from coming in. Iron grip on her, as if he hasn’t seen her in a month, even though it’s been a couple of days. She honestly lost count.

“I missed you…” He whispered into her hair.

“Sorry. I was under heavy surveillance. Couldn’t talk.” Tirion abused her Warlock hover to be able to hug him properly. Somehow forgetting how tall he was, but not forgetting the tiny static shocks that come with his hugs. She took his hand once they both loosened the grip, leading him to the couch. The table next to it had one too many datapads and Crucible reports that kept him from sleeping.

“The Vex took their fantasy world too seriously. Had to fix it.” Tirion summarized. “I assume you’ve heard the latest news.”

“That Osiris has been found? Word travels fast.”

She finally relaxed, laying her head down on his lap, letting his fingers play with her hair. Everything melted away. “Any thoughts?”

“I don’t care for his followers and their beliefs, but I am worried that whatever delusional sect they’ve got running on Mercury might expand now.” It was pleasant to hear his calm voice that only happens when he’s around her, as opposed to his normal booming one that could be heard all over the Tower. Some people claim that it can be heard all the way down in the City.

“And the man himself?”

“I’ve had a few scuffles with him. I do respect his belief that Guardians can be shaped like a blade.”

She sighed. “I really wish he believed in it himself.”

“What do you mean?”
“I don’t doubt that he holds the belief that doing the same thing over and over again builds character and that he will claim that you sound like him.” She saw him resisting to roll his eyes at the remark. “But, he and Haya started to argue in a different language because they ran out of words to insult each other with.”

“I fail to see the correlation.”

“No matter in how many languages you have the same discussion in, the outcome will be the same. People won’t budge, morals and opinions won’t change. I don’t think he and Haya accomplished anything.”

“That’s an entirely different battle.”

“I guess.” She mumbled, closing her eyes.

“What do you say we get out of here?”

“No Vex.”

Staircases and elevators were turned to rubble, with holes excavated by desperate looters, forging a pathway to the top of the old Tower. Using a ship to get to the top would be a waste of resources, and suspicious. At first glance it resembled undiscovered and unfamiliar land. When she saw the old stump of a tree, her brain began piecing the images together in order to realize that she was standing on what used to be the plaza.

“People were sent up here to clean up after the victory, to see if anything could be rebuilt.” Shaxx said, frowning at the debris.

“A lot of Guardians seem to think that it could be salvaged, but the Vanguard wanted to opt for better relations with the civilians.” She told as the Titan led her by the hand.

“Part of the reason, but…” He gestured towards the leveled surface that a Postmaster once lived in. “What is there to restore?”

Looters and other Guardians got there long before them, cleared up some of the rubble that blocked the path to the Hall of Guardians while they were there. Despite the win, times were desperate for others when she was on her little vacation. People scavenged for anything they could sell for any Glimmer they could get. Old Crucible banners and some of the war trophies weren’t in the interest of the looters, a relief to Shaxx, and he let go of her hand to dig through the rubble. His Ghost illuminated the room, as the lamps of the Hall were long burnt out.

Tirion barely remembered it all. Constantly wondering if Haya’s excellent memory was a blessing or a curse. The Evaluator once told her that when the mind feels threatened, amnesia is one of its most stalwart defenses.

Standing right in that spot made her remember.

She was out of the City. An insignificant Warlock doing insignificant things on an insignificant day. The sun was coming down washing everything in an orange haze. Nothing was notable about it to remember, with the loss of Light and other mistakes added on top of it. The peace was its own kind of punch in the gut. It was too perfect, manufactured almost. When they didn’t get any response from any channels as they were flying home, neither she nor her Ghost assumed that it was due to unscheduled emergency maintenance.
Tirion knew that the Cabal were coming. She and her team had done enough to anger the Empire. It was foolish to not expect their efficiency. Their storms, their cages. They knew they had to bring everything they’ve got to take down the Guardians, to be as to the point as they can. The element of surprise was the first step of defeating the Light Bearers. She met Cayde right where she was standing now, with all of his confidence that ended with him getting stuck in a Vex teleportation loop.

The chaos started when she said goodbye to Shaxx.

Confusion and disarray consumed the world. She remembered the dreadful feeling of fighting a battle they weren’t supposed to win. Not yet. Zavala was too stubborn. Ward after Ward after Ward he put down to showcase his refusal to give up to the Cabal that were getting stronger as the Guardians kept getting weaker. Ikora was too angry, letting it disarm her.

And then the order came.

She still didn’t know where she stood with Zavala with that. Was it right to hold the slightest bit of resentment towards anyone because of an order given amidst confusion and madness? No one benefits from prolonged wars. On his orders, the mission was fruitless. The Immortal stood in the skies as she plummeted. If not for people who wanted a peaceful end, they would have never won the war.

Tirion cringed, forcing herself to stop thinking about it. Thoughts like an unstoppable bullet in her mind.

“I can smell the alcohol at the Hangar Lounge all the way to here…” Tirion grimaced, as somewhat fonder memories took over her brain.

“You never told me what they were doing up in the Tower.” He said, briefly glancing up at her.

“I don’t think the alcohol they consumed allows them to remember what happened.” She joked. She has tried to ask them about it, none of them could recall much. Even Haya immediately developed a migraine when trying to recall it. Tirion assumed that the loss of Light had something to do with it. A great deal of Guardians were still suffering from the loss of their Light and the maddening thoughts that came with it. There was little help to be offered, as it has never happened before. The evaluators had no reference point. But Guardians have their own bandage solutions to deal with problems inside of their heads. When usual methods fail, repeat those methods except without a helmet.

Shaxx sighed, throwing away another broken skull of a long forgotten creature. “Looters got what wasn’t destroyed.”

“Don’t send your Redjacks after them.”

“They’ll come forward eventually. Now I know what to look for.” He grabbed her hand again. “Come on.”

Tirion will eventually come to qualms with the attributes of the new Tower in the wall, all of the people there and all of the complaints from Guardians that come with it. But she will never like the view from there, compared to her old home.

“We’ll never get a better view than this.” She breathed out, looking over the City. The old Tower perhaps put too big of a rift between Guardians and the people below, painted the Guardians with a sense of superiority and got them resented. But Guardians will always love things that look nice,
the world of political issues that come with it negated.

“We could get a better one.” He put his hands around her waist, the way she looks up at him with those glowing eyes still taking his breath away. Tirion put her own hands on his shoulders, as far as she could reach. They slowly swayed side to side, living in their moment away from the world.

“Planning something?” The Warlock tilted her head to the side as she said that, knowing what she was doing.

“No. You make me afraid of planning good things.”

She raised an eyebrow at Shaxx’s words, the smirk slightly dissipating. “Really?”

“Falling for someone like this was never in my plans.” Shaxx murmured, taking one of her hands. “Yet it has been the best thing that has happened to me.”

Tirion interlaced her fingers with his with one of her hands. “You love me.”

“I married you.”

“We eloped. It’s been quite a ride.” She laughed, looking down briefly. “I didn’t plan to marry the big, scary, loud Titan. Or that I’d be the only one who gets to witness the mythical calm side. The world doesn’t make any sense, does it?”

“It honestly stopped making sense the minute your Ghost revived you.”

Tirion smirked. “I take that as a compliment.”

Shaxx pulled away slightly, using the hand that was holding hers to spin her around and then bringing her back into his arms, the smile on her face now bigger once she figured out what the Titan was trying to do. Took him a while to learn that Tirion never laughed at his small frustrations with the smallest things. More often than not she smiled because she was genuinely happy, not mocking.

“You have full reign to point out the oddity in a Guardian not knowing how to dance.”

Tirion finally stopped restraining her laughter. Her laugh sounded sweeter than any victory chant he’s heard before. “You know how to kiss me.”

Shaxx reached up his hand to cup her face, leaning in with a smirk that reflected hers. “I’m happy to.” He whispered into her lips before finally kissing her. It always started out as confident, dominating. A personification of himself. The Warlock always manages to disarm him, making him melt more than his kisses melt her.

And she will never even realize it.

Tirion didn’t remember drinking.

She remembered not drinking.

Tirion remembered the view, the laughs. The dance on the top of the old Tower. The kiss, the several hours after that. Hours that wiped away all negative connotations of the once-marvelous Tower. But, she explicitly remembered that she didn’t drink. Alcohol was reserved for when she meets Cayde at his bar and they catch up to his local misdeeds, such as him sneaking out of the Tower and telling her how much he doesn’t want Zavala to know about it. She got him a notebook
as an additional Dawning gift, to help him keep track of each other’s debts.

Her head was unexplainably pounding, infatuated with gravity as she couldn’t lift it up from the pillow. She reached out a hand blindly, only to find an endless flat mattress and no one beside her. The sun was peeking in through the curtains, indicating that it was obviously far past morning. Sleeping in this late was a first in a long time. Tirion has always been presented with two choices. Be up all night or run on minimal sleep. Perhaps it was all due to her body reacting wrong to getting full night’s sleep.

“Ghost…” She strained to talk, the sensation of what felt like a thousand tiny Hive shards in her throat scraping it. “It’s safe to come out.”

“Oh, that’s bad…”

Tirion slowly opened her eyes again to find a blue eye staring curiously at her. “I don’t feel so well…” Whispering didn’t hurt as much.

“You don’t look so well.”

“I think I might be dying.”

“Oh, I remember this…” Ghost sighed. He didn’t know that he was going to need to prepare for this again. “You always get dramatic when you get sick.”

“I don’t.”

“Then how come that every time you get sick, murder gets put on your agenda? Not the good murder. Is there such a thing as good murder? It’s definitely murder if it’s other Guardians. And their Ghosts.”

Tirion painfully groaned into her pillow, as she was on the verge of death. “Keep your morals away from me right now…”

“I could give you another blanket.” Ghost said to the shivering Warlock, who was curling into a ball for warmth. Summoning Solar energy for warmth while surrounded by flammable objects was a lesson she needed to learn only once.

“I can get it myself.” Tirion whispered, unmoving.

“You know the magic word.”

“The magic—“ Her slightly raised voice made the pain worse. “Fine. I promise not to kill anyone and or burn them to ashes if they don’t relinquish control to me.”

“Wow.”

“I know…”

“That was very unconvincing, but…” Tirion felt the weight added to her body as a fur blanket appeared on her. “We’ll take it one step at a time.”

Ghost rested in her spread out hair, enjoying it all with a small amount of guilt. Guardians are not supposed to get sick. There are some ailments that Ghosts can’t fix, and part of the guilt hailed from that. Guardians are infallible. Adamantine. Bastions of bravery and safety, and a bright future. Guardians do not fall to illness, they are not felled by anything mere mortals can be felled by.
At least that’s what they’re supposed to be.

That’s the reputation they’re supposed to live up to.

Ghosts were the ones who had to deal with the actual truth.

It took less than a minute for her mind to start going berserk. Jobs only she can do, things around the Tower that she needs to keep an eye on. Reports about the Hive from Huritt, progress on Haya’s adventures on Mercury. Only place Tirion could still sit in was her ship, where the alternative was the unforgiving vacuum of space. There were missions to do instead of wasting time lying in a bed. There were also worse things than the Hive trying to summon something again: her misfits couldn’t be left alone. She also had a couple of leads on the Hunter she was trying to track down. Which meant going into the EDZ and fetching something Cayde left behind before Zavala finds out.

“Okay, never mind.” Her proclamation was a pained grunt as she tried to sit up. “I need to get out of here.”

Ghost helplessly watched her fall back to the bed, as she complaining, and him knowing the consequences of laughing at her. Guardian of Guardians, hilariously incapacitated by a simple cold. He helped her with the pain as much as he could by healing her. Nothing could be done about the core issue on his end.

“Now you’re just being delirious.”

“I’m not.”

“Prove it.”

Tirion crossed her arms angrily and looked up at the ceiling, working on ways to outsmart him while fighting her sudden onset weariness simultaneously.

“I remember the fight with Ghaul.”

“That’s… that’s progress!” Ghost exclaimed, sincerely. The way her face changed from anger to something else entirely was enough proof that she was genuine. He was happy for her, but sad that they no longer had an excuse as to why reports about the fight haven’t been turned in.

“The end of it, anyway. He hated that he was weak, that he has been forced down to his knees by a filthy creature. Unrelenting as he was dying, still begging for the Traveler’s approval.” Tirion whispered.

“Sounds like Ghaul.” Ghost let himself rest next to her again. Tirion was staring at the ceiling, seeing something past their mortal realm. The symbiosis only produced static.

“I felt this pain in my stomach, one of his goons got me. I was too reckless and didn’t clear the area out. I used the remaining bullets in my gun to finish off Ghaul and then…”

“You talked about something as he died, and then you fell.” Ghost recalled. “I didn’t hear what you said.”

“I didn’t fall.” She shook her head.

“I watched you fall.”
He was unsure of what the two said, something was crackling in the air during the final fight, something big. Like the Traveler was reaching out to its Ghosts.

“No, I was sent somewhere else.” Tirion’s frustrated words as another battle was added to the war in her brain. “I was on this endless sandy yellow road.”

“Okay. Now you’re definitely delirious.”

She felt the soothing wind trying to play with her hair, but failing as her hair was gunked up with dirt and Cabal oils. Stagnating something that was meant to be loose and free. Around her was green, lively crops on each side of the road, the fields stretching as far as she could see. Simulations of the past were as close as the Vex could get them, but they lacked life. A spirit. The world back then felt like it was breathing.

“It was a pleasant day…” Tirion murmured after a moment.

“Alright... What then?”

“A car in the distance. Driving right towards me. It stopped the second the driver saw me.” She told. “The woman got out of the car to greet me, tucking a strand of red hair behind her ear. She knew who I was, and she laughed. She laughed and laughed about how troubling it was that she ended up a pyromaniac.”

“I think I know who that is…”

“I... I couldn't bring myself to laugh. I lamented over the fact that I couldn’t change it. That I can’t find the universe where she gets to live a full life and help people, and I get to save the world. Where we can co-exist.”

“What did she say to that?”

“She told me that the universe I am thinking of exists. I just refuse to live in it. One and the same. Intertwined. Synonyms for synonyms…” Tirion trailed off. “The purpose of my Light is to die and bring myself back.”

“She was right. For a Guardian you have sure refused to abide the rules sometimes when it comes to life.” Ghost sighed sadly. “Please stop doing that, by the way.”

“I guess even though I forgot about it, I still hung onto it subconsciously. But now…”

“Why did you keep denying it?”

“We are so different. From the way she talks to our skin.” Tirion could barely keep her eyes open as she uttered the words. “And I could never live up to her.”

“What do you mean?” Ghost asked the still Warlock. “Guardian...?”

Tirion was still breathing, and breathing didn’t mean dead. “Hers was a good world. So different from the mess we live in now. I could fight my whole Guardian life to make this world as great as hers and never come close to finishing it.”

Sleep took over again, with hopes that she’ll once again dream of the better world.

Loud and intrusive whispers in the other room woke her up. Two voices, and it took her too long to identify them.
“Do you need any help?” Her Ghost asked the Titan, curiously.

“I’ve got it!”

A loud clang, sharp sound of metal clashing against metal fully woke her up. But it didn’t give her strength to get out of bed and investigate it. She knew that guns and swords sounded different than that.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I am!” Another clang, followed by annoyed and defeated groaning.

“I might have a solution. We need mulled wine.” Ghost helped out, hearing the silent plea for help from the Titan. “We’ll need Haya’s help.”

“I’m sorry, what?” The disdain in his voice pierced the walls. The proposition of asking for help from one of the inventors of cognitive dissonance to help with the situation was almost outrageous.

“Somehow she’s the only one who knows how. I’ve seen her help people with it before.”

“All right.” He sighed. Not believing the words of the little Ghost but not finding any other choice. A Guardian’s Ghost knew their Guardian better than anyone. “Where can I find her?”

“In their den.”

He crossed his arms at Ghost’s vagueness. “And where might that be?”

“Down in the City.” Ghost explained, unyielding in the face of Shaxx’s defiance. “I don’t have arms, but I’m one of the six Ghosts that can open the door.”

“Transmatting is a consideration.”

“Haya has tried to fight me when I’ve suggested that.”

There was no choice, so he geared up and followed Ghost to outside. He didn’t mind the other Titan, and the rest of Tirion’s team. The Guardians can annihilate things that oppose their Light like no one else, but a lot of their actions always had an asterisk. Always something unwritten that was part of the deal.

That’s where Tirion came in.

If her team was given the task of repairing and restoring a ship, they will make the ship look like as if it’s been made yesterday. Except, the pilot’s chair will be mangled on purpose. It was Tirion’s job to find a replacement chair before the owners of the ship get to see it.

Tirion’s role was to give them jobs and to mitigate consequences of doing a job in their way. Over the years the amount of paperwork Tirion has had to do monthly to make sure that the people of the City wouldn’t be frightened by some antics has lessened significantly. Maybe they were learning.

With the help of paint and their own tech, they made the old Cabal structure blend in perfectly into the City. Shaxx recognized the Cabal technology on the entrance, using their drop pod tech to shatter hard steel and build it back up. There were numerous other traps along the way, traps that only six Ghosts could disable. It was secretiveness such as this that made Shaxx distrust the team. Were they reclusive or actually planning something that the Vanguard or the City wouldn’t like to
As he got closer, he caught the end of an ongoing conversation, voices slowly becoming comprehensible.

“… I mean, hell… You mean the time a war criminal got annoyed by what a giant slob said and decided to become a responsible parent?” Haya scoffed at Kouhei sitting across from her.

“I had to talk to the Reef about Calus’s accusations. It was too important to let be.”

“What did they say?” Lorcan asked.

“Nothing you should care about so far. Rightfully so. Petra is the acting regent. She told me while she’s aware that the legs of the City are broken, the Reef has to get to water.”

“Hasn’t that been their motto?” The Hunter slightly rolled his eyes.

“They have their reasons.” Kouhei reassured the group, but the disbelief and disappointment wouldn’t fall from Haya’s face. “Their contingency reserves are overdrawn.”

“Their prince is goddamn leading the Fallen, what reasons?”

The Awoken Titan was staggered by the accusation. “How did you figure that out?”

“Tirion figured it out. Their beac—what the hell is this?!”

All of their eyes were on the tall Titan and the familiar Ghost standing next to the door.

“Sorry to interrupt. I… I was told I can get mulled wine here.” There was nothing familiar with the current situation unfolding. Not that he was scared by them. This has never been part of his routine.

“Oh. Is she okay?”

Shaxx knew that the group was close, but didn’t expect to see instant concern in all of their faces on the mere mention of the wine.

“She’s sick.” Shaxx explained, and Haya quickly got to work without further questions. He wondered what the odds were of this being about actual wine. They would never hurt one of their own, at least.

He surveyed the field as he waited wordlessly to distract himself. Their den was impressive, like a tiny little City.

Makeshift living room in the middle of the big room, with worn couches and old wooden tables. Some old metal boxes served as emergency chairs. Datapads, documents and holograms scattered on the tables. Projections of the Hellmouth and Titan, of Cabal treshers and their own ships they use to navigate the system with. The seated Guardians worked on their own little projects in silence.

On one side they had lockers for weapons and armor, not daring to put any trust in the Vaults of the Tower since the recent incident. Most of the weapons and armors were shared amongst each other. Only armors that realistically could be shared were the marks, capes, and bonds.

Right next to that were cabinets with resources. Dusklight shards, phaseglass needles, anything from any planet anyone could think of. Everything was properly labeled, a rare occurrence of order in their world of disarray.
All six of them contributed to keeping things in stock, with a set schedule. Everything from what weapons to get from Banshee to how many Dusklight shards they need, to what needs to be shot.

On the other side was the kitchen; the stove hardly used judging by the boxes from the ramen shop.

There were other doors leading to more rooms, possibly bedrooms and utilities.

Portraits, trinkets and war trophies scavenged from different planets were on the walls and in shelves as decorations. Cabal, Fallen and Hive armors and weapons, but nothing of the Vex. Some of the trinkets belonged to Guardians, fallen ones. Guardians he recognized, trinkets he’s seen being accidentally dropped in the Crucible and panicked Guardians sneaking into his arenas to always find them again.

A wall of lost friends and respected allies, a way to remember it all. And a way to remember who was responsible for them no longer being there.

It was strange to know that some time ago the whole den was architecture of intruders who wanted to butcher them, and these six managed to reclaim it. Much like the Crucible arenas. To recapture and claim assets of the enemy is a hell of a way to send a powerful message.

“You’ve killed a lot of Vex, why not showcase it?” Shaxx asked, when he noticed that something was absent from all their missions. They had something to show for almost everything. He found it suspicious how their recent victory didn’t yield any new accessories.

“Because Tirion raised a fair point about the need to keep Vex-anything away from our skin.” Haya said as she looked for something in one of the cabinets. “Also, last person we know of who made armor out of Vex parts got his mind assimilated by the Vex.”

“Did Osiris have anything to say about him?” Huritt asked.

“He said a lot of things that sounded honest but were total bullshit.” Haya grunted.

“I woulda shot him.” Lorcan said.

“Living is enough of a punishment for him.” The anger was quickly forgotten and replaced by annoyance filled with a rare case of humor. “Ha! Wanna hear a funny joke, though? We’ve got only the wine. What has happened to us?” She wiped the dust off the bottle, she thought she never would see the day.

“I could get the rest.” Lorcan volunteered, and Alva raised her hand alongside.

“Remember this time around that star anise isn’t something you get from a Servitor.”

“That… that was three days after I got revived…” Lorcan said slowly. Maybe she actually was an Exo? There were theories out there in the streets. It would explain a lot of things to him.

“Four days. I was talking to your Ghost.”

“I’m not responsible for her!” Lorcan excused himself.

“Which one?” Haya asked.

“Both of you.”

The two hunters ran out, almost bumping into Shaxx on the way. This world in their den felt
strange and foreign to him. He’s seen teamwork, but never the non-verbal kind.

“Tirion will be okay.” Haya reassured Shaxx while twirling the metal pot by its handle. When the loudest and the most abrasive Titan around was suspiciously silent, the helmet on his face couldn’t be less useless to hide the concern. “This thing will take a bit over an hour. I could give the passcode to the den to your Ghost.”

“Thanks, Guardian.” Shaxx nodded. “But there is no need for the passcode.”

“I agree with Lord Shaxx. Haya is about 900 years old. She's clearly becoming senile and losing her mind.” Kouhei muttered slowly, glaring at Haya with crossed arms. The poor Exo Warlock stuck in the middle of them didn’t dare move, forcing himself to concentrate on his book. His Ghost knew the drill.

“Is that a… joke?” Ghost asked, moving his eye from Kouhei to a glowering Haya. “Someone explain Kouhei making jokes.”

“I don’t joke.”

“Well, Kouhei, the important thing here is that you need to be a dick about it.” Haya retaliated, putting the bottle down before it ends up in several pieces in someone’s hair.

“I just need you to step back and understand the optics of what you just suggested.”

“Oh no, no, I got your point the first time. I’m trying to avoid the part where I glass you.”

“Oh-kay….” Ghost’s nervous laugh interrupted the conversation. “This is why I like being a Warlock’s Ghost. Far less shooting and yelling and biting… And then I’m more grateful.”

Haya shrugged. “This is why I miss living where the air hurts my face.”

“You were stationed up north?” Shaxx asked, rather bemused by the banter of the two Titans. It was nothing he hasn’t seen before, but seeing restraint in a Titan was a first.

“During my blunder years, yeah.” But, the subject was changed before she even answered the question. “Anyway, like it or not Shaxx, you’ve been adopted by this friend group.”

“Very well.” He said, reluctantly accepting his fate. “How about the things you stole from me?”

“Stole?” Haya scoffed with a smirk. “We only took one gun. Knew that trying to figure out what we’re doing and what we stole would drive you insane. It’s Sun goddamn Tzu.” She ignored the raised eyebrow on Kouhei’s face.

Many questions were swirling in his head, and he picked one at random. “Placing the blame on the Hunter was an interesting choice.”

“Because he stole the gun.”

“I can appreciate the honesty, at the very least.”

“Have no reason to lie now.”

The door slowly opened, but she didn’t worry as there were only two Ghosts and two Guardians who could unlock the door. She didn’t want him to see her like this. “Hey…” Shaxx cupped her freezing cold face with one of his hands, gently turning it.
“Hello, mister.” Tirion said, weakly, dim green glow in her eyes. “I have nothing flirtatious to say. I think I might be dying.”

He shook his head as he stood up straight, the hand leaving her face. “Tirion…” He muttered angrily.

“What?” She eyed him and found him peeling off his armor.

“You’ve stood in front of a Hive god and spat in his eyes. This should be nothing for you.”

Once he finished taking the hard parts of his armor off, he joined her on the bed. Gently, he pulled her shivering body to his until she was on top of him, and tightly wrapped his arms around her.

After a period of suspicious silence, Tirion looked up to see his contemplative face. “You look confused. You never look confused.”

“Haya initiated me into the ‘friend group’. Gave my Ghost access to the den.”

“I see. Are you confused because you haven’t had any friends besides me the past couple of years?”

“No. I’m confused because I’m trying to figure out what they’re up to, and I hope that you can help me.”

“The den is sacred and I trust her. If she gave you access to it then it means there is no mischief behind it.” She tried to convince him the truth, knowing how he works. “They already proved their worth in the Crucible, didn’t they? What do they have to gain?”

“I don’t know. But from what I’ve seen, the difference between them and beneficence to outsiders is rather vast.”

“We take care of each other, at least. In our own ways. Try checking Saladin’s decorations for explosives before he lights the fires, maybe?” She joked, feeling rational thought slowly return to her. “Wait, what were you doing talking to Haya?”

“Damn it…” He whispered, hand reaching out to rub the bridge of his nose. “Something about mulled wine. Got held up with damned forensic inquires because Zavala wants to ban weapons.”

“Ha! I’ve got it!” Ghost interrupted, and blue sparkles appeared on the nightstand until it took the shape of a bottle. “Just so you know, I had to hide anything that can insulate heat in order for her to let me do this.”

“Where did you put all of it?” Ghost averted his eye. “Little Light…”

“I have to go.” He blinked out of the room in a hurry.

“What’s with the wine?” The bottle was warm to the touch, and smelled like the Dawning from another timeline, a cozy smell. Sugary candlelight, almost. “Never seen this before.”

“Haya spent a lot of time up north during her blunder years. She learned it from some locals who survived the Collapse. It has been our miracle cure.”

“Looks like we’re going to need some glasses.” Tirion was about to lie down, grateful for the help and that he finally concluded that the drink wasn’t poison. Two strong arms picked her up and lifted her from the bed effortlessly. “Come on.”
“Hey!” She complained, despite finding it more comfortable than she should, frowning when he laid her down on the couch in the living room.

“Not in the bed.” He quickly kissed her and left to retrieve the wine.

Chapter End Notes

Just fluff for no reason.

Made some photomanips of some of the crew over at the blog!
http://crystal-lina.tumblr.com/
My Friend

For a little while, the sounds of children laughing was something thought to be lost after the war. Yet despite everything, there they were as if the war hadn’t happened. For a moment, anyway. Bolting through the streets of the City still in shambles, with their toy weapons and smiles early in the morning. Children re-enacting Guardian deeds will never cease making Tirion uncomfortable, but she knew it all came from a good place. She wasn’t going to take away one of the few things that makes them smile. Her job as a Guardian was to *keep* them smiling.

Guardians, however, expressed their concern and contentment with the world around them in other ways.

Tirion cried out in pain as someone hit her shoulder with their fist, interrupting the peaceful morning. “What was that for?”

“Did you *fall off*?” Haya demanded to know.

“What?”

“You know what I mean!”

“No!” Tirion rubbed her shoulder, which was on the verge of getting dislocated. Just as the bullet wounds were almost fully healed, stars aligned in a way that prevented it to heal.

“Then what the hell was the mulled wine bullshit?” Haya took a seat next to Tirion at the bench, glaring angrily at the confused Warlock.

“I was *sick*!” Tirion explained herself, almost throwing her arms into the air. “Actually sick. I caught a cold. The wine thing was out of my control.”

“Well, *clarify* it next time!” Haya huffed, crossing her arms. “If you fall off, I’m *definitely* killing you.”

“The wine was good, by the way. Thanks for being my very-older-younger-sister.” Despite Tirion’s joking tone, she was serious.

“Oh, *now* I’m definitely killing you at the first chance I get.” Haya rolled her eyes, and started to watch the kids playing in the distance instead. Tirion didn’t know if Haya was struggling to not crack a smile at the sight, or struggling to come up with words because she wanted to talk about something. Or perhaps she was trying to prevent herself from standing up and telling them that they’re re-enacting the battle *completely* wrong.

Tirion decided to guess. “Speaking of killing people, how did it go with Osiris after I left?”

“*Bad*.”

“Bad?”

“It went *bad*. Do you think I’m self-absorbed?” Haya let her habit to change subjects when things become uncomfortable take over the situation.

“Why are you hung up on what he said?” Tirion shook her head. Any other time Tirion would laugh at the question. Osiris’ presence made them question a lot of things.
“I… I don’t understand what he meant. I figured that you’ve been to a couple of those damn ‘we need to make sure you won’t snap and kill some people because of the things you’ve seen in the damn Darkness’ meetings.”

“Do you really want an honest answer?”

Haya thought about it for a moment. “Technically I’m no longer allowed to destroy things around the Tower and the City without getting exiled. Hit me.”

“I’m not saying that he was right, but… You want closure. Addiction to the need to look back on things without feeling sad or wronged or embarrassed is what seeking closure is.” Tirion said. “Even with all your rants about Asher. Getting closure scratches that itch. It’s a sign that you don’t understand how life works. You can’t control any of it. You certainly don’t deserve any of it.” Tirion’s words came out harsher than she intended, but the Titan didn’t seem to mind.

“Elaborate on that last part.”

“I don’t think anyone actually deserves anything in life. Good or bad things.”

Haya sighed. “I still don’t understand.”

Neither did Tirion, but things were slowly starting to make sense in her head.

“Alright. Look at it this way. A broken gun. Some gun from Banshee’s reject pile. Does the gun deserve to get repaired and restored to almost pristine condition and full power so it can shoot again?”

“It’s… it’s a gun.”

“What makes the rest of things crawling around here so different from that gun? You’ve said it yourself, the big ball didn’t do a background check.”

“Guess that makes sense.” Haya mumbled. “You know, I look up to our little Exo. I’ve never seen her actually angry. Annoyed, yeah, but not vengeful. I wish I had that. Anger is all I damn know. Once an addict always an addict, I guess.”

“I’m pretty sure she looks up to you in more ways than one. Don’t fail her.”

Haya scoffed. “What is there to look up to? Someone who won all of her battles due to cowardice, and somehow became a decorated Sunbreaker because of it, since the Sunbreakers are dead?”

“You’re strong. You care. Anyone wants to hurt you and they find themselves regretting all of their life choices.”

“That’s just being a Titan.”

“Take the praise.”

Haya clenched her teeth to stop herself from arguing, and continued with her previous point.

“After we yelled at each other for a while, Osiris asked me why I’m really here. I told him again that I didn’t want him to take away my sense of belonging.” She paused for a second, as if about to admit something painful. “Look, I’ve been alive for longer than I should. Longer than most. I’m technically younger than you so… shut up. There is no reason I should be still alive, considering the shit you keep bringing.”
“You love it.”

“But this whole family thing we have going on is the closest I’ve felt to a home. After the Warlords, the Sunbreakers… Home.” She flashed a smile, relaxing on the bench. “Even with Kouhei. He is an unthinking, frustrating, by-the-book, everything-is-black-and-white ass, but he’s still part of our team.”

“None of us are perfect.”

The young boy who was running at full speed came to a screeching halt once he reached the two women, wide eyes focused on the Titan in astonishment for a while.

“What is this…?” Haya whispered, slowly looking over to Tirion. “What is happening?”

“Why do you look like that?” The boy asked the Titan.

“Why do YOU look like that?” Haya retaliated, eyeing the dirt on his face.

“Haya…”

“What?”

“Behave.” Tirion ordered.

“No!”

The boy turned his gaze to Tirion. “You are… blue.”

“I am.” Tirion said, awkwardly.

“My dad says that if you oversleep for school you become an Awoken.”

Ignoring Haya’s loud snort at the statement, Tirion continued talking to the child. “There is nothing wrong with being an Awoken.”

“I like Zavala. My dad does too. That funny Exo tells me to not trust the Awoken, though. That they’re weird.”

“People’s behavior isn’t bound to what they are and how they look like. Cayde, case in point.”

The boy frowned deeply when he looked over at Haya again. “Your friend looks scary and speaks scary.”

“I don’t ‘speak scary’.” She muttered, as the boy walked closer to her, trying to get a better look. Haya didn’t realize that he was more curious and fascinated than disgusted.

“What happened to your eyes? They look weird.”

Haya said nothing, averting her gaze. The boy wasn’t going to go away, and Warlocks were notorious for talking. So, Tirion talked.

“Well. When people are scared, they make mistakes. At the time, they might not seem like mistakes.” Tirion said. “When you’re scared your head goes into survival mode. It makes you adapt to things that may not necessarily be okay or acceptable, but it will get you through the day. Until you’re free.”
“I was scared once. During the attack. Dad and I hid between dead Cabal for hours.”

“And you haven’t been scared since?”

“I have to be not scared.”

“You don’t.”

“Guardians are never scared. I want to be like you.”

Both Guardians knew that the world that the boy was thinking of couldn’t be found anywhere, not even in the Infinite Forest. “I’m going to let you into a little secret. Guardians also get scared. We feel mostly the same things you do.”

“Mostly?”

“The resurrections get to us after a while.”

“Well, Dad says you can’t fight if you’re scared.”

“It’s hard to find a reason to fight if you’re not scared.”

“That makes no sense!”

“Fear will destroy you if you don’t utilize it properly. Fear of what happens if we don’t fight is what keeps us going. Remember that.”

“That’s the sixth time you’ve stared at that statue for too long.” Ghost broke Tirion out of her strange trance.

“Don’t they look familiar to you?” She pointed at the statue.

“The what?” Ghost flew closer to the Vex structure, suddenly realizing. “Wait, didn’t we kill these guys in the Black Garden?”

“Yeah.”

“Normally I’d be nostalgic… but there is nothing about this planet that I really like. I’d rather be in the Iron Banner. Less stressful that way.”

“I’d rather not.” Tirion shuddered as they made their way to the Lighthouse with their loot.

“Shaxx sounded pretty horrified at the idea of you participating in there.”

“Well. Not my clowns, not my circus.”

Against Haya’s wishes, Tirion toyed with the lost prophecies of Osiris, provided to her by Brother Vance. The followers have been more than kind, letting her use their library and their desks and chairs. Refusing to provide answers or give any insight about the prophecies, besides their usual fanatic drivel. The verses predicted the Hive and the Red Legion, and other things she couldn’t piece together quite yet. None of them had been unlocked to achieve their true potential. Infusing them with her Light didn’t work, but as they were associated with time traveling, Tirion deduced that she needed Vex tech. Tech from the Forest that help Vex Minds interface with it, last vestiges of a long-lost Vex past. Perhaps this is how Osiris lost his mind.
There was no way that Osiris simply foresaw it all by himself. Perhaps he was shown a future, or traveled to one. He didn’t make it up. She was sure of it. Somehow, with all his power, he never saw her.

The one anomaly in his life.

Tirion had to be careful when handling the tech, not knowing what failure might lead to, or what the breaking point was. Acid burns weren’t a priority. Unlikely, but as a rule they should always be expected.

To her surprise after some fiddling, few of the small tablets lit up, light glowing through the symbols on it. Not enough. She picked one of them up to examine it, perhaps it needed more Light? It was almost if it was trying to escape from her fingers, beckoning her to follow. She walked through the Lighthouse, until the tablet stopped vibrating gently when she reached a strange machine connected to the stone wall.

“Strange…” Ghost said, scanning the weird device. “Be careful. It’s like parts of this machine shouldn’t exist yet.”

That’s what everything had in common.

Before Ghost could warn her, she threw the tablet into the arc pulses that were dancing in the middle of the machine. It started moving, attracting the attention of everyone around her. The dance of the arc energy became more and more violent, until it became blinding and she had to cover her eyes.

When the light show died down, she found a weapon in front of her. If there was a sign that she should just run away and never return, this was the one. Guardians weren’t known to heed such warnings.

“This weapon keeps coming back and back to haunt me…” Tirion whispered angrily as she stroked the cold surface. It was copper this time around. Before this it was green, a gift from Praedyth. Before that it was yellow, a gift from a helping hand of a stranger. She laughed the first time the weapon came back to her, but found no humor in the second time.

Three weapons to one. It was almost funny.

“Time traveling weapons. Where have we seen that before?” Ghost sighed. “And why is it always under mysterious circumstances? Why can’t someone just sell you a gun for a change?”

“It keeps things interesting.” She looked down the blue sights of the rifle. “And annoying.”

“What do you think happened to her? I hope she’s okay. If it weren’t for her we would have had a much harder time shutting down the Garden. We would have never found out about it.”

It was a good question. “Maybe she was… is… will be a follower of Osiris, and dissented? Will dissent? I don’t know. I don’t think I get paid enough to handle things outside of the present.”

“She wasn’t a Guardian.”

“No, she was not forged in Light…” Tirion imitated the accent of the Exo. “At this point I’m willing to accept that she was a hallucination, some kind of physical manifestation of my memories and rational thought that guided me?”

“After all we’ve been through, that actually makes sense!”
“Does it?”

“Not really.”

“I just want something to make sense. For once.” She walked over to where she had the rest of the glowing tablets. “What kind of ancient treasures will the rest of these dig up, I wonder?”

“And you rebuked me for jinxing things.” Ghost said. “Great. Now we’ll probably bring back Crota.”

“Don’t joke about that.”

The Iron Banner has returned, much to the dismay of half of the Tower. The Guardians hated it, but after the match, all of them had learned something that will help them fight the Darkness. The grueling test of the Light, the test that breaks the best both in the Crucible and outside of it. The silent contest of dominance between two Titans made the smoke from the fires around one of them pleasant. Only thing that was worse than a war was a silent passive-aggressive feud.

One that has went on for too long.

One that could be heard all the way down to the den of the misfits. Tirion was on Mercury, Kouhei and Lorcan were in the Banner, the Exos were off doing their own things. It all left one bored Titan behind. Haya was never a fan of the Banner, too much stuff. Usual Crucible was perfect for bashing heads in, but the Banner had too much stuff. She could never find a good word for it. Too much pompousness perhaps? Too many lies told about the Iron Lords? Maybe it was the abundance of worship for a group Guardians who wouldn’t recognize themselves if the tales about them manifested into a real thing.

The Iron Lords were just as bad as the Warlords. Unlike some, Haya remembered. The Warlords were just far less pretentious about it. Doing bad things in the name of the Light does not automatically make them good things. Killing people in the name of holier-than-thou does not make someone a hero.

Maybe that was it. She never claimed that she was better, though.

“I could help with pissing him off. Because you two are pissing me off.”

Shaxx rolled his eyes at Haya’s sudden suggestion, already used to her sneaking up on him. It wasn’t uncommon for Guardians to approach him for Crucible related inquiries, but very few dared to talk to him during the Banner.

“Hardly any of your business, and it’s not needed.”

“Well, Tirion faced Ghaul all by herself, yet coughed nervously and ran off back to Mercury when she saw Saladin.” Haya crossed her arms. “Something must be done about this Guardian pissing contest.”

The woman wasn’t going to budge. Despite some of her inappropriate behavior and questionable methods, she always yielded good results. And, she wanted to be his friend. Whatever that meant.

“It’s far from that.”

“He called you shy.” Haya continued to poke Shaxx, and he sighed in defeat through gritted teeth at the childishness.
“I have more important things to attend to, but… against my better judgment, what do you have in mind?”

“I was a Warlord before I was a Sunbreaker.” Haya could sense his angry glare through the helmet. “I withheld the truth because you don’t openly brag about it! Saladin’s old and doesn’t remember me. But if I go into the Banner, impress him, then reveal my dark and sinister past to him…”

“Out of the question.” Shaxx immediately brushed her off, returning to the troubling Redjack reports.

Haya groaned. “Why?”

“Because the words total annihilation come to mind. On the other hand, it’s outside of my jurisdiction to prohibit you, and I’ll never have a problem with mindless explosions. In the Crucible.” He glanced up, seeing Saladin return to his station behind the burning Iron Banner sign. “Take that as you will, Titan.”

“Titan?” Haya raised an eyebrow. “Really?”

“I still don’t know what you are up to, but I’m going to find out. No first name basis until then.”

“Do you really think that Guardians who have been alive longer than they should bother with plans instead of seeking whatever-the-hell thrill they can?”

“I know that you don’t need an answer to that question.”

“Nope!”

“I’m surprised that you don’t want vengeance.”

Shaxx’s words came as a surprise. She has heard the stories of the war she overslept. “Don’t you?”

“Do I look like I care? I earned my name at the battle that he is so furious about.” Shaxx said. “He’s the one still maintaining the war. There are more important battles to be fought now.”

“And you judge me for missing the war.” Haya joked. “I don’t look fondly back on the Warlords. But I know that a lot of them would have made excellent Guardians if Saladin would have given them a chance. It’s not vengeance just… a letdown, I guess.”

“Chance was given. It wasn’t taken. Unfortunate, but that’s how it went.”

“Chance.” She emphasized on his words. “I was there. It was a singular chance. Ghosts were crushed.”

“I never once claimed that there was anything excusable about the Dark Age. Best we can do is move forward.”

“And leave less Guardians dead in our wake, eh?”

“That’s one of the few things we can agree on.” With that, Shaxx returned to his reports, in lieu of Crucible matches to oversee. Haya had already left without saying goodbye, as she found something to do. She was going to mess with Saladin whether Shaxx liked it or not, but she owed him at least a warning. He was part of their weird family now.

Nothing could stop a determined Titan, besides a Guardian that could kill gods. One single text transmission stopped her in the middle of the courtyard.
“What took you so long?” Tirion shouted the second she saw Haya’s almost glowing head.

“Had to piss of Saladin. Haven’t seen a Titan that quiet since after the Gap.” Haya knew that the excuse wouldn’t work. “What’s up?”

“That signal I told you about? It’s old Vanguard code.” Something told her that at the back of her head, Tirion knew exactly what it was. The denial was just a way to protect herself. It wasn’t fair to Haya, but the Titan was smarter than she’d like to admit. “I won’t go to the Forest alone.”

“Could it be…?” Haya swallowed hard.

“I don’t know. But it’s worth checking out.”

Haya instantly drew her gun and made her way to the gate, focusing on the sounds of Cabal and the Vex slaughtering each other to drown out the pandemonium in her head. She didn’t want to feel hope. She didn’t want to feel defeat or make quips about how she wants Osiris to see his handiwork. Both roads would hurt too much. Not picking a road and standing still was more damaging in the long run, but she took it all in stride. It was a Titan’s duty to stand still and absorb the damage, to throw their bodies at danger so that others won’t have to. Usually, it’s so others won’t have to.

“I don’t think there is a way to enter the Forest without Osiris knowing.” Ghost said. “He kind of lives there. I can block him from the channels, if you want.”

“Do what you want. We reached an agreement and he knows about it.” Haya growled. “If he takes one more person away from me, I’ll smear the walls with Sagira.”

The walk to the pillar which Ghost was leading them to had nothing to shoot, just deafening silence. The Forest was as hollow as the Vex. No sounds of birds singing, or wind. No soothing daylight or the biting cold of night. Hard footsteps against the stone as they ran was the only thing that helped. They couldn’t outrun the sunrise, a friend once told Haya that.

A friend who wasn’t there anymore.

“I’m detecting traces of familiar Light up here. Wait… Saint-14?”

“Don’t.” Haya stopped Ghost, and both Guardians traversed through the gate to find the same view they left behind, the simulant present.

“Get me to that conflux. That’s where the signal is coming from.” Ghost ordered, his voice becoming heavier as it dawned on him. Every conflux they scanned felt like a loss. It was the one puzzle none of them wanted to solve, the one victory they didn’t want to achieve. The one mystery that should be left behind because living in denial and absence has become too sweet.

An explosion of Light pushed them away when Ghost unlocked the final conflux. A rift of Light, something created to build hope somehow shattered their resolve.

The Vex gave them a final distraction by coming out in droves to their deaths, and withdrew just before it was enough. Continuing their endless game with the Guardians.

“Saint…” Haya whispered through ragged breaths when the final Vex fell with a pained screech. “I recognize it. He created this rift with his Light. That means… I…” She threw her empty gun on the
ground, shattering it. Hands searching for something to *fiddle* with; first her face to rub her eyes then the sidearm to reload it, then holstering the gun to run a hand through her hair. Face steely cold all the way through. “I don’t know *what* to think!”

“If Saint-14 has been lost all this time, do you think he’s okay?” Ghost asked, unsure on how to calm her down. Tirion usually likes to talk about *anything*. With Haya, there was a chance of something getting *melted*.

“Nothing* could ever stop him! If he was left for dead here, he probably got pissed and willed himself to live, and then walked out to get his City back.” Haya struggled the words out. If he created the rift, that meant that he was *alive*. That she’ll finally see her friend again. That’s what her sense of reason kept telling her but that’s also what the Vex *wanted* her to think. She leaves these thoughts to Tirion for a very good reason. His return to the City will be huge. If the *stories* alone about him inspire the Guardians, his presence will have an impact like no other.

Regardless of his status, they were now stranded. Infinite realities to explore to find him, no one had that much time or that many arrogant reflections of himself. Haya knew that Osiris wasn’t even trying. Only way to be that clueless is complete apathy. Maybe he as well was in denial, but she’ll never admit that to herself.

Something was sparkling in the sand, attracting Tirion’s attention. A small cube, another lost prophecy. She carefully picked it up and unfolded it.

“*A tale that's different from the rest: the thread unfurls against the clocks. The one the Speaker loved the best must have a perfect paradox*?” Tirion read. “We need to charge this.”

“Charge?” Haya asked.

“I’ll explain when we get back to the Lighthouse.” She sprang up to her feet and heeded the warning of the verse, running to the gate.

“Tirion, wait!”

“What?”

“Help…” The plea was the only thing Haya could get out.

“Try looking for Vex artifacts, anything that helps Vex Minds interface with the Forest.” Tirion said. “It’ll keep you busy until we get to the Lighthouse.”

“What now?”

“I need to work on this for a minute.” Tirion answered Haya’s question. “Building something out of Vex scraps, Light and sheer will takes *time,*”

“Hang in there…” The Titan whispered, still not sitting down. The sound of a hand cannon getting smashed repeatedly against a desk relaxed her for a moment, and the shocked faces of the cultists were amusing enough. The Warlock handed her the broken gun; a bullet lodged into it the wrong way on purpose. Tirion twirled the gun so that the handle of it was aimed at Haya.

“There are screwdrivers in the cabinet over there.”

Haya grabbed the gun and went on a search for the tools, allowing Tirion to relax for a little while as she worked.
“How are you holding up, Guardian?” Ghost asked. “You haven’t said much.”

“I’m not sure how I’m holding up.” Tirion whispered. “Usually I’m the one on the verge of a mental breakdown.”

“We’ll find him.”

“Will we? A Guardian’s survival rate is measured by how little they care. Any Guardian that has brought any kind of good into this world has died. With the Vex… anything is possible.”

How do you fight something that has an infinite arsenal? She understood why Haya hated the silence as for every second that passed her work became more and more reckless. She couldn’t break this one. She won’t allow herself to do so.

“I don’t think I ever told you this, but Saint-14 was one of the first Guardians I ever met. Even before I met you.” Ghost told, noticing the distress. “I always hoped you would turn out like him. I wasn’t disappointed.”

“What was he like?”

“Just like the stories describe him.” Ghost paused for a second, finding something that hasn’t been told before about him. “He was a good friend.”

Has there been a Guardian that was more beloved than him? She didn’t understand how she even came close to his status. Nonetheless, it motivated her. Calmed her down just enough so that her work would be precise and no more resources would get wasted.

As if triggered by Ghost’s words, the tablet slightly lit up. Not enough just yet to forge something, but enough for a signal.

“Yes! I have a reading on Saint-14’s location!” Ghost’s burst echoed across the Lighthouse and Haya was next to them in an instant. “Hold on, we’re coming for you.”

Guardians were good at hoping.

Whether it was that they would stick the landing in a dark cave, throw a perfect grenade, or praying that the Hive will look the other way so they can escape, they were damn good at hoping. Lots of times Glimmer was involved in it but it hardly negated the point. Even when everything was turned against them, no Guardian simply gave in.

They fought for their beliefs until their Light was no more.

That’s what made a Guardian a Guardian.

As they were running towards something that was decided for them and their City untold centuries ago, they still hoped. Hoped that they could outrun time being rigged against them. The dark future was a place that shouldn’t exist. It was a place of pain with no screams, just red eyes and the Vex growing from the darkness.

The Vex were protective. What they were trying to protect wasn’t theirs to do so. Everything burned, everything could melt. Including the Mind that didn’t want them to proceed. Were the Vex protecting what was behind the door, or protecting them from the pain? Perhaps they took pity on the Guardians.

Maybe that was giving the Vex too much credit.
Stone grated against stone as the old door in front of them slowly opened, like a pupil of an eye in the darkest of rooms.

“What happened?” Ghost gasped as he followed the Guardians dragging their feet through the sea of metal corpses. “Vex. Thousands of them.”

It is said that the Vex have no hope. No imagination. No aspirations. No beauty, or a concept of it. Their unblinking red eyes and their cold ruthless march plagued hearts of all with hopelessness as they reduced the world to its simplest form.

Prove yourself to be interesting, and they will assimilate you and claim you as their own. Challenge them and prove yourself to be a warrior of note, and they will grant you a beautiful gift.

They had a sense of imagination, they always have.

“Saint-14’s Light… it’s gone.” Ghost whispered, the lone blue eye falling towards the ground.

A sharp anguished cry pierced the cave. Haya knew that the next one would make her collapse, and used the last of her resilience to carry on while holding her breath. She will hold off giving the Vex what they want for as long as she can. Saint was floating on the memorial they built for him, endless orbs of Light emerging from the ground on a journey to the darkest of skies. All roads lead them to that sky.

Haya gently laid down a shaking hand on Saint’s chest, thumb wiping away some of the moss that built up on his armor, revealing the familiar numerals that were underneath.

“Please…” She sobbed. “Don’t do this to me.”

She fell to her knees, one of her hands held on to Saint’s arm. Tears staining the purple ribbons of his she buried her face in.

Did anything matter anymore? She couldn’t distinguish anything from the dark future around her and what was inside her.

A fatal blow to the most beloved of all was a fatal blow to every single Guardian.

They weren’t immortal. They weren’t strong.

They were immortal and strong just because the Vex allowed them to believe it. The belief made them strong.

But she didn’t care about that. No one did. She would gladly sacrifice that immortality and strength for her friend.

There was no such deal to bring him back. The Guardians already lost their Light once and it wasn’t enough. It wasn’t supposed to happen like that. She tried to yell it all out, only finding wails escaping her throat.

“Come back…”

Haya found no pleasure in being right; that the only thing that could defeat him was time and space being bent against him, he was just that stubborn, indestructible, and only ever used that for good and the City. She found no relief that he wasn’t being tortured, or worse.

She found nothing.
The Vex learned to respect him, took the time to lay him to rest and build him a memorial. Others got assimilated, cut away from reality. Became lone voices in fragmented pieces that warned the others. This was another warning, but the Vex didn’t let their victim speak this time.

Tirion sat down on the stairs right behind her. Far away enough so that Haya could grieve in peace, yet close enough in case she was needed. Only then she noticed that she’s been holding her breath, finally letting out a shaky one as the first tears of her own fell.

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Tirion might as well be carrying a bomb to the Tower.

She won’t be able to keep up appearances and there was so much farther still to go. Making sure that Haya was safe was a priority, and the only thing she felt like doing afterwards was to crash her ship somewhere and never return. It was foolish to drop all responsibility, but she’d rather disappear than have a panicking City as Guardians start to lose it one by one as the news break out.

No reason or strength to be strong for hundreds of people, it was easier to just not be there. Anywhere.

They will all grieve in their own ways. From silent mourning to rebellions. Attempts to exploit it, and then there will be anger towards the exploiters. Guardians will tear themselves apart over the only thing that could prevent it. Then, there were the normal people. The ones they are sworn to protect. The ones that will be forgotten in the ensuing feuds.

Helmets were on as they landed at the Hangar, and she cursed her easily recognizable ship. Maybe they should have stayed in the Forest, as the concerned looks were already burning into the two Guardians that barely could walk through the Tower, and then down to their den. Rumors were already going around.

“Heya, Haya!” Lorcan said, regretting his words when he saw her face for a brief moment as she rushed past him. She shut the flimsy door to her room with almost enough force to break it, and the silence came back to suffocate them all.

“What happened?” Lorcan hesitated to ask the question as he looked back and forth from the smoldering door to Tirion and her drooped face. “What… what did you find?”

“I…”

“Tirion… What happened to her?”

“Saint is dead. We found him.” The tears swelling up in her eyes didn’t allow her to soften the blow, only tell the truth. "We found him deep in the Forest, in this memorial the Vex built for him, locked away."

The tools that the Hunter was holding slipped from his fingers. “…What?”

“The Vex… they drained his Light. I don’t know how but…” Tirion’s thick voice faltered. “I don’t know.”

Lorcan fell back to the couch, unblinking and unmoving.

“What?” He asked, staring off into the distance, right through the walls.

“I need to go back to Mercury to find out. I need you to stay with her.” The verse. The prophecy in
her pocket got fully charged when they found Saint. She needed to go back. Alone this time, with the temptation to never return home this time around. “Please.”

“I’ll stay with her.” He forced himself to nod, and returned to his turmoil. “Why?”

Tirion had no good answer. Not even a lie to satisfy him for a moment, she only followed where her legs led her to. People demanded answers as she made her way back to the Hangar, not able to feign anything. She saw some people running to Zavala as she refused to speak, and even Cayde had his own group gathering around him. Tirion got in her ship just before Cayde could catch up to her. She’ll tell the Vanguard when she’s ready. If she’ll ever be ready.

She should have just stayed in the damn Forest.

“Guardian…” Ghost said once they were in the ship.

“I…” She tapped frantically on the console to set the destination. “I don’t know.”

“We’re… we’re going to need to talk to those people, explain to them.” Lamented Ghost.

“I don’t know what to tell them.”

“Do you plan to go back?”

“I don’t know…” She repeated, and her ship set off in motion, heading straight towards Mercury. She should just run towards the Forest immediately.

“I’m going to really need you to try.”

“I don’t know!” Tirion cried out with enough force to cause her little companion to fly back until he hit a wall. “Alright!? I don’t know! We just lost the best Guardian that has been resurrected by the Traveler. We lost the best. We… we lost the kindest. We are not immortal and we’re at the mercy of the Vex! What am I supposed to tell them?!”

“Guardian…”

“You want me to plant false hope into those people? You want me to sing, and lull them into a false sense of security?”

“I don’t.” Ghost said. “I want you to breathe, Guardian.”

They sat in silence as they approached the planet and then on the trek to the Forge. The final tablet. Truth be told, she just wanted to get rid of it. To wash her hands off it. Become some nameless, numb tool to be used by the Vanguard and not a symbol of hope.

What chance or hope does she have if Saint didn’t?

She wanted to turn around and leave it all behind when the arc pulses started to dance again, but not one inch of her muscles wanted to heed. So, she just stood there and waited, watching just one more thing she couldn’t control unfold right infront of her eyes.

A shotgun made of shiny metal, with spikes like on Saint’s armor. Tirion held her breath as she read the number on it, written in orange paint.

“Don’t look at me…” Ghost said, as surprised as she was. “I… I don’t know either.”

“There is a message here I think…” She mumbled, picking up the shotgun and pulling out a piece
of paper tucked in a nook. Why this, why now. “He says that he never found Osiris, but killed enough Vex to end a war. They retaliated by creating a Mind with the sole function to drain his Light.”

“How?”

“He tells that it was keyed to the unique frequency of his Light.” She let her legs give in and sat down on the cold stone next to the Forge. “Don’t worry, not that you worry much. Who is he talking to?”

It was addressed to someone, with no name of the recipient. She flipped the note a couple of times in hopes of finding something, but nothing presented itself.

“Keep going. I want to hear what it says.”

“He mourns that he will never reach the heights this person has…” Tirion sighed. “To me, you represent everything a Guardian can become.”

“Many people didn’t believe his claims about a Guardian savior coming,” Ghost said. "They still followed him, though."

"All I have left is this weapon. The Cryptarchs say you crafted it yourself, built it out of scraps and Light and sheer will, inside the Infinite Forge.” She read, hugging the gun closer. “… I’ll make sure it finds its way back to you. When you gave it to me, I swore I would make it my duty to follow your example I’m still trying.”

She let the shotgun and the note rest in her lap as her hands returned to her face to wipe away the weariness and the tears.

Why him?

Why her?

A perfect paradox, against an army that couldn’t be defeated.

What kind of twisted force decided all of this?

The Lighthouse was anything but private. Holstering the gun, she set off into the fields with the infinite possibilities of ways to get lost.

Like an ant amongst Hive thralls she traversed through the Tower. Past the whispers and the demands to know what’s going on. Past what her mind tuned out. All roads led to home.

“What’s going on out there? People are making it sound like all hell has broken loose.” Shaxx pulled her by the hand to take her someplace else, away from everyone demanding her attention. He lifted her hanging face up with one finger. “Talk to me.”

“I… Well.” She cleared her throat. “We found Saint-14. He’s… dead.” Her thick voice was monotone, more emotionless than bored.

Shaxx’s reaction was a silent one. He had a hunch, of course. Greatest Titan who has ever lived simply doesn’t just take time off. But hearing the confirmation was a different thing. It made it real. Questions filled his mind. What it meant for the Guardians, how could it be prevented…

“How did it happen?”
It was already a question she was tired of answering. “Vex drained his Light. Haya is… she’s completely gone.”

“And you?”

“I’m scared. I’m done. The Vex can get rid of us, just like that. Make them angry enough and… I don’t know what to believe now. It’s not fair.”

None of it mattered either, as he wrapped his arms around her and hugged her close. The people could stare if they wanted. The others knew that a word about it meant cleaning the arenas and pulling out bullets from the walls with their teeth. They could step into the Crucible if they so wished.

“I don’t know what to do.” She whispered into his chestplate. “I don’t. I don’t know.” His strong hold tightened, and they stood there for a while, amidst all the chaos.

“You don’t have to know.” He loosened his grip, and reached up a gloved hand to wipe a tear from her face.

“They want me to know.”

“Yeah, well. Screw them.” He growled. “They’ll be fine.”

“I need to go and check up on my team.” She sighed out. “Saint died a hero, but he also died alone. Can’t let that happen to more people.”

Haya was deep asleep when Tirion checked up on her, for the best. Alva assured her that it was natural and nothing to worry about, the Exo hard at work to keep Haya away from anything suspicious.

“How is she holding up?” Asked Lorcan, bags under his eyes made blinking a chore for him. “Who’s with her?”

“As well as you’d expect, but asleep. Alva is looking after her now.” She looked over to the assortment of grey and white fabrics on the table infront of him. “What are you doing?”

“I’m uh… I’m making Ghost toys. For the kids.” He said, tossing one of the finished ones up to catch it again, finding it difficult to be satisfied with his work. “Something to protect them by. They’re scared, wondering why Guardians die. I figured if I make these and tell them that they’ll be safe if they don’t lose their Ghosts… I don’t know.”

“You’re worried that it might be disingenuous?”

“Partly.”

“Belief is a hell of a thing. If they hold on to these they might find strength inside them.”

“That would be one way to honor Saint.” The name was just above a pained whisper. “The belief that a Guardian of Guardians is coming kept him going no matter what.”

“There will be no better.”

The Hunter tried to continue with his work, flipping the fabric, trying to find the lines he drew. Frustrated and not being able to see the needle he was holding, he tossed it all aside. That wasn’t enough, as he swiped everything off the table.
“Why did it have to end like this?!” Lorcan sighed into his hands as he rubbed his eyes. “Him… of all people. Of all damn people.”

“Did you imagine it going any other way for Saint?”

“Yes, I did!” Lorcan suddenly shouted, standing up to his feet. “I imagined us finding him alive and him returning to the City. I didn’t imagine finding out that he died forgotten and alone!”

Tirion let him talk, the void energy around his fists calming down as he controlled his breathing. He sat back down on the couch, that vacant stare now aimed at the floor covered with the pieces of fabric.

“Saint didn’t deserve that.” He whispered. “I need to get out of here. I need to annihilate something. I need to send something to the damn void. I can’t sit here.”

“EDZ needs help, and it’s close. We could start there. If Haya needs something it would be a short flight home.”

They allowed themselves to forget while patrolling. By the time they were done the Psions and the Cabal were running from them in fear. Void and solar, both destructive forces. The biggest problem of EDZ now became Devrim running out of tea because of the free time due to the two Guardians finishing all of his chores.

Neither of them heard anything as they were out there. If it moved, it got shot. It worked.

“It’s nice to have a Guardian helping us normals for a change.” Hawthorne said, the first voice Tirion allowed past her barrier in hours.

“I’m sorry… what?”

“You all tried to make it so we never even laid eyes on a Dreg. To keep us safe, right?”

It’s been a long day. Tirion didn’t need this. Haya’s pained cries were still ringing in her ears, the red eyes staring back when she closed her own haunting her. She just wanted to go home. It was supposed to be a quick errand to hand her something from Devrim.

“Look, I…” She rubbed her eyes, trying to somehow wipe away the unwelcome frustration. “What’s your point, Hawthorne? What is your point?”

“All I’m saying is that there is another word for a place you’re not allowed to leave, you know, with walls you can’t see over, and guards everywhere.” Hawthorne explained, and Tirion’s jaw slowly dropped towards the floor. “The Farm could be the opposite of that. Come and go whenever you want.”

The Warlock was too exhausted to even roll her eyes at that.

“You left the City as a teenager, correct? To seek a new purpose and live in the wilds?” Tirion asked.

“Yeah, I did.”

“That takes courage, even I will admit it. But, you rebelled on your own accord, Hawthorne. Enough of the snide comments against us.” Tirion spat. “You don't get to choose to make your life harder intentionally, and then take it out on others. That’s not how it works.”
Tirion sighed in frustration before Hawthorne could respond. “These walls you’re talking about? Six Titans took it during the war. Six Titans against thousands of Fallen and the Titans died a thousand times. The wall held. We die over and over again so that you won’t have to.”

“So, what?” Hawthorne scoffed. “You seriously expect us to keep living in a police state, no real say in how the City is governed? Only alternative we have is fending for ourselves in the wilds.” Hawthorne retaliated.

“That’s an entirely different problem, and you know that. I like your Farm idea. I fully support a world that is completely your own and governed by yourself, but…” Tirion groaned in frustration. “Hooray for you, you can kill five Dregs with a rifle without dying. Talk to me again when you can board the Dreadnaught and live to tell the tale.” Shot Tirion.

“I—“

“That wasn’t permission. Talk to me again when you cry for hours over your best friend who sacrificed it all for a City he believed in, only to have the Vex build a Mind to drain the Light from him, leaving him in hell. You don’t have those problems. The strongest Guardian I know of has completely given up on life! If you are stronger than that, please prove it to me.”

“Guardian…” Ghost whispered, observing the still world around them as everyone in the Bazaar was staring at the scene she caused. “We should go home.”

“Only if she gets out of my home.” Tirion retorted, taking a step towards Hawthorne. “Take your damn bird, your snide ass and your friends, and get the hell out of my City!”

“All Titans know each other and those Titans are all dead.” Haya’s hoarse ramble caught Shaxx’s attention. “May we not punch down the trees that will make our coffins, and then sin as much as we are able.”

“… Because it’s the good ones who are dead.” Shaxx finished the old chant.

“Yeah… A Warlock wrote that, you know?” Everything he knew about the Sunbreaker was gone. The Vex had robbed her of her poise and polish, eyes almost as dark as they were in a time long forgot. She looked like a fresh recruit, entering the City for the first time.

“The end comes to us all, even Guardians.” His grip on the console was as hard as he could make it without breaking it, small cracks already formed on the screen. His low voice was glum, it already being too late to make it sound less like a broken record.

“That’s… that’s fucking nihilistic.”

He nodded. “Here I would say that all Guardians fall and the only thing that matters is what you do after that.”

“But one too many have fallen permanently for that speech to hold up. Saint amounted to a hundred Guardians.”

“Exactly.”

She didn’t want to curl her hands around the railing in front of her, at the risk that the cold of the metal would remind her too much of the cold of Saint’s armor. They left him there. No sense in
disturbing the dead, and moving them from their burial place. Maybe the next visit will be easier.

“The speech still holds up for you, Haya” He continued, and she glanced at him with her bloodshot eyes. “Stand up. Be the Guardian Saint and the Sunbreakers would be proud of.”

“Well… for the first one, that’s Tirion. It’s always been her.” She smiled sadly. “The Sunbreakers aren’t here anymore, who are they to judge?”

“Don’t let this be the end. We both know this part and this is where you come back.”

“You might be numb to it all, numb to losing great people, but I’ve retroactively lost everyone.” A tear rolled down her cheek. “I’ll lose this too. Tirion is about to lose it because she knows she’s fighting a war she can’t win. She loses it, and the City loses it because she's a damn hero. I lose it and I’m just another crazy Titan.”

Titans will never listen to Titans. It’s a general rule. The rule was proven as she started to walk away, mountains in her sight.

“Tirion…” He said into the microphone. “Haya needs your help.”

“Where is she?” The tired voice took its time to respond.

“In the courtyard.”

Running around the courtyard looking for the Titan caused more worry. She’ll give them a speech later. That, an earful to Saint when she inevitably meets him, for making her hold inspirational speeches. She found the Titan in one of the walkways below, looking at the mountains.

“Leave me alone, Tirionna.” Tirion, ignoring Haya’s request, sat down yellow railing next to the Titan. “Alright. You’re being annoying as hell.”

“I can’t let you be alone. Not after that. We need to stick together.”

“I saw the way you shut down Hawthorne when she was trying to start shit. Again.” Haya said. “If… Honestly, if I would have got to her before you I would have killed her. I didn’t kill Osiris. But I would have shot her right there. Fuck her. She’s like three weeks old.”

“What would Saint say about that?”

“He… he would have liked her.” Haya said. “I think he would have liked her clan idea. Not just for combat. A great City, groups of people helping people, helping each other. He tried so hard. Traveler knows, he’s still trying. He never fought out of anger or kicks, like most of us dumbass Titans. He fought out of love, out of love for the City.”

“I don’t understand how you two got along.”

Haya shrugged. “Me neither. He was a real fucking weirdo.”

“I’m sorry, Haya.”

“I hoped you could bring him back. Somehow.” Haya closed her eyes and tried to breathe. “I miss him so much. Your damn tales about singing away death don’t do anything. What the hell even is that? Do you seriously believe that?”

Haya was right. Tirion knew that the Titan was speaking in grief, but the words held truth. Haya was searching for a way to make people angry, so she’d get into a fight. Anger and adrenaline of
battle was the strongest force. But she didn’t realize that she was right.

The nightingales, its songs, the emperors. The tales written on a parchment long since lost to history. The mechanic birds that broke down. Perfect paradoxes of parallels between it all as if put there on purpose were meaningless.

There was no hope or power offered by it.

It was all absolutely meaningless. Stories for children.

“I… I had a little brother.” Tirion began. “Before all of this.”

“You never told me.”

“He had this disorder. Golden Age, the Traveler… nothing could help him. And… he died. Just like that. There was no reason for his death, nor a lesson to be gleamed from it.” She told. “It was simply a horrible thing that happens to a normal person for no particular reason. He liked storybooks. That Nightingale tale was his favorite. I hung on to it.”

Haya flinched at her earlier words. “Sorry… I didn’t know.”

“It’s okay.”

Haya took a deep breath and tried to smile. “There were times were I and Saint used to sit on top of the Wall, just around here. There were a lot of pigeons here.”

“What did you talk about?”

“Anything. Everything. A bright future, mostly. A thriving City. He was skilled at making people believe it. He could find a redeemable feature in anything, he found a redeemable feature in me.” Haya told. “He could make anyone follow him to hell and back without a second thought. Reminds me of someone I know.”

“We’ll make him proud.”

“You already made him proud. You got five people to kill gods.” Haya said. “I mean, we have had our scuffles. But, oh damn, when an ancient god or someone who wants to be a god comes along we’re all grouped up in a squad like the best damn Guardians ever known.”

“We’re good. The City isn’t good.” Tirion argued. “We’re far away from the City that Saint spoke of.”

“Well then, get your shit together!” Haya groaned. “For Saint. We owe him. If not him, for someone. You won’t be able to build a damn thriving City if the Guardian of Guardians spends all her damn energy moping.”

“You’ve been moping, too.”

“I’m allowed to mope, thank you very much.” Haya wiped a tear away. “All my friends are dead or dead to me.”

“Let’s hope it stops at being dead to you.”

“Yeah. Wait…” Haya suddenly looked over at the Warlock. “How do you know about the City Saint spoke about?”
Tirion climbed off the railing so she’d have a solid surface underneath her, and pulled out the shotgun from the holster strapped to her back, hearing Haya softly gasp at the sight. She didn’t want to flaunt it around, too many grabby hands and too many questions.

“This is what I needed to charge the tablet for,” Tirion explained. “It’s a long story. There is this thing they call The Infinite Forge in the Lighthouse, I still don’t really understand how it works.”

“He told me that a friend gave this gun to him...” Haya reached out to touch the gun, but her arm recoiled just before she her finger grazed it. “His inspiration.”

“You could have it, if you want. He was your friend.”

“No...” Haya shook her head. “It’s yours. It has always been yours.”

Tirion let the world decide what was going to happen to her next, and luckily, she fell on a soft couch, begging for the day to come to an end as she massaged her head. Every clang against the floor as Shaxx dropped his armor were sharp daggers in her head. She felt something strong grab hold of her, the arms around her pulled her to him until there was no space between them.

She laid there comfortably in his embrace, convinced that if he was still wearing his armor it wouldn’t take long until the frantic beat of his heart would knock it right off. His arms tightened around her, with no intention to let go, one hand gently stroking her back.

“Can we just fall asleep?” Tirion whispered. “Like the night before I set out to fight Oryx for the first time.”

He wordlessly kissed the top of her head, remembering that night.

“You’re still here...” Shaxx said, low voice barely recognizable.

“I’m still here.” She huddled closer to him. “Don’t go down the path where I’m not.”

“I don’t want to control what you do but promise me that you’ll never go into the Forest alone.”

“The Dreadnaught is fine, then?”

His deep, shaky, disapproving breath filled her with dread. “Why do you always do that? The jokes...”

“I’m not joking. I miss the Dreadnaught.” She whispered. “Oryx couldn’t take a Guardian. He was a threat but I didn’t have to live with the fear that I’ll be turned into a Taken looming over me.”

“Hey...” He moved her until he had her in a sitting position, looking right at her. “The Vex won’t get you.”

“They got Saint. They got Kabr. They got Praedyth.” Tirion listed. “They got many more Guardians that have been erased from time, and they’re in my head.”

“Don’t let them believe that they are capable of conquering you.”

“I’d rather convince myself that it isn’t a matter of time.”

“You’ve got an entire army behind you to make sure that it isn’t. You don’t need to be told that by anyone.”
She looked down for a moment. Maybe – just maybe – if she couldn’t help herself, she could help others. If they would be willing to listen.

“Stay away from the Forest, Shaxx.” Tirion warned, the glowing eyes drilling into his. “That includes you, and that includes the Crucible. I can’t lose you.”

“I’ll be fine.”

“I don’t trust that.” Tirion fell back into his hold, no longer being able to resist sleep. “Promise me that you will stay away. Promise me that you won’t get turned to stone…”
I've given all I can, but we're still on the payroll.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Lingering between Light and Dark, the world of sleep and the awake one. An indecisive mind searching for a purpose, and all it can find is a sea of red eyes. Tirion was trying to drown herself in sleep, but couldn’t stop herself from swimming up for air. She opened her eyes for the hundredth time with a soft sigh, warm arms around her still holding her close in the bed. Carefully, while knowing far too well that he was the heaviest sleeper she knew of, she slipped out of his grasp into the cold. Tirion sat still for a minute on the edge of the bed, eyes already adjusted to the dark.

What now? Where to go from there? A full night’s rest will find her only when she finds the answers.

Repeating the question in her head didn’t bring any answers. The silent room reminded her too much of the dead ambience of the Forest, getting out was the first step. Picking up her armour, she quickly got dressed and followed anything that made the slightest sound outside.

“Where are we going?” Ghost asked once they were outside, shivering at the cold and deciding to nest in the warmth of her scarf instead.

“Somewhere.”

“You know I don’t like it when you do that.” Ghost complained. “Last time you said somewhere, my shell almost melted off.”

“Better than not knowing at all, right?”

There was only one place in the entire Tower that was alive at this time. Only one place with constant sound and a Hunter who would gladly talk her ear off on top of it.

“Wake up!” She nudged the snoring Exo sleeping on the counter, saving him from rolling off the said counter in his sleep.

“Ikora, we can’t do that again! Not because I don’t agree, it’s because I broke the traps and— uh…” Cayde stopped himself, and blinked a couple of times. “Hi…”

“Hey!”

Still half asleep and fumbling around, he reached out a hand to move back the needle on the record player, filling the room with soft music of ages past once again. He fixed the hole in his roof while she was gone. Shoddily, but enough so that the warmth won’t escape.

“So... I just gotta ask you somethin’…” Cayde started, slowly. “Now, don’t take this the wrong way or nothin’, since we’re friends and all. But, what the hell was—”

“Saint-14 is dead. We found him. Vex drained his Light. I was pissed.”

Cayde didn’t even flinch.

“Whelp!” He grabbed a bottle and filled up his glass until it was almost overflowing with acidic green liquid. “I now owe Shaxx a lot of Glimmer, did you really have to go out there and ruin my
day like that?"

“That’s what you’re concerned with? Bets?”

“Ayup.”

So, she played along. “When did that bet happen?”

“A couple of years ago… I wanna say it was around the time your Ghost rezzed you for the first time.” He said. “Actually, we were talking about you, come to think of it.”

“Really?”

“Believe it or not, you caught his eye early. We were talkin’ about how weird Saint was, and how he went on annoying tangents that some Guardian saviour is coming.” Cayde told. “Then Shaxx being Shaxx, ignoring my great ideas, walked away, saying that a recruit from Old Russia he has had his eye on was entering the Crucible for the first time.”

“That’s hardly talking about me.”

“Yeah, we decided to call you ‘Crota’s End’.”

“That nickname didn’t really stick.”

He shook his head. “Nope. You just had to go out there and had to make sure that when they write a book about ya’ half of it will be your titles.”

The brown bottle in the shelf looked more tempting than it ever has. She couldn’t afford to be drunk then. There were speeches to be made when the sun came up and inevitable Consensus meetings, and they will tear her to shreds if they smell the alcohol in her breath.

“How do you do that, Cayde?” Tirion whispered out the question. “Not feel any grief?”

“No!” He said again, harsher this time, almost jabbing her in the shoulder with a metal finger. “No!”

“What…?”

“No mopin’ in my bar!”

“You do realize that alcohol was made for moping and bars were made to capitalize and monetize moping, don’t you?”

“Fine. I’ll allow silent moping just because you’re my favourite.”

So, she heeded. Half laying down on the cold marble counter and closing her eyes, focusing on the old music of long forgotten voices singing about forgotten love.

Cayde glanced over to her half-dead form, he owed to her to at least try to say something. She didn’t look forlorn, just had the look all Warlocks have on their faces, but about a thousand times stronger. Constantly trying to figure life out to no avail. It was easier being a Hunter, the not figuring out the world part. Easier to just not care, to not get overwhelmed. “All I can say is that you’ve just gotta play the hand you’re dealt, Guardian.”

“Appropriate metaphor since I never learned how to play poker.” She mumbled. “I’ve been too busy and I think I hated fun in my previous life.”
“Well, this just happens to be your lucky night!” Cayde laughed to himself, shuffling a deck he just pulled out. You never knew when people want to settle things over a nice card game or guns at high noon. It was always good to be prepared for both.

“You know that you’ll just cheat.”

“You have that little faith in me? Guardian, I’m hurt.”

Explaining it all to her was surprisingly simple and she patiently listened to every step, he liked a quick learner. It meant that it’ll take less time for him to get his Glimmer. Cayde always had the upper hand, with a face devoid of emotions. At least he thought that he had the upper hand. He noticed that whenever she was bluffing, she looked at a specific spot on his face, to the point of almost annoying him. It just made her a better opponent, using some kind of psychological warfare to throw him off.

Up until the moment of the final standoff, her face showed no emotion. Maybe she was too exhausted to move her face. But there, for half a second, he saw that smirk at the corner of her lip.

Cayde pushed in the remainder of the old plastic chips into the pile in the middle. “I ain’t falling for that. All in.”

Tirion looked up again, filling him with confidence with his decision. “You shouldn’t have done that.”

He put the cards down with one hand, the other reaching for the chips. “Full house!”

“Oh…” She frowned. “I just have a lot of clubs here.”

“Told ya, can’t—”

Tirion turned her cards so they would be facing them, taking it all in. “What do you call this? A straight flush?” She laughed out the end of the sentence, unable to fake it anymore. She was proud of herself for lasting as long as she did.

“I call you a scoundrel and a damn liar!” Cayde groaned, his jaw almost falling off the hinges. “Never learned how to— Rematch! You come into my bar and do that!”

“We could play a thousand hands and I would still beat you.” Tirion smirked, smugly.

“Must be a Warlock thing…” He picked up her cards, examining them for possible tampering he was too distracted to notice during the game. She must have done something.

“No, it’s just a thing where I can see your cards reflected on your face.”

“Damn it! And here I thought Amanda was starin’ at me for different reasons. Huh.” He put all the cards back into the deck, and started shuffling again. “Also, not that I don’t appreciate the company, but what brings you out here in the middle of the night?”

“It was too quiet. Needed some noise.” Tirion said. “I need constant noise around me after escaping the Forest. I hate that place.”

“Too quiet? Around Shaxx?” He was sure his jaw will literally fall off any minute.

“Having the greatest Titan and Guardian who has ever lived die to the Vex asserting their dominance has a way of dampening one’s general enthusiasm.” She picked up her cards. “Even
Shaxx’ and his love for shouting and murder.”

At first sight, the den was lifeless and dull. Lacking its usual arguments and tinkering that happens in it. Tirion tried not to stumble on anything as her eyes adjusted to the darkness. She saw several notepads filled with handwriting on the table, some pages scattered on the floor. Haya was asleep on the couch, with Alva asleep in her lap. Huritt next to her. Lorcan was hogging the other couch, and Kouhei was in the armchair keeping his distance. It was hard not to smile at it all.

“Agh, fuck…” Haya whispered. “What time is it?”

“Sun isn’t up yet.”

Haya carefully lifted Alva’s head so she wouldn’t wake her as she stood up gingerly, placing Alva’s head on a pillow once she was done. Aches from sleeping in her armour kicked in quickly. Warlocks didn’t know what fortune they had. Haya picked up the notes around the table, and motioned towards the door. Waking them all up would be chaos. “Come on.”

Tirion let Haya lead her into the depths into the City, until they found a rectangle shaped statue, carved out of old stone. Hundreds of tiny silver inscriptions and pieces of paper on the black stone, names, years. Messages off bargaining and acceptance. The two Guardians sat down on a bench across from it in silence.

“They’ve expanded the memorial the other day.” Haya finally spoke, holding the sheets of paper close to her. “To uh, allow people to write down names of people they lost no matter when. The old one was destroyed in the attack.”

“You don’t have to do it just yet.”

Haya straightened out the edges of the papers. “I’ve written down all the names I could think of but I can’t write down his. I want to do it before the Consensus gets to. We owe him that much.”

“I think the Consensus will be too busy making bad decisions for a little while. You have time.”

“I know. Not really about time here. A part of me thinks that it’s typical Saint to lie down and take a nap after killing a lot of Vex.” Haya frowned, one finger trailing through the names. “I… In my hysterics I talked to Huritt about it, about any chance of restoring him.”

“Haya…”

“He told me that it would actually be possible to repair him and wake him up. But, it wouldn’t be him. It’d be far worse than a memory wipe. Can’t do that to him or anyone.” Haya found the page she was looking for, the unfinished list. “I need your help. I can’t do it myself yet. He was as much your friend as he was mine.”

Not presented much choice, Tirion took the paper and the pen from Haya’s hands, eyeing the endless list of names. “You met all of them?”

“I didn’t get my memory issues until after the Warlords were closed for damn business.” Haya said. “Guess the big ball placed a curse on me.”

“You could always use that knowledge to document it all. Maybe become a teacher.”

“The effort alone of that pisses me off. I’ve got my hands full with the baby Sunbreakers.”
Tirion smirked. “Don’t ever change, Haya.” She took her time writing the name, easier with every letter. “There. He now lives on.”

“You could add some of your own names there. If you want.” Haya said just as Tirion was about to give the notepad back.

So, she did.

Short descriptions had to suffice instead of names for most of the people she wrote down. Tirion was fighting for the forgotten ones. The Guardians whose Ghosts ended up hanging from the Consul’s neck, the Guardians crying for help on the comms during the attack. The Guardians who once were there but were erased from time. The names from her journals before the Collapse. Someone had to fight for them.

Tirion handed the notepad back to the Titan, who stood up without a word and carefully peeled the pages out to be pinned on to the stone. Haya stood there for a moment infront of the stone, whispering something to herself for a moment, a prayer in a long-lost language.

“Sun’s almost up.” Haya said once she finished what she was doing. “You should go to Shaxx. If we learned anything out of this it’s to value our loved ones like they’re gonna get their Light drained tomorrow, right? Too soon? Nah.”

Tirion nodded in agreement as Haya motioned towards the stone with her hands to emphasize her point. Immortality didn’t mean immunity from your name written on a memorial.

“Will you be alright, Haya?”

“Ha! Hell nope! I’m gonna go back to the den. Gonna try to not be left alone because I don’t trust myself right now. It’ll be a long day.” Haya smiled for a split second. She had to try. “Now, get the hell outta here!”

Wordlessly, Tirion obeyed, standing up from the bench with her hands in the air in surrender, slight smile on her face.

“Also, Tirionna.”

“Yeah?”

“Thanks. For the hunt for the Vex things and the broken gun.”

“Anytime. Older sister.”

“I hate you!” Haya sang, almost joyfully, to the departing Warlock. “So much!”

If anything came from this, it’s the realization that she’d rather have silence and a home rather than noise everywhere and loneliness. All the noise around you didn’t mean a thing if there was zero substance to that horrid noise.

“Where were you?” Warm arms pulling her in accompanied the raspy morning voice. Only time people of the Tower heard that from him was on the very rare occasions he was late for his duties.

“I couldn’t sleep and needed fresh air. Then I felt like doing some charity work for the Tower, so I trashed Cayde at poker.”

Shaxx chuckled. “Good. Wake me next time.” His beard scratched her neck as he talked.
Everything was so normal in that moment. It would be difficult to face the world without those moments.

“For all my god killing abilities, I have never been able to wake you.” She turned around until she was facing him, his hot breath on her face. “I can barely get you to move from that station.”

“You know why I have to do my work.”

“And why I have to do mine.”

Tirion giggled when he grabbed hold of her to move her, until she was sitting on his lap with her legs around him. Her arms naturally found a home around his neck.

“What’s on your agenda today?”

“A lot of people are going to want to talk to me. I believe that what I do is pretty self-explanatory.”

“You’ll be able to handle it.”

Tirion pouted. “Doesn’t mean that I want to.”

He couldn’t resist and captured her pouting lips with his own.

“What about you?”

“Hm?” He barely heard the question.

“Yelling at recruits as usual?”

“Maybe…” Shaxx whispered as he moved his lips against hers. “There are arrangements to be done for the Crucible tomorrow.”

“But, priorities.” She yelped into his lips when he pushed her into the bed again. “And it’s still very early.”

Shaxx pulled away slowly, hovering on top of her, taking his time to simply gaze down at her. He almost threw off his balance when he moved his hand to caress her cheek, trailing the swirls of light had become a habit.

“What’s wrong?” Tirion asked, worried about why he had stopped so suddenly.

“Nothing. You look like you’ve fought a thousand wars yet you still take my breath away every time I look at you.”

“And you have bad taste.” She said playfully.

“No. No, I don’t.” He laughed. “You are beautiful. And I’m just beyond lucky that you found me. Don’t know what I would do if I didn’t get to tell you that I love you.”

“I’m lucky that you didn’t yell me out of the Hall.”

“That’s the reason why I’m lucky. I could have accidentally pushed away the best thing that was going to happen to me.” He pushed strands of red hair away to see her full face. “The most frustrating and maddening at certain times, but still the best.”

“I choose think it was almost fate. You know as well as I do that I would have come back no
matter what to bother you.” Her hand slipped around his neck to slowly pull him down to her lips. “Big guy.”

“Alright…” Tirion began, looking at the hologram projections on the table. “We need to figure out where to go from here.”

“I… I have no clue.” Lorcan sighed. “How the hell do you fight something like this?”

“They killed Saint to send us a message.” Kouhei said. “They’re ruthless, but no different than any other enemy.”

“Wha…” Lorcan scowled. “They are time traveling robots, Kouhei!”

“They have their strategies. Strategies that can be attacked.”

“They don’t read Sun goddamn Tzu, Kouhei!”

“Do any of you have anything to contribute?” Tirion interrupted the squabble. “I know all of us are angry, but we need to concentrate.”

“The Vex calculate everything.” Huritt pointed out. “They have no concept of pointlessness.”

“I don’t suppose we can just go back in time and erase the Vex, can we?” Lorcan asked.

“Too much depends on the Vex existing up until this point.” Tirion said. “If it weren't for the Vex, I wouldn't have shut down the Black Garden because there would be no Black Garden. We never would have cleared the Vault because there would be no Vault.”

“Which in turn means that we would have never killed Crota.” Huritt finished. “The Hive would be more powerful than ever.”

“Exactly.”

“All I know is that by killing Saint they scared a lot of people.” Lorcan twirled his finger and made a tiny hologram of a Vex goblin. “Do we just lie to everyone and tell them that everything is neat? I’m a liar for a profit but I’m going to need a two weeks’ notice before I consider it. Mailed to me. In a fancy envelope. With a red wax seal. Read to me by some old dude. As I sit upon a throne.”

“Fear…” Tirion whispered as Lorcan rambled on. “Maybe that’s why they killed Saint. They know us. They’re using our fears to get to us, pick us off one by one. With Saint, they got Haya. They made Panoptes in the shape of Oryx, and tried to get me. But, if that’s not their plan, then we just gave them a way to defeat us!” Tirion groaned into her hands in frustration.

“So, what are you saying?” Asked Lorcan. “They are going to take us down one by one until there is nothing left to burn?”

“We lost two battles, hardly the war.”

“You seem oddly confident.” Huritt said.

“I already accepted that the Vex will annihilate me from reality at some point, and it makes it easier to concentrate on the work that is needed to be done.” She turned her attention to the holograms, lifting one up of the Forest gate. “From now on, the only ones that are allowed to go to the Forest are me and Haya, and that’s only during emergencies. We can’t give them any more fodder and more variables.”
“I’m done with that place.” Haya muttered. “Not even to kill Osiris.”

“Good. We need to starve the Vex, don't give them anything. Don't expose them to Guardians.” She brought up the solar system in the projection. “Ideally, I would love to prohibit visitation to some of the planets, but the Vanguard would never go for it.”

“Nessus is their newest thing.” Huritt said, pointing at the red and green planet.

“Failsafe is too valuable.” Lorcan shook his head. “Hey, we could save her to a data chip and install it in our helmets, so then we can have even more voices that aren't ours in our head!”

“We'll find a way to save her.” Tirion removed the planet rom view. “Io is a hellhole. Asher won’t leave, but that’s completely on him.”

“Io also holds a lot of Taken, and we need to keep an eye on it. They need a new leader.” Huritt pointed out.

“Fair enough. Limited exposure to it, then.” With that, Tirion moved on to Earth, their home. “The Vex don’t care about Earth. We’re safe here.”

“If they truly wanted to assimilate us, and if the Light of the holy ball is the thing that is keeping them back, why didn't they launch an onslaught on us when the Light was out?” Lorcan asked.

“I think it was such a big mess that even the Vex were like ‘fuck that!’” Haya shrugged.

“Mars and Venus are already locked off. That only leaves Titan…” Tirion stared at the image of the moon, reaching out to touch it. “And that’s where we need to be.”

“But the Vex have no interest in Titan.” Kouhei said.

“It's not the Vex I am worried about. It’s what they’re distracting us from. The Hive are still seeding our Moon and Titan, and they still have a lot of gods left to throw at us.”

“Ugh, whatever.” Haya grunted. “What could one more Hive god do? We don’t need that much preparation for them. Focusing on the robots takes my vote.”

It was Huritt’s time to shine again. “We spent most of our time weakening Crota and Oryx. This systematic weakening of the Hive Gods is the only reason we have been able to beat either of them. If Oryx's sisters notice this pattern, it will be very hard to kill them.”

“Oh, well it's a good thing that Savathun isn't very smart.” Lorcan laughed to himself. “Ha ha... hah... oh... this is bad.”

“All I’m hearing is that you’re suggesting that we should just hide in fear from them.” Kouhei argued against Tirion’s point.

“We can still kill them. Only the Minds, not waste time on the minions unless we have to.” She said. “Fighting the minions only feeds them. We need to primarily focus on looking for the Minds, and keeping an eye on the Hive threat.”

“Yeah. Ok. But that does lead to a problem. We six retreating aren't gonna change anything.”

Tirion raised an eyebrow, surprised at Lorcan’s sudden opposition. “We are the ones they’re most interested in. Us six staying away will do a lot.”

“I'm saying that Shaxx sent out Redjacks to the Infinite Forest, and other parts of Mercury.” Lorcan
watched Tirion gasp at his words. “You didn't know?”

“What madness is this, Shaxx!?” She shouted at the first sight of him, the recruits around him instantly fleeing like scared birds. "I told you to stay away from the Forest! What is this I’m hearing about Crucible arenas in the Forest?"

“Guardians need to familiarize themselves with it. The better they know it, the less of them will end up like Saint.”

“Please don’t do it, Shaxx.”

“Why not?”

“Do I seriously have to answer this question? Do I seriously have to explain that the Vex use the Forest as an experimentation ground? By having Guardians fight there, you are feeding the Vex knowledge and strategies.”

“Unlike Zavala and his strike operations, I plan to be careful with this. Enough exposure to the Forest so that the recruits can learn, not enough so that the Vex would learn something from it.”

“So that’s your plan? Only send weaklings there?”

“Yes. The fresh recruits don’t know what the Vex can do and they need to learn. The Vex won’t get anything decent out of them. Once they show improvement, they’re out.”

“Guardian!” A voice called out behind her. “You're late.”

“Late for what?” Tirion didn’t remember getting booked for any meetings.


Tirion turned back to Shaxx. “We’ll continue this later. Don’t send your Redjacks to Savathun’s Dreadnaught until then.”

You don’t become an official Guardian until you’re stuck in meetings with people you don’t know, nor care about getting to know them. Some faces were familiar, like some of the Faction leaders and the Vanguard.

“It's no secret that Guardians revived before the Red War will have an air of superiority around them…” One of the people Tirion didn’t recognize whispered, eyes on her.

“… like our leader here, who seems to be wildly apathetic to what is going on around her.” Another man she didn’t recognize was motioning towards her when he preached to his audience, barely snapping her out of her bored state.

“I’d like to remind you that the City still remains ungoverned, and no leader has been elected.” Ikora said. “Leadership of the City is a subject for another meeting.”

“Well then, let me change my verbiage.” He cleared his throat, looking straight at the disinterested Tirion. “Tell me, Guardian of Guardians, have you ever lost someone you cared about?”

“I... I have no idea who you are, so no respect intended here in the slightest; you know the answer to that question.” Tirion said flatly. “I’d appreciate if you would get to your condescending point so we can end this meeting.”
“You see, I don’t trust you, Guardian.”

“Watch what you say, councilor.” Ikora interrupted. “Without her, you wouldn’t be standing here to spit that out.”

“I just want to know about her failures.”

Tirion sighed, forcing herself to be entertained by all of this. “Why?”

“You shut down the Black Garden, conquered the Vault of Glass, killed Crota, killed Oryx not once but twice, shut down the SIVA crisis, demoralized the Red Legion and took out Ghaul…”

The man stopped listing it, trying to stop himself from saying something he shouldn’t. “There is an entire library worth of your smaller accomplishments that were done during the Vanguard strike operations and your own freelance work, even sans your fireteam.”

“Why my failures though?”

“As I said, I don’t trust you, Guardian. In the slightest.” He repeated himself. “You’re too perfect. I outright refuse to believe that a bunch of rag-tag ruffians who are a little rough around the edges managed to successfully complete all those missions without also failing just as many missions and hiding the casualties.”

“I should have stopped you about a minute ago.” Tirion had no time for that. “Nothing here needs to be discussed. I and my team saved you all from certain death multiple times. This meeting isn’t about me, either.”

“It is about you. I am perturbed by how little you care that the Vex struck a fatal blow.”

“Well what a coincidence! Because I am perturbed by the fact that you still remain unmurdered, and by how crass you are after we lost a hero and a friend.”

The man grinned at her words, feeling victorious. “The savior of us all is making threats against an innocent man. Do you see what she really is yet?”

“Alright. I’m done.” Tirion slammed her hands on the table as she stood up. “I’m walking out of here. I might retire, and not help you at all when Rasputin inevitably tries to kill us. I’m not sure.”

“The meeting has not been adjourned.” Ikora called out to stop her from leaving.

“I’m glad that Ikora doesn’t let you do whatever you want just because you have appealed to her ego.”

“The Vanguard don’t own me.” Tirion told him.

“Very true. If the Vanguard did monitor everything you did we wouldn’t have gone through the Red War.”

Worried whispers arose from his accusation, all eyes on her now. By the look on her face, he knew that Tirion knew what he was talking about.

“I’ve bled for my mistakes and I ended the war I started with my own hands.” Tirion skipped the trivialness of it all that the man wanted her to painfully dwell in.

“The war you started?” Zavala asked. “What are you talking about?”

“I killed so many Cabal to the point where they sent out a distress signal to the Empire because
they couldn’t hold ground by themselves in the Solar System, sir.” Tirion interrupted the man who was about to mock her. “We didn’t disable the signal that they were trying to send on the Dreadnaught. We got there too late. We covered it up.”

“That’s it—”

“Don’t put that guilt on me. We covered it up because we found out that the Cabal had at least a hundred backups of the signal to send out in case the first time didn’t work.” Tirion finally managed to stagger that man. “The Cabal Empire’s problems started before the Traveler found us. They would have come to us, distress signal or not. They wanted the Traveler.”

“I’m sorry, what does this have to do with the original purpose of this meeting?” A woman spoke up from the crowd.

The man wasn’t done. “Saint’s death proved to us that we are in dire need of leadership. So, we’re here to evaluate if this Guardian is capable of leading us in these trying times, or if we should look for a replacement.” He explained.

“I believe we can have the best of both worlds.” Zavala said. “What will truly decide if she’s capable to lead this City is how she handles herself outside of this room, how she addresses the crowd reacting to the unfortunate loss of Saint-14. Other than that, she’s capable. I’ve seen her in action and read her reports.”

“Very well. I can’t wait to see it myself, considering how she reacted to Hawthorne.”

“I did not represent the Guardians, the image of the Guardian of Guardians or the Vanguard in my rant.” Tirion said. “My friend was grieving. I wasn’t going to let Hawthorne say her usual things in that moment. It was people being people.”

“Not even when you called for her exile from the City?”

“I didn’t call for her exile. She and her jittery bird are still there. I resolved the issue.”

“How can we be sure that there will be no more meltdowns such as that?”

“When you a…” Tirion sighed, frustrated. “When you people let me do my job out there making sure that no more people die instead of keeping me in these arbitrary meetings that in the end have nothing to do with me or will have ever anything to do with me.”

“These Consensus meetings are needed. Your brashness isn’t.”

“I’m sorry, my brashness?” Tirion felt the warmth of her solar energy around her fingertips. “I may give precisely zero fucks about anything you people do, but at least that’s because of priorities and not ill will.”

“What priorities might that be?”

“Are you aware that during the Red War some Lightless Guardians were trying to throw a coup because the Vanguard abandoned them? The Vanguard, and by extension the Consensus. Some went worse routes than coup planning. You want me to detail them?”

“I fail to see the point, asides from blatant emotional manipulation.”

“I reunited the Vanguard while they were doing their own things, during a war. I was the one who fought for those Lightless Guardians who got abandoned. It’s always been me with a gun in my
“Our victory came under the leadership of the Vanguard once you reunited them.” He added.

“Our victory came from me shooting Ghaul until he was on his knees. Shut up.”

“Cocky. I know that you didn’t know about the Almighty until you found Zavala. Tell me, what plans did you have before you found the Farm?” The man was trying his hardest to get under her skin. For *what*, she wondered. “Does a ship full of explosives ring a bell?”

“In my defense, I was *high.*” Tirion’s straight-faced response got a couple of snickers out of the audience.

“So, she’s a junkie now too.”

“Not anymore. I quit some time ago but you people are *really* testing me.”

“You see it as a joke, don’t you?”

“How am I supposed to deal with what’s happening around me if not humor or drugs?”

“Enough of this sudden conflict between you two.” Zavala interrupted. “Tirion is right. We shouldn’t be wasting time here tearing each other apart while the enemy force goes stronger, we can’t let more anymore Guardians end up like Saint. We need practicality.”

Pointing out that Saint was a predetermined thing would raise questions. She wanted to rub it in their face so badly. “I’ve seen too much despondency since I got revived. Too many desperate measures taken by Guardians because of the hopeless surroundings due to a fractured leadership. I fight for *them*.”

“So, you agree to be nominated to lead this City?” Zavala asked.

“What? No!” Tirion shook her head. “I agree to *fight.* I will not gaze at the Traveler with incense around me and mumble things to fledging Guardians. May the Traveler rest his Light and all.”

“We aren’t asking you to be the next Speaker.”

“If I inspire enough courage so that people choose to follow me, I won’t stop them. I’ll welcome them. But, I will keep fighting and not let go of my gun until there is nothing left to burn.”

“Need we remind you that similar initiative to yours was what got Saint-14 killed by the Vex?” The mystery man said.

“If you’re going to be an insensitive ass, please make sure your argument holds ground in logic. You’ll *never* understand what happened to Saint.”

These meetings weren’t her job. The whole auditorium full of people had that responsibility. Tirion turned around to leave once things had gotten too silent, she didn’t belong there. She felt too much guilt to be able to sit in that chair and not fight, or to just look over the horizon and send out *others* to fight.

The crowds on the other side of the door demanded her attention. It was time.

“What’s happening? Are the Cabal coming back?” A concerned woman asked. “Please talk to us, Guardian!”
“I’ve heard that Saint-14 has been found dead. If he can die… what will happen to the rest of you? What will happen to us? Are the Vex going to get us?”

Once she meets the Titan, she will give him an earful as payback for all of this. The speeches and the meetings.

“There is no need to worry.” She reassured them after casting a brief glance at the building behind her. They better be watching.

“No need to worry?!” A man shouted from the back. “What got the Consensus and you so worried?”

“Just because the strongest fall doesn’t mean that the others are weak. We are not weak.”

“How can you be so sure of that?” The questions continued. “What is happening?”

“It’s true. Saint died.” Tirion started, listening to the gasps of shock ensue. “We are not getting attacked, we are as safe as we can get in the Last City.”

“That’s what they said before the Cabal invaded!” Someone shouted.

“That’s what they said, but not what I said. I’ve been the one fighting. Saint was one of the best, but he didn’t go out without a fight. Neither will we if worst comes to worst. The enemies respected him. He loved this City and everything it stood for, and we owe to him to make it even better.” Her speech silenced the crowd looking at her. “The best thing we can do to honor him and all the Guardians that have fallen before and since is to fight with the same passion they did. To build a City beyond their dreams. For every one that falls, Guardian or not, we improve and build and fight in their honor.”

“Tirion…”

“Hi!” She greeted Shaxx. “I’m not sure if I’m still mad at you for the arena stunt, because I accidentally made my leadership campaign motto ‘Burn everything to the ground’.” Tirion motioned with her hands like she was trailing an invisible banner, with her words nicely embroidered on it.

Shaxx smirked underneath the helmet. “I heard whispers about it, about a standoff between you and one of the Consensus members.”

“I wanted to set him on fire!”

“Don’t set people on fire, Tirion. As much as I would want to, I can’t throw members of the Consensus into the Crucible.”

“When the Vex want to get into our heads, I get a little bit on edge.” She wasn’t going to let him forget.

“I should have told you about the arenas from the beginning. There was no time to bring it up.”

“I am tired and I don’t even care. All I need is reassurance that you can control it.” She stepped closer to him, forcing him to look at her. It was always difficult with that helmet. “We’re going after the Minds as efficiently as we can, we need to ambush them.”

“Don’t worry. If the rookies have mastered anything, it’s to be unpredictable dangers to
themselves. The Vex can watch all they want.”

“This could be my sleep deprived state talking, but this might just work.” At this point, she was willing to grasp at anything that somewhat made sense.

“There is one more thing. I might need to make an exception for tomorrow.” He said slowly, looking at something over her shoulder.

“Why? We can’t make any exceptions. I—”

The color red overpowered everything around her, soft drops of crimson dropping from the sky, getting stuck in her hair and her robes. Tirion identified the perpetrators by their laughing as she was trying to swat away the red, and another bucket of the crimson petals was dumped on her before she could address them.

“Would you—” She spat some of the rose petals out of her mouth, turning to the laughing Titan and two Hunters. Tirion gathered some of the petals in a ball and threw it at them, but they proved to be too light and never reached their target. “You jerks.”

“We volunteered to decorate the Tower with these.” Lorcan said, emptying the last on the petals on the ground. The instructions he was given were ‘drop them pretty much everywhere’. He was immune to complaints.

“Well. She forgot again, you owe me Glimmer.” Haya’s Ghost was already dancing around Lorcan, anticipating the Glimmer transfer.

“I forgot about what again?”

“Crimson Days tomorrow. You forget every year.” Haya said, distracted by the scuffle that was happening between her and Lorcan’s Ghosts. She put a hand in-between them, preventing the Ghosts from crashing into each other. “Hey! Behave! Don’t make me put a leash on you!”

“You do forget about it every year.” Shaxx cut in. “What’s happening with the Ghosts?”

“I don’t even know where to start.” Lorcan shrugged, pulling his squirmy Ghost back to him. “They’re under a lot of stress.”

“Asking what puts your Ghosts under that much stress is pointless, I suppose.”

“It’s mostly gri—” Lorcan’s Ghost tried to get away again, almost slipping away from his fingers. Her defiance forced him to hold her with both hands. “Hey! Stop it. Shush. I know!”

Alva was already running away to fetch more petals, not interested in the Ghost feud.

“Wanna help us out?” Asked Haya, burying her Ghost in rose petals in the bucket, careful not to injure it. The Ghost seemed to revel in it all, digging itself deeper.

“I’m always up for helping you guys… terrorize people with rose petals.” Tirion said through a smile.

“Alright. Last one to the Bazaar is a dreg face!” Lorcan shouted as he ran away towards the Bazaar, Haya right after him.

“Slayers of Atheon, Crota, Oryx, and Aksis…” Tirion laughed as she listed the accomplishments. “Is it wrong to be sad that small moments like that won’t be in the history books?”
“Not if you’re not the one writing them.” He chuckled as he pulled out a handful of the petals out of her hair, then moved on to brushing them off her shoulder, almost scratching through the robes.

“Well…” Tirion took his hand with both of hers, slowly backing away, teasingly. “You just gave me an idea for the petals. Such a shame that you’ll be stuck at work for a couple more hours.”

The helmet suppressed most of his grunt. “You just had to do that. You’re going to drive me absolutely mad.”

Tirion smirked, taking her time letting go of his hand. “Not that you don’t deserve it. Going to burn off these meeting stained robes, piece by piece.”

Shaxx blinked, and she was out of his sight, but her smirk and the images she placed still at the back of his head.

Chapter End Notes

In which Tirion gets her shit together and starts a fire or two.
Love

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“We use these holidays to honor friendship. Camaraderie.” Shaxx glanced over to the Warlock, leaning against the wall with a smirk, watching him address the crowd of Guardians intently listening to him. “Love, for those of us lucky enough to find it…”

“Gross…” Haya whispered, joining Tirion’s side as Shaxx went on with the speech. “You two are *gross*.”

“You’ve never been in love, Haya?”

The Titan nervously cleared her throat before answering. “I uh… I shot a guy in the face once in the act for using the term ‘*make love*’” Haya shuddered the phrase out. “Luckily for me he was a Guardian. His Ghost was pretty traumatized.”

“That doesn’t count.”

“And I know that you want to ask; just because we were both Titans and we’ll basically hit anything that moves does not mean we were hitting—.”

“I wasn’t going to ask.” Tirion said, not taking her eyes off the speech. She’ll have to ask him how to hold a speech, or hold her ground in an argument, without threatening to set other people on fire. Albeit the loudness, there was always warmth in his voice. More so during the Crimson Days. The Crucible was always the loudest about it.

The crowd moved on to the Redjacks to sign up for the event, some even pushing eachother in excitement.

“There you are.” Shaxx said softly to the emerging Tirion.

“Having fun?”

“The day has just begun.” He smirked underneath his helmet.

“Whoa, glad I and Kouhei signed up in advance…” Haya grimaced at the crowd behind her.

“I need to remind you two *monsters* that Crimson Days are a holiday celebration.” Shaxx warned her. “I also expect you to beat the taste out of anyone that gets in your way. Don’t disappoint me.”

“How long has this tradition been going, Haya? Five years in a row now?” Tirion asked.

“It’s *not* a tradition.” Haya corrected her.

*Once* is an instance, *twice* is a coincidence. Five years in a row is a tradition.”

“We missed a year because he tried to stab us, your argument is void.” Haya corrected her yet again, and then moved her attention to Shaxx. “I was going to ask if I can borrow Tirion, but she wants to be a responsible Guardian today.” The Titan’s voice held slight resentment in it.

“Even after having witnessed it in the Crucible every year, I would have never picked you and Kouhei as Crimson Bonds. You’re both great Guardians, but I’ve never seen you get along. I’m
afraid to ask how it started.”

Tirion laughed slyly at Shaxx’s observation “Well, it started with Glimmer.” She said, “And now they argue like an old married couple every day, and then Alva looks up at them with those sad eyes every time they do so they’re forced to get along.”

“Even Kouhei can’t say no to those eyes.” Haya said.

“Alva kind of adopted them as parents. Of sorts. But it was against their will, so she… pretty much kidnapped them.”

“And he failed her!” Haya scoffed in disbelief. “He taught her how to use a machine gun. Yes, it was cute, but am I supposed to be fine with that? Do you know what happens when you give an invisible troublemaker a machine gun?”

“Wait, is that why we no longer have machine guns?” Asked Tirion.

Haya opened her mouth and pursed her lips instantly. “You know what? I refuse to comment. I’ll see you on the Crucible screens!” She ran off immediately, in search for her partner.

“Well. Let’s just continue to pretend that it was the Cabal who did it…” Tirion has heard some rumors about fires in weapon factories, and Banshee grunting about certain weapon shipments discontinuing certain weapons due to repeated incidents. In the midst of it all, the Cabal got the blame. She was surprised that she was surprised.

Shaxx cracked his knuckles. “Looking forward to see how they’ll break the arenas this time. I should hire them again, as stress testers this time.”

“Make the commentary fun for me.” Tirion lifted the datapad she was holding. “Going to need a lot of entertainment if I’m going to have to watch this all day.”

“Anything for you. What’s that you’ve got?”

“I was up most of the night creating this Vex tracker, using anything at my disposal. Pretty much everything that either I or the Vanguard placed on planets that has a sensor on it.” She tapped on it, sighing at the lack of change. “To help track the Minds.”

“You know how it ended up for Osiris.”

“We just want to kill them, not write poetry.” Tirion eased his worries. “But they’re sneaky, burrowing into places they don’t belong.”

“Good. Animals do that when they’re terrified.”

“Scared of little old me?” Her voice was filled with coy. “I’ll be on the boxes right over there, where I won’t distract you.”

Seeing Shaxx unveil the side of him only she gets to see to the world was strange. It wasn’t fully unveiled, of course. Still covered up by his usual work-related enthusiasm and boastfulness, not personal and intimate like with her. The Titan who terrified her back when she first met him was now comfortable shouting about love infront of everyone, giving others an indication that there was an actual person underneath all that armor and mystery, and loud yelling and excitement.

Might be one of her greatest accomplishments.
She saw him glance over to her quite often as he talked to the competing teams, as if drawing inspiration. Nevertheless, it will be the cause of a lot of whispers between Guardians. But, as long as the Factions don’t have anything concrete to hold on to, she didn’t worry. The Factions were about to get busy with their own rallies and competitions, instead of trying to influence the Crucible and sticking their hands where they don't belong. But it all came with a lot of new problems. Frightened civilians, spies. Tirion will have to think about that some other time. There were bigger spies she needed to worry about in that moment.

The datapad vibrated slightly, begging for her attention, prompting a rare curse out of her mouth once she saw what it said. She hoped it was an error at first, miscommunication because of her own lack of skills dealing with the tech. But that was never it. Calling the first available person was her first move. One who pretty much lived in the Crucible but you will never see him fighting in it during the event. He has never given them a reason why.

“Hey, Lorcan?”

“Yeah?” The tired and hoarse response came in her earpiece.

“I found a Mind, and it’s the one that’s converting Nessus.”

“I’m sure Failsafe will be happy to hear that.” His joy died down quickly. “It’s not on Nessus, is it? Of course, it’s not on Nessus. Where is it?”

“It’s stuck in the Leviathan.” Tirion had to briefly pull out her earpiece to not go deaf in one ear from him sighing into the microphone.

“Goddamn it!” He groaned. “Well, if it's stuck there it can be stuck there for a little while longer. Messing up Calus’s shit.”

“What are you up to?”

“Just woke up. Watching the Crucible feed.” He mumbled, with a dreamy sigh. “I think I’m in love with him.”

“Back off.”

“Damn Kouhei for stabbing me, coulda got to him before you if it weren’t for the incident.”

“Alright…” She laughed. “I’ll let you swoon over my husband by yourself. Meeting about the Mind later today.”

“Oh, God’s sake. Don’t make me think of Calus and the prospect of actually experiencing his loving embrace…” He gagged at the thought as he hung up the call. Tirion prepared herself for another session of staring into the datapad until she saw nothing but blue, but her little companion had other distracting plans.

“Ugh…” Ghost grumbled. “That’s not… urgh… Come on, where is it?”

“What’s going on?”

Her Ghost tried to shake himself, twirling and twisting every movable part, flipping backwards in the air as he confused himself and lost control, too many spinning parts. “There is something bothering me, and I can’t get to it.”

“Like an itch you can’t scratch?”
Ghost stopped to think for a moment. “I don’t know what an itch is.”

Tirion reached out, and lightly scratched his shell. “Imagine that. An itch is like a feeling that wants you to do that.” Ghost inadvertently followed her hand for a second when she retreated it.

“I think someone is sending me a message but something is actively blocking it. Give me a minute.” He grumbled some more, taking slight offense at Tirion laughing at him struggling against aerodynamics. “Alright! I got it. I think. It’s a message for you from… Oh, you’re not going to like this.”

“Let me guess. Our suitor number sixteen likes dogs, royal wine, loving embraces and long walks on his world eating ship!”

“That’s not the part you’re not going to like.” Ghost said. “I’ll send it over to your datapad but… he praises you for a while about your refusal to kneel, and boasts about how he can kill you at any moment’s notice.”

“That’s just great.”

“Then he says – and I’ll read it word for word – ‘If I wished it, you would die your final death. But I won’t. Why? Because I'm in love.’”

“Oh…” A feeling akin to bugs and Hive worms covering every inch of her skin took over her. “Ew.”

“Well. That's evil and creepy and now I want a shower.” She winced. “Preferably in a lead chamber, given the recent developments.”

“Happy Crimson Days…?”

“I think Calus ruined that for me. We’re really going to have to kill him soon.”

“I don't think he's watching you as well as he claims, considering that he talks about your refusal to kneel.” Haya snorted as she read the letter.

“Haya…”

“What?”

“Stop.” Tirion said, unable to wipe the smile off Haya’s face.

“Pick a sound isolated storage closet next time.”

“Stop it!”

“Well, I don’t think Calus is in love with you. He just has a boner.”

“That… that opens up an entire list of questions I don’t want to think about. Thanks!”

One of the doors opened behind Haya, and a tired Lorcan walked out from the other side, rubbing his eyes. “Why did I have to come back to talks about Calus again?”

“Tirion got a letter.”
Lorcan cringed at his morbid curiosity getting the better of him as he automatically took the datapad from Haya’s hands. “How do you file a restraining order against the Cabal emperor?”

“You don’t. The Vanguard don’t know what he’s here.” Tirion said.

“He makes the *er, ‘dimming of the world’* sound like some sort of orgy and I don’t want to be a part of this.” He read.

“I was done with those during the Warlord days…”

Lorcan’s eyes held a combination of disgust and curiosity. “Do you really think… uh…”

“Some of us have been alive for a couple of centuries, it wouldn’t be impossible that som—”

“No.” Tirion stopped Haya. “I know where this is going. No.”

“All I’m saying is that the chance that no Guardian whatsoever has not acted upon Guardian and alien coitus is non-existent.”

Tirion stared at Haya for a long minute in exasperation. “Are we done?”

“Why are you upset with me? I’m right.”

“It’s a holiday.”

“Yes, and we’re obviously very God fearing around these parts. I’m talking about very relevant subjects here, Tirionna!”

“Now all three of us are traumatized.” Lorcan said. “Good job, Haya.”

“I never claimed that I did it, or even thought about it.”

“Can we go back to talking about Calus?” Tirion suggested.

“I never thought that I would find talking about us being Calus’ bitches preferable over anything.” The Hunter propped his feet on the table after sitting down, the struggle to not think about what Haya told them visible on his face.

“I don’t think we are… that.” Tirion argued, refusing to repeat Lorcan’s words. “I believe that we could benefit from the power he is offering us. If a reckoning unlike anything this galaxy has ever seen will happen soon, as he claims, we might need his help. *Then* we can kill him.”

“Why not negotiate and ask for the powers instead of all of this?” Lorcan asked.

“We shouldn’t ask for anything, especially from those who are stronger than us. You saw what Calus did with that weird skull realm. The point is, they’ll make the offer themselves, and give everything themselves.”

“You sounded like our good pal Rasputin there for a second.” He said. “Hey, can’t we get him to launch a couple of rockets at the Leviathan?”

“Do you by chance happen to speak pre-Golden Age Russian? We all know what happened last time Guardians tried talking to him.”

Haya stared at them in disbelief. “They kind of shot at him over a language dispute.”
“And that’s not what we’ve been doing to the Fallen?”

“I don’t care who you are or where you’re from. Bite, scratch, or stab me and I’m setting you on fire.”

“Speaking of stabbing…” Lorcan began. “Where is the Dad Titan and the kids?”

“There was some Taken problem in the EDZ that Huritt wanted to look at. Had to cut the Crimson dates short.” Haya immediately raised a finger in front of Lorcan’s face to shut him up. “If you consider *that a pun*, I am going to *hit* you.”

Lorcan suppressed a snort. “You don’t have to… mow me down like that.”

“Tirion… help me.” Haya turned to the smiling Warlock watching them both.

“I was about to tell Lorcan to cut it out so we could focus on Argos, but I’m having way too much fun.”

“Do you two sit down now and then and write all these down or something?”

“There have been some intersections.” The Hunter vaulted over the couch to avoid being hit by a pillow.

“That doesn’t even work, you asshat!” Haya threw the pillow right at him.

“Tirion, you be the judge!” Lorcan begged the Warlock to settle the language feud.

“It’s a reach, unfortunately.” Tirion’s words caused Lorcan to throw the pillow he caught prior at the ground in frustration, disappointed in himself. “To say that we’ve *intersected* would have worked better, but still a reach. I don’t know. I’m a bad Warlock.”

“I truly hate you both.” Haya added. “Oh, did I mention that there were a lot of proposals happening in the Crucible today? It was very weird.”

Tirion just had to ask. “Weird? Why?”

“There are two reasons why Guardians get married. Either they’re delusional and believe they’ll be together forever, which is… *yeah*, self-explanatory. Or, they’re in a situation where one of them or both will die at any moment so they want to tie the knot while they still have time. Bunch of time wasting shenanigans.” Haya explained, but didn’t allow any further questions from either one of them. “So, the Mind. What about it?”

“It’s a Hydra, I think. A *big* one. I call it Argos.” Tirion said, slowly, still processing what Haya just said.

“Pros and cons of letting it rot in Calus’ ship?”

“Vex do not *rot*. If we kill Argos, we could potentially halt the conversion of Nessus, if not outright stop it. Would be great progress for us.”

“So, it’s between letting Calus suffer in annoyance or stop the Vex from converting Nessus.” Haya contemplated. “I vote for putting Failsafe in a chip.”

“If we ignore it, Calus could potentially find new Guardians to do his bidding. Then the Vanguard will get involved. In turn means that the Vanguard will send up Guardians who have no idea what they’re doing to clear it out. Calus wants *us*. I will not let other people fight my battles.”
“I’m with you, don’t get me wrong, but…” Lorcan started. “It worked out pretty well for you to get unleashed upon the world.”

“Yeah, but that was saving a shard of the Traveler from Hive corruption and then shutting down the Black Garden.” Tirion shrugged, innocently. “These new Guardians are just used to patrol missions and Cayde cracking bad jokes in their ear.”

“What? Like it’s not our fault?” Haya smirked. “We keep taking their jobs. What is there for other Guardians to do? Maybe that’s why the universe is trying to kill us. They are just tired of our shit. If we let a new group of Guardians fight, maybe the Hive will calm down a little.”

“Ha!” Lorcan laughed. “I can imagine a Knight intentionally trying to summon something from the ascendant realm, in hopes of getting someone else to come visit them. Then we come guns blazing, and they just sigh and mutter ‘Oh, it’s these idiots again, well, time to die again!’”

“And what a wonderful world would that be.” Tirion said.

It has almost become an obsession.

There had to be more of them. Tirion couldn’t afford to let it stop at Argos. Had to categorize which Minds they’ve already defeated. Not to shelve them, but because they had a habit of coming back. To map where they were. Then to keep an eye on the ones they haven’t gotten to yet, to planets they’re still converting. Could any of them be in the Forest, will she be forced to go back? She had to expand it all. Boost the beacons, put traps around them. Keep the Vanguard from knowing. No, that wasn’t a priority. But there was no point in informing the Vanguard, as they could do so very little. They’ve always done things on their own, and she was starting to feel a certain bitterness about the Vanguard taking credit.

It was their thing.

She also had to keep an eye on them. What they’re sending Guardians out to. Perhaps it was jealousy and the need to be better than everyone else, perhaps it was her not wanting the Guardians to die unless they had to. But that wasn’t a concern.

No hits on Mars, she hasn’t been able to place new beacons there. The Cabal still hold onto it with everything they have left. Another problem to deal with. They could be planning something. There was time. The tool-less runts and grunts couldn’t make a new Dominus that quickly. They were merely prisoners on the red planet.

Venus was an unknown, but she was certain that she cleansed the minds there a while ago. Green glowing eyes flickering from screen to screen, making sure she didn’t miss something. Maybe if she waits just one more second.

Io, they got Brakion. But it has never stopped there. Note added to anticipate his return. Same went Protheon. But he was discovered when the Cabal planted drills there. So many more of them could be underground, undetected by her tech. She had to become better. They were expecting her to shatter expectations, now.

“Tirion!”

The voice broke through the barrier of thoughts she had built up. It was unbreakable that Shaxx had to yell out her name out so she’d hear him next to her, a comforting hand on her shoulder. There was that worry in his eyes again. Hence why she did it during the night. He didn’t need the worry.
“Sorry…” Tirion let go of the datapad. “Got carried away.”

“This seems different than merely getting carried away.” He looked at her work, it almost held a self-destructive vibe to it. Constant data streams on the monitor, not tolerating a second of her not paying attention. Constantly needing to be fed to grow and be better. There was no room for limits of any kind. Her mission was to _shatter_ skies, apparently. “When was the last time you slept?”

“Does getting killed by a Cabal a day or two ago count?” She still saw their red eyes in the plane she goes to just before her Ghost revives her. She wasn’t afraid, just exhausted by the same image haunting her. Was it weird and greedy to ask for better hauntings?

Shaxx let out a disappointed sigh. “Death doesn’t count.”

Tirion said nothing more, just a low grunt as a response that barely acted as a grunt, the light blue fingers curling around the datapad again. He gently cupped her soft face and turned her to him, tearing her eyes away from the monitors. She didn’t struggle against it, because she couldn’t tear her eyes away herself, and it wasn’t due to lack of strength.

But something else lingered in those green eyes when she got a good look at him.

“Did you love her?” Tirion asked out of nowhere, taking him aback. “Efrideet.”

“I did.” He answered honestly. “Once upon a time.”

“You always speak so fondly of her. Did you ever look at me as a replacement for her?”

“What brought this on?”

“I haven’t slept in a while and I’ve heard things about something you’ve said. Mostly from other Guardians.” She ran a hand through her hair, fingers absentmindedly searching for something. “I don’t have an off-switch for my brain.”

He owed her the truth. Especially in her current state of mind.

“We caught up shortly after the SIVA crisis. She was the one appointed to host the Iron Banner after Saladin’s brief retirement.”

“I know.”

“Finding out that she was alive after all those years of believing she was dead came as a shock. I had all the opportunity to reconcile, yet… I didn’t want to take it. There was no temptation because of you.” He said. “I was still uncertain how I felt about you at the time. But I still chose uncertainty. It was more complex with you.”

Tirion smiled slightly, just a twinge of the lips. “I kind of miss the Taken War.” She mumbled. “Not that we had it better then, with the stress of Oryx. But… the _figuring out_ part.”

“You hit me completely over the head with all of it, if I’m going to be honest.” He finally sat down next to her, gently taking the datapad away from her grasp.

“When did you realize?”

“When I saw you with Lorcan.”

“That was possibly the _dumbest_ thing we’ve come up with…”
“It looked real enough.”

Tirion looked up at him, with *that* look. That look of trickery and mischief. “You were *jealous*?”

“I will *never* be jealous of a *Hunter*.”

“Hmm-hmm.”

He dismissed that smile of hers. “What you two were doing looked real enough to be painful. How *he* made you laugh, and how you’d never choose me. I didn’t say it out loud until I got into an argument with Cayde. That’s when I really knew.”

“Wait…” Tirion’s smile turned into a grin. “Wait a minute…”

He shouldn’t have told her that. *Of course* she would pick up on that. “*Don’t.*”

“You told Cayde first?”

“He was being an annoying *pest* as usual. I didn’t mean to, I just had a long day. He was accusing me of sending Guardians to their deaths because of my feelings towards you.”

Oh, she was going to *revel* in all this newfound knowledge. “Cayde, of all people, was the first to f —”

Shaxx swiftly cut her off with a rough kiss, leaning into her until she was lying flat on the fur carpet. Fervent lips moving against hers as he pressed into her, pinning her against the floor, suddenly desiring *more*.

“*Don’t.*” He whispered again, to no avail as she laughed.

“You know, if you want me to stop talking about embarrassing things, you should do the exact opposite of *that.*” She said, out of breath. “Otherwise *I will* keep doing it.”

“Double edged sword.” He brushed his lips against hers again. “It’s the only way you’ll stay quiet.”

“We could always settle this in the Crucible.”

“No fun when the enemy doesn’t stand a chance. As much as I enjoy watching it, I’d like to keep *massacres* out of it.”

“The massacre of the enemy team when we two go against them, or *yours* when you go against me?”

“Tempting.”

“It was *not* a challenge, stop avoiding the question.” She said into his lips. They’ve had this conversation before, but the topic always got derailed. Largely at his insistence.

“I know for sure that you can completely *annihilate* me, in more ways than one. Whether you want to, or not.” Shaxx knew as well as she did that his low voice was enough to completely disarm her. He could say anything, but it was more fun for him to knock two birds out with one stone. He proceeded to move all the red hair away from her face with his palm, exposing her flushed face completely. “…good enough?”

“Good enough.”
He wasn’t going to give her what she wanted quite yet. “When did you realize, if I may ask?”

“When I saw how you looked at me just before you tried to kiss me for the first time.” She lifted the hand that wasn’t pinned under him to caress his lips. “I was afraid of thinking about it at first, I didn’t know you were capable of feeling any affection until I saw that look in your eyes. Then you never stopped looking at me like that.”

“Well then…” He whispered. “Let’s make up for those times I didn’t kiss you.”

She smiled again, just about as the Titan’s lips were about to crash into hers again.

Chapter End Notes

Happy (belated) Valentines!
“I need a shower…” Haya whined over the comms. “I wanted the shower in the engine of the Leviathan but Calus had to be a dick about it.”

“It’s done. Let’s not think about it.” Tirion said. “The Mind is dead, Nessus is safe for a while. Failsafe had her things to say about it. Onto the next one.”

“We almost died nine times, but hey, new cloak!” Lorcan chimed in. “New… cloak. Wait… half… half a cloak? Oh, come on. Did he seriously give me half of a bloody cloak?! I’m done working with him!”

The complaints and comments and various attempts at humour rang through the comms for a while as they flied home. It was a welcome change compared to the solemn silence and lingering anger after their first visit to the Leviathan. None of them expressed joy about their agreement with the exiled Cabal Emperor, but it paid too well to step away. If anything, it was just shared discomfort. Specifically, discomfort about the kill switches the Emperor has for all of them. He just needs to disable one of the six. The Vex tried, but Haya proved to be too strong. The Vex had four more chances, but Tirion was not going to let that happen.

Either way, it was hard not to trust Calus. He has shown to be their only ally and benefactor to help them survive upcoming apocalypse. But, could that apocalypse be just the imagination of an old man? Stuck in the past, and referring to a near-extinction event of his own people that happened long ago? She didn’t believe the latter. Calus was too smart and cunning.

If Calus had to die, he wanted to die surrounded by opulence. But, Calus didn’t want to die. He wouldn’t work with filthy creatures lesser than him otherwise. He knew that the only way to keep a Guardian on a leash is to threaten them with death, and offer treasures.

If they’re going to survive, the Guardians needed Calus, and Calus needed them. Something was coming.

Whispers in the dark told her something about the Traveler having a dark mirror. One which woke up alongside the Traveler.

Maybe she could prevent it right now. Another thing on her list. Tirion closed her eyes to concentrate, flickering stars too distracting. Her Ghost could drive for a moment.

Killing the Traveler would mean loss of the Light, loss of Guardians. Loss of Ghosts. Loss of her Little Light. Sacrificing abilities and immortality was easy, sacrificing friends was not. It was out of the question.

There had to be a way to put it back into eternal sleep.

But how? The Traveler did that to itself, put itself into a coma. It was awake now, but barely alive. The Traveler wasn’t flesh and bone, wasn’t nerves. There was no drug she could think of that could do the work. How do you numb a machine?

Smothering the Traveler would get her shunned out of the City, her track record won’t help with the outrage. Even if she would explain the reasons behind her actions, no one would stand for it. Unless she could find a way to show them what’s coming. No, that would be too time consuming. They didn’t have the means. Not without the Warminds, at least. Whatever she needed to do, it had to be done quick.
Maybe going back to the Shard will help. The wound of the Traveler. Examine its innards to find out what it’s made of…

“Ha! Busted!” Axel exclaimed. “I finally found you doing something fun!”

The woman put a small bookmark in the book she was reading, so she could close it to show the cover to the young man. Somehow, somewhere, she found an even older book about brains. Axel sighed loudly, almost breaking the plastic chair next to hers when he fell on it, giving up.

“What’s her story?” Emma looked through the window in front of her, at the woman lying in a white bed on the other side of it. She looked peaceful, unharmed. Nothing about her belonged in the hospital with the sick and the dying.

“Sleeping beauty. Was brought in here about two days ago, in the middle of the night.”

“By whom?”

“A couple on a night stroll. They found her in a coma in the middle of the street. If she wouldn’t be breathing, she’d be dead. You know what I mean. She’s completely fine besides the sleep thing.”

That piqued Emma’s interest. She squinted, trying to assess the patient from afar. She wasn’t allowed to wander into any room she wanted quite yet. Just one more exam. “No bruises?”

“No nothing. No identification. We call her Myx.”

“She’s too young to be a Myx.”

“We’ll find out later today.” It always amused him to see the gears turn in her head, waiting for the moment they turn too fast and fly off. “Why don’t you think she’s a Myx? Hey wait!”

Before anyone could notice, Emma snuck into the room of the woman. He saw her quickly swift over the journal next to her bed, and then run out, back in her chair and a phone in her hand with the pictures she took. She looked around, into the farthest reaches of the corridors, to make sure that she won’t get in trouble for her stunt.

“Alright…”

Axel looked wide eyed at her. “You trust me that much?”

“Huh?”

“What if I would have lied about the coma, and in reality she carried a virus that makes people bleed from their eyes?”

“I…” She looked up at him, confused as she always is by others. Mostly him. “I’m not bleeding from my eyes.”

“But you could.” Axel waited for a response that never came. “And I… I could be quiet and let you read.”

“It’s good practice…” Emma whispered, scrolling through her finds.

“For what?”

“Restraint. To be quiet.” She said. “Patients don't want their surgeons goofing off during a surgery. It’s a sign of detachment from reality. The patient will die, and I will not feel guilt.”
She jotted down what she could make out from the pictures. The patient wasn’t a Myx, but the name had stuck. Young woman. Nothing discernible about her. Notes about birthmarks being recently scratched away. No tattoos, hair not dyed. Wearing clothes that can be found at any given store. No jewelry. Nothing in her pockets. Not even lint.

Almost intentional, almost ceremonial. She put a tremendous amount of effort to end up in this state, to have the world forget her. Why remain alive, though?

“Do you have a home, Owens?” She cast him one of her looks at his question. “Not that you... look homeless or anything. Actually, the opposite. I only ever see you here or in the library or writing exams. Not that I... I'll shut up.”

“I have an apartment. I’ve spent a lot of time here before, and if I’m going to work here, might as well never leave.”

“Really? You want to stay on Earth? In this dump? Not work on Mars for Clovis Bray or something?”

“Clovis Bray doesn’t need brain surgeons.”

“They need them considering what I’ve been hearing. Heard the latest rumors about SIVA?”

“Not really.”

“How do you...” Axel interrupted his trail of thought. “Nevermind. I heard rumors that there has been some drama in the family.”

“What kind of drama?”

“Human experiments. At least five patients.”

Emma rolled her eyes. “Sounds like a smear campaign.”

“Talk around town is that at some point someone went mute because of SIVA, and that they have no plans to add any failsafes to it. Reeks of confidence! The company is undergoing a PR shitstorm right now.”

“Who went mute? Someone they experimented on, or an employee they wanted to stay quiet? Not sure which is worse.”

“Dunno. What if it’s both? Either way they desperately need someone to politely insert a sharp object into their brains. You always have a failsafe!”

Tirion gasped herself awake, Saturn in her sights and the dream quickly fading. Her body tensed up out of fear that she’ll automatically grip the steering wheel and launch her ship back into the Dreadnaught. Part of her mind will always live there, will always think that the Taken war didn’t end. She was at her weakest then. Without her friends, and appointed by guilt and the Vanguard to be the only one to fix it.

The readings on the dashboard caught her attention, pulling her out of her sea of thoughts.

“What the hell...” Tirion whispered. “Hey, guys are you seeing this on the feed? Something is going on Titan.”

“Let me check...” Haya slowed down her ship, ending the impromptu space-race she had with the
Hunters. “There is chatter about a failed strike and some... lost fireteams.”

“I... ‘glossed’ over Sloane’s terminal just now. Several fireteams went missing after getting sent to investigate a summoning ritual below the Arcology.” Lorcan read. “They got one report about an hour back, and then radio silence.”

“How many Guardians?”

“They sent a squad of nine.” Lorcan said. “Three more are on the way. What the entire hell? There was a big incident where we learned that sending big squads after the Hive is a bad idea.”

“Sounds like we need to get down there.” Tirion set the course for the moon. “That fireteam has no chance.”

“Tirion...” Haya knew about the Warlock and her stance on the Hive. “You don’t have to go down there. We can do it.”

“I’ll...” Worms slithering around her feet, weighing her down as she ran for the lanterns, running out of time as the closest one was almost a deep red. Screams of the Wizards piercing her ears, Thralls clawing her to pieces. Hive had their ways to create their own ideas of paradise. “I’ll be fine.”

“Are you sure?”

“I’ll try. I assume you’re coming with me. Huritt, want to join us? We’ll need your expertise.”

“I was about to volunteer.”

They landed next to the Arcology, running to find shelter from the rain, mumbling something about rust and fizzling out. Tirion didn’t want to be back there, but her own needs have never been a priority. Better to face her fears now than wait until Savathun forces her to. The City needs her at her best when a new threat comes.

She had to give the Hive credit for trying something new. Their locks were placed on a human door, and no keys scattered around. But, they forgot that the Guardians have their Ghosts, who occasionally have to be lockpicks.

Tirion always heard whispers at the back of her head when near the Hive. Undecipherable whispers. Occasional screams, if they were too close. No Guardian should ever become Ascendant, should ever become one of them. But, Guardians should sacrifice themselves for the greater good. Or so she has been told.

“Oh!” A voice cried out in pain. It was real. She knew it was real because she could understand it. “They already took my Ghost, please!”

She ran towards the source as fast as her feet could carry her, incinerating the Hive in her way. Whatever they were guarding, she was going to take it away from them. On a hunch, she took what remained of the strange crystal she destroyed, and slammed it into the receptible of the Shrieker, destroying it. The voice, however, was nowhere to be heard. She could swear it came from right where she was standing. Where the Hive now playing mind tricks on her, too? Able to somehow emulate Guardian voices?

“That Crystal you destroyed, it was full of Void Light!” Ghost remarked. “Void Light can only be created by Guardians. I don’t understand how the Hive got their claws on it.”
“From Guardians…” Tirion realized. “That has to be the only way. They took it from Guardians. Huritt!”

“Right ahead of you…” The Exo raised his hand to demonstrate the arc energy crackling around his fingers. But, his eyes were distracted by everything in the cave. “I’ve studied the Hive more than anyone, and never heard of them doing this before, it can’t be right. Void, however, would be the quickest way for them to summon something.”

“Please…” Tirion pleaded to anyone that would listen. “Please tell me we’re not too late!”

“Too late for what?” Haya asked, running alongside the Warlock.

“Savathun! We need to keep her out of this realm!”

They jumped down a couple of levels, deeper into what was slowly becoming a tomb. More purple crystals in their way, she swore she counted more than nine. She couldn’t let the Hive have what remained. To the Hive, it was fuel. To her, they were Guardians. Guardians that shouldn’t have ended up there. They had resources and measures to prevent it.

“I think that’s a cap on some kind of summoning spell.” Ghost immediately started to scan the weird device. “It’s powered by… Void Light. You were right.”

“Wait just a damn minute. Lorcan said that nine Guardians were sent out…” Haya tried to get her thoughts in order, walking into one of the nearby worm-infested caves with her gun drawn. “We destroyed more than nine crystals so far!”

And it wasn’t going to stop.

The walls of the small cave lit up with purple light. Counting them was too painful. All she needed to know was that there were more than nine.

“These crystals are keeping the barrier up.” Huritt pointed out, tapping lightly at the barrier with his gun. There was an entire battalion of Hive on the other side of it, waiting. Killing them requires time no one has.

“Destroy them, and then turn around.” Tirion commanded.

“We’re retreating?”

“No. We’re taking a shortcut.” Pulling out her trusty sidearm, Tirion forced herself to not count the shots as she obliterated the crystals, hearing the scream of each Guardian as she did. Better to free them than the alternative. All those lives wasted, pointlessly. At what point would they have stopped sending fireteams? More than nine Guardians dying wasn’t enough. She returned her attention to the summoning cap, kneeling to touch the bone it was made of. Bone was always brittle. Immense force in the form of flaming hammers would be overkill any other day.

“Think you can melt this, Haya? I want this gone.”

Fire consumed the Titan when she gladly summoned the Hammers, a welcome warmth in the rotten caves. She threw them at the device until it disintegrated, revealing a passageway down below. A passageway into more rot and filth of the Hive.

“How did you know that was there?” Huritt asked.

“Something is screaming down there and we need to take care of it.”
“Screaming?!” Haya shouted.

Tirion didn’t answer, just jumped into the hole. They managed to intercept some of the Cursed Thralls before they got to them. There was very little Light down there to die for fun.

“Wait, is someone there?” A woman’s voice called out. An Exo, kneeling next to a receptacle, resembling one they saw before and used to destroy a smaller shrieker. “Thank the Traveler! My name is Taeko-3, only one left…”

“What happened here?” Ghost asked.

“We came down here as a squad of nine. Got picked off one by one. Watched a Wizard rip the Light out of my best friend and funnel it into some kind of crystal.”

“So, it’s true. They were harvesting Guardians.” Ghost sighed, broken hearted. “What is that thing up there? A Shrieker?”

“Yep. Biggest Shrieker I've seen in all my lives. Mark my words, something real mean and real old is gonna use that thing to lay eyes on this planet.”

“How do we kill it?” Tirion asked. The Shrieker was closed shut. Only thing she cared about was opening it up. “We’ve been able to use the crystals against a smaller shrieker. Could we do the same for this big one?”

“Well, we better figure out fast. I’m not sure how much my Ghost can take, and I’m running out of ammo.” Taeko drew her gun, and the screams returned. “They’re back for another round.”

The Hive flooded in through every crevice, going after all four of them forcing each Guardian to focus on themselves. Tirion always considered fire to be a special element. The most destructive of the three. Void is just a sinister plaything, and arc sparks go out within seconds.

Fire will never have a limit. Fire will live on long after the firestarter has died.

“It’s no use. Give Sloane my regards!” A determined shout pierced the air. “Embrace the Praxic Fire!”

Tirion only caught a glimpse of it. Of a valiant Wizard tearing the Light out of Taeko, leaving just a crystal. And now it had its eyes on the remaining Guardians.

The Guardians showed it no mercy. There was no time nor room for it.

Silence.

“Taeko…” Huritt gasped, dragging his feet to the purple crystal that was left behind. “She…”

“She did that on purpose!” Haya blurted. “I saw her run towards the Wizard.”

“The Song of Savathun stripped her Light.” Huritt carefully touched the crystal. “She allowed it to strip her light and turn it into ammunition for us. Like her weapon.”

“So the Vanguard sent out a CSAR mission for a Fireteam that doesn’t desire staying alive? What’s the point?”

“They sent out a CSAR mission for a Fireteam that does what they have to do.” Tirion drew out her sidearm. “Let’s go. I don’t want to spend any more time here.”
The crystal shattered, angering the Shrieker as it unleashed its song again. They were too angry to be susceptible to Savathun’s spells, and they had the upper hand. The Shrieker’s minutes were numbered.

*Nothing* and *no one* survives the Guardians of Guardians.

Just as with all things they encounter, the Shrieker succumbed to the damage after the firefight. Exploding into pieces with one final scream. Savathun was delayed.

“We did it.” Ghost broke the silence. “Wish it would have went differently, but—”

Tirion kicked the remains of the Shrieker in anger, causing it roll down the little hill of Hive filth. “Damn it!” She growled.

“There was nothing we could have done for her…” Huritt mumbled.

“Oh, we *could*! While we were out there, dealing with Argos, Guardians were *dying down here*! And it didn’t begin *today*!” Tirion yelled. “They were *dying* here, because the Vanguard kept sending them here!”

“It’s *not* the fault of the *Vanguard*.” Huritt tried to help.

“Fuck *yep* it is!” Haya cut in.

“How?”

“Because they decided to send a bunch of Guardians to be slaughtered by a race who grow stronger by slaughtering others, that’s why!” Tirion answered in Haya’s stead. “We could have delayed the attack on Argos if we would have known. I checked the boards, there were no strike operations for Titan until about an *hour* ago. *This* has been going on for longer than an hour!”

“So those bastards not only allowed but also *sent* Guardians here willy-nilly?” Haya hissed, but then blinked in surprise. “*Why* am I surprised by this? I think I’m getting old.”

“Uh, guys? I found something.” Ghost was scanning a corpse of a Knight, trying not to get involved in the argument. “This Knight is holding on to an old Ghost. *Very* old. It’s from the time when the Hive first invaded. I think I can pull some recordings out of it.”

“Do it.” Tirion ordered him. “Why would a Knight hold onto a Ghost for all these years?”

“This Knight was dead long before we got there. The Ghost is almost… ew, *melted* into him. Part of the chitin. The core of the Ghost is still intact.” Ghost turned his eye to her. “Just proves what a good Ghost shell can do.”

Somehow, the Little Light always made her smile. “Why were you looking at me when you said that, Little Light?”

“No reason. You’ve been good. All done.”

“Well. Guess we’re going to be stuck with paperwork for the rest of— rest of the…” Loud thumping and footsteps cut her off, and the three Guardians drew their guns. The mission just didn’t want to end. On top of that, it didn’t sound anything like the Hive. “Oh, come on!”

“This is Caliban. We’ve made it down into the Chasm of Screams and—” The stranger Titan cut himself off when he noticed the other Guardians aiming their guns at his team. “We’re not alone!”
“Hi!” Tirion waved her free hand.

“Er… No. No, all Hive are dead. We found three other Guardians. I don’t think they’re one of the missing ones. It’s… a Titan and two Warlocks.” The Titan spoke into his microphone to whomever was on the other side.

“We’re right here, ya dipshit.” Haya rolled her eyes. “We got here before you.”

“Oh…” The male Titan stuttered, crumbling under Haya’s and Tirion’s intense stares. “Y-yeah… they match the description— Zavala wants to know how you got here before us and what you’re doing here.”

“Shortcuts.” Tirion answered bluntly. “Among other things.”

“She just said ‘shortcuts’— I can—I don’t know! They’re here, and everything around them is dead! Look, I’m patching you in. Sir.”

“No need. Tell him I’ll talk to him when we get back to the City.” She got her Ghost back in her hand, locking for transmat to her ship and her friends followed. “I’m using the word talk very loosely.”

Log… I lost track of it. Log thirty something. There was something special about that number.

This will be the last thing I’ll ever say. Make the Vanguard listen to it. Get my voice to echo in their heads.

The Vanguard ordered over a thousand Guardians to go on a full-scale assault on the moon. Zavala said that the main priority was to establish a beachhead. They ordered us to go up there like our lives don’t mean anything, under some excuses about Guardian duty and heroism and fancy speeches. I saw a thousand of those things kill five hundred of us in seconds.

The Vanguard killed us. Remember that. Remember that there ain’t nothing with them. It’s just pain and then you’re gone. The Vanguard don’t care about you. They never will. They will treat you as their children to get you to follow them into deepest valleys. But you will never be their child.

All the Vanguard are going to do is lock this moon away and forbid everyone from going here. They will cover up their mistakes. Forbid people burying their friends. Forbid people from avenging their friends.

Friends…

You know, before all this my name was Axel. I was a doctor and now I’m dying with a gun in my hand. I knew this… amazing person. Remembering those green eyes was the only thing that kept the fear out of my mind when the Hive set the sky ablaze. This is not a love proclamation. She was terrifying. A terrifying creature with a heart of gold. She wasn’t from this world. I know that. Only reason I know she didn’t forget her promise to meet me in a zombieland is because Crota didn’t shrivel and die. If she would have been there, all she would have had to do is look at that beast with those ‘shut up’ eyes, and he would have died.

I’m going to pretend that that’s how it went down. Makes dying easier. That I was just a casualty because I was an idiot. That she jumped into the Hellmouth and killed Crota and then there was peace.
I can almost see her there, red hair only splash of color in this worm-infested dump. Shrugging off incredible deeds as if they were nothing. Then I would say something incredibly stupid, and she’d roll her eyes, and laugh when she thought that no one saw her.

I think I’ll do that.

I’ll do that.

The recording came to a stop there.

“Rune.” Haya murmured. “His name was Rune. I recognize that voice. Goddamnit all, we tried to save him! Why was he an idiot about it? He had one job!”

“Save him?” Tirion has never heard that story.

“We knew things would go sideways on the moon. I and Lorcan.” She told. “We made quite a lot of Glimmer from… diverting Guardians from taking the order to reclaim the Moon. We were very bored.”

Something was dubious about the tale to the Warlock. “Were you saving lives because you genuinely cared and got inspired, or because the Hive parked a ship full of Glimmer outside of your front door?”

“We got inspired by the ship full of Glimmer.”

“Got it. So, ‘diverting’ means…?”

“We had them run errands.” Lorcan said, eyes stuck on the dead Ghost. “My job was to pretend to be their friend to get some ‘I have an urgent deadline and I need a favor from you, I’ll pay you back when I can’ kind of things. We had about twenty people in on the scheme.”

“How many did you save?”

“We got about 200-250 Guardians to go against orders, that’s where I lost count. I also lost my voice that day. We had people buy time during the Consensus meetings, to prolong decision making. To be a nuisance. I think some of us got exiled from the City for being annoying.”

Haya sighed. “Rune got the errand done and then immediately ran off to the Moon, apparently. He never reported back to us, so we assumed he jumped ship out of the City and went into hiding. Guess the Vanguard were on to us and were getting desperate.”

“Shaxx begged the Consensus and Zavala to delay the attack. You weren’t the only ones.” Tirion began. “He wanted to examine and understand the Hive’s weapons, to train against them. Not just attack instantly and hope for the best. Zavala told him that it’s up to the Consensus to decide. Consensus decided.”

“This is a mess.” Haya breathed out through her fingers, palming her face.

“Yeah… can’t wait to see how our third crisis of faith will look like when Calus calls us again.” Lorcan joked, albeit without any humor. He clicked his tongue. “So, what in the holy jolly Hive hell do we do now?”

Tirion made a decision. It wasn’t a difficult one. “Keep hunting the Minds while we keep an eye on Titan. Business as usual.”
“I meant with the Vanguard.”

“I think that there are things far more important than these conflicts.” Tirion said. “I think we and the Vanguard need to be able to work together when needed. Yes, I’m bitter about them not telling us about Titan, but we were nowhere to be found in the hour of need, were we? I’m angrier at myself.”

“We have the power to hijack their plans, hack into their communications. We could go great lengths to not talk to them.” Haya pointed out. “We just need to check their feeds every two seconds now out of fear that they’ll do something dumb, of course!”

“Well, we’re understaffed. We can’t hire people, so we’re going to have to expand our tech. Have our Ghosts get notified when an anomaly happens.”

“I can start the work on that today. Will need Alva for it.” Lorcan said. “Can’t fight if we spend the whole day just staring at the monitors. Alva’s the coder, I’m the screw driver person.”

“So, we’re really doing this? Starting a war against the Vanguard?” Haya wanted to make sure, just in case. “I thought that finally saying the words out loud would be more satisfying.”

“It’s not a war.” Tirion looked at the other side. Alva was already in hiding somewhere, in her room last time anyone saw her. Huritt was unresponsive, in thought about what he witnessed on Titan. That only left Kouhei.

“I was at the Reef during the Hive struggles. We had strict orders to defend our own, and be smart about it.” The Titan said. “I have no opinions on the Vanguard.”

“That’s…” Lorcan scowled in confusion. “Noble of you.”

“The City has similar opinions about the Reef. About the Awoken. That we’re homicidal shut-ins, recluses. Tirion has improved our reputation and how people view us. But, our smallest notoriety is when one of our own killed nine City Guardians and their Ghosts over a miscommunication.”

“Must have been some miscommunication!”

“I’m just saying it would be hypocritical for me to have an issue with the Vanguard.”

“Don’t take this the wrong way but, why are you here Kouhei?” Tirion wanted to know. “You’re still welcomed at the Reef, you consider that to be your home, and your loyalty lies with them. Yet you stay here with us. You’re appreciated here but… I’m just curious.”

Tirion wasn't prepared for what she accidentally instigated. For what a glorious mess their den was about turn into. Kouhei was struggling, red glowing eyes almost flashing.

“Oh, here we go! Look at him!” Haya quietly laughed, eyes zooming into Kouhei’s face, wide smile on her own face. “Say it!”

“I won’t say it, Haya.” He stood up from the couch, trying to hide an unthinkable smile under his dark beard with the scowl. “And you know why, Tirion.”

“Kouhei, don’t leave!” Lorcan was about to fall on the floor from laughing as he begged Kouhei to stay, reaching out to try and clutch onto his legs. The Titan escaped the traps of the Hunter, and headed for the door to attend some other business. “Come on! You can do it, Kouhei! Kouheeeeeeei! Come back! We love you, too! Say it!”
“No!” He accidentally abandoned his battle, by cracking a visible smile at Lorcan finally losing his balance, rolling off the couch to land on the carpet, in pain from laughing. His cloak stuck on a piece of rusty metal sticking out of the couch, keeping him from rolling further. Haya helped his not functioning state by unclasping the cloak at his neck to make sure he won’t suffocate himself. It was the arguments with the Ghosts that made dying unpleasant.

“This is why Calus gave you half a cloak.” Haya muttered, trying to get it untangled from the metal.

“I…” Lorcan wheezed. “Oh, man. Don’t let me being a responsible cloak owner distract you from Kouhei smiling over there!”

Kouhei quickly regained his composure and carried on, knowing that nothing slips past them. It was too late.

“You looooove us!” Haya shouted just about as he was about to walk through the door. “You love us and you know it! You softie!”
State of crisis.

Tirion tried to snuff herself out. Holding her breath underneath the water, watching it warp and distort the lights on the ceiling.

Plagued by memories and dreams of both past and future and set out to drive on roads leading to nowhere. She theorized that perhaps her brain categorized things wrong. Instead of restoring memories that were lost when her Light was ripped away from her, it brought back memories of when she had no Light. A voice somewhere deep inside her head laughed at the ridiculous idea.

She has become a representative of prophecies and expectations. Prophecies and perfect paradoxes set in stone before she had a say. No individuality, just the prophecy. The hero, Guardian of Guardians. Subconsciously sabotaging everything. Would Saint be still alive if it wasn’t for her?

There she went again, still burning.

There was nothing inviting about letting her lungs fill with water, she just needed to find a way to force herself to calm down. Past the fear of getting submerged, she needed to learn to embrace the hissing silence. Getting Hive gunk out of her skin was barely a concern. Finding the courage to get out of the warm water and step out into the cold apartment was. Maybe she could toss a grenade, hover it in the air a little while. Grenades were hardly ever about control and finesse, rather just throwing them at anything that moved. Warlocks who chose to wield the powers of the Void and Gunslingers often disagreed with that statement, arguing that having grace, elegance and beauty in battle is a crucial thing. Naturally, they are usually found being graceful, elegant, and beautiful behind a Titan’s barricade. The Titans sighed at the different kinds of sartorial contests and struggles, prioritizing protection and how many enemies they can kill, over looking good.

Knowing that she’ll become one with the water if she stays there any longer, she bit the bullet and got out, throwing on the first shirt she found. She knew what to do next, at least.

"What are you hoping to find?" Asked Ghost, curious about her sudden interest in the old journals. “Thought you were done with these journals.”

“I had a dream. It ended with a cliff-hanger.” She told him. “If my dream was a memory, then I’ll probably find something about it in her… er, my diaries.”

“You knew Rune, didn’t you?”

The hurt she felt at the name was akin to a muscle memory, voice not her own quietly crying out in pain somewhere deep inside.

“I did. Thought we might find him alive.”

Pages upon pages of handwritten diary entries, preserved by a force she still didn’t understand. A lot of people would pay great Glimmer for the contents, but it wouldn’t be fair to anyone to sell it. She didn’t care if it was selfish to withhold knowledge. It didn’t survive this long to get sold and its secrets dissected, once-private thoughts exposed to the world.
“You know, I’m just going to say this, I don’t think it’s fair to blame the Vanguard.” Ghost said, sensing her inner struggles. “The Hive are monsters. Today reinforced that, but... When they attacked, the primary focus was to reclaim what’s ours. Everyone was angry.”

“Does that justify it?”

“The other option was to not do anything about it and then let them come for Earth. We gave up the Moon to keep them away from Earth, we thought it might be enough for them.”

“I just want to know if it was enough.”

“We had them contained there for a little while. They reached Earth around the time I finally found you. Lucky timing, huh?”

“I’m... I’m so conflicted.” Tirion sighed at the inability to find a better word. “I know that those decisions had to be made, I know why, but would have other options led to fewer dead Guardians? I know it’s completely pointless to think about it now.”

“Is this about when Hive first invaded, or about what happened on Titan?”

“Titan was my fault.” She berated herself. “I should have been more readily available. I should have kept an eye on Titan earlier but I didn’t because I was scared. I was scared of going back there.”

She had to look past her team’s peer pressuring to detest the Vanguard. She owed a lot to the Vanguard and they owed a lot to her. She was blindsided by the frustrations that came from pointless loss of life.

Including her own.

The world needed Guardians more than ever. Everyone could agree on that.

“To be fair, you were busy saving all of time and space.” Ghost tried to help.

“I still should have been better.”

“Unless you find a way to clone—Nope! Not even going to joke about that!”

With no date to follow, Tirion would have to read the diary from the beginning to find the story of that woman. She saw different mentions of Axel when flipping through the pages, along many other names that didn’t ring any bells. She had the diary on her on the day of the attack, always holding it close. It has survived hell and highwater, as if fated. Reading the diary still felt wrong, intrusive. She didn’t recognize that life, even with the small glimpses she gets at it when she sleeps.

“I found something…” She trailed the writing with one finger. “‘Axel, my local key to shenanigans around these parts. He’s on a mission from at least three different entities to get me to act more human.’” Tirion read.

“How the tables have turned…”

“Hush…” She shushed Ghost. “‘He can be annoying, I think he’s terrified of me. But he’s the only person in the country that can stand me. I could tell him that I burned the hospital down and he’d be the only person who could forgive me.’ Was I that bad? Am I still that bad?”
“I refuse to comment.” Ghost dodged the question, jokingly. Swiftly avoiding her friendly swat of her hand. “If he thought you were terrifying without a gun in your hand, I don’t ever want to meet you before you became a Guardian.”

“I take issue with that word now. I really do.”

She continued skimming through the pages, reading silently to herself. A lot of it was verbiage she didn’t understand, medical terms. Abbreviations, levels of schooling that no longer existed. Scribbles about Clovis Bray and other Golden Age brands she recognized. No mention of that woman so far. There had to be something, some ending to that story. She was hardly insignificant.

A door loudly opening behind her caused a smile to creep up on her face. The heavy footsteps accompanied sounds of heavier discarded armor hitting the floor, helmet always gently placed on a table. Couldn’t risk losing the other horn.

The tips of Shaxx’s fingers tickled her neck as he slowly moved her damp hair away, sending a pleasant shiver down her spine. Every movement calculated to get that effect. Not like it was difficult.

“Evening…” Hot breath on her neck with every syllable he drew out in the simple word, lips fluttering on it, traveling up with every kiss. “What are you up to?”

“I’m reading about comas. You’re being very distracting.” Tirion leaned into his hold, his hands moving from her shoulders to around her waist, gripping the silks of the shirt she was wearing.

“Am I?” He nibbled on her earlobe with his soft lips, tugging on it just a tad, triumphant over the small moan he got out of her.

“You are.”

He chuckled, and placed his head on her shoulder. The strong aroma of flowers from her bath and the shirt that barely reached her knees… it was all quite alluring.

“What’s this about comas?”

“The Vanguard and other recent events are making me want to slip into a coma.” Tirion flipped through the pages of the journal. “No. Jokes aside, I remembered something. Just want to know the end of it. Had to do with a woman in a coma.”

“The Vanguard are just pre-occupied with their own agendas.” He whispered. “They miss a lot of good things happening.”

Tirion shut the journal, too pleasantly distracted by him drawing small circles with his finger on her bare thigh. “Hm. Long day?”

Shaxx hummed out a silent response, hugging her close instead of continuing the journey up her shirt and her slender leg. “There was quite the turmoil about the Hive. The Vanguard are not happy, to say the least. Which then in turn went into my territory regarding the need for Guardian training. You know how it goes.”

Tirion turned until she was facing his tired face, his hands never leaving her waist. “There is Guardian training for battle, and then there are Guardians making bad decisions.”

“One and the same.” He said. “With every new threat there is a cadre of Guardians to educate and forge. I won’t have rookies out there without knowing the basics.”
“It worked well for me to get sent out there without knowing the basics and only get told to…” Tirion cleared her throat dramatically; “Destroy this machine god, and send their souls screaming back to Hell!”

Shaxx rolled his eyes, “I’m not much for talking you out of things, but please don’t do that again.” Despite being slightly disturbed at her impersonating Zavala, he still found it amusing.

“Oh, the things our Ghosts could tell you. Haya can do a perfect imitation of Ikora if she tries.”

He could only imagine. “And I’m sure you haven’t used that for any kind of misdemeanor…”

“Us? Being up to no good? Good thing we no longer have a Speaker to exile you for this heresy!”

The sun was barely up and the City was still shrouded in the cold of night. Haya’s message was brief, and unusually cryptic. Coordinates where to meet her, somewhere east of the City, nothing about what they should expect. Tirion ignored the flood of messages until the Titan called her through her Ghost, yelling at her to be there as soon as she can.

She found them sitting next to a building. Huritt was keeping himself awake by reading a book, Alva gave up the battle long ago and was still asleep on Kouhei’s shoulder. Lorcan was tinkering with another new project, barely able to hold the screwdriver with his tired hands.

What stuck out the most to Tirion was the group of about twenty Titans standing in a field not too far away.

“What is going on?” Tirion asked, taking a seat next to her team. “Haya yelled at me to get here.”

“Same.” Lorcan yawned, abandoning his project and crossing his arms for warmth. “Maybe she finally snapped and wants us to sacrifice Guardians? She’s not getting my knife. My knife is for stabbing, not for... ritual sacrifice.”

Tirion stared at the confused Titans, they more lost than her. “Who are these people?”

“I have no clue. They don’t seem to have noticed us.”

Clang.

Fire of the Hammers of Sol lit up the area like the sun, aimed straight for the group of Guardians.

Guardian Down

Guardian Down

Guardian Down

The Titans owed a great deal to the blinding fire that surrounded them, because it covered the shame of those who ran away, screaming in fear.

Guardian Down

Guardian Down

A couple of Titans found harmony and rational thought in the hot chaos, tried to block it with their swords and panicked Wards, some tried deflecting the ruthless Hammers with their own Hammers. To no avail as the relentless assault continued.
A unison of Ghosts called out the status of their Guardians, and the Hammers didn’t stop until none were standing. A sea of confused and frightened Ghosts gathering Light to rez their Guardians, anticipating at least four more revives when they did their jobs.

Tense silence followed, replacing the flames which were slowly dying off. One Ghost was brave enough to revive its Guardian, but a Hammer struck them down again before the Guardian could gasp for breath.

“Alright, my little shits!” Haya called out, picking up her mug from the ground. “You can all safely come back to life now. Let’s get to it.”

Reluctantly, the Guardians were revived by their Ghosts, one by one. One of the Guardians audibly winced when Haya brought the cup to her lips to take a drink, shaking hand on her gun.

As if that was going to save her.

“Wow… she’s really on a mission to get Ouros to crawl out of her grave, isn’t she?” Lorcan watched the ordeal with newfound interest. “Also, what she just did can only be done if your sense of smell died about two centuries ago.”

“That’s disgusting.” Tirion grunted.

“Did I say two centuries? I meant nineteen.” Lorcan joked. “Ha-ha! She can’t get angry at me if she can’t hear me!” He stuck out his tongue.

Haya separated the group into two, the ones who ran away in fear and the ones who stood resilient. She quickly shut down the complaints about fairness, as it wasn’t the Crucible and she wasn’t Shaxx.

The Cabal assaulting the Sunbreaker outpost wasn’t fair.

Ouros’ mighty Order getting eradicated by the Cabal wasn’t fair.

Was it deserved? Up to debate. But fairness got them nothing.

She won’t be able to teach them how to survive by being fair.

Won’t be able to make them unbreakable.

Long speeches will do little. Long speeches can’t break the brittle and bend the weak.

The weak needed to be made strong. The strong needed to walk away steeled and tempered.

She needed to become the Forge.

Only after that, she’ll consider letting them take the Oath. And then, only then, their journey will start.

The Titans were ordered to give up their guns, as their Light was all they needed. Haya, although she won’t admit it, completely reveled in all of it. She was aware that she was using fear to control them, just as the Warlords did with her, but it was a necessary evil. Part of the test she was devising. A test to drive the fear out of them was the first step. She was done wasting time. She
was going to become better than Ouros, smarter. Stronger. Ouros could curse her from the grave all she wanted. It didn’t matter.

Haya was going to put her and her Order to shame.

“Alright. I need you, the stronger ones, to summon your Hammers and throw them at the other group.” Haya commanded. “Now.”

“What does this achieve?” A Titan complained, cringing as another loud clang of the Hammer rang through the air. She threw it up in the air, catching it again when it fell after a flip.

“Nope. You go to the other group.” She ordered, and the Titan scuttled over to the other side, gulping. “I want you to beat the shit out of each other until none of you wince.”

“Wait so, attempted murders amongst Guardians are tolerated?”

Haya’s Hammer went straight for the new complainer’s face, instigating chaos again as her Sunbreakers obeyed her orders, being offered no choice. She let it go on for a couple of minutes, examining every face with a stern gaze. They learned quickly. They knew they had to learn if they wanted the pain to stop. It was a team effort, just like the Order. If one of them winced and faltered, the whole team would suffer for it.

One weak link meant death. Meant sending text transmissions with your last words to anyone who would listen. Humiliation.

“Alright!” She called it off. “Let’s take a break before Shaxx gets down here and complains about this.”

Haya still had work to do, as her group of Titans fell in exhaustion, bruised and battered. She made a mental note of the few that stood the tallest, no matter how hunched over they were. The strongest ones, the ones the others should aspire to be better than. There was just one more thing. She picked up one of the guns from the ground and shot at random Guardians, pleasantly surprised at someone returning fire with a hand cannon.

“Good!” Haya complimented. “You. Stand up.”

The Titan looked around, at the shocked expressions of his other peers and pointed at himself.

“Me?”

“We can work on that, but yes.”

The poor Titan almost passed out when he tried to stand up, denying help of his peers. Hesitantly, he walked over to Haya. She could sense the feigned awkwardness and hesitance. He couldn’t fool her.

“Uh…”

“What’s your name?” She asked.

“Ivo.”

Haya turned to the audience. “Ivo didn’t flinch once during either one of the assaults, and didn’t trust me when I told you to discard all of your guns. He was prepared. As far as I can tell, all of you combined don’t reach his Sunbreaker potential.”
“But we’re already Sunbreakers!” A Guardian complained.

“You can wield the Hammer but you haven’t taken the Oath. If you want to take the Oath at some point, become better than Ivo tomorrow.”

“This is ridiculous…” One of them muttered, standing up. “But I won’t say no to competition.”

“Get over here.” She beckoned him, and he followed. “What is your name?”

His smile was derisive to the point where it made Haya almost vomit. “Oh, it’s Saint-14!”

The Titan couldn’t duck the punch that came from Haya, his body almost leaving a crater in the ground where he fell from the impact, his face scorched from the fire. Arc energy spread from Haya’s fingertips to her arms, and before it consumed her whole she was running towards the winded Titan, the slam of her Fist of Havoc obliterating him.

Guardian down!

Her hand cannon was now aimed at his frightened Ghost, finger hugging the trigger.

Tirion cast one look at Lorcan and Kouhei, and it was all that was needed for them to get the message and get them to run alongside her to stop it. Nothing could distract Haya when she was blinded by rage. It was too late by the time Tirion reached her. The crowd gasped in terror as the gun went off, echoing through the City.

There was no target Haya couldn’t hit. Not when it still hurt.

Tirion opened her eyes in dread, and found purple all around her, Void energy growling at her, and small white sparks dancing in the purple. Relieved, she found that Kouhei had placed a Ward just in the nick of time, it’s edge between Haya and the Ghost. The bullet bounced off the Ward, not hitting the intended target. Once the cocky Titan got revived, he crawled away, as quickly as he could from Haya.

It wasn’t enough. Not for what he said. Not for that smug smile on his face.

Haya stepped out of the Ward and shot the Titan in the leg to stop him, and threw the gun at his pained face as he yelled in pain, effectively knocking him out. His blood stained the concrete before his Ghost could start healing him.

She was breathing heavily, glaring at the passed-out Titan, the only thing she could see. And certain people were berating her for being unworthy of the Hammer and the Oath.

“Haya!” Tirion tried to get her attention. “Hey... It’s alright. You're alright. Come back. It’s safe.”

“I lost myself there for a minute.” Haya whispered through heavy breaths. “Bastard.”

“Yeah, I was about to tether you!” Lorcan proclaimed, trying his best to convince his body that the panic was over. “I hate when you go Warlord. What the entire hell...”

Haya gestured towards the Titan on the ground. She’ll play the tape of Ouros’ last words to them if she has to. Show them what failure looks like. “Do you want to take the oath and become a Sunbreaker, or do you want to be a smartass and die like the previous Order? Fail like Ouros?”

“Sunbreaker... Sunbreaker!” One of them answered, and the others followed, turning into a chant.
Tirion was grateful to have people in her life that make the stress of an impending doom seem like nothing. Haya has her moments, Lorcan calls it Going Warlord. Certain things put her in a different world where all she sees is death. If she was prepared to do that to a Sunbreaker rookie, Osiris had the best of reasons to burrow himself into a reality engine where no one could find him. Tirion didn’t take the threats to kill Sagira seriously up until now. Now she knew with certainty that if Osiris for whatever reason steps out of the Forest, he will get killed on the spot. Vex getting into her brains was the only thing that prevented Haya from going in there and destroying him.

Saint’s death still stung.

A note on the stone and a prayer doesn’t put a stop to grief. It will sting for as long as it needs to.

Rest of the lecture went well. The recruits knew what they were in for. Next lesson was going to focus on battle techniques, how to draw the best out of one’s Light, how to throw the Hammer the furthest. There was so much they had to know before she allowed them to take the oath.

It ended when the sun was high in the sky, the Guardians had duties to do. She took a note of those who decided to rest instead for team forming tomorrow. Resting gets people killed.

The walk to the den was silent, no one was sure if Haya was out of her state. One of the rare moments Lorcan didn’t dare to crack a joke. That Titan could level the City if she wanted to.

Haya will be okay. She always ends up okay. When the opportunity presented itself, Tirion found Kouhei for questions only he could answer, asking him to meet her outside. Only way she’ll get silence in her head if she gets answers.

The second she saw him, she refused to stall. He hated stalling as it was.

“You remember what happened, don’t you?” Kouhei avoided looking at her when she asked the question. “You remember what happened to us…”

“What do you remember, Tirion?” He asked instead, cutting her off. Barely phased by the sudden confrontation. “Of when you died.”

“I was in Old Russia, in a stockpile. Then this... boiling darkness came, and I died.” The Titan scoffed at her words, crossing his arms. “It’s the truth! That’s what the shard showed me when I went to regain my powers!”

“You didn’t die then.” Kouhei said. “I don’t know what that shard showed you, but you didn’t die then. The shard lied to you.”

“What are you talking about?”

“We – Awoken – were created at the edge of the Deep Black. You didn’t die in Old Russia.”

His words didn’t make sense. Not after all she found and all she went through. “I have proof I was there. I found my car, documents. Diaries. Was able to trace things back.”

“You were there. You didn’t die there. Something brought you back there after you died.”

“You sound like you know a lot about this.”

Kouhei nodded. “I’ve tried to investigate it, just like you did. Tried to trace things back. It only led me to weird time distortions, items, thoughts, moments that shouldn’t be here.” He grunted in frustration. “Whatever happened to us... it shouldn’t be solved. Shouldn’t be revealed. Something
doesn’t want us to. They will do all in their power to stop us.”

Tirion was so close. She wasn’t going to let it slip. “Kouhei… please. There are so little of us left.”

“Maybe that’s for the best. Maybe Savathun will finish us off. For the longest time I thought we were the apex, but… we’re the anomalies.”

“Don’t you want answers, regardless of who we are?”

“Look. If you want answers…” He shouldn’t be telling her this. But, she wasn’t going to let go. He had to make a decision. “We... We need to talk to the Emissary of The Nine.”

“We?”

“Yes. We. All I know is that you shouldn’t go there alone.”

Tirion, like others, knew very little of the Nine. Warlocks theorized that they are like the Awoken, but took a step too far into the Dark. Light hurts them, but they are not part of the Darkness the same way the Hive are. So many mysteries. The overturned stone reveals the ants beneath.

“Where?” Tirion asked, with newfound determination. She knew the answer.

“Where it all began. Unknown space.”

“Unknown space…” Tirion whispered. “I have no idea where it is but somehow I know exactly how to get there.”

Chapter End Notes

We get a little mad sometimes.
I'm Not Human at All

She’ll never get tired of getting woken up by the tender touch of his fingers lightly caressing her back. Always trailing those little specs of light on her skin, fascination never ending. Shaxx could do it all night. It helped to deal with the rough nights when sleep wouldn’t find him. She always would wake up from it, laugh softly, turn her head to him and say…

“Hey, big guy.”

The smile was never visible under the mass of red hair, but he always knew it was there. Her hair was a lot longer now, usually kept in a loose braid when she’s out and about. Tirion doesn’t have the heart to cut it, she’d miss the cushioning for her helmet, and on top of that she would miss the complaints from her team.

For all the things that changed, a whole lot stayed the same.

“Hey…” He whispered.

“What are you thinking about?”

But, a lot has changed. The world outside the room they were in held no resemblance to their previous world. The process of watching it burn down and then having to deal with the fallout was one of the reasons he couldn’t sleep.

“About what happened back at the Farm. I can’t stop thinking about it.” He finally admitted. “I’m trying to count how many times I have lied down next to you just listening to you breathe since then.”

“Oh.”

“I’ve lost count.” He muttered, resting his cold hand on her warm shoulder. “I lost count.”

Tirion still wished he wouldn’t have had to endure that. Only if she had a choice back then.

“I’ll be fine. I don’t want you to stay up all night worrying about it. I also don’t want your heart to stop beating due to lack of sleep. Or worse, you getting cranky at the recruits.” Tirion reached out a hand to turn his head so he’d look at her, his own hand landed on hers, keeping it from dropping from the side of his face. “I also have my Ghost this time around. I didn’t have him back then.”

“I don’t get cranky at the recruits.”

“You do.”

“Only when they purposely end the match in a draw, or can’t toss a grenade.”

“Uh-huh.” She withdrew her hand and laid back down, looking up at him with those big eyes of hers.

The Warlock still remained mystifying. As mystifying as she was on the day he met her.

The green eyes were never peaceful, the mind behind them constantly at work. It has gotten worse since the Cabal attacked. Better for the City and the Guardians, but worse for her. Thinking, planning, scheming, lost in her own worlds of both past and future and parallels and stories. Constantly fighting, gun in hand or not. Shaxx found himself wondering how there were any gears
left in her head to turn. With most people, they would have succumbed to overuse and erosion long ago. He knew that there was no point in waiting for her mind to make sense, or to actively work to try and understand it. Because it never will make sense, and the ones who are brave enough to try to understand it will lose their mind over it.

Just one of the things he loved about her.

“How about you?” By reflex, he moved the hair that was obstructing her face. What he knew didn’t stop him from asking: “What’s going on in that weird head of yours?”

Tirion worked up a tired, sad smile. “I have to go away for a little while again.”

He was used to hearing it, but part of him always hated hearing it. “Nothing out of the ordinary, then.”

“This will be different. I and Kouhei discovered something. Something about the Awoken and the Nine. We’re going to have to go to the edge of the System to find it.” It sounded strange to say it, almost coming across as a lie. As far as she knew, no Guardian has attempted what they were planning to attempt.

Tirion should have told him about this earlier. But she also knew that he wouldn’t like the idea, so she wanted to wait until she found the right words. Shaxx wasn’t going to control her, he had no intentions to, either. But, hearing her say that she has plans to fly off to unknown space with someone commonly referred to as a ‘backstabbing cheat’ didn’t sit right with him. A lot of the remarks towards Kouhei hailed from dark humor, their own way of dealing with it. He hoped. It was still difficult to tell if it was dark humor or if they still held resentment towards him. If it was the latter, he could betray them again. What better place to do it than the edge of the System?

Turning to lie down on his back away from her, Shaxx crossed his arms and stared at the ceiling, deep in thought. “I see.”

“You sound worried.”

“I am.” Shaxx’s tone was almost harsh. More contemplative than harsh, but it still made her flinch slightly.

“There is no risk of him going insane again. Also, he’s the best Defender I know. I’ll be safe with him.” She needed him to believe her. “He has turned over a new leaf.”

“Can’t you take any others with you?”

“Awoken only party, I’m afraid.”

“Hmph.”

“I know how it sounds like.” Tirion crawled closer to him, draping a hand across his crossed arms. “This journey… It could help me to clear up a lot going on in my head. Rest of my team will be keeping an eye on other threats. It will be alright.”

“I’m not trying to talk you out of anything, I just want you to know the risks.” Shaxx informed her, still not looking at her. “If you truly believe something can help you there, I won’t argue. But, Travelers Light can’t reach that far. You’ve met that agent of theirs, he didn’t seem to be too fond of the Light.” He didn’t want to argue. Just wanted the reassurance that she’ll come back. Usually she has to go away due to sudden threats, not because of her own free will.
“If my Ghost complains, then I’ll leave immediately. But, I truly believe that I can find something there.”

“How long will you be gone?”

“A couple of weeks, the usual, not more than a month. Planning to leave in a day or two, need to gather some last-minute supplies.”

He turned to his side, sighing softly at her words. “That’s the worst of this fight.”

“I’ll miss you too.” She frowned, thumb stroking the side of his large face. “Maybe if I fight enough, I’ll get a future where I won’t have to leave to fight.”

“I hope so.”

So, she left for the dark with someone commonly referred to as a ‘backstabbing cheat’.

Shaxx trusted her and her decisions. He will always do. But it didn’t mean that he wasn’t allowed to worry and feel a certain way about those decisions. He had no reason to doubt her; she has a track record that puts most Guardians to shame, and – most importantly – he has seen evidence that the other Titan has turned over a new leaf.

Kouhei says one brash thing with a disapproving scowl on his face and his eyes burning red, but then the next moment he is seen helping Alva with her cloak, making sure it’s not crooked. Or teaching her how to use a sword and other weapons unfit for a hellion with a tendency to go invisible, often earning Haya’s wrath. Last time he checked, the two Titans settled that a fusion rifle might be the best weapon for the small Hunter. A powerful weapon, but the charge time of the gun gave people enough time to move out of the way in case of an incident.

Maybe Kouhei was just a Defender through and through, protective of his family no matter how he does it. He and Lorcan seemed to get along now, often seen in the Crucible together scaring the recruits. A Nightstalker and a Defender is an unlikely match. Until the Titan utilizes his Arc abilities, and the results become devastating.

One to disorient and trap them, other to annihilate them.

It was a slaughter, but it was exactly what the new recruits needed.

“Hey, Shaxxy! How you doin’ buddy?” But, there were always problems that were actual problems. “Been a while.”

Shaxx didn’t even glance at the Hunter, and cracked his knuckles in an attempt to shoo him away. “Cut that out. You got banned for a reason. I don’t accept plea deals from cheaters.”

Cayde groaned. “I didn’t cheat! My pants were just suuuuuuuuper lucky.”

“No, they weren’t. You got caught. Live with it. Preferably, outside of the Crucible.”

“How about a bet, eh?” Cayde suggested, forcing himself into Shaxx’s vision and not letting the Titan ignore him by digging his eyes into a datapad. “Shaxx, buddy. A little bet ain’t ever hurt no one.”

Shaxx gritted his teeth. He had a problem. “Alright. What are the stakes?”

“I win, you un-ban me from the Crucible!”
“No.” No hesitation present in the retort, not even a slight movement of his helmeted head.

“No!” Cayde wasn’t finished. “However, if I lose, I remain banned forever.”

“And?” There was always more with the sly Hunter.

“Of course, with the chance to get un-banned with future bets.”

“There it is.”

“I could have done worse. Coulda made you train those brats again.” Cayde shook his head at the memory, sudden anger creeping up on him. “You ruined them, you know that? They stopped liking me! How did you do that?”

“Not that difficult of a task.”

Cayde gasped. “At least I don’t scare people away by being loud and obnoxious.”

“You might not scare people away, but you’re still loud and obnoxious.” Shaxx held back a snort as he said those words.

“Alright, if it’s gonna be like that, I don’t wanna do that bet anymore!” Cayde gave up, arms raised in the air. “I’ll find a way to get back into your Crucible. You know what I have? Nightstalkers. A whole mess of ’em. I heard the Cryptarchs made a crystal that starts fires, I know what I’m using it on.”

“Sure…” Shaxx mumbled, disinterested, as he looked over the reports. “You do that. Go ahead and try it.”

“Alright. 500 Glimmer. You win, and no lasers. Golden Guns against Fist of Havoc. I bet you that you can’t take me down as I’m shooting at you.” Confident in the offer, he twirled his trusty hand cannon as he spoke.

*Fists* of Havoc, Shaxx almost corrected him. The Travelers awakening had improved some of their skills. The Glimmer offer was many forms of offensive, barely worth half a Crucible match.

But he had a problem.

“I can do that easily.” Shaxx accepted the offer. “And you are keeping those laser abominations out of my Crucible.”

“You’re on! Oh, I can’t wait to see the sports arenas light up with an epic laser show. This will be so great!” Cayde laughed mischievously to himself. “Did I say that out loud?”

“I don’t need to answer that.”

“Not feeling that confident, are ya?”

“I am confident that you’ll never present a bet that is remotely a challenge.”

Cayde didn’t even take offense. It’s been too long. “Aww, I missed you too!”

Shaxx couldn’t help but roll his eyes. But, while Cayde was up there, he might as well make himself useful. “By the way, what do you and the Vanguard know about the Leviathan?”

Cayde was surprised by the question, but realized he wasn’t getting paid enough by being the
"We had Guardians sent up there, none of them could find a way to enter the ship itself. It was locked off tight and guarded by Cabal stronger than I've ever heard of. They made the Legion sound like drunk Dregs. Rockets barely scratched 'em."

"So, you know nothing?"

"Ah… yep. Zavala is antsy about it. Heard ya’ sent up some of your little buddies there though."

Shaxx smirked. “Every threat that enters the System leaves big ships for me to take. The Cabal are no different.”

“But how did you get past those guards?”

The real answer was that there were no guards where the Redjacks ended up. After one too many Redjack losses to the Loyalists, they had to take another route. He wasn’t proud of that, but the Redjacks learned from the experience. Tirion told him that Calus, whatever he may be, only opens the doors and calms the guards for her and her team. But…

“Easy. I’m better than you.” Shaxx said, hands on his hips, towering over the Hunter.

"Oohhh! You’re on, Shaxx!” Cayde shouted, one finger pointed at the Titan as he backed away. “You’re. On.”

Shaxx had already forgotten about the Hunter, and the next Crucible match was about to start. He’ll worry about the bet later.

He frowned when he looked at the roster, both in anticipation and with a sense of wonder. There was something different about the Sunbreakers. They had been changed, as if overnight. Changed in ways he has never seen before, in any Titan or Guardian. Changed for the better, but for the stranger. Their cold demeanor was complimentary to the flames of their Hammers. The coldest ones burned the hottest. None of the Sunbreakers he has met before were as austere as this new group.

It had to be Haya’s work. But, how was she doing it? He wouldn’t have picked Haya as the culprit if it wasn’t for the talks he had with her. Honestly, he expected more absurdity from her pupils, them to turn out like their teacher. But then again Haya hasn’t really been the same since Saint’s death.

Shaxx watched the Guardians gather up on the monitors, noticing that the four Sunbreakers had small medallions on their armor. As far as he could tell, they depicted bent handles of the Hammers. His guess was that she imposed a ranking system on them, and these were fresh recruits.

He almost feared what the higher ranks will bring to the table, both in the Crucible and against the Darkness. Assuming that anyone is left alive once she’s done with them, of course.

Haya had found herself in a place most unfortunate.

The Titan sat uncomfortably in the armchair. Her fingers gripping the armrests almost poked holes in the dull gray fabric. Noticing none of it, too busy being part of an awkward and stubborn stare off with the evaluator sitting in front of her. The ticking clock on the wall added to her tension, her muscles recoiling with every tick. She swore that the sole reason that old clock was there was just to agitate people.
“Alright, Haya.” The Evaluator broke the tense silence. “Tell me all about it.”

"Do we really have to do this?” She tried to back out of it.

“Yes. We do. Don’t spin tales about how Glimmer can change my mind, either.” The evaluator said, too familiar with the patience of Titans. None of them sat still in that room, or sat in the chair properly. “I should have you six come in here once every week. You have been common troublemakers the past few years.”

“Ugh…” Haya rolled her eyes. “What do you want me to tell?”

The evaluator tapped on his datapad, not sure where to start. “You’ve lived quite the life, Haya.”

“Don’t call me old.”

“A list of misdemeanors going back a couple of centuries is not a lot to go by. Makes it hard to construct a story about your past.”

“… why?”

“Because if I am going to put in the work required to understand why you almost killed a Guardian last week, I need to understand you.”

“Fine…” Haya sank into the armchair, grunting in boredom and letting her eyes stare at the gray ceiling. “Uh… I was a Warlord, they got killed. Sunbreakers took me in, they left to be killed with Osiris. Had nothing better to do with my immortal life, became a drug addict…”

“As you do.”

“As you do. At some point the Hive attacked, started a pyramid scheme with my best friend under the guise of saving people’s lives. Then met a red head. It’s been…” Haya sighed. “I wouldn’t say it’s been downhill… more like a lot of good steps forward and then a dance to the side, and then falling backwards into a pit of shit. At least we have eachother in that pit.”

“Let’s start with the period between shortly after you joined the Sunbreakers to the Hive attack.”

She raised her eyebrow at the oddly specific time the evaluator chose. “That’s a lot of years.”

“We’ve got time and you’ve shown great skills at summarizing.”

She wasn’t sure if she should take that as an insult. “Well, I was climbing the Sunbreaker ranks. I was one of the best. Now I’m the best.”

“You are very confident.”

Haya ignored that quip. “My stellar personality held me back from achieving anything good in the Order. I snuck out a lot. And I met someone.”

“Tell me about them.”

“I don’t want to.” Haya barely let him finish that request.

“Fair enough.”

“The Sunbreakers left with Osiris despite me begging them not to. A criminal. Had no purpose in my life, so… knocked myself out in dreamlands. Repeatedly. My friend helped me out of it, was by
my side when he could. Forced me to fight, to carry on…” She trailed off, lost in the gray she was boring her eyes into. “Made me believe in something other than that the world was just a giant dead duck and that I was all alone. Then, as all people do, he left. And now he’s…” Haya didn’t let the evaluator see her frown, just as Kouhei won’t let anyone see him express anything that resembles joy. It was a story she has told before, but it always had the same ending. Up until now. She didn’t want to tell that ending yet. “I was about to destroy someone’s Ghost because he said something about my friend that I didn’t agree with.”

“What happened after your friend left?”

“I was still struggling. Bending over backwards trying to convince myself that death wouldn’t be better. Death would have been better, but…” She trailed off again, with the ability to get back on track this time around. “But, I found an idiot Hunter that I couldn’t let die so I took him under my wing, and we carried on.”

It was one way to put it.

Saint and Lorcan acted as her self-control while she was one of those people who were desperate for an afterglow of a pleasant feeling, craving a sense of bliss. The side-effects of that beautiful world were nothing compared to the insanity around her. Everything was right, no harm could be done. If she wouldn’t have encountered people who could see the debts she racked up chasing that warmth, she wouldn’t have survived.

Her own Ghost abandoned her at one point. The ultimate shame of a Guardian.

One person tore her away from that virtue of peace and forced her to face the world, taught her how to live with it. Taught her how to find the beauty in it all, in reality, even in a common gray bird.

The other one kept her from going back to her own wonderful world, because his survival depended on her. Because nothing could be gained by living in that beautiful world, nothing could be learned from absolute perfection. Eventually, absolute perfection will turn you to dust. Perfection leaves you stagnant.

The temptation to go back was always there. Ghosts couldn’t heal that. For all Haya knew, Ghosts could heal it, but hers wouldn’t due to bitterness towards its Guardian.

“…you should know that his Ghost couldn’t heal his wounds, out of fear. That Titan is in the hospital now.” He looked over his never-ending notes. “Burns on his face and a shattered leg from the bullet. His Ghost feels worse than his Guardian looks.”

“Tough shit. That Titan will survive, and his Ghost will go through worse. Why am I here?” Haya asked, the room getting smaller. “If the purpose of this damn meeting is to evaluate if I’m fit to hold a gun in my hands, where the hell were you when Dredgen Yor was going insane?”

"That name is locked behind Vang—"

“That's not an answer.”

“That was before me. But, this evaluation system was created to prevent incidents like that.”

“'Incidents like that?'” Haya scowled as she made the air quotes with her fingers. “I don’t have time for 'Poor Rezyl, oh he was so troubled. Such a shame it ended like that for that poor troubled child.'”
“I wasn’t insinuating that by any means, but I’d be happy to hear more about your beliefs on the subject. Did you know him?”

“Dredgen Yor was an asshole. Such an asshole in fact that the Vanguard went out of their way to hide the fact that he was a Titan.” Haya began. “His dumb shit was an insult to all of us. Don’t tell me that this was founded because you hold some sort of sympathy.”

“There is a huge difference between justification and understanding. No one besides his cult is excusing his behaviour.” He sighed. “These talks wouldn’t have prevented him.”

Haya was ready to counter argue but then the words sank in. “…What?”

“Some people got their path. You can't save them and you can't make it easier.” The evaluator said. “There's no way to save somebody who is intent on destruction. All we can hope for is to prevent casualties. We don’t need Guardians killing Guardians.”

"Then what in the hell are we doing here?"

“Evaluating you.” The Evaluators patience was wearing a bit thin. “You’re just bored. That’s the diagnosis. You are not intent on destruction.” He lowered his eyes. “Your friend is, though.” Voice a murmur, thinking out loud as he typed something in.

“My friend...?”

“Excuse me?”

“You said my friend is intent on destruction.”

“Nothing. Just a slip. I have to keep the confidentiality up.”

“Alright. Do you need anything else for the report so I can avoid jail time or can I go now?”

“You may leave.”

Haya immediately headed for the door, the office feeling like a sick ward, crawling with disease. Something about that office made a Hive pit preferable.

It was weird not having Tirion around or not going on missions with her. She’s been gone for a couple of days now, barely any contact. Usually the Warlock is the only wall Haya cares about, a wall to rant at. A wall that could speak. Pushing that out of the mind, she had work to focus on.

Everyone looked at Haya differently now, rumors about her new Sunbreaker legion have spread. Mostly good rumors, some terrifying. Neither the misfits or the Vanguard made attempts to quell the discussions about the Guardian she almost killed, of the face she maimed. The rowdy bar had its air sucked out of the room when she barged in, one patron fumbling with the record player and putting an abrupt stop to the music.

Haya had a strong presence in a crowd before all of this, but now she had the added reputation. Added fear. Added tales and rumors. There was no in-between in the bar’s populace; only the oldest of Guardians and the freshly resurrected ones. The older ones have seen much worse than her, they have seen the likes of Dredgen Yor and other barbaric acts of the Dark Ages. They barely batted an eye, just glared at her with suspicion and a twinge of apprehension. One hand hugging a tankard, other hand on their gun.

The younger ones instantly looked away when she glanced at them, she counted a few hugging
their Ghosts. The new Guardians were often dragged to this place by older Guardians so they would get to see what to expect after a couple centuries of fighting. If they survive, that is.

All in all, she felt the most remorse over not having a non-disclosure agreement for her Sunbreakers to sign. The rumors and tales could be worse. It hardly humiliated her.

“The usual?” The bartender stuttered the words out. It was a question she has heard one too many times.

“Twenty-three bottles the best swill you have, to go. Your choice. Give it to my Ghost.” Steely eyes watched the bartender back away a couple of steps as she took a seat on the stool. He glanced over the counter, making sure her hands weren’t on her gun, and if she was armed in the first place. “Alright, what the hell is going on here?”

“Ghosts barely dare to come out near you, you know?” The bartender said, searching for a box for the bottles. The soft music and the murmurs gradually returned, not yet daring to be rowdy again with her being there. “Are the rumors true? That you were a… you know…”

“A brunette?” She hoped she could charm the nervous fellow with her impatience and other nonchalant charms.

The bartender looked nervously around the bar, and lowered his voice for his next question. “A Warlord?”

“Yes, I was a brunette once. What about it?”

“I was sure that all of you guys were dead, killed for what you did.” He whispered, hoping to mask what he was saying by being extra loud with packing the bottles.

“We are and we were.” Haya said. “But I’m suspecting you have something more to waste my time with.”

”N-nothing! Nothing more. Don’t mind me.” He hurriedly placed the box on the counter, losing patrons as they were running out the door. “Your Ghost can now lock this for transmat. Go ahead.”

Haya nodded to her Ghost, and the box disappeared into blue sparkles until it was gone. She wasn’t going to carry it, had no point to prove about her strength. The dull company around her made the idea of getting drunk on the spot not that appealing, the first in a long time. It was time for her next destination, and she heard the loud sighs of relief just after she walked out the door. It saddened her, because she liked that bar and she now was no longer welcome. The bar was outside of the Wall, so only Guardians dared to make the trek there. For some, it was their home away from home. Mostly older Guardians, most of them retired. Never by choice. Either injuries, lost Ghosts, or minds they’ve lost when attempting to comprehend their bizarre world.

None of them were too damaged to be unable to drink for the lost.

“Heya, Haya!” Lorcan waved from where he was lying on the grass. The Exos were minding their own business, not too far away, playing a weird game of fetch with grenades. It involved not dying by them by not holding onto them too long. “Where are your murderous kids?”

“Not gonna be here for another hour.” She sat down next to him on the cold, slightly wet, grass. The snow had just melted, and the millionth boring spring was on the horizon. “Had some of them run a couple of rounds in the Crucible.”

“You make Shaxx look decent, though. Hardly a punishment.”
“Not supposed to be one.” She brought down the box, and handed Lorcan a bottle which he gladly accepted. “He might get pissy with me for having Guardians fight outside the Crucible but that’s Tirion’s benefit.”

“Please don’t finish that thought.” He cringed.

Lorcan – and of course, the Glimmer that came with having him around – was one of the reasons she has carried out this long. Teaching him, making sure that he won’t die. Small goals. But now, she has taught him everything she knows, and he has become his own Guardian. No more need for babysitting. In battle, at least. The experiments he does with salvaged Fallen parts is another thing.

Maybe her group of Sunbreakers will fill that sudden void of boredom and lack of purpose in her life. She wasn’t like Tirion. Leading the fight against the Darkness wasn’t her sole reason for existing. Too much stress involved in that job. No one wanted the job of being the Guardian of Guardians.

The boredom was the worst of it all.

The soul-crushing boredom.

Deadlines were a foreign subject for Guardians. They had no list of things to finish because of their long lifespans. No hurry. No personal goals. At the end of day, they were weapons, weapons forged to fight against the creatures who hunger for the Travelers Light, weapons to protect the last of humanity, the last of the real humans. Guardians have been slowly breaking free from it, consciously and not. These weird segments of peace have put a lot of them in a strange headspace. Of course there are those who have completely given up hoping for permanent peace, but there are some who still believe in a bright future. That hope comes with a different kind of pain and questions. What will they do when peace finally hits? Where do you put all these trigger-happy thrill seekers who have lost touch with reality?

What does one do once their life purpose has been concluded?

What happens to a program once it has finished its task? What happens to a weapon once there are no more enemies to shoot? What will happen when the Guardians are no longer needed?

There will be new thrills to find as long as there are Ghosts. But, thrills get boring quickly, or you keep seeking bigger thrills until something eventually kills you. Very few Guardians take the time to forge bonds, forge families. Forge a normal life. Or, what’s defined as normal in a dictionary, because that’s as close to normal as they’re going to get to experience it. It is said that there are two types of Guardians. Those who look at the civilians with longing in their eyes because they want to have that life, and those Guardians who will never understand or even make an attempt to understand it, and they then will vault over a railing in the Tower to take a “shortcut” to the City below, dying as a joke.

Of course, Guardians never see the hardships of the civilians. Not being allowed to sneak out past the walls, not being allowed to see the world, not being allowed to sleep underneath the stars every night on a beautiful planet. Not having a say in their own safety. Relying on dancing thrill seekers to keep them from dying. Having to deal with the Factions and the Consensus spying on them. Either stay confined in the “protection” of the great City or fend for themselves in the harsh wilds. They are born in the City, and they die in the City.

And the civilians will never see the hardships of Guardians. Guardians might be arrogant, not familiar with the concept of humility. But, a while back, they were people. Now, Guardians will never lead a normal life, just imitations of it. Their humanity stripped away from them without
them having any say in it. Memories erased. Majority have no recollection of who they were before, nothing to reference and be nostalgic about. They simply have no idea what humanity feels like, lacking the recollection of humanity. Small things. Holiday dinners with their families, pride over the smallest accomplishments, coming home from work to hug their spouse, hobbies that didn’t include guns and aliens. Enjoying simple things and appreciating life for all its sweetness. Different cultures, kingdoms, different languages. Being capable of wondrous works and creations, working together to expand the world.

All of that was gone.

All that was now was one group huddled up in fear behind walls, other group fighting a war that can’t be won.

Maybe Haya was lucky that she remembered her life before. It also was a source of unwelcomed guilt. She had it all, everything people could ask for, but chose to take it for granted and throw it away. All these centuries later, she was still alive and all of them were dead.

She’ll have to visit them sometime. She remembered all things, except where she left them.

Perhaps that’s why the first Risen were annihilated. Their Traveler didn’t like them remembering anything.

Either way, during the Collapse everyone was equal.

“What do you remember of before, Lorc?”

“You’ve already asked me that. Still just that dream.” He mumbled, trying to balance the bottle on his forehead instead of drinking it. ”Why?”

“Just thinking of Tirion’s obsession to remember the past, the damn diaries.”

Lorcan bit the inside of his cheek, trying to restrain himself. It got harder every time the subject was brought up. “Honestly… It shouldn’t piss me off but it does.”

“Which part?”

“That you and Tirion lived during the Golden Age.”

“And?”

“Something that Rune said on his deathbed bugged me…. He quickly regretted opening his mouth about it. ”Never mind.”

“A lot of things about what he said bugged me.”

He sighed, knowing that it will fester if he keeps it in his head. “With the Guardians that lived during the Golden Age, they have a small chance to reconnect with people they once knew. you know? Friends, family. Maybe find a trinket, something to remember them by.” Lorcan stopped for a second, feeling slight relief when he saw Haya nod in acknowledgement. “Well. In my case, there is nothing. It got erased long before the Collapse got here. Long before the Traveler. They never found me, so I guess I didn’t have a family or anyone that missed me.”

“I’m sure you did. If you got us five now, you probably had friends back then.”

“Things were significantly harder then, too. Didn’t have a magic white ball to bring a damn utopia.
The opposite, if anything.” He said, but hesitated his next words “And then there is Saint.”

“What about him?”

“Do you think he was scared?”

“Nope.”

“Meant scared of no one ever finding him. It took paracursial… magic to find me.”

“By what Tirion said, he was pretty confident in his decision to die. He knew he was going to die. That bastard.”

“Well, that makes sense. No better way to live your life to the fullest if you know when you will die.”

“I’m not sure what it is you’re getting at but—” She stopped, noticing two figures in the grassy field, ruining the beautiful view of the City. Two intruding figures. “Wait, what is that?”

Lorcan rose up, the bottle falling onto the grass. The baffling image made him not care about the wasted beer. “Is that Shaxx and Cayde?”

“Hey, those two assholes are on my field!” She scoffed. “I claimed that field!”

“Great! Before we know it, we’ll find that someone had spray-painted ‘Warlord scum’ on the wall of our den.”

“Hey, knuckleheads.” Haya called over the Exos. She wasn’t going to let them intervene. “Get over here. Especially you, Alva.”

Haya kept a watchful eye on the smaller Exo, making sure that she won’t apply her stealth cloak and run away to cause trouble.

The four were in for quite a show.
To this day, no one knows what the Awoken are. Only few things are known for certain about them. Pieces of three different puzzles that somehow fit together into one.

Tirion sits alone next to the moss-covered gravestone in the middle of the cold night, hugging her legs to her chest and a twist in her mind.

The Awoken say they feel a sense of terrible loneliness, and an Awoken Warlock was a deadly combination of everything nature had to offer. A black hole of thoughts that is destined to eat itself. The deep-seeded need to solve everything was like a drug. Where did curiosity stop and obsession begin? She was curious, so she looked. Sought them out in the deep black. Meditation wasn’t enough. Staying still wasn’t enough. Nothing was enough for her. She fought gods, but at the end they were no more gods than her.

The voice of the Emissary took over that thought. Tirion shook her head but couldn’t clear it out. She asked them about the future and they only knew one thing. That she went mad trying to understand and they went mad trying to speak.

It didn’t matter.

When she was ready, they will take it from her, and she will be glad of it.

“There you are!” Ghost sighed in relief, his voice slightly startling her. “I’ve been looking all over for you. Don’t do that again! I almost thought that everything up until now was a dream, and I was still searching for you.”

“Sorry…” The whisper was just a shiver. She didn’t mean to leave him behind in the ship and disappear, it was more of a chain reaction.

“This place looks lively…” Ghost remarked, scanning around. “That… that wasn’t supposed to be a pun. Anyway, what are you doing here, Guardian? Let’s go home.”

“My head is still messed up.”

“So…” He looked at the gravestones and back at her. “Did you plan to bury your head? I’m not sure how and if that would work… We don’t even have a tombstone made for it. Bad idea.”

“I’m running out of ideas here.” She shivered again. “The Nine… they were weird. It wasn’t a waste of time for Kouhei though, he revels in the assignment he was given. With those three damn keys.”

“For all it’s worth… I’m sorry.” Ghost said. “I know how much it means to you to find out what you are. We’ll find answers. One day.”

“It’s less about that… I just want to not experience the side effects anymore.” She mumbled, looking at the swirls of light on her arms. “The visions, the dreams. The general… weirdness. I wish it would go away.”

“On the upside, we have all the time in the world to figure it out!” Ghost tried to cheer her up to no
“We won’t have all the time in the world if all of this drives me insane and I find the deepest Hive pit and throw myself in it.” She realized what she said one second too late. “I… I wouldn’t do that to you. Not on purpose.”

“Please don’t tell me you believe it will come to that…”

She cringed at the melancholy in his voice, the melancholy she caused. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Do you want to talk about why… oh…”

“What?”

He laughed nervously. “Nothing. I thought I saw that one gravestone move and heard groaning sounds.”

“Very funny.”

“Either way, this is very Voidwalker of you.”

“Well…” She shoved the box that was right next to her away so he could see. “I wanted to bury something. Thought this was as good of a place as any.”

He flied right next to it, turning on the flashlight to see better. “Your old stuff? You know, I don’t want to give Rahool a reason to set the new Tower on fire, considering we just finished decorating it.”

Tirion swore to keep all the things she salvaged from that apartment safe, had them hidden in places only she knew of. It took quite a while to find them again. She was surprised that the Fallen didn’t get their claws on it. To anyone else, it was a pile of priceless Golden Age artifacts. To her it was a source of nightmares and exhaustion. She stood up determined and grabbed the shovel she found, and started digging.

“Alright, what are we doing?” Ghost asked. It always worried her when she didn’t fill him in. “I didn’t sign up for grave robbing.”

“We’re not grave robbing.” She grunted as she kept on digging. “We’re burying. We’re making graves.”

“You know, I actually once found a Guardian in a stasis pod once. A Guardian with exceptional Light sealed himself inside. He’s been in there for centuries” He told. “Before I found you I tried resurrecting him, but he preferred to sleep. He said the last war was enough for a thousand lifetimes.”

“You’re expecting to find some sleeping vampire Guardians in here?”

“You never know!”

She threw away the shovel once the hole was big enough, and sat back down without bothering to clean the dirt from her hands.

“Is it wrong that I want to record this and send it to Rahool just to mess with him?” She joked, returning her attention to the box.
“We could send the video to master Ives instead. If he’s still alive.”

She smirked. “I miss that guy’s constant barrage of sarcasm directed squarely at me.”

“I miss Variks, actually.” He sighed. “It’s weird being in a tough battle and not hear ‘Dismantle mines, yess? Or… you dieee’. Then watch you panic and start swearing at him.”

Tirion chuckled. “Yeah, but you don’t have eardrums that can be made useless by him shouting at you.”

“You’d think living with Shaxx would have made you immune to that.”

“Shaxx is Shaxx. Variks can break the sound barrier.” She grimaced. “Which Shaxx would take as a challenge and… my ears are already bleeding.”

“You could say… they were killed dead by that thought.” He half groaned out that joke. “Blame Lorcan’s Ghost. She’s got a worse sense of humor than him.”

The humor and the procrastination for what she came to do had to stop at some point, though. There was no hesitation as she gathered up the items. The pictures, the recordings, the diaries. The pain and the happiness depicted in those frozen stills of time. She laid it down in the hole of dirt. Then there was the book. The book that somehow found its way back to her. It wasn’t really hers, it was the child’s. That one hurt to let go of, hurt to place on top of the pile. It had to be done. She had to stop relying on the fairytales.

“I can’t keep trying to be you, Emma.” Tirion began after a long period of thinking. “You… you don’t exist anymore. Nothing of you does. Your world is dead, and so is everyone you loved. And so are you. Every cell of your skin is dead and been replaced. You’ve been my gateway to the past but… I need to focus on this world. On my world.”

She continued. “I promise to one day rebuild all of it. To bring back the world… But I need you to get out of my brain, need you to stop causing whatever it’s been you’ve been causing. You need to rest. I can’t bring you or anyone back. My powers are limited. I can just bring back the world.”

It all felt pointless, but there was some relief saying it out loud. Like something had eased the pressure in her brain, drained something. “None of this is your fault. You just… died. Sacrificed yourself so that I could be created. Still not sure how and when but… you died. I wish I had you to blame all this on, but I’m just me.” She smiled sadly. “I just got unlucky enough to become… to become me.”

Tirion gathered up some dirt in her hands, slowly pouring it over, pile by pile. “It’s not all that bad. We have things constantly trying to kill us, everything between gods and time traveling robots, and things seem hopeless but… it’s not that bad. I have a weird family. In no particular order; my group of friends involve an Exo who was programmed to be a kid, then someone tried very hard to program her to kill people. Leaving this goofball kid with homicidal tendencies.”

Every scoop of the dirt became easier than the previous. “Haya is… well… If I could shoot flaming Hammers out of my hands I would have very little patience for anything as well. I think right now she’s teaching her little Sunbreakers how to run a Cabal naval blockade. Both ways.”

Ghost found himself entranced by the story, and sat down next to her as she continued talking. “Lorcan came from a world before ours, you know? A world of pain and suffering, gold was used for warfare and not in association with a paradise. Give him a screwdriver and he’ll build you the world. The stability of that world depends on how much he wants to rob you.”
“Then there is Huritt.” She continued introducing them. “Mention his name in front of Ikora Rey and she’ll punch you with her gaze, because he’s the true expert on the Hive. He’s not really a child, Kouhei and Haya like to call him a kid anyway. But then again Haya is about 900 years old, and Kouhei…”

Tirion bit her lip, trying to figure out a way to introduce him. “He’s like me. More blunt than me but… he’s like me. Nothing can penetrate his Ward. A thousand Strikers could try to jump him and he wouldn’t move. Then he’ll kill you if you look at any of us wrong.”

The pile of stuff was almost fully covered with dirt now, just some stubborn pictures sticking out now. “I seem to have a thing for Titans, I married one. It was a private little ceremony on a beach, and we spent three months’ worth of Glimmer bribing the witnesses, and that’s all I’m going to ever tell. I was once scared of him because he almost had a dozen Strikers ambush us back when we were less morally… sensible. You would not have liked him in the slightest. He’s a good man, not just a suit of armor. Loud but… good. I’m glad to have broken one of his arenas a couple of years ago.”

She put the final pile on top, flattening it with both of her hands. Only time could hide the tampering now. Tirion reached out to get some rocks, to try to hide it.

"In time all this will be myth, confused and glorious. The details matter less than those who tell it. Maybe I should honor you and keep a diary, then have someone turn it into a long, convoluted book about my adventures that people will debate for years. I think I’ll do that. I will make sure that you have not died in vain, and I’ll make sure you’re remembered somehow. But for now… rest. Goodbye, Emma Owens.”

It was done.

This wasn’t going to stop the visions, the nightmares, the questions.

But, it’s a start.

Saying goodbye to the past was a start.

“So…” Ghost flew in front of her face. “Who are you then?”

“I’m Tirion.” She smiled. “Tirion, the Guardian of Guardians, the holder of too many titles. Tirion, the one who is too dead for this.”


Her little friend will always put a smile on her face, no matter what. No matter what happens. He was her best friend, to the end. She turned to the grave for one final time.

“Oh, and this is Ghost, the Little Light.” Tirion lightly poked him as he grumbled over the nickname. “I didn’t forget about him. He’s too adorable to forget.”

“Hey!” He scoffed. “I’m not adorable.”

“You are.”

“Ugh…” Ghost groaned.

“Just because you’re adorable doesn’t mean that you’re useless. You can be both adorable and the
best Ghost a Guardian can have.”

He lit up at her words. “Aww, that’s because I found the best Guardian. High five!” Tirion smiled at him, through the awkward silence as Ghost processed what he just said, spinning around in the air at the realization. “Oh… right.”

“Alright…” She couldn’t contain her laugh and began the trek home. “Let’s get going. Can you opt me into the group channel?”

“Sure!” Ghost obeyed. “What are the odds that they didn’t break anything while you were gone?”

“Absolutely non-existent.”

“… they seemed unprotected.” Lorcan observed. “Is this how the SIVA outbreak started? It’s a mechanized sexually transmitted disease!”

Tirion didn’t want to interrupt just yet.

“Can you imagine SIVA Guardians, though?” Huritt’s question was immediately drowned out by loud shouts of disapproval. “What?”

“If it came with the part where absolute power wouldn’t corrupt absolutely and drive you insane, why not?” Lorcan counter-argued. “I’m too frustrated at this gadget to not be redundant words.”

“Still struggling with your Ghost’s buddy?” Haya asked.

“Will neither confirm or deny.”

Huritt was at a loss when it came to the situation. “May I ask, how does a Ghost get lonely with its Guardian alive and well?”

Lorcan sighed. “She keeps picking fights with other Ghosts. She got a taste for battle when Haya’s Ghost called mine a ‘robot’…”

“Hm. Doesn’t answer my question.”

“She also keeps picking fights with other Guardians.”

“To be fair, you shot her once.” Haya pointed out. “She has the right to be moody.”

“That was 200 years ago!”


‘A Hawthorne’ is now an acceptable way to measure time?”

“Yep!”

“How do you two deal with that?” Huritt wondered. “How have you two been alive for so long without losing your minds?”

“How old are you, Huritt?” She asked. “Don’t think I ever asked that.”

“I don’t remember. I got completely rebooted for the fourth time about seven years ago.”
“Lucky you.” Haya whispered.

“Would you get rebooted, Haya? Start completely over, given the chance?”

A solemn period of silence followed. “I don’t know, actually. I’d imagine it be a lot more painful to get the procedure done on a human.”

“I wouldn’t.” Lorcan cut in. “Waste of time. You’ll dedicate your whole damn life to trying to figure out what it was you forgot. It’s best to just never forget in the first place.”

“We’ve been alive too goddamn long. I’m just… bored of it.” Haya muttered. “When Savathun gets here I’m just flinging myself right at her, who cares at this point.”

Lorcan snickered. “Doesn’t make much sense for a Guardian to name herself after Oryx’s sister.”

“Listen here you…. I see you creeping there, Tirionna!”

Tirion immediately called for Ghost to disconnect her from the channel through her laughing. She’ll deal with that later. It was hard enough as it was to see where she was going, slightly blurry vision from some of the alcohol she had earlier. The meeting with the Nine was a bit overwhelming, too many edges she needed to take off.

“Walk on, noble hero…” Ghost said, noticing her slightly wobbly steps. “…all roads lead home.”

She decided to sit down next to a ruined building instead. She’ll need her ship. Somehow. She didn’t remember where she left her ship, though. She might have to steal another one. But she loved her ship. Her ship had all her stuff in it.

“Call Shaxx.” Tirion whispered. “I need to talk to him.”

“Alright… Sure thing. Are you alright?”

“I dunno.” She shrugged.

“Tirion…”

“Please don’t be asleep…” She accidentally interrupted him answering the call almost immediately. “I’m drunk and I need to tell you how much I love you.”

That deep laugh on the other side filled her with warmth that none of her abilities could. “I love you too, and it’s the middle of the day here. I’m hardly asleep. Have hardly slept since you left.”

“Well… it’s night somewhere where Germany used to be.” She murmured, and glanced around. “Or where England used to be. I don’t know, to be honest.”

“I see.” Shaxx sounded more amused than anything. “Why are you drunk somewhere either where Germany or England used to be?”

“Because I can.” Tirion closed her eyes to be able to hear that voice she loved better. “Because why not. I’m happy, I noticed. It is a recent development, actually.”

“I heard you made quite the impression on the Nine. There are talks about them wanting to run their own tournaments, using my arenas.”

Tirion wasn’t surprised that he jumped straight to that subject. She’ll tell him about the arena she found for him later. Shaxx loved souvenirs, in the shape of many things. From Vex heads to
Crucible arenas.

“They were… weird.” Tirion mumbled.

“As if you didn’t take it as a challenge to understand them.”

Tirion could see that proud smirk on his face in the back of her head.

“No…” She shook her head. “They were weird. Very weird. I’ll explain when I’m… sober.”

“Did you find any answers?”

“I found so few answers I don’t want to question anything anymore.” She said. “Better to just enjoy things. Enjoy views. Whatever.”

“Doesn’t sound like the woman I know.”

“I’m not done killing gods and saving the world. I’m just… not going to worry about it.”

“That sounds more like you.”

The mic picked up the sounds of the Crucible match next to him. She shouldn’t distract him too long. He had work, she was drunk. She loved him. “You make me feel small. Usually, I’m this big thing, the big hero. The protector of the City. The Guardian of Guardians.” She cringed at the title. “It’s exhausting. I don’t feel exhausted with you. I like feeling small. Even if it lasts a moment.”

“Come home—”

“And that isn’t a jab at your height. People call me short and that’s just because you’re taller than every Guardian in a ten-mile radius.” She heard him chuckle through her words. “You just… are. You are very tall, but you’re also… are.”

He could and gladly would listen to her drunkenly ramble like that all day if he wouldn’t have to lecture the Guardians who didn’t know what heavy ammo was. “Come home soon. I missed you.”

“These stars are nothing compared to the ones I’ve seen in your eyes.”

“Alright…” The roll of his eyes was audible through the voice channel. “Come back. Even with that rambling I can’t take another moment alone.”

“Shut up. My rambling is cute.”

“It is. I... I don’t want to think about what I’d be like without you.”

“Manifested into the Almighty and blown up a planet or two would be my guess.”

“Sounds about—” Shaxx stopped, and deeply sighed in disappointment. “… What does he think he’s doing?”

“What’s wrong? Are you alright?”

“Give me a minute... I need to handle this.” He cleared his throat, and she braced for impact knowing what’s to come. “What do you think ‘Heavy Ammo Available’ means, Guardian?! Tell me! Because I don’t think you get it!”
Chapter End Notes

The story isn't ending! Not at all. We have almost 60 chapters in this series. No plans to stop. Thanks for all the support so far even though I don't have a schedule.

SYLOK THE DEFILED
The work never stopped for the Guardians.

Tirion didn’t have a clue on which problem she should focus on. First problem was that the Hive had found a way to make their own Ghosts, using necromancer Wizards. The second was what Amanda was planning to do with the Hive shard they had unearthed, as her enthusiasm about it was more disturbing than the Hive. Third one was the never-ending squabble between Fallen and the Hive, which normally wouldn’t be a problem. Except this time around they were fighting over reactor cores. That’s the only problem they managed to make worse, as the misfits aligned themselves with the Fallen captain while trying to claim the reactor for the City. Tirion had her reservations about the Fallen and killing them. If anything, she almost felt sorry for them. The Vanguard would never tolerate an alliance between the Guardians and the Fallen, though.

Either way, half of the ongoings and disasters on Titan weren’t Tirion’s responsibility, it was ran by Sloane and her crew. Other half to do with the Hive, which actually was Tirion’s responsibility. They couldn’t have a repeat of Oryx’s arrival, they had no excuses for a surprise attack. Not that they had an excuse the first two times. It was up to her and her crew to learn from mistakes of the past.

They’ve managed to shut down all the summoning rituals on Titan so far, but no matter what she did, Tirion couldn’t shake the fear and worry that the Hive will soon find a new spot for their plans and it won’t be discovered until it’s too late.

They had the tools to track the Vex, the Fallen, and even the Taken to some extent by reading energy levels. The Hive were much different.

It was death and sacrifice that fuelled them. You had to look for bodies.

The Vex can trap you in time, the Fallen can shoot guns and claw at you, the Taken are just mindless minions.

The Hive had the ability to brainwash you, to consume you, to fill your head with nightmares, instil your heart with darkness. All of that, just to reach one goal; to break you. Everyone has a breaking point and the Hive have all the time and Wizards in the world. They just haven’t found her breaking point yet. Perhaps they have, perhaps she was strong enough to ignore the whispers and differentiate dreams from the waking world. Real things in the darkness seem no realer than dreams now, though.

Intrusive pounding somewhere in the den pulled Tirion out of it.

“Who’s knocking?” Haya whispered, surprised, slowly picking up her gun from the table. “Since when do we knock?”

“Maybe it’s just some kids.” Tirion speculated, and then her face contorted into a scowl. “Maybe put down the gun?”

“You’re right.” Haya shrugged and put down the hand cannon as she stood up. “I can shoot flaming hammers outta my hands. Why do I need a gun?”
Tirion couldn’t stop the Titan to lecture her about fire hazards, as Haya was already deep in the corridor leading to the entrance. A loud sigh gave everyone in the room a good idea as to who the guest was.

“I found a lost child!” Haya proclaimed as she stepped into the light, motioning her hands towards Hawthorne and rolling her eyes.

“Great. And here I thought we could have a nice talk.” Hawthorne said, watching Haya sigh some more as she returned to the couch. “Do you have an issue with me?”

“I don’t have an issue. Just… issues. Plural. With you.” With that, Haya returned to the armour she was repairing, trying to get the Hive gunk out of her gauntlets that were obstructing the movement. It was difficult to punch people when you couldn’t clench your fingers into a fist.

“Ignore Haya.” Tirion put a stop to it, shaking her head. “Only thing I didn’t mean when I yelled at you was that I wanted you out of the City.”

“Don’t worry. I’m not here to demand any kind of apology. I know how you Guardians are.” If Hawthorne was still bothered by Haya sulking from her presence alone, she didn’t show it.

“Actually, I’m here because I’ve been thinking about what you said. I’d like to study up, about you Guardians.”

Haya scoffed, hoping that it would blow Hawthorne out of the room. “Don’t you have schools?”

“I didn’t know I would be working with so many Guardians in the future.” Hawthorne clarified. “If I would have known, I would have paid more attention at school.”

“I’m on it!” Huritt’s voice was a welcome halt to the tension, already gladly digging through his books. “Anything specific you want to know?”

“Anything!” Hawthorne was taken aback by the sudden contrast to Haya. “Vanguard history, the Consensus, faction wars, founding of the City…”

The discomfort on Haya’s face wasn’t due to Hawthorne’s wish or the pile of stale Hive gunk right in front of her. Quite the opposite. “Hey, Huritt. Are those Vanguard sanctioned books?” She asked.

“Some of them, yeah.”

“Ooooh boy!” The Titan discarded her work and leaned back in the couch, thinking of her next move as she bit her lip. Sabotage would be the easiest road to pick, but picking which evil to sabotage was surprisingly difficult.

“What’s that about?” Hawthorne felt the sudden worry creep up on her. She hasn’t heard many stories about disagreements between the Vanguard and the rest of the Guardians. It was mostly the civilians who complained, Guardians always seemed obedient, almost blindly obedient.

Haya looked over at Tirion, who had her face back in the datapad, not interested in the petty arguments going on around her, as Huritt had things handled and Hawthorne will soon be out of her hair. The datapad was almost like her third home at this point.

“So, remind me, how much do we want to piss off the Vanguard?”

“Keep me out of this. They’re already antsy with me.” Tirion dismissed Haya.
“So, do you just despise everyone equally, or have the Vanguard done something bad?” Hawthorne asked. For every second there, two questions arose.

Haya confidently sunk into the couch, having made her decision. Hawthorne hasn’t been alive long enough to cause even a quarter of the damage the Vanguard have done. And if Hawthorne wanted to read history books, certain warnings had to be issued.

“You want to know about the founding of the City, the Consensus, and the Faction Wars? Ask Zavala about Dredgen Yor and you’ll find out. It’ll be hilarious.”

“Ha!” Lorcan laughed, never taking his eyes off the weapon he was tinkering with. “He really rose to the occasion to be a thorn in our side, didn’t he?”

So much for Haya’s confident face, as it was replaced by annoyance at the words.

“You didn’t…” She whispered slowly, vehemently hating how his dumb humour always disarmed her. Lorcan however just quietly snickered to himself.

“Who was this Dredgen Yor?” Hawthorne let her curiosity guide her. Whether Haya was trying to lure her into a trap or not, she was still curious. Whoever the person was, they were obviously a big part of history. She’s heard whispers of the name, whispers that are usually cut short.

“An asshole.” As per usual, Haya didn’t shy away from bluntness. “Everyone adored him. He was a great leader and a champion, saved a lot of refugees in the Dark Ages. Coined the term Guardian, and is partly responsible for the Consensus and the Factions and the City being the way it is.”

There was something about Haya’s demeanour as she told the story, like a comedian waiting for the right moment to drop a punch line.

“Oh, I get it now. Right. Everyone who has done some kind of good in this world is a bad guy to you.”

“He went on to destroy a human settlement, spared only one person and a Ghost. He then went on to murder some Guardians – some of us, don’t let what Zavala called you get to your head – one of the people he murdered was the best Titan the Crucible has ever seen. Just like that.” The morbid punchline hit, and she could see Hawthorne’s face drop. “So when you see the name Rezyl Azzir in those books, remember what he became. And how the Vanguard went out of their way to hide the truth. And that’s not the only instance.”

Morbid silence shrouded the room, but Haya didn’t feel triumphant over mortifying Hawthorne, which came as a surprise.

Guardians talk. They will always talk. Dangle enough shiny weapons infront of their faces, and they will talk. The Vanguard still believe that only they know the truth. That only they know the steps that have been taken to avoid bad morale amongst the populace. Guardians will always talk. Ghosts will always talk. Diaries and messages left behind will talk. A secret stops being a secret if more than one person knows it.

Haya had the upper hand with it, she was cursed to remember everything.

Lorcan slowly looked up to assess the situation once the silence got too heavy, and Huritt stopped digging through his books. Even Tirion had to investigate it, as the silence had become too suspicious. It was really hard to not half-listen to the conversation. Some clarifying was in order.

“What you need to know about Dredgen Yor is that it’s a story about how adorning your gun with
Hive artefacts makes people change their minds about a lot of things.” Tirion said. “If hiding the truth makes Guardians sharper tools to cut down the Hive with, maybe that’s not so bad.”

“Unbelievable!” Haya raised her hands in the air. “You’re siding with the Vanguard?”

“I have no idea what you are getting at Haya, but the world isn’t black and white,” She said, looking over at the Titan. “Should the Vanguard educate the Guardians so that someone else won’t go down the same path? Sure. But, there are other mistakes they’ve made that we can be angry at them for, if there is even a point to be angry at them.”

“I… I have the books!” Huritt tapped on the pile with one hand, though his interruption was more akin to building a paper wall around a fire to contain it. “There are nice stories here, like ones about wish granting dragons.”

Hawthorne cleared her throat. “I’m sorry, wish granting what now?”

“See Haya? You could have started with that story!” Lorcan scolded her jokingly. “Instead you have to make it dark.”

“Zavala calling her a Guardian is the ultimate dark.”

“Alright what—”

“Are you two done?” Tirion cut Hawthorne off. “I won’t have this here. If you two can’t get along you can do it outside of the den.”

“I thought you were better than this, Tirion.” Haya sighed. “Has the Traveler killed itself at this point?”

“Alright. While I disagree with what Zavala said, Hawthorne did save his life and she wants to learn.” The Warlock pointed at the books Hawthorne was holding. “I can commend that.”

“So, what makes a Guardian a Guardian besides that they don’t know how to love?” Hawthorne recalled the previous time they had this conversation.

The answer was simple.

“I’m a Guardian. Dredgen Yor was a Guardian. His Shadows are Guardians,” Tirion’s statement wasn’t self-explanatory enough. “A Guardian is an undead being brought back to life, if you want to get down to the technicalities. There are some side effects to it, side effects that makes us a whole lot different from you.”

“What makes us so different?” Hawthorne for once sounded sincere. “We’re all the same deep down, and we want the same things.”

“We’re not brave, we’ve merely forgotten the fear of death.” Tirion’s whisper was barely loud enough for anyone to hear. “We die every minute as a joke. That should tell you enough. We’re also a touch arrogant about our abilities and the strength of the City. It’s not a great fortress, as the majority want to believe.”

Hawthorne smirked. “Is that some humility I hear?”

“No. We’re still important, as we’re the only ones who can do deadly tasks without permanently dying.” Tirion corrected her. “Still, with the Light, we are mediocre. The Cabal, Hive, Vex, and even the Fallen are more than capable on their own. Give the Light to any of them, and they’ll be
unstoppable."

“Heh. You don’t seem to be willing to give them a chance to even try, based on half of what I hear on the streets.”

Getting something close to a compliment from Hawthorne was rather disturbing, but Tirion still carried on.

“It’s not just me. I just shoot things when bad things happen.” She said. “I believe that Oryx would have destroyed the City if the Reef hadn’t bought us time. I believe that we wouldn’t be able to fend off the Fallen with just walls and guns if it weren’t for the countless wars fought before, wars that weakened them.”

“Sounds pretty humble to me.” Hawthorne gave a half smile, hugging the books closer to her. “I should get back before Louis freaks out. Too many trigger-happy Guardians out there.”

“How did you find our den, by the way?” Tirion just had to ask.

“People talk around these parts, in case you haven’t noticed.” She told. “There is constant buzz around you six all the time anyway.”

“Huh…” The words raised some concerns, but it wasn’t necessarily news. “I’ll see you around, Hawthorne.”

With a small wave, Hawthorne departed. In the corner of her eye, she saw Huritt crossing his arms, metal grating against itself. He clenched his jaw when Hawthorne was there, trying to not add fuel to the fire. Anyone who sought out knowledge and to better themselves deserved a chance to do so. Now that Hawthorne was out of the room, he could finally share his distress.

“Dredgen Yor? Really?” Huritt glared at Haya, disappointed and head hanging low. “Really? Out of all the stories, out of all the knowledge… Dredgen Yor? You lived through most of – if not all – Guardian history and you pick… Dredgen Yor!?"

“I hate Hawthorne, but I’m not going to have her sigh dreamily about him when she reads the books. He was a big part of everything she wants to read up on.” Haya explained. “Better to get the heartbreak overwith early on.”

“I—I—” Huritt stuttered, and gave up. “Sometimes – and I mean all the times – I really don’t understand you, Haya.”

“Funny. That’s exactly what Ouros said once. In that tone and all.”

Lorcan frowned, unable to focus on his work. Haya could joke, and so could he to some extent. But he joked because it disturbed him, joked because he knew that he was doomed if he couldn’t joke about it. Hearing that name was the equivalent of getting thrown into a pit filled with mud, fighting desperately to crawl out of it. “I remember meeting him once. Dredgen.” He muttered.

“Neither of you have ever told me that you’ve met him.” Huritt took a seat between them, immediate interest in the tale.

“I met him once before the madness. I and Lorc stumbled upon him much later on during his campaign of destruction.” Haya frowned. “I didn’t fear his weapon back then, I didn’t know what it did. I guess that’s where he had the advantage. No Guardian cares if you point a damn gun at them.”
The Hunter visibly shuddered when her words forced him to remember. “Yeah… the damn way he — he leered at us. Like someone pouring glue all over you, and you become paralyzed and can’t get it off.”

“Why did he spare you two?” Huritt asked.

“We never got close enough.” Lorcan quavered. “It was… It was *fucked*.”

“I know it’s a touchy subject but…” Huritt was regretting the conversation, seeing that anguish on both of their faces. “I can’t believe that a single Hive artefact turned him into that.”

“Murder is one thing. He loved fearlessness.” Haya started. “He liked watching that moment, that moment where bravery turned into fear of death. *Asshole*. I don’t think it was the Hive that made him do that. It had to be something rooted deep in, *right?’*

Huritt wished he had a better answer. The question was almost a plea. “We don’t know. I’ve been studying the Hive as long as I can remember. Not like we had a control group during the onslaught, to have something to compare it to.”

“Yeah… well. I’d rather not know the answers then.” She shook her head, gaze fixed on the floor. “Don’t want studies, that leads to victims. Out of all of them, Pahanin hit the hardest. Thalor? He lived a full life. He was a champion at his peak. Pahanin… he didn’t deserve that. Not after all he went through in the Vault.”

“Anyway. Um… here is hoping we didn’t traumatize Hawthorne.” Lorcan tried to change the subject. None of them actually wanted to continue it. “Should we tell her that the Vanguard ordered Guardians to kill the wish granting dragons?”

“All stories end.” Haya said casually, shaking off the sadness. “Like Tirion’s story right now is becoming part Warlock, part Datapad. What the hell, Tirion?”

“Huh? What?” Tirion jerked up her head, realizing that she didn’t hear anything past Hawthorne leaving, not having a clue why they were laughing at her. “Sorry. Got a hit on something weird.”

“That’s… that’s *every* day.”

“*Weird-er?’” Tirion shrugged. “Anyway. A signal, on Mars of all places. Some of the beacons we planted a while back still work. Few of them went down as early as yesterday.”

“Wouldn’t worry.” Haya put her hands behind her head. “That’s the secret Cabal hiding spot now. They can’t do much.”

“I’m also picking up some weird signals. Ugh…” Dealing with the datapad was starting to become frustrating, being unable to reach through the screen to find out what the signal was. Only way to investigate was to get closer. “If I didn’t know any better, I’d say it was a Warmind.”

“Grandpa’s trying to contact us, maybe?”

Huritt almost winced at the nickname Lorcan used. “Would you stop calling violent Warminds ‘grandpa’!”

“Tirion started it!”

She smiled. “I did.”
“No respect…” Huritt grumbled.

“He’s old, he’s grumpy. He just wants to listen to his music and be in peace. Sometimes he says weird things.” She said. “And we are the ones to handle it when people want to try to put a stop to it.”


Haya almost threw up in her mouth. “Don’t ask questions. I feel disgusting enough as it is.”

“Guess we’re going to Mars, then.” Tirion threw away the datapad, a feeling of weird liberation accompanying it.

“Really?” Haya sounded less than pleased with the suggestion.

“I’m bored, Titan is mostly contained. You’re welcome to join me if you want.”

“I don’t want to… but I want to get there before the Vanguard do.” The Titan pouted. “Which might take a couple of months.”

“The way I see it, we have two choices.” Tirion clicked her tongue. “Either we go to Mars to investigate, or stay here and start a betting pool for how long it will take until the Vanguard notice.”

“Oh!” Lorcan raised a finger. “I have a third option!”

“Which is?”

“We go to Mars and create a betting pool for how long it will take for the Vanguard to notice that we’re doing stuff on Mars.”

“Do we really want to play with fire?”

“You’re the Sunsinger.” He glanced at Haya. “You’re the Sunbreaker. And I… I can create Void flames. And Huritt—”

“I don’t enjoy wielding Solar energy.” The Exo said from where he was sorting his things. “Fire in the heart sends smoke to the head. Destructive and uncontrollable things, the ones we don’t have a firm grasp on, are not things I want to wield if it can be avoided.”

“Um, Haya’s right here.” Lorcan pointed at her with his thumb. “You can tell her about how much you hated the face melting thing to her… face.”

“Nothing to do with Haya. One Solar grenade can cause a forest fire. As you said, absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

“But I want attention!” Haya whined. “Ugh! Why are you making this so difficult?”

As fun as this was, Tirion had to move. Good sign that she should was that she had no idea how many hours she spent staring at that blue screen.

“I don’t, but I need a walk.” Tirion underestimated how much it would hurt to stand up after not moving and reading a datapad for hours. A blue image was burned into her sight. She couldn’t keep going like this. “Wonder where Alva went off.”

Walking through the corridor filled her with dread for the first time. People talked, Hawthorne had
her agents. She had little doubts that Hawthorne would snitch, or had any actual malicious intents. But people knew. Most importantly, people had their own opinions about the group, particularly after Haya’s stunt. The War caused a lot of distrust between Guardians and civilians, of what they are capable of or if the City is in their best interest.

Tirion wished that the sun would hurt her eyes a little bit longer once she made her way out, so that she wouldn’t have to witness what was going on outside.

No matter what she does, she misses something.

Focused on the Minds, and missed the Hive summoning ritual on Titans. Focused on her search for answers and trouble on Mars, and missed what the Factions were planning.

Their flags were everywhere. Ones that weren’t there in the early hours of the morning.

She has heard things about a Faction Rally for years now, but nothing ever came out of those plans. Until now. A rally that no doubt the Factions wanted her to be a part of. Whoever she would pledge to would get a massive advantage in the contest. The ridiculous, stupid, asinine contest. Why couldn’t the Consensus just leave it well enough alone?

Tirion knew the truth. The truth was that the Factions will use fancy weapons and armor to charm the Guardians. The facts as to why they get so many people to align with them won’t matter, as long as they had the numbers to flaunt, numbers to use to prove why their ideology was the best. Tirion was one of those Guardians before. Aligning herself with a nihilist group just because of a weapon that would make her life easier was such an innocent act back then. Same went for all the schemes and exploits her team came up with. Only after the Cabal attacked it struck her that it wasn’t a game. The Factions and their projects were terrifying.

Tirion didn’t like any of them, believed they had no business having any authority.

She believed that the members of Dead Orbit were nihilists. Fleeing like cowards wouldn’t solve anything. If they would somehow manage to depart the system, they would deliberately leave a lot of people behind to die. Fatalism didn’t make good leadership.

FWC were lunatics, starving for attention. They helped her out once, to find a group of Guardians lost to time. It didn’t count. Tirion would willingly bet the Den that the FWC were now wailing about how they predicted the Red War, and that they were the only saviors. They’ve been claiming that they’ve been around since before the Collapse. Either they were liars, or they let a lot of wars happen just because they allowed it. Tirion hoped that they were nothing more than liars. When the next war hits, they will claim that they predicted it. And the next one. And the one after that. They will claim credit for predicting peace when it happens, after centuries of ranting how war is the only constant.

And then there was the New Monarchy.

The Monarchy was the lesser of three evils. If she had to choose one to rule the City, she would throw herself into the deepest Hive pit in search for Toland. She’d rather get lectured by a crazy Warlock for all eternity, listen to him rant about how she and her team were fools for killing Oryx and not taking his throne, getting berated for breaking the Sword Logic at its peak, how because of six Guardians his life has been for nothing.

New Monarchy was complicated. She wanted to restore the Golden Age more than anything. To salvage ruins and rebuild, to restore all that was lost. To make sure that the loss of millions of lives weren’t in vain. They could fight for centuries just as they have been doing, but what’s the point in
endless fighting if no progress is made? The Traveler brought them back so they’d have a chance to restore it all. It’s pointless to not take it. Build more cities, introduce freedom and a sense of civility into it all. Rebuild their entire world instead of looking at salvaged pictures and sighing.

But a small side effect came with the Monarchy’s brilliant ideals. They wanted tyranny, a dictatorship on top it all. They wanted an unimpeachable leader. And their eyes were right on her. She wasn’t going to let any of it happen. Right in that moment, she was too angry to come up with solutions to the problem that didn’t involve setting something on fire.

Worst of it all, they meddled with civilians too much for her liking. A day didn’t go by at the Tower when she didn’t hear stories about black eyes caused by New Monarchy thugs, or people being afraid of saying anything wrong because they know the Factions have ears everywhere.

The Factions were filling the City with fear and nonsense.

Dead Orbit was preaching nihilism and breaking morale.

FWC have been doing their best to cover up their sinister experiments, putting innocents into strange devices. Scaring people with tirades about upcoming wars which according to them couldn’t be won.

New Monarchy disguised themselves as the good guys with the luxurious garments, but they just wanted to oppress people with fear.

The people needed hope. They needed light.

Her job was to be that light.

It didn’t take long to find Alva, as there was only one place to look nowadays. She was far less liberal with the use of her stealth cloak now, at least in the Tower. Whether she got bored of the mischief or learned that mischief is bad is unknown.

Alva never liked participating in their usual deliberations and lengthy debates and discussions about the next thing that wants to kill them, which usually lasted several hours. Found little to no fun in it. Instead, during down time she liked to go to the playground in the slums of the City. The parents of the kids there were busy working double shifts for several people, or weren’t there anymore. Why stay in a room with no windows where voices shout about Hive worms, when she can be in the light somewhere where she is needed? Small stature, big heart.

The sight – despite it all – put a smile on Tirion’s face, watching Lorcan take the opportunity to join her and the kids. He, with Alva’s help, finished the first iteration of the drone for his Ghost. Now, the two were trying to figure out how to introduce the new buddy to the Ghost with the kids watching them and the drone hovering in the air with wide eyed wonder. Lorcan quickly got busy with reassuring his Ghost that it was a friend, and mumbling requests to her to not headbutt her new friend on sight.

Tirion felt a sudden presence next to her, a Warlock she didn’t recognize. He was looking at the ordeal with interest, tilting his head in confusion as he watched Lorcan release his Ghost to introduce her to the friend he built.

“Hm. Is Alva an AI?” He asked.

The sudden question distracted Tirion from the ordeal infront of her. “…What?”

“Your friend, that Exo.” He motioned towards the Hunter. “The one who doesn’t talk, has the
weird leg. I see her all the time here.”

Whoever this Warlock was, Tirion hoped that he had plans to choose his next words very carefully. She wasn’t planning to scorch his face, she had people to do it for her. “What makes you think she’s an AI?”

He brought up a hand to his chin, thinking, observing. “Not an advanced one, only able to communicate through text by the looks of it. Alva, right? Maybe the L is an upper case I?”

“I’m sorry?”

“I didn’t think the famous Guardian would be so daft. Would be understandable if you were a Hunter.”

“I understood what you said perfectly, but I got hung up on the fact that you are prejudiced. On top of that, I have no idea who you are. Now, if you excuse me…”

“I’m just curious.” He stopped her. “Consider me just a Guardian of science and curiosity.”

“No, she’s not an AI. We wouldn’t think lesser of her if she was.” Tirion said, realizing he won’t leave unless he gets something out of her. “Alva has saved us more times than we can count with her subterfuge tech.”

The other Warlock was completely lost in his own world. “But imagine the possibilities! An Artificial Intelligence created from scratch, infused with light. Home grown Guardians.”

“If you know who I am, you know that I killed the last creature who wanted to grow his own Guardians.” She hardly needed to list her credentials to anyone. “…and I can have a Sunbreaker barge through the wall right now and smack you over the head if you want to continue that thought about my friends.”

“Ah, yes. I heard the rumors. Glad to see you hold absolutely no interest in damage control for your party.” The sarcasm was deliberate, trying to get under her skin. “You’re very lucky that we’re in such drastic times.”

“I’d like to know how you consider the current situation being any good for me.”

"In these trying times, the people are desperate for a leader.” He looked up at the Faction flags flailing on the balconies. ”They will cling onto anyone. Even you.”

"’Even me’?” She repeated in disgust.

"You six are all liars and thieves, selfish mercenaries. Exceptional weirdoes who can do anything. You haven't changed.” He said. “Well, I guess one thing changed. You are completely self-employed now. You don’t need the Vanguard anymore.”

“Like it or not, we are the best these people have got.”

The man laughed under his breath. “How?”

“We may be liars and thieves, but we are the ones who are fighting. That puts us above nihilists, self-absorbed attention seekers, and those who yearn for tyranny.”

“Is that so?” He didn’t believe her. “Well. Don’t be surprised if the populace gets fed up when your hero shroud inevitably wears off. I’ll see you around.”
Sorry for the wait.

I'm a sysadmin IRL. A job which fluctuates between "there is NOTHING to do!!!!" and "there is EVERYTHING to do!!!!" a lot.

Haven't had the chance to write. :|
“What do you think you’re doing?”

Finding Zavala on Mars wasn’t exactly a surprise to her. That rage in his eyes was not something you saw on a daily basis, however. Tirion watched his face get sterner with every angry stride he took towards her, watching him run out of patience as he waited for her to explain herself. “Do you have any idea how dangerous this thing is?!”

It was one of the few times when Tirion wished that Haya was by her side to do the yelling. That Titan is always waiting for an opportunity to be angry at the world, angry at Zavala in particular. When it came to Zavala, Tirion was always too collected to raise her voice in front of him. She had to be, had to be the balance, the somewhat sensible one.

All it took was one insult to throw all that out of the window.

“What is a Warmind to someone who has fought gods in the heart of the Black Garden?” Tirion blurted out before she could think things through. Zavala’s unrelenting gaze didn’t leave her with much time to think, for rational thought. It was too late to go back now.

“What were you trying to do to Rasputin?” Ana tried to interject, but all it did was cause Zavala to clench his fists tighter.

“Rasputin is Vanguard business, Anastasia. Not yours. You do not belong here.”

Tirion scoffed. She wasn’t going to have this. Not after everything. “The Guardians are not your kids, Zavala. You don’t have the right to police us and set curfews on us.”

He harshly turned back to the Warlock: “You—”

“What are you going to tell Ana?” She stopped him. “Tell her that she belongs in the City and berate her for not fighting alongside us when Ghaul came for us?”

“Anastasia was—”

“And you were on Titan and a group of Guardians wanted to throw a coup against you because they thought that you left them to die. A lot of people still haven’t forgiven you.” That stopped him from talking. “What does it matter what Ana did during the war? We all fought our own battles.”

Took her longer than she’s proud to admit that the sudden, loud, monstrous roar came from the outside, and not from Zavala. An appropriate interruption, and a reminder. A reminder, that they had better and bigger things to worry about rather than hating each other. Whatever that even may be.

“Ok. Uh…” Ghost stuttered. “As much as it’s not terrifying at all to see my Guardian go berserk, we should really figure out exactly what’s doing that.”

“We can continue this later.” Zavala muttered, collecting himself. “And I can tell you what that is. Rasputin was not the only thing to awaken on Mars.”
“That’s very great and all but, well…” Tirion started to back away. “I came to Mars because I ran out of things to do, and now there is something to do, so…”

“We’re not finished with this discussion, Guardian.”

The roll of her eyes was enough to briefly stop her. “Of course we’re not!”

“Guardian…” Ghost warned her in a low voice.

“You mean you don’t enjoy when the Vanguard keeps life-threatening things a secret from the only people who can subdue things? Because that’s always lots of fun. Dead Guardians help morale.” Tirion shrugged at Ghost and resumed walking away. “I can point myself in the right direction for the subduing of whatever that is outside.”

Tirion got out of the dark room was fast as her legs could carry her, jogging down to the lower levels until she was out of the Mindlab. The Warsats were still raining outside, she figured out that it was Rasputin’s work before Ana told her. Not like she was surprised. Curious, but not surprised. She has known Rasputin to be temperamental, to say the least. In all cases so far, him throwing a tantrum meant that he was threatened by something. Tirion had no qualms with helping him, but hoped that at some point she’ll be able to teach him how to send her a message instead of melting the Martian ice caps for attention.

“Are you okay, Guardian?” Ghost asked.

“Nope.” She stopped and looked down at the cold ground, sighing in frustration. “There are actual lives at stake here. I just, for once, wanted to intercept something. That’s what I’m angry at. I don’t want to get a call from the Vanguard where they inform me of another ‘it’s almost too late to fix this’ situation. I’m tired of putting out the flames. I want to kill the pyromaniac before he can start the fire.”

“Appropriate analogy.” Ghost joked.

“I respect Zavala, but I am getting tired of him hiding things from us, wanting the past to stay buried, keeping secrets to keep us safe.” She told as she resumed walking. “I can see his logic in it, yes, but that logic won’t help me find the pyromaniac. Then they wonder why everything is on fire.” Tirion realized that her point devolved to a ramble and stopped herself.

“Well. I’m sure the rest of the group have different demands for peace with the Vanguard.”

“I don’t think they care. But, they’re not stupid, either. They know that continuing to work with the Vanguard means certain death, and that we’re the new leaders now.” She shook her head. “The Vanguard aren’t the ones who will lead the way forward. We will.”

“As opposed to working with creepy Cabal emperors hiding in planet eating ships.” He refused to let that little technicality slip through. “Oh, and keeping that a secret from the Vanguard.”

“We’re not working with him.” She corrected Ghost’s cruel reminder. “We’re just being held at gunpoint by him and he pays us in guns.” Tirion grimaced, as if looking at spoiled food.

“Huh. Guns. Not the words I would have chosen.”

“Oh, I have many words. Using the right words means that I have to make it a priority to find a shower on Mars.” Tirion’s words were humorless despite the effort, too distraught by Ghost’s sudden sour tone. “And I know how the conversation sounded.” She picked up the pace, dragging feet behind her.
“Do you?” He stared right at her intensely, with his little blue eye half-covered by his shell to resemble a disapproving scowl. “Really? I couldn’t even tell!”

“What am I supposed to do, Ghost?” She asked, sincerely. “The thing between us and Calus, it’s personal. Getting the Vanguard involved wouldn’t work out, I know how they operate. There is also no good way to explain this spectacular failure to anyone outside of our circle.”

“You feel bad about your choices now, but not when you allied yourself with the Cabal devil?” Ghost froze after a moment of watching her to contemplate a response. “You’re not… scared, are you? Of what he can do?” The sourness of his voice was gone now, sensing her inner distress.

“I’m not afraid, just creeped out. What does one do when a Cabal Emperor holds you in a strange psychological hostage situation?” She mumbled out the admission, kicking some ice as she walked. “I got a new message from him, just the other day.”

“You need to start telling me about these things.”

“I know. But I was too weirded out by it.” It wasn’t difficult to recall what it said because of the disgust associated with it. “He’s been tracking us, under the excuse that he needs to know what we’re doing so his plans for the end of the world won’t get disrupted.”

“We have the tech to hide from him.”

“He knows we’ve been trying to hide from him. He’s not upset, though! Which… which doesn’t make it that much better.” Despite the unfamiliar surroundings making it obvious that she was lost and should call someone for directions, she continued walking through the Martian terrain. “He’s curious if there is a reason I don’t want him to see me.”

“Yep. I think spectacular failure was a fair choice of words there.”

Tirion looked up at the starry night sky. Martian sky has always been spectacular and grand, on the verge of looking artificial. She sat down on a cold red rock, just to catch her breath. Ice underneath her fingertips melting as she gripped it anxiously.

“Do you remember when during the Taken War I was brooding in my ship…”

“That happened a lot.”

“Uptight…” She whispered playfully. “Anyway. I was sitting in my ship and asked the stars what would happen if I would just run, run far away somewhere and everyone would forget that I was ever here.”

“You’re not seriously considering it this time, are you?”

“I am. In a way.”

“Guardian…”

“Shush!” She raised a finger. “Don’t Guardian me.”

“I’m sorry, but besides disabling your Sparrow, Guardianing you is all I can do! We can’t just run away!”

“Look. Listen. Just…” Tirion stumbled, still working out the plan. “We could do it, after this is done. Only tell Shaxx and the misfits and just… go. Make everyone else think that I just
“disappeared. It could be the only way to get rid of Calus.”

“Go where, exactly?”

*Good question.*

“I wouldn’t be able to blend in with the humans in one of the new settlements.” She saw Ghost almost drop to the ground in defeat when he realized that she was actually planning it. “Reef is no option. There are some nice houses on Earth where no one would look.”

“The Vanguard would look. They never stopped searching for Saint.”

“They didn’t find him, did they? I was the one who found him.”

“That’s because he…” Ghost trailed off, trying to convince himself that her mind wasn’t made up.

“I know what you’re trying to say.” She stood up, legs slightly shaking from the cold from sitting too long. “That the only way to get out of this is a final death, and I don’t want to die. And I know what I said at the Consensus meeting, that I’ll be there for people. But… there is nowhere to go but down after this, is there?”

“The City needs you.”

“The City needs more like me, like *us*. I can’t do everything. I can’t keep on being the *only* wrench. And I’m out of ideas. We both know that things won’t change as long as they can rely on the *Hero.*” Her expression turned solemn. “What will happen when I fall…” She whispered the question to herself.

“You won’t fall, Guardian.”

“I’ll fall one day. I can just hope that it will be graceful and that it will be the act that inspires others to shine. Maybe only then we will reach the mythical *Age of Legends*. Right now it’s more akin to *Age Of Six Idiots, Who Killed Some Gods And Stuff.*”

Ghost had no time for her sudden jokes. “Guardian, *please*…”

“You know, *she* never asked for this, remember that.” Tirion turned to face him. “Traveler *created* you with a purpose and a task. I – *whatever I even am* – was *hurled* towards a task.”

Ghost flinched at her words, shell slightly slowly loosening as his eye drifted down. He floated there in silence for a while, avoiding the world. Much like she does when deep in thought. “If you don’t mind, Zavala figured out how to proceed.”

“I *promise* to fix my spectacular failure…”

He didn’t let her finish. “That creature making all that noise is a Worm God, called Xol. In order to kill it, we’re going to have to draw it out, and Zavala suggests a fragment of the Traveler. We best get going to the EDZ.”

Tirion didn’t expect to add redefining the definition of the word *awkward* to her list of accomplishments. She didn’t even hear his shell turn once on their flight over to the EDZ, her heart breaking slightly every time she recalled the conversation in her head. Bitterness, exhaustion, fear, confusion. All of it combined into a muddled mess, making her lash out at her most trusted companion.
“It’s the Taken. They’re jamming me.” Ghost spoke up for the first time in hours when they were on the battlefield, anger still lingering in his voice. She killed the Taken whilst running on pure autopilot, she knew all there is to know about how they fight and their tactics. Maybe she should write everything down for others, something for the next generation of Guardians to read. The Crucible can teach them how to use a gun, but the only way to learn how to defeat a horde of Taken is to risk your life against them.

No matter of what she thought of, she couldn’t distance herself away from the problem at hand. Telling the Vanguard about Calus would get her exiled. Keeping it a secret and returning to the almost robotic routine would kill her. She couldn’t pick the former, she needed to inspire people. Her image getting tarnished would cause too much harm, would shatter the little hope they had into a million pieces. A tale told a lot of times in her head and in prophecies and paradoxes. She tried to shake herself out of it, knowing that she can’t afford distractions for the battle to come. The arguments in her earpiece between Ana and Zavala were distracting enough. Something about winning against impossible odds before, without Rasputin. More questions added to her never-ending list. Would they have won against those impossible odds without her?

She couldn’t help but dwell in it: what would the Vanguard do if she’d disappear? Who would they rely on? Will the universe be kind enough to inflict another heap of coincidences on them to give birth to a new hero? For every day that passed there was more and more doubt in her mind that her getting revived during the worst darkness sent upon them was a simple coincidence.

“The taken have shielded the Fragment.” Ghost’s voice pulled her back to reality, and she let him out to scan it. The routine. While stranger Hunters weren’t a new thing, having one adjust the trajectory of a Warsat to get rid of a shield the Taken put on the shard of the Traveler was new. A blur of orange and crimson falling from the sky burned her skin as she staggered back, ripping the shield away from the shard. Was she really needed there when they had this kind of firepower at their fingertips?

“Ana, how did you get it to fire?” Zavala demanded to know, urgently.

“I asked him. Rasputin was created to help Humanity. He listens to me.”

“This time, the Warmind listened. But, are you ready to shoulder the burden the day it doesn’t?”

Only silence followed.

Things in Tirion’s world usually fell into place, she knew that much. There will be time to talk to Ana later. Ana hasn’t given a single reason to not trust her, but Tirion was still unsure about the connection Ana and Rasputin shared. All it mattered now is that Rasputin could be controlled. They will cross bridges once they get to them.

But for now, silence.

Silence. Too much silence. Cabal clad in red, roaring at her, only a weapon by her side, hands too shaky to wield it to fend them off. Her legs still worked, so did her stealth shroud. Silence again, because anything else meant them finding her in the darkest burrows of the City. Fingers automatically scrambling to get someone who’d talk. Someone that can convince her that she wasn’t all alone in the past anymore.

“Hey.” Huritt’s voice on the speaker pierced the silence.

“This is going to sound weird. What do you know about Xol?”

“Explains what?” She raised an eyebrow.

“Last I heard of Lorcan and Haya were them yelling about a giant worm and cutting the feed, but you know how they are.”

“Great, at least they’re having fun I guess. But, what about Xol?”

“A lot. The Hive have one too many family theatrics to keep it short.” He paused for a minute, to shuffle through a book. “Xol feared getting killed by Yul, another Worm God, so he made a pact with Nokris. The two sought out a new world to rule. Ended up frozen on Mars, by the looks of it.”

“Nokris?”

“Another victim of family theatrics. Oryx’s neglected son. Not much on him. All I could gather was that he disappointed Oryx, and he got disowned. Using light terms here, of course.”

“What do you have to do to disappoint Oryx? Have intercourse with a Guardian?”

“Whatever it was, it was heresy. Do yourself a favour and don’t try to think about what counts as heresy for the Hive.”

“Nice. Thanks. You and Alva still in the City?”

“Haya doesn’t want us on Mars until she knows it’s safe for Exos. Doesn’t know what Rasputin might do.”

“That’s sweet of her.”

“Yeah. We’re in the EDZ now, waiting for the call. Devrim needed help with some things. With ‘things’, I mean tea.”

“Say hi to him for me. Meanwhile, I think Zavala wants me to kill Xol.”

“What…?”

“I’ll call you later, Huritt.”

“What?!”

She promptly hung up the call, not really having the time or words to explain, and the red planet was drawing closer. There was a sinking feeling in her gut, everything was in a disarray. Her muscles begging her to turn around and run away. But she had to finish this, see this one fight to its conclusion.

There were some fights not worth having, though. Not worth finishing nor starting. Her Ghost still refused to look at her, resting on the dashboard instead of her shoulder. She just had to inadvertently make it ten times worse for herself for the sake of a challenge, didn’t she? Funny how you feel the most alone when you’re surrounded by dozens of people.

No matter how hard she tried to pay attention, she could hear very little of the banter between Ana and Zavala as she navigated the worm-ridden caverns. Something about Rasputin, something about him not being trustworthy. Whispers replaced it all. Whispers louder than pained screams, sorrowful laughs. Death. Sounds of gunfire couldn’t drown it out, but at least her guns obliterated the fools that dared tread infront of her. What wasn’t a sacrifice or a conductor of the sacrifice was
covered in giant yellow sacks and grey worms. The claustrophobic caverns made Titan look like a joke.

She heard the pattern loud and clear in her head.


Her earpiece screeched, loud enough to hurt.

“Ana?” Ghost called out. “Ana!”

*Déjà vu.*

Maybe the nausea was from seven different déjà vus hitting her all at once. A Hive ritual, no contact with the outside world. She’s been there before, except in a world far less vibrant. It all came into focus in that moment, the whispers subsiding around her. It was a strange ritual site, glowing Knights kneeling in a circle, attacking her at first sign of interruption. Green and black portal springing to life when no life remained. *Life* was a strange concept for the Hive, though.

The creature emerged from it, with the undeniable family resemblance. Only if the creature knew that she has done to his lineage.

She hoped that it was afraid. The one who challenges death battling the one refusing to let things die. They could play their little game for hours, *ages*. They had all the time in the world to dance.

All things must die. Nokris won’t. He’ll come back, and so will she. Guardians and the Hive had an important thing in common: they broke the laws of nature. *No one* is supposed to defy death, not her not them. Deathless against deathless, fighting a war which was almost comical. Watching him wither away after the final shotgun blast didn’t fill her with relief or a sense of victory. He’ll be back soon.

“There! In the center. That’s where we can place the fragment.” Tirion almost forgot. Forgot that she came down there with a purpose instead of a daydream and whispers leading her there. The battle was oddly peaceful, perhaps a final token of gratitude.

Tirion took the chance to look around as Ghost transmatted the shard over. The Hive sealed the way out as a retaliation for what she did, and best she could tell the link to her ship above was severed along with the comms. They left her. No panic this time around. No urge to claw at the walls to get out from the pit she’s been left in. She could have used some of this numbness during the Taken war, but they wouldn’t had won the war if she had been numb throughout it. Not *numb*, rather, accepting. Accepting of what’s to come.

“Little Light…” She whispered.

No grunt, no wince, no squeak. Nothing more escaped her throat as she collapsed to the floor. Her face flat against the ice-cold stone plate. Her vision red, ground shaking violently underneath her. The tremors hardly moved her body, but they tore her mind apart. She could no longer take in what was going on around her, and the worm looked down at her to boast about its handiwork, to brag about how it *finally* figured out how to defeat her.

There is no Light here.

The worm slithered away until it was out of her sight. The voice was echoing in her head, rummaging and slithering through her brain and mangling everything. She couldn’t stop it, couldn’t shoot it. Couldn’t stop them from breaking into her mind. Tirion was impressed, though. They
finally figured it out.

Maybe she shouldn’t have been so cocky.

*You are alone.*

Her Ghost was by her side, frozen in shock, in awe of the beast around them both. Her mind was too crushed to think of an apology, too ruined to even form a frown or remember what the argument was about.

*You shall drift.*

This wasn’t how it felt when she lost her Light. When Ghaul took it, it felt like he stole a part of her, ripped something away. Xol didn’t need to do that, it just destroyed her from the inside. Like an ice pick in her eye socket.

Past all the tremors, this was almost tranquil.

*You shall drown in the Deep.*

The ground underneath her gave in, and she started to sink like a stone, but light as a feather.

“Guardian…?” The lights above got smaller and smaller until there was no more. “Guardian?! Where are you?!”

She knew she was dying.

Chapter End Notes

Well.
“I am going to kill her!”

The Worm’s corpse was barely fully disintegrated when Haya took off in full sprint out of the Mindlab, anger and the high from their latest victory making her forget about her aching limbs. The two other Guardians were right behind shouting at her, while knowing fully well that she becomes deaf when she’s berserk.

They lied.

She wasn’t going to take kindly to that.

Told them that there was no time left, and she couldn’t make it, that she was just running late. Part of it was true, Xol had to be stopped. Arriving just a minute too late meant the end of Rasputin, and the start of an unstoppable Hive worm god on the loose. No one could afford that, and it was in no one’s interest to force sacrifices on people. Figuring out that the truth was withheld was easy. A statement about a Guardian becomes suspicious when said Guardian’s chatty Ghost doesn’t want to talk.

Flames engulfed her and she gripped the Hammer of Sol tightly in her hand as she went through the final doorway leading to the room where Ana was. With one swift throw, the Hammer shattered the glass window right next to the Hunter, pieces of glass getting stuck in the white fabrics of her armor and pitch-black hair. Without hesitation, Ana retaliated and drew the revolver from her holster to aim it at the livid Titan.

“Where is she?!” Haya roared, charging another Hammer.

The revolver in Ana’s hand turned hot yellow, steady in her hand. “Whoa, back up!”

“You lied to us! What the hell happened to Tirion!?”

“Oh boy…” Lorcan threw a quick wide-eyed glance at Kouhei, who had his arms crossed and just shrugged as a response. Seeing no other choice, he summoned his void bow and shot at a nearby wall, briefly putting out the flames on both sides. Both of the women shrugged it off, but Ana decided to holster her gun.

“I did nothing to your friend.” Ana explained, as if the scuffle didn’t happen. “Dealing with Xol was a priority. We’ve been trying to find her the whole time you’ve been fighting.”

Lorcan raised his hands, attempting to ease the situation. “What happened?” He asked softly, as Haya was too busy gritting her teeth to utter any words.

“She disappeared.” Ghost mumbled from where he was sitting next to Ana’s console. “The floor gave in underneath her, and she fell.”

“She fell?!” Haya repeated with a groan. “Fell?!”

“Xol did something to her.” He struggled to speak. “I’m not really sure what happened.”
She scoffed. “Fuck that.”

“Hunters and Titans go together like cats and dogs…” Ana began. “But we’re going to have to work together if we want to find her.”

Haya grumbled as she gathered the ammo scattered on the ground, remains of an old battle for territory. “Fuck that.”

“I think that means ‘Where was Tirion last seen?’ in her language.” Lorcan clarified, taking on the task to out balance the Titan.

“We… we were sent to a cavern, to draw out Xol. Down in the Drift.” Ghost said. “I could try to lead you to it.”

“Try?” He asked.

“Xol caused the cave to collapse in as it escaped.”

“And we don’t have the tools for a drilling operation, so…” Ana continued for him, as he could barely talk. “The caves are too deep for Rasputin to help. There is nothing…”

“Fuck that!” Haya stopped her, loading the last of her guns.

“I think that means uh…” Lorcan pointed at Kouhei behind him. “I think it means ‘We have two Titans’…?”

Haya rolled her eyes at Lorcan. “She’s not dead until she’s found and dead. I’m not letting a third die.”

Ana raised an eyebrow. “A third?”

“Ghost, are you coming?” Haya ignored Ana’s question, and the Ghost flew to her side without a word.

“Well, if it’s going to be like that; you better get out of here before Zavala gets here and gives you a lecture about how dangerous it is to go back there.” Ana said. “I’ll stay behind, making sure that you three won’t get lost. Call me if you need help.”

“Zavala can say what he wants. Remember Twilight Gap?” Haya joked.

Ana glanced over to Haya’s hand, where the burning Hammer was just a couple of minutes ago. She has heard the stories. “You were at the Gap?”

“That was a genuine question for Haya…” Lorcan filled in as Haya was already out of the room. “She—You know what, never mind. We need to go.”

Only thing that stung more than the situation was the cold. For two out of the three, at least. Haya was warm from both anger and abusing her Light powers, fuming at the dead silence of the caves and lack of Hive to exact revenge on. The trek was slow, as Ghost scanned every crevice for a sign of his Guardian. Maybe she made it out, maybe they just missed her. No search felt thorough enough. Maybe they should backtrack to try again, maybe they should hurry up. Maybe they were looking in the wrong place altogether.

“What… what are you staring at?” Lorcan scowled at Kouhei, his words echoing in the icy cave.

“You Hunters put vermilion stripes on your armor when you lose someone, is that right?” The
Titan kept eyeing the Hunter.

“Yeah…” Lorcan dragged out his words. “For some, at least. We aren’t part of a cult.”

“Hm.”

The Hunter almost staggered back. “Hm? What is hm supposed to mean?”

“You have none.”

“Nope.”

“You haven’t lost anyone?”

“I have. I just don’t believe in the stripe thing.”

“How can you simply not believe in something that’s part of who you are?”

“Because it isn’t a part of who I am…?”

That answer wasn’t satisfying to Kouhei. “Being a protector is part of being a Titan. Tell me how red stripes are different.”

“They’re vermillion, you dingus.” He shook his head at the disrespect, and then pointed at Haya walking infront of them. “And she smashes everything she sees.”

“That’s… Hm.” Kouhei cut himself off to process what Lorcan said.

“Stop hm-ing!”

“I understand your point now.”

“And I’m waiting for the joke.” He spread out his arms as he walked. “Come on, insult me.”

“No jokes. Some Titans are meant to protect, others to destroy. Guess we all have different roles to fill.”

“No insult?” Lorcan pouted.

“No insult.” He reassured the Hunter. “Though, I’m curious to know why you really reject the tradition.”

The idea of opening up to Kouhei about it all was a strange one, but it was appropriate time for it.

“Final step of loss is letting go. But once you have that stripe on you, it’ll stay there. You’ll grieve forever. You won’t be able to let go and move on. Look at Cayde. How many years since Andal died?”

“That’s… actually sound reasoning.”

“Better to not put the mark there in the first place, you know? Just remember the happy moments instead, and not dwell on their final tragedy.” He said. “But are you actually asking if I’d put a red stripe of my armor if she dies?”

“Guys…” Haya interrupted, nodding over to Tirion’s Ghost who was scanning everything in their path, trying to find a sign.
“She’s not dead.” He made it clear. “I hope she’s not. Crucible will be a complete bitch if she is.”

“That’s your concern?” She snapped at the Hunter. “The Crucible?”

“She’s our friend, but he really loves her.” Lorcan kept it simple. “So yeah, watching someone crumble will be a bitch.”

“When did you develop a sense of genuine empathy, Lorcan?” Kouhei asked.

“I don’t know, when did you develop the ability to not insult people?” The Hunter clapped back.

“No one will crumble. We’re not leaving her.” Haya said, interrupting them both. “It’s not fair for her to die. Not after everything they’ve done to her.”

“You can’t complain about things being unfair when you aren’t following the rules.”

“Oh, you—” She rolled her eyes at Kouhei. “Don’t you go all literal Tirion on me. She already told me that no one deserves anything. Don’t need to hear that again.”

“I found something.” Ghost interrupted her, scanning some Hive seals. Too busy trying to find his Guardian to pay attention to any noise around him. “Give me a moment, I can crack these.”

“For fu— there has to be something!” She punched the wall of ice with a grunt, continuing their conversation. Not a single care in the system that her strength could bring the entire cavern down. “Has to be, right?”

Her eyes were red, bloodshot. Old scars reopening for just a split second, until her Ghost catches up and heals them. Never permanently though. She’ll never let them heal. Letting them heal means letting go of the anger. She didn’t know how to do it quite yet.

“Maybe.” Kouhei half whispered. “What do your people actually believe in?”

“Ah!” Lorcan raised a finger. “There is the insult!”

“It’s not an insult.”

“We don’t believe in much.” She answered Kouhei’s question. “We believe more in actually doing things instead of believing things.”

“Sounds like you.”

“Yeah, but the principles are hit or miss. One states that the good will be rewarded and the wicked will be punished, and the other states that the dead will get resurrected.”

“Is this about you struggling with trying to figure out who is actually good and who is actually wicked depending on the punishments you’ve seen imposed on people?”

Haya stared blankly at him for a moment. Conversations with Kouhei never lasted this long.

“No… What I was going to say is that Osiris is a dick risen from the dead who hasn’t been punished for what he’s done.” She answered as bluntly as ever. “Why do you have to make this philosophical?”

“I got it!” Ghost shouted, and they wasted no time to get to the door.

“You’re smarter than that, Haya.”
“I don’t need your validation.” She barked.

“That wasn’t intended to be taken as a validation attempt. It was just a fact.”

Lorcan’s wide eyes darted between the two of them as they bickered, noticing the sparks of fire at Haya’s fingertips.

“Am I the only weirded out by how many words Kouhei just said?” He wondered as he caught up with both of them heading for the newly opened door, carefully eyeing the Awoken Titan, a hand on his gun just in case. “Are you okay?”

Getting silence back from Kouhei should have been a relief, but Lorcan found none. The Titan saying more than five words in a minute was weird, shifting back to silence was even weirder. It was easier to focus on that mystery rather than to focus on what they were doing in the deepest caves of Mars, treading through worm infested burrows, searching for their friend. Her Ghost led the three Guardians, expecting Hive to ambush them at any given moment. It all was suspiciously empty, even more reason for them to not let their guard down. The rubble between them and the room where Tirion was seen last didn’t stop them, no match for their weapons and Light.

The room was bigger than Ghost remembered, due to Xol no doubt. The bright colours in such a sinister place perturbed him to no end. Another difference that stuck out was the sizable hole in the middle of it. Where he lost her. He didn’t remember how he got out. There was a flash of light, and then he was looking at the sky.

Lorcan whistled, looking down into the darkness. “That’s…”


“I’m not going to delve into bad jokes now.” He kicked a nearby rock into the pit, waiting for the sound of it landing somewhere which never came. “Well…”

“Let’s just do it.” Haya decided. “We need to do it.”

“Who’s going to go fir—” The clang of the Hammers didn’t let him finish the question, as Haya jumped in, as radiant as the sun, illuminating the path. “Subtlety is a suggestion, anyway.”

Kouhei jumped second, Lorcan third albeit nervously. The place reminded him too much of the Moon, the Hellmouth. He could hear the screeching of the thralls who weren’t there. The fall was much shorter than the one of the descent into the Hellmouth. It compensated with ten times the darkness, Ghosts quickly helping them out by lighting up the place, their awe reflecting their own Guardians’. Endless tunnels, endless worms. Walls of stone. One more necropolis to add to the pile and to categorize.

Lorcan’s keen eyes noticed something instantly. It always helped to have a Hunter on the team, whether anyone else liked to admit it or not.

“Scorch marks?” He whispered, touching the blackness on the floor. “Is this yours, Haya?”

“Nope.” She shook her head, and looked up to find no light. “I stopped burning before I hit the ground.”

“At least we know she survived the fall.”

“How?” Ghost asked.
“You’re the Ghost of a Sunsinger, you should know how weird they are.” He explained. “Do you think the rumors are true that when they die they see a vision of the past?”

“All I know that they are the only ones who can bring themselves back from a final death.” Kouhei said.

“You sound like you know a lot about this.”

“I’ve heard stories. Met cults who hunted Sunsingers to kill them, deeming them not holy.”

Lorcan flinched. “Why?”

“Some people believe that for every time they are brought back to life from a final death, there is a sacrifice.” Kouhei told. “Someone has to die. That’s the rule. If it’s not the Sunsinger, it’s someone else. A price has to be paid. The cult thought that they could lessen death by killing people.”

“Somehow Sunsingers still remain the weirdest.” Lorcan shrugged. “We already bend reality and law of the freaking nature by being Guardians and getting resurrected. Sunsingers break it even further. They actually come back from the dead. Dead dead.”

“Well, that’s why people like them so much.” Said Haya. “They don’t care. If whatever the hell force tries to give them what they deserve, or grant unjust punishment… they just don’t care.”

“You sound bitter.” Lorcan noticed. “Wanna talk about it?”

“Some of them caused some trouble for us. Naming their gloves after us.”

“Ha. I can see how that could make you a bit salty.”

“We didn’t have to do much. They thought that we were going to sacrifice them to the Forge. Reputation is enough sometimes.” Her face hardened. “I want to do better with my Sunbreakers. We need to find Tirion first, though. Please tell me that for once she decided to not care…”

“Over there, more scorch marks on the walls.” Ghost pointed out, following them. “Come on Guardian… where are you?”

“Oh, she and her damn fairy tales…” Haya muttered, taking the lead and chasing after the scorch marks, regaining her balance instantly as suddenly she almost stumbled due to the charred Hive corpses in her way. Hundreds of them. Thralls, Knights, Acolytes, several Wizards. They weren’t allowed to wither, frozen in ash. The smell was the worst of it, forcing them to put on their helmets to be able to breathe.

“Looks like she killed enough Hive to end a war. Or start one.” Lorcan remarked, but concern flooded over him when he noticed that Haya was standing there frozen in the light of her Ghost. “Haya? You alright?”

“Killed enough Hive to end a war…” She repeated, own heartbeat deafening her. Why couldn’t she move? “This is not happening.”

“What’s not happening?” His face sank underneath the helmet when he realized what he said. “No… No!”

They didn’t let the corpses stop them, crushed underneath their boots and finally turning to dust. It seemed never ending, darkness unrelenting. The scorch marks came to an end, as most things do. No one is going to let this happen.
“She’s not dead until she is found and dead…” Haya muttered to herself. “We haven’t found her yet…”

Denial no longer worked. That logic no longer worked. They didn’t find the Sunbreakers, either. And they’re dead. They’ve only found one. She found the one.

There was nothing. They could run for ages and still find nothing.

“We should go back.” Kouhei whispered after several minutes of dead silence, watching Haya struggle to let out a swear word. Lorcan was sitting on the ground, fists clenched on his knees.

Tirion didn’t leave them breadcrumbs to find her. She left them so they could find their way back.

The little spark of light refused to give up. He owed to his Guardian to search everywhere until there was no Light for him. Just like when he was trying to find her for the first time, searching every corner of the system. From highest buildings to deepest tunnels. He eventually found her. He will find her again. The scorch marks stopped, which meant that she probably didn’t go further than that. He did what she usually does when frustrated; closed his eye to think, to try to observe the world in a different way. He never understood why she did that until the greatest moment of despair.

It took a moment, but once the cave fell into an absolute silence, he sensed something. Light. Could it be?

“There!” Ghost sighed in relief and zoomed to the figure lying on the floor amidst the ash. The red hair was almost brown from the grime, entire body camouflaged and hidden from the world.

Haya swallowed, half thinking that she hallucinated the voice. “And…?”

“She’s alive…” Blue light swirled around the Guardian as he healed her. The lights on her face still danced faintly. “Barely, but alive.”

The sheer force of all of them finally allowing themselves to breathe was almost enough to blow the cavern apart.

“Why isn’t she waking up…?” Lorcan asked, stepping closer to her. “Shouldn’t she wake up?”

“I can heal her but…” Ghost could barely multitask with everything going on. “Whatever the Hive did to her is too much for me to fix in one go. Too little Light down here. For the lack of a better term…” He sighed sadly. “We need to get her back to the City.”

“She’ll be fine, right?”

“Yes. She will.”

“We better lock for transmat. Somehow. I guess we can follow the scorch marks to get back to where we came from.” Haya said, every part of her body wanting to collapse. “You can use my ship. We can take her to the City. No one needs to die.”

“It’ll be alright, Guardian.” Ghost whispered to her. “Let’s get you home.”
A shorter chapter is better than none at all, I guess.
The five of them could barely fit in the corridor, sitting on the ground right next to her room and disrupting traffic of the hospital, earning a fair share of angry stares from the staff. It was out of their hands now, waiting was the only thing left. And waiting. Still in their gunked up armor, too tired and too worried to go change. The hospital and its staff were used to bad smells, considering all the things Guardians bring to them on a daily basis.

Waiting and having nothing to fidget with led to thinking. They should have brought something to fidget with, stolen something on the way. The waiting eventually led to weird glares until the tension forced one of them to speak up.

“Do you really believe that, Kouhei?” Haya stared right into his red eyes as she asked the question. The question that has been at the back of her head ever since they’ve left Mars. “That there is a cosmic consequence for avoiding death? You constantly go on all about how everyone has a role.”

“There is no right answer.”

“I’m asking what you believe in. You have to have some beliefs of your own.”

“We aren’t supposed to be the way we are. It’s only natural that there is retaliation.” He said. “But I think the concepts of that cult are atrocious. It also doesn’t matter what I believe.”

“Hmph.” She huffed, earning an annoyed stare from Lorcan. He already lectured Kouhei enough about that particular way of answering things, he didn’t need Haya to start answering things in that way as well. He liked words, coherent sentences. Those were good and understandable. Nothing could be done with a huff.

Heavy footsteps distracted them, heavier than the staff of the hospital. None of them needed to turn their heads to look to find out who it was. Haya cursed under her breath; if she had waited just a second longer there would have been no need to start a conversation. She still wanted answers. Finding answers without using fists was a challenge for her.

“Guardians.” Zavala’s deep voice greeted their frozen forms. “How is our friend doing?”

“We don’t know yet.” Haya crossed her arms tighter, dismissively. “We’ve been waiting for a couple of hours now. Is there anything you want?”

The coldness from them was akin to finding out that water was wet. Always expected, no point in even feigning surprise. “I wanted to congratulate you.”

“On surviving, and a job well done. With the fall of Nokris and Xol, you’ve dealt a significant blow to the Hive.” He took the time to clarify despite their almost petulant opposition, putting his hands behind his back. “It wasn’t the orders of the Vanguard that brought you all to Mars, that was all on your own initiative. Remember, taking on Nokris was her own choice.”

“Really?” Haya looked over at him. “You should know by this point that she doesn’t have the ability to disobey orders. She hasn’t been alive long enough to know any other life than what you
throw at her.”

“What’s this about, Titan?” He asked sincerely.

“I don’t know, it's about a damn questionnaire. What was it that inspired you to throw all the burdens of the world at her?”

Zavala didn’t have to think about the answer. “The question of what inspires her to throw herself at all the darkness to light it up is one only she can answer. We never forced her to do anything.”

“Yeah… at this point you really, really should know that she doesn’t have the ability to say no.” Haya repeated herself.

“Out of all the things we lack, no Guardian lacks free will.” He argued. “I’ve seen countless Guardians enter the City through the years, you’d be surprised at how many of them run away when they find out what they have been turned into.”

“You can just say Hunters…” Lorcan chimed in.

“Not just Hunters, though Cayde’s introductions to new Guardians can be a bit… unconventional.” He said. “Warlocks who had potential to be the greatest thinkers, Titans who could have been the most stalwart defenders. They left the City and forged their own paths, wanting nothing to do with it.”

“So, how much did you pay Tirion so that she won’t run away screaming?” Haya returned to the jokes.

“Have I ever told you the story about the day I met Tirion?” Everyone sitting on the floor shook their heads, curiosity growing in their eyes. “Ikora’s Hidden informed us that a Devil Archon has been felled in the Cosmodrome. Riksis was a particularly troublesome one, known for collecting skulls of dead Guardians as offerings to their Servitor, Sepiks Prime.”

“The Fallen are a cheerful bunch, aren’t they?” Lorcan chuckled humourlessly. “How does this tie into Tirion?”

“Guardians were under strict orders to not engage with him. We couldn’t afford more casualties until we knew where Sepiks was hiding.” Not smirking at what he’s about to say was difficult, but he still managed to keep a stern face. “How wrong I was when I thought that she was completely unremarkable when she stumbled into the Hall…”

“We’ve all fallen for that. I tried to rob her.”

“She would have gotten away with it all, if it weren’t for her Ghost letting us know about the warp drive they had to kill an Archon for. She just wanted directions to the Hangar.” Zavala told. “Truth be told, we expected her to drop out of sight once her ship got repaired, saw her nothing more than a tiny stroke of luck in that moment. To everyone’s surprise, she returned, again and again. Willingly, without us bending her will.”

Haya’s eye was almost twitching at that point, she was staring right through him, deep in her own head.

“Let Haya think for a minute, she isn’t familiar with the concept of people making their own choices.”

“Lorc…!” Haya raised a finger to silence him, and returned her attention to Zavala. “You keep
looking up at her where she’s on the pedestal you put her on, thinking that she’s an unstoppable tank. You know, she’s honestly no stronger than any of us and she’s scared.”

“It’s unfortunately not her fault nor ours.”

“I just wish that someone would have noticed that she was saving the world for her own self-destructive purposes before she started to deteriorate. It’s our fault, and hers.” She spat. “All of us were supposed to be there, but you treated her no different than Rasputin. Just sought to wield her as a weapon—”

“Haya…” Lorcan stopped her. “Not to channel Tirion but… will this solve anything?”

“Probably not.” She crossed her arms again, pushing herself against the wall hoping she’d slip through it. “I just want him gone.”

“Either way, I just wanted to congratulate you. You survived where others have not, and you keep surviving. Excellent work on Mars. There is usually a great deal of uncertainty with the six of you sometimes…” Zavala nodded to himself. “In all this uncertainty, one thing has never wavered; and that is my faith that you are the ones who will lead the way forward. Keep at it, Guardians.”

Zavala left without anyone saying goodbye, receiving only cold silence back. Didn’t expect anything else.

There was one person who has been there for her, though. When no one was. The only good thing that came out of their biggest mistake.

“So, have we told Shaxx about this yet?” Haya asked the crew.

“Yeah!”

“Really, Lorc?”

“Well, yeah! Of course!” It didn’t work, as he was surrounded by people who were immune to his trickery. “Because telling a big loud Titan with a broken helmet that his loved one was tortured by the Hive always ends well.”

“Anyone volunteering to step up to him?” Haya eyed each one of them. “Anyone?”

“No, because that’s what I have to do to reach his height. I need a ladder and need to step up on it.” He joked. Tried to, at least. “I’d say we wait for this to blow over because, you know, we don’t want him to snap off his other horn and stab Cayde or something.”

“You really think he’d do that?”

“He gets… agitated when her life is in uncertainty. Makes for fun Crucible matches, sometimes.” He said. “Hive torture miiight push it a little.”

“Well. Speaking of the Great Marquis of Hell…” Huritt motioned towards the orange and white figure on the other side of the hall and returned to his Hive research on the datapad. “You better figure out who’s going to do the talking.”

“I will.” Ghost’s voice startled all of them, her Ghost.

Warmth.
She felt warm. Not by her own doing, not by abusing her solar powers to stay warm in the deepest pits of Hive hell. It felt like home. They didn’t forget about her. Or maybe it was a dream? The face right next to her came into focus as she slowly opened her eyes. It wasn’t fuzzy enough to be a dream, wasn’t ethereal enough. She’s had enough visions to be able to differentiate between reality and dreams.

“Hi…”

Shaxx sighed at her crackly voice, a mixture of relief and unending exasperation. The already tight grip on her hand – almost as if he was holding on to her for his life – tightened to pull her closer to him until she was wrapped in his strong arms. Home.

“I’m through with warning you.” He spoke softly into her red hair. “You just take warnings to not die as a challenge. Stop it.”

“I like to look at it as the world seeing me as a challenge.” She whispered. “I’m too dangerous for it.”

“The world should cease that.”

“How come?” It was a question that didn’t need to be asked.

“Because you’re the most powerful woman in the system, and you’re the love of my life.” He murmured, loosening his grip as it sunk in that she was alive. “You’re also without a doubt the most frustrating person I’ve ever met.”

“The Awoken way, remember? Frustrating, mysterious, tendency to kill things and die a lot.” She smirked, but it was short lived. “Alright. Not funny. The Hive can destroy my mind but they can’t take my sense of humor.”

To her surprise, Shaxx stifled a chuckle. “Keep trying.”

“I’m still funnier than you.”

Tirion winced as she tried to sit up using her own muscles, giving up quickly due to the sudden pain. She had little memory of what happened. Falling. Peacefulness. Then suddenly unending armies of Hive. The wires in her hand was the first thing she noticed, the flimsy grey hospital gown after that. The resentment towards that awful piece of clothing was bigger than the one she held for the Hive.

“Looks like they want you to be here for a while.”

“You’re not funny.” The second stifled chuckle was worse than the words he said. Not moving and being confined in a room was difficult for her. But, she had one thing which always made any given situation better, one thing that wasn’t there. Last thing she remembered of him was that they got separated. “Wait, where is my Little Light?”

Tirion smiled when she heard the whoosh somewhere in the room. The blue eye was right infront of her eyes before she could react.

“I’m still mad at you!” Ghost grumbled, and turned to the other Guardian in the room. “Hey, Shaxx!”

His voice helped her remember. Remember the argument they had. That could have been the last thing they said to eachother.
Tirion sighed, watching him rest on her feet at the end of the bed. “I’m sorry, Ghost. You know I didn’t mean it like that.”

“Hrmph.” He turned away from her with a bounce. It was almost funny and adorable, but not the time to laugh.

“What happened down there… I don’t ever want to hear that it’s part of being a Guardian. I don’t want to hear that it’s obligatory to go through that. Not from you, not from Shaxx, not from Zavala. Not from anyone. Nothing in life is worth going through that.”

“What happened down there?” Shaxx asked, gently turning her face to him with his hand. “Your team didn’t really know. Made some jokes about a Worm God.”

“Yeah…” Ghost started, trying to figure out how to explain it all. “About that…”

“They weren’t joking. I saw it and…” Panic took over as she recalled what happened. She forgot about Xol. She also forgot about the pain and the wires, as they quickly shut her down when she tried to get out of bed. “Damn it!”

“Xol’s dead!” Ghost let her know before she could do any more harm to herself. “The trio killed him. The arguments about sword logic on our way back were more heated than the fight itself.”

“Good.” Tirion laid back down, out of breath, and felt Shaxx hold her free hand. She was still groggy from all of it, not fully in the real-world quite yet. “Xol… got into my head. There are too many people reading my mind as it is. Best I can describe it is… a direct assault on my mind. Not my head, just my mind.”

“You just disappeared.” Ghost eyed her slowly. “I had no idea.”

“Look, I…” Tirion struggled. "Guardians are made for a task as well, just like Ghosts. Made to be protectors of the last of humanity. Down the eons they come to test us: gods and cosmic intellects, vandals and mighty empires. With each test I lose a part of myself, and now my mind was almost taken."

“Guardian…”

“I haven’t had the chance to live.” She whispered, leaning her head back to look at the ceiling, trying to pretend she was somewhere else. “Is it selfish to want a chance to live, to want to be something else than what you were created for?”

“Not at all.” He said, flying closer to her. “Why don’t we ever go on a vacation, just to look at some nice trees? Oh, right. The worst Darkness sent against us. That’s nice.”

Tirion found a different kind of bitterness quickly. “Haya is about two thousand years old, so she has had her chances to live. Lorcan is slightly younger. They’ve seen everything and now they’re just bored, so the worst darkness sent against them is fun to them.”

“Did you hear that? I think I just heard the clang of a Hammer of Sol somewhere.”

She laughed for the first time in a long while. A pained laugh, but still a laugh. “Well, Kouhei is… Kouhei. Huritt takes every opportunity to research. Alva somehow doesn’t see bad things in life. Not sure how she does it but… Me? I got woken up, ten seconds later I am shutting down the Black Garden. Chaos ever since.”

“Everything you’ve accomplished makes it easy to forget that you’ve been a Guardian for a very
“I believe in the whole thing that everyone was revived by their Ghosts at the right time. Honestly, it’s another way to say that if I hadn’t been revived when I did, the Tower would have fallen years ago.” She smiled. “I don’t mean it in a way that I saved you all from impending doom... I did, but... I mean more in the sense that I would have burned the City to the ground and then been up for doing it again. By accident, of course.”

“By accident.” He repeated, mimicking her smile.

“*By accident.* Imagine what would have happened if Haya had started her Sunbreaker army a century ago.” Tirion felt her muscles relax as her Ghost finally healed her. “We’re a powerful bunch. It’s actually frightening to think about where we will be in about a decade.”

“Frightening is an understatement. Those Sunbreakers have been terrorizing the Crucible.” He told. “Not used to seeing them there. They used to terrorize the wilds before, as far away from the City as possible.”

“That’s not the scariest part. Imagine how skilled you have to be to get Haya to stop hating Osiris long enough to mentor you.” She grimaced at the concept. “I think she uses the Crucible to prepare them for the wilds. I’d apologize on her behalf, but you know how she does.”

“Not a complaint. The rookies get to experience the force of an entire Cabal armada. They often criticize me for the gruelling battle conditions, but they always come back hoping to learn something.”

“Yeah...” Tirion suddenly frowned as reality set in. Fantasy scenarios were fun, sometimes. But not realistic. “The new Sunbreakers wouldn’t exist if it weren’t for the Red Legion killing Ouros. I guess all of us were revived at just the right time, but... I’m too tired to think about this.”

“You don’t know the concept of resting so I wasn’t going to suggest it.”

“Speaking of comedy...” She lowered her voice, the smile finding its way back. She needed a laugh right now. Something else to think about than death. “I need you to do something for me.”

“Anything.”

Tirion lifted a free hand to point at the door. “Open that door.” She whispered.

“Should I ask?”

“Nope!” Her smile morphed into a mischievous grin as he stood up to do what she told him. Unsuspecting, the Titan unlocked the door and swiftly opened it, to be greeted by Lorcan losing his balance and falling into the room flat on his face. Haya managed to regain her balance by gripping the wood door post with a hand, shifting her balance to her heavy armor.

“Told you that she knew you two were listening in!” Huritt shouted from the corridor.

“Oh, we weren’t listening in!” Haya lied, helping Lorcan up to his feet. “We—oh! Hello!”

“What? What are you looking at?” Lorcan followed Haya’s gaze at something behind him, way above his head. It was a struggle to be impressed. “Oh! I thought it’d be just a giant red sign with two swords on it.”
“Enough ogling. You have better things to do than that.” Shaxx muttered, rolling his eyes.

“Only thing I’m ogling is the Glimmer we’re going to get from this.” Haya almost took a step back from the sharp glare; she wasn’t used to associating an actual face with the image of the Crucible, even after all the years of listening to him shout. “I’m kidding! You’re part of our weird family now. We don’t exploit family like that.” She kicked the door shut with her foot, making sure that no one else would get to see the forbidden things.

“I appreciate that.”

“Great. Can I get out of this room yet?” Tirion complained, doing all in her might to not set the bed on fire. The scene was amusing, but not amusing enough.

“No.” Ghost shut her down.

“What do you mean ‘no’?”

“Here we go…” Lorcan chuckled, preparing himself.

“Why are you laughing?” She looked at everyone in the room. “What were you told?”

“The doctors said they want you to be here for a couple… of… days.” Ghost dragged out the words, anticipating a pillow getting thrown at him. “I’ve notified them that you’re awake and they —”

“Days…”

“To be fair, no one has been mentally assaulted by a Hive Worm God before.”

“Days?!”

Lorcan shook his head in amusement. “Can I just point out how messed up it is that you married someone who believes it’s worse to be forced to stand still for a couple of days than it is being tortured by a Hive worm god?” He said to Shaxx, unable to even glance at Tirion’s angry stare without bursting into laughter.

Tirion’s angry eyes never left her target. “Little Light…”

“Nope!”

“Get me out of here.” She begged with an angry mutter. "Please."

“No. Doctor’s orders.”

“Ugh. Can’t you transmat me out of here?”

“I need your ship to be able to do that.”

Things didn’t click quite yet. “Then Transmat Amanda to this room or something!”

“I don’t think she’d like that.”

Tirion covered her face with her hands and groaned into them. “I guess you have the right to laugh since you got me out of there, but…”

“I’m not laughing…” Haya could barely get the squeaky sentence out. “And we can stick around
for company. This is way too much fun.”

“Well... If I’m going to be stuck here, I need the books from my ship.” In an instant, the laughing stopped. “Wait, where is my ship? Did I lose my ship?”

“Probably around Mars somewhere. Hopefully.” Lorcan shrugged. “We can get it for you. If you allow us to laugh at you some more.”

She stared at them for a while through her fingers. The stare which has staggered legions was unable to stagger her closest friends, though. “Fine. I just need my books. Don’t care about the ship.”

“I’ll come along. I need to talk to Ana about ruining her window anyway.” Haya said.

“Wait, what?” Lorcan halted just as Haya was about to open the door. “You... you don’t hate her?”

“Why should I?”

“Someone shoot Haya. I think she might be a corrupt clone of our favorite Titan who resents absolutely everyone.”

“Ana hasn’t given me a reason to hate her.”

“Has nothing to do with the pitch-black hair and the voice?”

Tirion didn’t hear the answer to that inquiry, as it was muttered when they were out of the room and the door shut behind them.

“I hate this.”

“Sadly, I’m not about to make it better.” Shaxx walked over to her. “I really wish I could stay but I have recruits to train. I hate to leave you here. At least you’re safe. But…”

“I’d rather fight the Hive.”

“Exactly.” He leaned down to kiss her, taking every opportunity he can. Never knowing how many moments he had left. He was the one who pulled away, had to force himself to not stay. “I’ll be back when I can. Take care of her, Ghost.”

"If she'd let me."

Tirion held onto his hand until it slipped her grasp, and just like her friends, he was gone with the helmet on to avoid more controversy. Left her alone with her Ghost in the ghastly white room.

It was nice to have Ghost beside her, talking her off many ledges involving setting things on fire. The doctors just wanted to make sure she was completely alright. Those who had harmful intentions didn’t dare to act on them on the first sight of her glare. Didn’t take long until she saw yet another familiar face. Or, another chance to go through with her plans.

“Cayde!” Tirion called out at the first sight of his horn when the door creaked open. “You have to get me out of here!”

“Don’t listen to her.” Ghost warned, as by this point he has gained enough experience with her begging and bartering. Every person in the hospital has been warned to not let her out. They still didn’t know how much Xol damaged her.
“Cayde, do listen to her!” Tirion spoke in third person. “I’m turning into Haya.”

“Ha!” The Exo heartily laughed at the sight, and even harder when she crossed her arms. “Your friends were right. This is kinda funny. Anyway, I wanted to check up on my favorite Guardian.” Cayde placed the big box he was holding on the night stand next to her bed, almost knocking over the lamp in a reckless fashion.

“Please tell me that is a prison break kit.”

“Ikora wanted me to give you a gift.” Cayde told. “The whole City is worried about ya.”

“Word flies fast, I guess…” She uncrossed her arms and let curiosity lead her, bringing the box closer to her. It wasn’t that heavy. Probably not weapons, much to her disappointment. But what are weapons when she can set things on fire with her fingertips. Maybe stealth bombs? She could use stealth bombs.

“Word flies surprisingly slow around here until a Titan flies fast to the nearest hospital. If you want the whole Tower to know somethin’ you just go and talk to Shaxx. Guy has only one volume.” He pulled out a chair, as curious as she was as to what was in the box and sat down. “Ikora said she’s been meaning to give you that for a while now, but you just can’t sit still can you?”

Took her a minute to register it all. Robes. Familiar robes. Smooth black fabric with a golden bird on the chest, the Warlock insignia. The same robes she was wearing on the day of the attack. It all felt like a million years ago.

“I need to get out of this place.” Tirion whispered.

“I hear taking some time off to celebrate a big victory is a great idea. The uh, celebration could use more energy.”

“A perk of being the Guardian of Guardians is that people die when I rest. I don’t know how to rest. Maybe I’m just an addict. Haven’t figured anything out yet.” She pulled out the robes out of the box to examine them further. The robes weren’t her favourite, but everything and anything was preferable over the flimsy gown. Boots and gloves laid right underneath it. She’ll have to remember to thank Ikora. “What have you been doing? Been a while since we’ve caught up.”

“Nothin’ much. Just small gigs around some shores of the tangled nature. The bar is pretty empty nowadays.” He avoided the question, leaning back in the chair.

“Tangled Shores? That’s…” She looked Cayde dead in the glowing eyes. “That’s the Reef.”

He didn’t expect her to figure it all out that quickly. “Ah… Yep.”

“Don’t make the Prince angry, Cayde.”

“Hey, don’t worry about me. When was the last time I got into trouble?”

“Nessus.” She said, unblinking. There have been other minor incidents since, but it was the first one that came to mind.

“That was almost a year ago. Sheesh. I thought your friend was the one with the good memory.”

“You got stuck in a Vex teleporter loop.”

“Exactly! A brooding prince is nothin’ compared to that little adventure. I’ll be fine. Not much to
him without his sister anyhow.”

“That’s exactly the problem, Cayde.” Tirion tried to catch his gaze, exasperated. “Before, his sister was the only one who could stop him and knock some sense into him. If it weren’t for her I would have never gotten the key to the Black Garden, because he was acting all insufferable about it. Now he’s unleashed and doing who knows what.”

Cayde raised his hands in the air. “Hey, I know ya love me – everyone does – and that you worry —”

“Point is, that his sister died and his home and people were almost completely destroyed because of my actions. Uldren despises me and the City. If he sees you, he won’t hesitate.” It was always difficult with Exos, to see if you’re getting through. Unmoving faces gave little hints. Cayde’s hands fell, at least. Her words were doing something. She wasn’t sure what.

Tirion continued: “Look. I don’t think you’re dumb. Maybe reckless, but not dumb. I know you’ve been stuck in the Tower for years and I won’t Zavala you and tell you that you’re not allowed to go out and have fun. You’re not a kid. You have your freedoms.” She hoped that her words were enough to explain things. “But I won’t let you die either. Not alone at least. Invite me next time you plan a trip to the Reef, yeah? I want to shoot things just to shoot things, without the fate of the world depending on it. I miss the Prison for that reason.”

“Now you’re speakin’ my language! You won’t believe what kinda uglies roam around the Reef now.” He exclaimed, making finger guns. “Pirates, thieves and assassins, like a while buffet of ugly. It’s like the Dark Ages just became purple there. Might stumble across a Warlord.”

“It has lots of things to shoot just to relax, no panic or rush behind it, just the thrill of kill or be killed and not kill or let the world die? Sounds like a dreamland to me.”

“Nice. That’s what I like to hear, Guardian! We’ll bring drinks and everything, it’ll be great!”

“I can’t wait.” She smiled at the idea.

“How was Mars by the way? Say hi to Ana for me next time you see her. Wait, don’t do that. I think I owe her some Glimmer…”

Tirion let the subject change happen. “Cold. Filled with Hive. Rasputin was there. Not sure what became of him after I passed out. Should probably find out but it’s not really my problem, to be honest.”

“I heard from Zavala that he declared independence or somethin’.”

“What…?”

“Yeah, heard him raving about how Rasputin will no longer define the reality of his own existence and a buncha other words I didn’t pay attention to because your goliath almost killed me.”

“This…” She breathed out. “That’s it. I don’t think I can keep up anymore. I take one nap and a dangerous AI declares independence. Great. This is why I want to get away.”

“Ana appeared to have control over Rasputin, so…” Her Ghost tried to convince himself. “Hoping for the best…? I’m kidding. When has that worked out for us?”

“That’s her problem. Not my Fallen house, not my Dregs.” She sunk into the bed. “Rasputin is as responsible for killing a lot of people as I am responsible for killing the Awoken. We don’t know
where Rasputin’s morals lie, so Ana better be able to control it or I’ll sic Haya on her. On purpose, this time.”

“Aren’t you the one calling him Grandpa?”

“Grandpa is not a moral alignment, Ghost.”

“Man…” Cayde shook his head. “We need to get you out of here.”

“You think?” She winced. “You mean you don’t want to hear a five-hour monologue about morality and the intricacies of the darkness of souls of living creatures?”

“I can’t break you out—”

“B-but…”

“I can’t break ya out today. Tomorrow, look for one of my Hunters. He’ll tell you what to do.”

She had a hard time believing him, eyeing him as he stood up with a grunt. “Really?”

“You see, a prison break takes planning, it takes finesse. You can’t just wing it out of nowhere. Have to know the enemy, too.” Cayde sounded too excited for this for her liking, almost twirling as he talked, but she wasn’t going to look the gift Exo in the mouth. “This is gonna be great!”

“How much will I owe you?”

“Just make good on that promise to follow me to the Reef. A lot of things there require four hands, and surprise to no one, the Fallen aren’t willing to help me out. Can you believe it?”

“How rude of them. Let me know when!”

“You’ll know my Hunter when you see him.” He said joyfully while heading for the door. “Catch you later!”

“Oh, hello Cayde. Ana says hi!” Haya almost crashed into him on the other side, books and weapons in her hands.

“Great!” He started backing away. “And you tell her that you didn’t see me. I and Andal onc— you know what, nevermind. I have to go and you… you kinda scare me.”

“That’s a first…” Haya shook it off quickly though. “Hey, we found your books! Didn’t have to go far to find your ship. It kinda... drifted.”

“What’s all this?” Tirion wondered, watching all the chairs being brought and kicked in.

“We’re taking over.” Lorcan proclaimed, kicking a chair in. The others were right behind him, annoyed at him being slow on purpose. “It’s past visiting hours so, technically this is a sit in now.”

“I don’t think the staff will be that happy about this.” Tirion forgot completely how many things she had stored in her ship. The small room was almost instantaneously turned into a library. They might get in trouble, but between all the Guardians in the room no one would be able to get them out of the room, not even a second attack on the City.

“There we go.” Lorcan plopped himself in the chair and put his feet on the bed, a piece of metal that needs to be repaired already in his hand, but instantly distracted by Tirion. “Why are you ripping out the hell is in your arm?”
She made sure to be careful with it, gently pulling it out. It wasn’t anything she needed now that her Ghost was no longer mad at her. “I need to put on my robes. If any staff comes in here, I don’t know... Tell them that Rasputin ate me. See if I care.”

She was lucky that she had an excuse for her stumbling on the way to the bathroom with the box. Blamed it on the number of Guardians in the room and not her weak legs. The lights felt harsher in the bathroom, more aggressive. Just made the sight in the mirror that much worse. Tirion barely recognized herself. She didn’t look like anyone, just a regular Awoken. Hair in an inexcusable disarray even by her standards. That’s where she started, the hair. Maybe she should cut it. They left her with no hair brushes, so the best she could do was to slowly braid it.

“Did Ana forgive you for the window?” Lorcan asked in the other room. “I missed the hilarity.”

“She has a girlfriend with a robot arm, that’s all I got from the hilarity.” Haya sighed. “I also found out that Ana is also kind of insane, so there. I hate her now. Two psychopaths don’t really work out.”

“Works for Tirion and Shaxx!”

“Hey!” Tirion shouted from the bathroom.

“They don’t fall under the definition of psychopaths. Well... they’re compatible psychopaths.” Haya defended her. “Not in the same way being irresponsible with a Warmind makes you a psychopath. She treats him like a kid. What the hell?”

“Didn’t she have her little hand scanny thingy?” Lorcan waved his hand to emphasize what he was saying. The later it got the less he tried with coherent sentences. “If she has any control over it, isn’t it better than Grandpa being completely loose?”

“That’s my point. Crazy runs in the family. If the grandpa is crazy so is the granddaughter.”

“I think technically she’s his aunt, based on the records...” Huritt tried to correct them.

“Whatever! You still don’t get together with gals who are obsessed with morality of artificial intelligences, and damn, I never thought I’d say those words.”

Tirion didn’t realize she was grinning at what she was hearing until she finished the long braid and decided to focus on her face. Nothing looked familiar, but some of that remaining Hive dirt had to go. Second step back to normalcy was done once it was gone.

Now for the robes. Maybe, for however long this moment lasted, she could pretend that the attack never happened and they were hanging out in the Hangar lounge again. Or she could accept new beginnings and a new chapter. The cursed bird being reborn was just part of it. The robes fit her perfectly, and she had no plans to ask Ikora how she knew her size.

“She’s back!” Lorcan cheered, and Tirion did a small bow before returning to the bed. “How long do they want you to stay here?”

“Doesn’t matter. Breaking out tomorrow. Made a deal with Cayde.”

“What in return?”

“A vacation in the Reef to shoot stuff.”

“Which part of the Reef?” Asked Kouhei.
“Tangled Shores. Know anything we don’t know?”

His face hardened immediately. “It’s not under Awoken authority, a lawless frontier. I spent years there.”

She could jump around it. But she had to know. She knew that Kouhei didn’t like to waste words. “I’m just going to ask. What is Uldren really doing?”

“I didn’t tell you the whole truth after I got back from what remained of the Outpost.” Kouhei admitted. Surprise to no one. “They did take significant damage after the War, but the containment risk I was talking about referred to Uldren.”

“Containment risk? What does that mean?”

“Uldren has spies in the ranks, listening to everything that’s said and reading every message. Petra and the Paladins have to be clever about it.” Kouhei said. “Petra knows that Uldren is untrustworthy and desires power, to the point where he would be willing to betray the Reef and ally himself with forces he shouldn’t align himself with. What those forces are, I don’t know. No one does.”

“Just out of good ole’ curiosity…” Lorcan interrupted. “What’s with the drama? Are Awoken capable of discussing happy things?”

“No.” Tirion and Kouhei answered at the same time.

“That wasn’t creepy at all.”

“We’re weird and we have no idea why we’re weird. It comes with its own problems. But…” She trailed off. “Uldren is the Reef’s problem. Rasputin is Ana’s problem. Vex are Osiris’ problem. Not everything in this world is my problem.”

“Huh… only took Hive torture to make you realize that.” Disgust washed over Lorcan’s face as well with a realization. “This leaves us only with Calus… why? Why are we the ones who have to deal with Calus?”

“We kind of broke into his home.” Tirion tried to justify it. “But we were also invited. The first time, anyway. I haven’t really been up to speed.”

“Hey, so, got any books on how to force an exiled Cabal Emperor into a class about boundaries?”

“Oh, you have no idea how much I wish I had that…”

Chapter End Notes

I am not prepared for Forsaken.

This is basically just fluff.
We Said We’d Only Die of Lonely Secrets

It all was no more.

When the shock wore off and her body unfroze, Tirion took a heavy step forward, slogging through the clutter. Trudging through the shattered remains of everything they had was reminiscent to walking through snow, she could almost feel the cold of winter when she closed her eyes for a moment.

Only one stone was left unturned.

They left the memorial alone, with no intentions to harm those who didn’t deserve it. The dead did nothing wrong. Not a scratch on Taeko’s rifle or the helmet of Saint-14. If anything it appeared like someone tidied it up, made it look more respectful. Could be just the contrast against the mess around it.

The stock of materials was mostly dust, what wasn’t dust was too contaminated to ever be used for anything.

All of the guns had fired their last bullet long ago, long before they knew it would be their last. Disassembled and every piece of their individual puzzles bent and broken. Not even Banshee could fix it, neither would he want to.

Pieces of armor torn to shreds; cloaks and robes cut to pieces, bonds broken. They tried to break the Titan armors, with minimal success. The marks were sacred, hidden where they couldn’t be found prior to this onslaught.

It didn’t feel like a victory.

They spared nothing. The nodes for their tech, the datapads, harddrives… all just an assortment of green and gray circuit boards covering the ground.

Even the furniture. It took a while to notice for all of them, as the furniture was battered back when it was found by the misfits when the den was built.

There was one common theme. Nothing was stolen.

“Holy hell…” Lorcan whispered. A whisper which was a plea to himself, to convince himself that just one thing could be salvaged. They had some backups on their ships, blueprints. They could get it back, but starting from the beginning was inevitable. Inevitable and time consuming. “How long were we gone? Less than a week?”

There was no point in answering a question that was instantly answered. No one dared to speak, anger and lashing out had to wait. Haya stomped to her room, pulling the door open to find out that someone had relieved it off its hinges. No job too thorough. Behind the door was a ransacked room. Nothing was missing yet again, just destroyed. Huritt was kneeling down next to his box of books. Locked box, luckily enough. The perpetrators didn’t manage to crack it.

Another thing that was hard to celebrate.

Tirion kicked away what she assumed was once a submachine gun, and sat down on the ground. A natural response, it helped her think. Helped her relax and unclench her jaw. They had nothing.
“Oh, no you don’t!” Haya caught the little Exo running away by the waist just in the nick of time, disarming her sword with a free hand. “Who thought you that stabbing people in revenge was a good idea? We don’t even know who to stab.”

Alva squirmed for a second, trying to get out of Haya’s grasp, but was presented no other choice but to give up, turning around to hug the Titan instead, despite the angry growling.

“Can we figure out who did this so I know who to tether to a Skiff?” Lorcan was frozen in place in a sensory overload, no idea where to begin. His eyes couldn’t focus on one single thing.

“Anyone.” Tirion stated the obvious. “We should have seen this coming.”

“How?”

“We’ve been all cosy in our den, while many haven’t had their own bed since the War. Children without parents are always playing right outside.”

“Yeah, and Haya melted someone’s face off.” Lorcan pointed out.

“Don’t put this on me. How many people have you swindled?” Haya retorted. The anger couldn’t be put on hold anymore.

“We don’t need this right now.” Lorcan tried to control the situation. “We don’t. We can take this later.”

“What about you?” The Titan asked.

“Do you want to do this now?”

“Yep! You can’t holier than thou fingerpoint at us when we just lost everything!”

“In the eyes of everyone else, whatever you do means that I approve of it.” She bit her lip before continuing, clenching her jaw was starting to give her a migraine. “And what didn’t I do? Recently I told the Consensus to fuck off, insulted the Speaker, pretty much started a mutiny against the Vanguard, and I didn’t exactly say no to everything we did all those years ago. Only thing that keeps people from murdering me is the hero shroud.”

“We had a lot more Guardians back then and we didn’t hurt anyone who didn’t deserve it.” Lorcan said. “We didn’t directly hurt most and we didn’t leave a trail to follow.”

They could argue about this all day if they wanted to. There was hardly any point. There was nothing left to destroy. They already turned on themselves once and learned from the experience. Perhaps the perpetrators didn’t know that and their plan already failed.

“Kouhei, does this look familiar to you?” Tirion asked the other Titan, who was unmoving with crossed arms. “Did Uldren finally snap at me?”

He shook his head. “The Reef wouldn’t do this. They don’t have time for messages, especially
those that involve making a mess. They just kill on sight, or exile. Or on one occasion, terrify people into self-exile and a bullet in the head.”

“We’re talking about Uldren here, not the Reef.”

“Uldren doesn’t have the mental capacity to be subtle.” He picked up a piece of metal off the ground. “This is subtle compared to his own personal sense of drama.”

“Getting the hint that you don’t really like Uldren very much.” Lorcan said, reveling in any amusement he can get.

“He’s a child. If Uldren is actually responsible for something, you usually know in an instant.” Kouhei gritted his teeth. “He won’t kill you unless the light falls perfectly on his face and he’s surrounded by an entire theater production.”

“Huh…” Lorcan sensed where this was going. “Was that why you left the Reef? Rather quit your job willingly than be fired by your boss for making her baby sibling cry?”

“Part of it.”

“Why are we worried about Uldren now?” To Haya, this discussion was a waste of time.

“It was a joke…” Tirion muttered, forgotten on the ground. “I’m not worried, really. Only thing I’m worried about is what we should do now.”

“Well, we can’t stay here. The den is a loss. It took us a month to create the locks,” Haya grumbled, frustrated at the lack of things to take out her anger on. “Tirion has her own apartment, however.”

“No. Out of the question.”

“Why? Do you two do some kinky stuff? Is it like, tie him to a chair, oil his body and edge him for 5 hours kind of kinky?”

“I…” Tirion’s voice squeaked, and she cleared her throat. This will be an absolute joy to explain to her Ghost later. “There is no room for you five. And it has less security than our den had. I don’t want any more apartments destroyed. Whoever did this will follow us wherever we go. We can’t stay in the City.”

Lorcan raised a hand. “We get out of here, rig everything – that’s including our brains to get rid of certain images, thanks Haya – with explosions, and wait!”

“Then where do we go? The wilds?”

“Maybe…” Haya started.

“We can’t go to the wilds, Haya. We still need a base of operations. The wilds aren’t a base.”

“Listen. Shush. I know where we can go until we figure things out, at least. Where no one can find us. There is this secret Sunbreaker hideout on Earth. We had different places where we stashed things we couldn’t carry. We couldn’t use the vaults of the City.”

“Doesn’t sound that big if it was just used for storage.”

“The one on Earth is big, reserved for the Magistrates. Ouros is dead, so what can she do to stop me? Haunt the place?”
“But what do we do after that?”

Tirion had an answer to Lorcan’s question. An idea born in desperation, but still an idea. Something that would send a message back, that they shouldn’t be messed with. Something that couldn’t be infiltrated this easy.

“The ship in the EDZ. The Ourobas Ventura. It’s grounded and I want it. It has tanks and Cabal weaponry. That’s what we should aim to get.”

It was a risky idea. They would have to massacre the remainder of the Cabal still hiding out there, it could become a turf war that would take weeks to win. But, they still had some weapons and their Light, they had everything they needed to create several explosions. They killed Oryx with less. If the hiding place Haya talked about is still there, it could work out.

“You see… ten minutes ago I would have never considered the idea… Because, well, elevators.” Lorcan began. “But I’d rather claim a big-ass elevator filled Cabal ship than explain to Alva and my Ghost what edg—”

“Shut up!” Tirion cut him off, jumping to her feet.

“Why oil th—”

“Shut-the-hell-up!”

“Does the helmet ever get involved?” Haya asked, both out of curiosity and because she enjoyed egging Tirion on. “There is actually a store in the Fua—”

“You two just earned the mop duty once we conquer that ship.”

“What mop duty? I thought we could pour some alcohol on it and then set it on fire to cleanse it.”

Lorcan’s idea was not met with any amusement, for several reasons.

“That’d work but… we’d need gin.” Haya said, rubbing her chin with one hand. “Then we would need to seal the ship and heat it up from inside, and I’m not volunteering.”

“Absolutely not!” Tirion stopped her.

“We’d get drunk in the process and this… mess calls for us getting drunk.” Haya argued. “It’s an old Warlord recipe.”

“For what?”

“For getting drunk. And cleaning. Try guessing which one of the two we loved to do.”

“Look I…” Tirion shook her head, getting amused by her team’s brilliant ideas was her guilty pleasure. “Let’s meet up next to Devrim’s church in 5 hours. Then let’s take it from there.”

“5 hours it is then, huh. Can't believe I was right.” Haya smirked. “Gotchaaaa!”

“I will not be doing what you think I’ll be doing!” Tirion said, backing away.

“But you should!”

“You should shut up!” Tirion sang back, getting out of the den as fast as she could. They spent weeks on the locks. Whoever took them down must know them very well. This was planned, not a
random incident.

“What was that about, Guardian?”

Tirion winced at Ghost’s question. “You’ll get it when you’re older.”

Ghost blinked a couple of times. “… what?”

“Just…” It was a rabbit hole she didn’t want to get herself into. “Don’t ask questions. Please. For the love of anything that is left and you consider holy.”

“Are you alright Guardian?” She was covering her face with a hand. “You look a little…”

“Ghost.”

“What?”

“No.”

“Well then, uh…” Still confused, he tried to continue, but words got caught as he watched his Guardian find a nearby wall to lean against, and then slide down until she was sitting on the ground. “Are you really okay?”

It took all she had to stop herself from shaking her head. “I think breaking out of the hospital early was a bad idea.”

“I know you didn’t sleep.”

“I’m a little bit terrified of going to sleep after what Xol did to me. The only person I know who can help me is missing, so that’s nice.” She said. “Our den was ransacked, so that’s also nice. When we land on the EDZ, they will probably set it on fire. So, that’s also pretty great!”

“I see…”

“Great.”

“We should… get to the Hangar. Amanda sent a message to you, something about not bringing your Titan friend when you pick up the package…?” Ghost read. “Which one of your Titan friends?”

“Hey there, bigshot!” Amanda dropped the wrench she was holding and wiped the sweat off of her brow. “I don’t know how you do the things or why you do ‘em, but I’m not gonna complain when you bring beauties like that to the Hangar. Came outta nowhere, and all the scans are saying is just your name.”

“I’m sorry?”

“They don’t make them how they used to. How I wish I could take it apart and see what we can learn. Those ships might not have been the fastest, but they endure more than the Dreadnought.”

“Amanda.”

“Oh!” She broke herself free from the daydream. “Hangar six. They’ll recognize ya and they will let ya in. It came in yesterday, took everythin’ in me to not take it for a test flight. Wouldn’t even let me in.”
With one quick confused glanced at Ghost, Tirion turned her heel and headed for the said hangar. She could of course ask Amanda which Titan she meant, but Tirion knew that she wouldn’t get an answer past Amanda’s swooning. It was also much more fun to find things out by herself.

Just as Amanda told them, they immediately let Tirion through. The opening of the giant gate felt particularly slow that day, maybe it was broken, maybe she was just impatient.

Only one question got answered once the lights got turned on. In return, they got fifty questions back.

Scratched grey steel with patches of gold, still shiny in some parts. It looked as if it had been through battles of both past and future, and was meant to fight those battles again and again until the world was no more. The blue ribbons attached to the blue netting on its wings hung lifelessly, no wind or force to sway them in the cold hangar. It was calling to her, wanting to fly again.

“I’m sure Haya will be very happy about this.” Ghost mused at the ship. The beak of it resembled the beak of a bird, a grey pigeon. “I can see why Amanda would swoon over this. Let’s check it out!”

“You know, I’m not sure what has me the most upset at this point.” Tirion followed Ghost, eyes examining every detail of the ship instead of where she was stepping. “That things from the past keep haunting me or that at this point there are enough birds to open a wildlife park. Nightingales, Crows, Freaking Cormorants. Phoenixes. Whatever Ghaul turned into there for a second. Pigeons.”

“Gray Pigeon…” Ghost scanned the faint engraving on it. “I wonder why he named it that.”

“Haya mentioned that it was because pigeons were the only birds left in the City sky, one of the many 'last things' they fight for.” She put her hand on the door. “Sounds like a valid reason to me.”

“You never gave your own ship a name. You never gave me a name, either.” If Ghost could, he would frown at her.

“Little Light.”

“Well, it wasn’t you who came up with that.”

“You expect me of all people to be good with names? I named myself after a street sign.” She slowly opened the door, as if it responded to only her. “If we meet the Stranger again, I’ll make sure to thank her. Odds are that we will.”

Saint’s ship was much smaller than hers, more claustrophobic and strictly business. No room for books or beds. It had a lonely ambience to it, as only one Guardian could fit behind the wheel. No room for friendship or any kind of comradery, really. The seat was worn, full of scrapes caused by heavy Titan armor. It smelled like old metal and dust, corners of it still had sparks of Arc and swirls of Void, evidence that once it was inhabited. She slowly brushed the dashboard, trying to find something that might bring it to life. It wasn’t anything like she had seen and she doubted that Amanda might know much about it. One option was to call Haya, but there was no desire to see the ship and the hangar in flames just yet. She lucked out with a button she pressed, and the dashboard lit up with purple and white.

“What now?” She asked herself. “Are there any logs you could pull from this?”

“Sure. Give me a moment.”

Tirion put her hands on the steering wheel. It didn’t feel right to sit there or even think about taking
it to the skies; the ship wasn’t hers. She almost felt guilty. If anything, she should give it to Haya, or maybe even Zavala. Someone who knew him better, someone who could treat this ship with care and respect.

“I got it!” Ghost crowed, followed by a sigh. “Oh… Haya will not be happy about this.”

“On a scale to having Lorcan restrain her, to sealing the entrance to the Infinite Forest with concrete...”

“Last time I checked, Fuan District sold concrete. We could start there. I forwarded the final log to your datapad.”

Tirion struggled a bit to reach her backpack, really curious to know how Saint managed to fit in the seat. She managed to wiggle the datapad out after a brief scuffle, finally victorious.

“Let’s see…” She scrolled and started reading. “Osiris. I hope whatever you find in this place is worth it. My recommendation to install you as Vanguard Commander was not a gesture to stroke your ego. It was an order to stay and help the City achieve all that it could. An order you refused to follow.”

“Come to think of it, we might need something stronger than concrete.”

She ignored Ghost. “News of my demise will no doubt reach you late. I can already see your response—the guilt that will follow, however fleeting.” Tirion stopped reading for a second. “He knew he was going to die?”

“I don’t understand. If he knew, why not avoid it? Why did he want to die?”

“That’s what I’m wondering, too.” She decided to continue. “I thought you had changed after Six Fronts; that seeing your people on the brink of destruction and spared from death would be reward enough to stay. To fight. I'll fight in your stead one last time.”

“I think this might have escalated into a ‘revive Ghaul from the dead and have him take the Light away again’ situation…”

The decision was easy.

“We won’t need to revive Ghaul because we’re not showing this to Haya. Ever.”

“Are you sure about this? I think she deserves to hear this.”

“I know how she works. I would like her memories of her best friend remain untainted.” Tirion said. “This will get to her head, and she’ll eventually start blaming Saint for everything. Foremost, blame him for going through things that he knew would inevitably kill him. She'd never forgive him.”

“There is more to that…” Ghost pointed out.

“Father…” Tirion slowly read. “Father?”

“The Speaker. Saint was pretty eccentric.”

She continued. “My duty is at its end. I've seen what the City can become. I know you can lead its people to it.”

“I still can’t believe the Speaker is gone. Feels like we let Saint down by letting him die.”
“There was nothing anyone could have done.” Tirion frowned at the last row of the log. “To my inspiration. Your final gift to me I now send back to you. It will be good to see you again.”

“Maybe that’s why he—”

“Nope.” Disgust filled her voice.

“Guardian?”

“Why?!” She hastily shoved the datapad back in the backpack. “Someone, somewhere, sometime, caused this ripple in time and space and when I find them I’m going to yell at them. It was cute when it was just weapons and protesters and meeting my past self, now it’s getting annoying.”

“It’s really a minor inconvenience compared to what we usually go through.”

“If I see one more thing that is out of place in this timeline, there is nothing no one will be able to do to stop me from going back to the Black Garden and waking it up again so that we’re back where we started.” She didn’t find it amusing that Ghost laughed at her little rant. “I’m serious! What is happening?! Why can’t things just stay where they belong?”

“You’re keeping the ship, right?”

“Oh, of course I am! I’ve been chosen by the laws of the universe to keep this ship! Because why not, why have things stay in their respective damn time—” She was angry, but Ghost’s adorable laughing made it a chore to stay angry. “Stop laughing, Little Light!”

“You know, Kouhei, you can start conversations with people by talking to them instead of creepily staring…” Haya muttered, leading the way. It was always with the unblinking staring, the glow of the red eyes making it look as if they were on fire.

“Teaching your Sunbreakers to not seek battles and alliances beyond the walls is an interesting choice.” He finally spoke. “You keep them in the City.”

“If you want to see my Sunbreaker credentials, I’d be happy to hit you in the face with a Hammer.” Haya rolled her eyes before returning them to their goal.

“It wasn’t about your credentials.”

“They need to learn how to fight, first. As much as I want Ouros to roll in her grave and all. Then I’ll send them out.”

“You jest about her.”

“I do, Kouhei.”

“Why? I thought you respected Ouros.”

“I’m kind of only…” She raised her hands as she walked, attempting to visualize her thoughts. “Focusing on the Ouros that I knew before she started to hate me, you know? Kind of living in ignorance about it all. Was really easy up until after she died.”

“I don’t think she died hating you.”

“I think she did. After the Hive invasion she sent me a salty letter, actually. Out of nowhere.” Haya told. “She bragged about how great the Order was at fighting the Hive, how she was proud of the
Order and the beautiful alliances forming around her.”

“You consider that… salty?”

“It was a set up to make a jab about how green fire and failure would be my sole remembrance of that day and not pride. I and Lorc ran away from the Hive instead of fighting, and she found out about it. She wasn’t proud.” She scoffed silently. “She wanted to make it really clear to me how wrong I was to oppose them with the whole Osiris ordeal and in turn, leave them. If I had not opposed it, I would be fighting Hive with them in the alliance forged in the heat of the Sunbreakers’ luminescence. Whatever the hell that even means.”

“Hm.”

“The last thing she said in the letter was: if our flame should one day flicker and die, let it be to set your history ablaze. I still don’t know what it means. But…” She looked up at the sky and shouted: “I’m still alive and Ouros is dead!”

“You have no respect for the dead.”

“The dead-ees had no respect for me. I’m still alive because I made choices which she despised. Funny how that works.” She picked up the pace, and pointed at something unseen in the distance. “We’re almost there.”

To a passerby, it was just an abandoned camp of a sojourner. A long time ago, no one dared to enter these lands. That’s what made it a great hiding place. Now everyone was there, Fallen and Guardians alike. Good news were that not everyone knew about its secrets.

“Tah-fucking-dah!” Haya cheered humorlessly as the hidden door on the ground reacted to her Hammer. It wasn’t as satisfying as she thought it would be. “Hey, Tirionna?”

There was something about the Traveler and Warlocks, the way they stared at it, like entranced thralls waiting for their next order. Tirion hasn’t been back to the shard since the attack. It wasn’t guilt she felt, but suspicion. Suspicion that it didn’t show her the truth. It was too easy. She didn’t find answers on her journey to the edge of the system, at least she didn’t think she did. Besides a confirmation. She was converted. It didn’t show conversion, it showed death. There is a stark difference between the two. Thoughts were now swarming her head, with no strength to stop it or make them decipherable.

It showed her dying by a blast. Even Kouhei was suspicious. Tirion wasn’t converted there. She died there, but not from what it showed her, or how it showed her. There was still that fear of it. Both it and reclaiming her powers. Was that the exchange which was offered? That she’d get her full powers back, but the price would be the terrible truth about what really happened to her?

Tirion felt embarrassed that it took her this long to figure out, to grow suspicious that something was wrong. It wasn’t time to talk to it just yet. She needed more information so she wouldn’t make a bigger fool of herself than she already had.

“Guardian?” Her Ghost called out softly. “Are you still there?”


Kouhei had to know. He had to. They haven’t picked off where they left off since the trip. He told her that he couldn’t find what he wanted to find, no more elaboration. He thought that the Nine would give him the location of where it was, where it went, but they just talked in shouts and cryptic whispers. It was clear now that they gave him a grueling task where the reward was
The new den was what they had anticipated, more or less. It had more weapons and armor than they could possibly need, beautiful Sunbreaker banners draped on the walls. Chairs and a table for emergency meetings, and some beds and sleeping bags in the back. It was enough to spend the night. Even though it was deep underground, it felt naturally warm. You could always rely on the Sunbreakers for warmth.

“Didn’t age a day.” Haya dropped the bags on the table and started looking around, as others got their bearings. “Which means…”

“What are you doing, Haya?” Asked Lorcan, sounding absolutely drained. She was looking for a specific thing, not just trying to get into things.

“Snooping.” She bowed down and pulled out a dusty book from one of the boxes. “There it is.”

“That looks like a diary.” He observed as she sat down on the old wooden chair next to her.

“Uh-huh.” She got right into it, not saying anything more. Loran was oddly appreciative of it. Usually he could concentrate on his work with a lot of going on around him. But not when he was angry. He couldn’t have both. Everytime something happened, they knew who to blame and who to exact revenge on. This time, no trail was left, besides for the memorial that was left alone. The traps were carefully dismantled, so it wasn’t a hit and run. The tech, his tech that was made to prevent this and identify those response was destroyed. He and Alva couldn’t have done it better, so what was it that failed? Maybe there was some footage, but he needs to interlink with his ship first. At least he had the silence.

“This reads like a horror book, though.”

“… why?” Tirion asked. Violence didn’t repulse Haya, so the Warlock waited patiently for a response.

“This is pre-Magistrate Ouros diary and I want to burn it now.” She flipped the page. “She sounds like… me.”

Lorcan glanced up at her. “What kind of Sunbreaker magic did you guys have to preserve salt for hundreds of years?”

“This is genuinely fucked.” Ignoring Lorcan’s remark, she kept on reading. “She doesn’t know the definition of proper. Didn’t want to become a Magistrate, referred to the title as a stuffy old leader. – Ha! – Right in Aodh’s face!”

“There are not nearly enough mentions of Osiris to sound like you.”

“She talks about how she’s frustrated that the Forge won’t choose her, laments about how she just wants to fight, not caring what the City dwellers think. Simpler times, huh…”

“Maybe that’s why she hated you.” Tirion figured.

“Huh?”

“Shejust looked at herself and knew that you would usurp her one day. It takes power to recognize those who have power.”

“Pfft.” Haya brushed her off. “I gave her a lot of reasons to hate me. Acting like her in her younger answers.
days was definitely not the reason. Besides, I had no difficulties with the Forge.”

That pain on Lorcan’s face didn’t make any of them want to continue the conversation. Work had to be done, things had to be processed. The perfect time. Tirion quickly motioned over to Kouhei to follow as she made her way outside. The sun had almost set. EDZ was one of the few places that didn’t look normal. No matter where you looked you saw ruin, even the sky wasn’t free of it, with the Shard resting there. There was no escaping anything. No time to admire and think, as the footsteps behind her stopped and she turned around to look at the Titan.

“What was it that we didn’t find on the edge of the system?” She asked outright. “I know that there was something you didn’t tell me. I know that you don’t withhold things out of malice. What was it?”

“The Dreaming City.” She has never heard Kouhei be this careful with his words, speaking this slowly. The answer was blunt as ever, the presentation wasn’t. Tirion could always rely on Kouhei for straight answers. Only when the correct questions got asked, though. She was familiar with the Reef, studied it. The Dreaming City didn’t come up once.

“And that is?”

“It’s…” For whatever reason, he seemed frustrated. Acting like this conversation was unnecessary, like how he usually behaves when asked to do something twice. He didn’t like repetition or redundancy. If they didn't hear it the first time, they didn't want to hear it. “It’s the homeland of the Awoken.”

Tirion’s eyes widened, wondering if she had heard it right. Homeland. “Why didn’t you tell me that from the beginning?”

“Because the Dreaming City is lost to us. It has been for some time.” He saw that sliver of hope fade from her face, green glowing eyes dimming as her gaze fell to the ground. He was more collected with his speech this time around. “It was pulled into the Ascendant realm, halfway trapped between realms. Much like us. It’s rather poetic.”

“But why go to the Nine first?”

“They know things no one else does, they have sight beyond ours. I thought they could tell me what happened. They gave me a job instead, with a chance for answers if I do it right.” He told. “One way to see it is; The Humans, they are… this realm. We Awoken are trapped between. The Nine are deep in the other side. No one can cross and no one can come back. Not anymore. The Collapse has come and gone and the last Awoken was converted centuries ago.”

“What about Petra? What’s her opinion on the Dreaming City?”

“She wants to get the Dreaming City back as much as any Reefborn. It’s a struggle to get something back once the Ascendant realm gets its claws on it.”

“Yeah… You don’t have to tell me.” She frowned. Just for a second, she got so close. She fully understood why he withheld the knowledge from her. That pain from being so close but getting nothing out of it. Disappointment like a shower of rocks. Other people than Kouhei could have dragged it out longer. Tirion took a deep breath and swallowed hard. “I guess that’s it, then? We're never going home?”

“It isn’t. The Reef doesn’t welcome strangers, but you’re not a stranger. If anyone can bring the Dreaming City back, it will be you. I can get you in touch with Petra. Maybe you two can figure
something out until the Nine talk.”

She gave him a grateful smile, albeit a sad one. “Never thought that killing Skolas would pay off one day. Always wondered what part that played in all of this. They would have protected themselves from Oryx regardless.”

“You weren’t a stranger to the Reef before you killed Skolas.” Kouhei let out, almost against his will. She deserved to know at this point, after everything. After all the speeches that Haya has held about how the Warlock is too lost and gets little cosmic reward for what she has sacrificed. It was unfair to pile on more.

She didn’t understand quite yet.

“I did ask them for help when I was dealing with the Black Garden.”

“You weren’t a stranger then, either. Uldren was just an imbecile, but the Queen recognized you. She knew who you were.” He didn’t tell her this before because he was unsure, but he knew since the start that all he was doing was just convincing himself that it was anything other than unmistakable. “Why do you think it took so long for your Ghost to find you?”

She opened her mouth to speak. “Wha—"

“You’re smarter than that. You’re far too smart to question what I’m talking about. Half of the Reef can attest to it.”

He was right. They wouldn’t be having this conversation if he was wrong. Every detail of their conversation finally sunk in, the struggle, the hesitation. The shifts. The repetition.

“You knew me.” Tirion whispered.

Instantaneous actions always equated less pain.

“Yes.”
One Time You Were A Glowing Young Ruffian

Chapter Notes

Slight spoilers for Forsaken in this chapter! Nothing major, but it talks about what the new Fallen faction are. Just a warning in case you want to go in 100% blind.

“You knew me.” She whispered, trying to contain her sudden heavy breathing.

“Yes.” Kouhei remained calm and stone like, the opposite of her. She couldn’t figure out his motivations with all of this. Was it to hurt her, or was he just trying to have a tone-deaf conversation with her?

Tirion shut her eyes tightly, falling asleep on her feet. She had to fight the exhaustion. It was too much for now. She desperately wanted to know more, but they both knew that she was in no shape to handle it. Not then. She absolutely despised it. The combination of wanting more knowledge, wanting more coins that might buy them a tomorrow, whilst knowing that the knowledge could destroy her.

It all just felt senselessly cruel.

She fought through it, and decided to start simple.

“How long ago did I actually die?”

“I found you dead in the Cosmodrome ten years ago. You can find most of the answers by going back there.”

“We already searched it, shortly after the SIVA crisis.” Tirion breathed out, a hand in her hair, fingers twitching because she wanted to pull it all out. She didn’t want to go back there. Going there for answers the first time started something that ended up being too much for her. Too complicated. It was a cursed graveyard.

“You didn’t search enough.” Kouhei shut her down. “I buried your gun right next to the car I found you in. Find it.”

“Why?”

“I’ll tell you the rest once you feel ready for it.”

It was a rare and surprising moment of sympathy from Kouhei. She figured that they must have known each other well all those years ago. Tirion couldn’t even imagine a world where he was anything else than a cold, relentless, and brutal Titan.

If there was one thing she wished for, it was to never face the same force that broke him.

“How did you become a Guardian, Kouhei?” Tirion stopped him from going back down to the den, as the conversation was finished for him. He slowly looked back at her, face deadpan as ever, maybe with a twinge of bitterness. He knew exactly what she was asking. “You had to die to become one.”
“You killed me.”

“Oh…” Tirion froze. She didn’t expect to hear that. “Was it justified, at least?”

“Defeat was inevitable, for someone.” Kouhei echoed the words of long past. “You fought relentlessly to make sure it wasn’t you. I can respect that.”

Tirion lifted her hand to look at it, watching Solar energy fly around her fingers. The powers she had meant one thing. “Sounds like I failed.”

“You still tried.” Whether he was factual or sincere was a mystery to her. Kouhei was fighting his own battles as he struggled out the words, that much was clear. He was the one who wasn’t ready to relive the story. She had forgotten all of it, so for her it would be nothing but information. For him, it was a vivid memory, a moment in time he didn’t want to relive. “You should go. If you want to find out what happened, look for scars you don’t know the cause of. You can figure it out.”

There were many more questions lingering in her head, but she had doubts that either of them were ready. Kouhei was gone in the blink of an eye, offering her much needed peace of the night. She stood there unmoving for a while, her body almost collapsing from the fatigue. The realization wasn’t the worst of it, the worst was that haunted look on his face just before he turned around.

“I don’t even know what to say.” Ghost spoke softly, trying to not be too jarring. “I searched for you for a very long time. I even started to blame myself, thought I would never find you. To think that you’ve been alive all that time…”

“We need to go back to the City.” Tirion mumbled tiredly, she needed a moment away from trying to make sense of it all.

“Not the Cosmodrome? What did you do to my Guardian?”

“Kept her awake for three days. Apologies on her behalf.” Tirion gazed at the Gray Pigeon soaring in the air, getting closer and closer. It was always a majestic sight. She fully understood why Amanda found ships so fascinating, “Let’s go home. They’ll be alright. I have nothing to contribute, anyway.”

“Are you sure?”

“They don’t need someone talking their ear off right now.” She realized how it sounded. “I do, though. Let’s go.”

Saint’s ship wasn’t made for stargazing, besides a tiny window. It still did the job for her.

Maybe that’s where her fascination with stars started. Only times Emma mentioned stars in her diaries was when she mocked something, often it had something to do with Clovis Bray. She was too busy fighting her own battles on the ground, her own grief. Stars and journeys to ends of the universe held no meaning, held no interest to her. Wasn’t her business. Clovis Bray and other organizations could take their lives to the stars all they wanted, but she wouldn’t leave even if they paid her.

A long time ago Tirion simply assumed that it was just an innate part of being someone with the ability to think. The fascination, and the wonder that comes with it, questions of what lies beyond. The stars were the last thing people escaping the Collapse saw.

The stars. She couldn’t remember how it felt. Was there any peace in those stars, was there still the
same wonder and hope? She’ll probably never know. She wasn’t sure if she wanted to know. It was a fascinating dilemma for a Warlock.

The sun was almost down in the City. It was the first time in years she considered Shaxx’s busy hours a good perk. Knowing the misfits, they kept it to a minimum and sealed the den to prevent rumors. What they weren’t aware of was their own reputation, and that most inhabitants of the City would start rumors that the damage was self-inflicted. It was just obvious that someone just wanted them out of the City. They’ll come back soon, the people needed their presence. Meanwhile, they’ll take over the EDZ, one area at the time. There were too many Red Legion structures remaining, Tirion had no plans to stop until all those structures were converted for the City. They could be turned into new settlements, housing.

They’re going to start with one big ship and take it from there. They’re going to have to change the name of it, but Tirion wasn’t willing to shoulder that responsibility.

All she could muster was a small wave to the Titan before taking her weary body to the apartment district. There was a temptation to place bets whether she looked terrified, sad, or angry judging by how the others looked at her. Everything that happened between her putting the key in and her falling on the bed was a blur, and she didn’t care. She welcomed the darkness, the dreamless sleep. Staying awake until she could no longer bear it always led to dreamless nights. She knew that one day it will stop working, but she didn’t care.

Something disturbed her after a while, and if it was anything else than the loving familiarity they would have gotten her wrath in return. She instinctively relaxed in the warm hold, at peace. One of the few things that made surviving worth it.

“Hi, big guy.” She murmured.

“Didn’t mean to wake you.”

Tirion hugged her Titan closer, eyes barely open. “Did you replace any Guardians with craters today?”

“Just one fireteam.”

Her head snapped up. “It was a rhetorical question, Shaxx. Again. But, why?”

“They shot me, which gave away their position. I needed to show them the consequences of that. Redrix could take it, so could his fireteam. They’re Guardians, that’s what Guardians do.”

“Knowing what I know about the Crucible…” Tirion relaxed again and turned until she was lying on the stomach, getting a better look at him. “They were against impossible odds. They would have been cratered regardless. Can’t kill you with a couple of bullets.”

“They could have been smart about it. That's all I ask.”

“Stop scaring the recruits, Shaxx. They’ll eventually realize that you’re not that scary.”

He chuckled at the remark, a hand playing with her hair, until his fingertips started tickling the back of her neck, circling a scar that caught his attention. He always enjoyed tracing her scars, hearing the stories about the battles that caused them. Scars, dents on their armor and imperfections in general didn’t last long on Guardians because of their Ghosts. Some Guardians refuse to let their Ghosts heal their scars. There were valuable lessons and memories in those scars, those dents in their armor, those shattered Warlock bonds marking broken promises.
Some Guardians want to be perfect and utterly pristine. They think it grants them authority. Those are the Guardians who get to meet their final death faster than anyone else.

Only the charred ones get granted lengthy lives.

“I hate this place…” Tirion hissed. “I really, really do.”

“Let’s agree to never come back here once we finish what we came for.” Ghost said, getting to work with his scanner. “What if he’s wrong?”

“I don’t think he lied, he doesn’t lie out of malice. I don’t know what brought on the change of heart, though.”

Tirion will never forget that one car. It was almost identical to every other pile of rust that surrounded it, but her car had this pull. She leaned against it as Ghost worked, hoping that she’ll somehow destroy it in the process. Why has none of it turned to dust yet? What stories could this graveyard still tell? It was pure silence around her, everything was too rusty to creak. The Fallen had no reason to lurk in the corners any more. Yet, even though it was abandoned and lifeless, it didn’t want to let go, it didn’t want to turn to dust. It had one more story to tell.

“I found something…” Ghost moved closer to the dirt. “Underground. Well… I mean, obviously.”

“Is it diggable without a shovel?”

“I think. Doesn’t seem to be that deep in.”

Doing what any sensible Guardian tired of it all would do, she tossed a grenade right next to the spot Ghost was scanning, and then another one for good measure. The explosion knocked away a chunk of the dirt, leaving a big hole. “There.”

“Alright, then. I see it. Let me transmat it out.” Ghost was less than pleased about almost getting blown up, though understanding. “Surprised you didn’t start a forest fire. Also, please care about Ghost.”

“I can start forest fires if I want to. I am not in the mood for that until the gun is found.”

She closed her eyes, waiting for the sounds of transmatting to stop. It wasn’t fear that prevented her eyes from opening but a sense of antipathy. Antipathy or not, it meant that the only choice she had in the matter was to open her eyes and face it.

Just as Kouhei said.

Tirion snatched the hand cannon, and started rubbing the dirt off until the gold crown insignia was visible on the barrel of it.

“This ending was inevitable.” Tirion pointed the dirty gun at where the voice came from, but calmed down once she assessed the situation. There was hardly any danger from Kouhei. If he wanted revenge, he would have acted upon it. “As I told you. The Collapse didn't kill you. You didn't die then.”

Tirion lowered the gun and returned to trying to clean it with her bare fingers, dirt getting stuck underneath her fingernails. The pink metal still shone through the grime. Maybe it could work again. Of course, it will work again. “I guess this is where the question asking starts.”
He sighed, preparing himself. “What do you want to know?”

She started with what was infront of her. “What’s the story behind this gun?”

“My Ghost found me minutes after you killed me, you were gone by then. I was tasked to bring you back for trial. I followed your footsteps to this place.” Kouhei’s eyes were fixated on the old car, reliving the memory and the pain with it. Ten years wasn’t enough to get rid of what was etched into his mind. “I don’t know why you chose this place and why you did what you did. I can’t speak for you.”

“You almost make it sound like it was difficult.” She was too busy staring at the gun to notice his reaction to her comment.

“It was. I left the Reef because of what I saw here. It’s been an aggravating back and forth with them since then. Some consider me a traitor, putting bounties on me. Others understand why I left. I technically still work for the Reef, Petra is still in my favor.”

“And the Queen?” She glanced up at him, suddenly distraught by a semblance of torment on his face.

“In her eyes, the job was done. You were neutralized and she trusted my word about what happened. Saved me from exile, not from the shunning though.”

“I can’t imagine that she was happy with either one of us when she saw me again.”

“No. But, knowing how Mara works, she saw more benefit in putting you to work compared to reprimanding someone for not predicting who will get chosen by the Traveler’s Light.”

The hand cannon was clean enough for now, and she holstered it at her hip. What was she supposed to say? She didn’t remember anything that happened.

“I’m sorry, Kouhei.” It wasn’t enough. It didn’t feel sincere. It was a start, though.

He nodded, and started to walk, prompting her to follow. Neither of them wanted to stay next to the car. “Haya keeps saying that you can’t save someone intent on destruction, that they’ve got their path.”

“Haya says a lot of things.” She cringed when she realized how bad it sounded. “Didn’t mean it in a bad way. But, for a Titan she says a lot of things.”

Kouhei gritted his teeth, but he had to admit certain things out loud. “She has a lot of points, albeit derived from her own view of the world. But, she was the one who got me thinking about this. You deserved to know. You fallen down that path once.”

“I don’t understand why you decided to tell me all of this. Wouldn’t it all be easier for both of us if you wouldn’t have told me about it?”

“Repetition is pointless. Repetition of history even more so.”

They reached the end of the bridge in silence, Tirion taking the time to formulate some questions in her head. She had to choose carefully. Kouhei wasn’t much of a storyteller, and they hardly had time for the entire story. That was hers to discover by other means.

There were few questions only he could answer. “What were we like? Before I killed you, of course.”
“We were friends. Family.” Hearing Kouhei say those words was unsettling, but it was easy to brush off. “My daughter looked up to you. Adored you. Haya and Alva remind me of you two.”

“And the mother?”

“One of the Queen’s Guard to this day. Duty goes above everything else.”

“Lorcan told me you have a great-great-great-great granddaughter.”

He scowled at that. He’s been getting along with the Hunter fairly well as of late, but they still had their usual disputes. “Lorcan is Lorcan, possibly the only person who you can’t silence with money.”

But, she was just too curious, and a little too impatient. Kouhei almost smiled at that excitement in her eyes, like a child’s. She wanted to know it all, discover everything. Absolutely nothing has changed besides her name. Kouhei saw it as bittersweet. She was still there, but that curiosity and hunt for knowledge was the very thing that ended up killing her.

“I know you’re tired of the questions but… can you give me the short version of what happened, why did I kill you?”

He was used to all her sentences ending with a question mark. Always curious. “You were researching something and went mad trying to understand it. Refused to talk about it to anyone but few select people. Uldren Sov was one of them.”

“What could I possibly collaborate with Uldren for?”

“I think he’s the only one alive who remembers.”

She didn’t like that, but she was lying to herself by not seeing that as an added challenge to her new pursuit. “What then?”

“You got progressively worse from it. Suddenly, there was a riot. I’m not sure if it was fallout of you setting your research on fire to destroy it, or a distraction so you could do it. Either way, it worked very well.” He told. “I got in the way of your escape. You know as much as I do now.”

“Do you think Uldren did something to me?” She asked, hesitantly.

“No. I think he was afraid of you and what you unearthed.” He smirked for a split second, or maybe it was just his face spasming. “Prepare for amusement when he recognizes you. Prepare your gun, as well. He will run.”

“Anything specific I should do to trigger his memory?”

“Call him ‘darling’.”

“… why? Gross!”

He shrugged, recalling a much happier memory now. “I wish you would remember how much that word in your voice annoyed him.”

“Well. This trip to the Reef is sounding better and better by the day, isn’t it?”

“That it is. Assuming that Zavala doesn’t feel the need to share his input.”

“Why wou— Of course he would.” She groaned. “We need to find Cayde.”
“What are you hoping to achieve with that?”

“Come with me. Return to your brooding, menacing self once we break orbit. We’ll need it.”

“What did you do, Cayde?” Tirion tried to sound somewhat not angry. Cayde opened his mouth, the lights glowing in his jaw but he didn’t get a chance to let out a quip. “No quips!”

“You gotta be more specific!”

“The Reef. The truth.”

“Oh, that. Nothin’ much. Just had my finest Hunters imprison some Fallen. I’ve got a good lead on the last of em’. Been lookin’ for him for almost a year now.” He explained calmly, and pulled out a datapad. “Fi… Fikr… Fikrul?”

“Fikrul.” Kouhei finished harshly for him, fists clenched.

“Yeah, that one. He’s their leader. No biggie. No need to look that menacing, Titan. You'll get wrinkles from that.”

“You let Fikrul escape?” Only reason Cayde wasn’t a smear on Lakshmi’s window was because Tirion was standing right next to him.

“What? No compliment for killing a whole lotta ‘em and imprisoning the rest?”

“Someone fill me in here, thanks.” Tirion waved her hand.

“Fikrul the Fanatic is the leader of the Scorn. Fallen outcasts turned terrorists turned undead, they’ve been destroying the Reef since Oryx arrived. When I went back to the Reef a couple of months ago, Petra told me that they were imprisoned.”

“You’re welcome!” Cayde boasted.

“You let Fikrul escape. You’ll get no thanks from me.”

“Now why you gotta be like that?”

“Because your efforts were rendered futile the second you let him escape.”

“I get it! I let him escape, sheesh.” Cayde rolled his eyes. “We’ll get him!”

“No.” Kouhei took a slight step towards the Hunter. “You won’t. Tell your Vanguard to back off. You have no business with the Reef. The City isn’t obligated to jump into fights other people are in.”

“You might wanna take all of that to Zavala, because y’know he’s running this whole show.” Cayde showed no signs of caving in, and pointed towards the door.

“What are his plans?”

“Just a simple case of bringin’ back some law and order to the Reef. Reason I’m there is because it has to be done with style. Zavala’s not really that good at it.”

“Stay out of it, Hunter.” Kouhei warned him. “The City is your territory. The Reef is ours. You are not welcome. There is a steep price for trespassing and trying to fix problems that aren’t yours.”
“Well, as my protégé would say, *I beg to differ.*”

“A gun aimed at your head has no ears. It does not care that you disagree with what it’s about to do.” Kouhei retaliated. “It’s not my City, nor is it my people. I don’t care if you die. All I care about are entitled trespassers feeling like it’s okay to go into someone else’s territory to solve their problems.”

Feeling like he got his point across, Kouhei turned around and left without even a grumble. It couldn’t have deviated any more from Tirion’s original plan than it did. She just wanted a chat with Cayde, find out more about his role in the Reef.

“He’s a… happy fella, isn’t he? Makes Shaxx look kinda decent.”

“That’s all you got from that, Cayde?” Tirion was deeply disappointed in him. She made a promise to not chide him and treat him like a child, but she agreed with Kouhei.

“Yep. My desk was next to Shaxx’s for years, I know how to handle irate Titans.” He laughed to himself. “Y’know, there was one time before you—”

“Cayde.”

He pointed at the datapad he was holding in his hands before returning to it. “I have a plan here! We find the last ugly, throw him in the Prison, and then have some Ramen. They’ve got this new spe—”

“I don’t care about the special.” She cut him off again. “Maybe we should talk to Zavala, pull the Vanguard out of this. Kouhei knows about the Scorn, I’m sure the two of us can handle it.”

“I find it weird how he doesn’t hate you for not being a Reefborn.”

“I am a Reefborn.” She raised a hand to stop him. She didn’t have time for conversation because a Vanguard’s life might be in danger. “Long story. Found out yesterday. Will tell you over drinks later.”

“You know I love a good story.” Cayde said. “Speaking of written in stone, I don’t think the big blue is willing to pull outta it. It’ll be fine, Guardian! Since when are you so worried?”

“Since I’m scared of losing a friend.”

“Aww!”

“Don’t let that feed your ego.” Tirion rolled her eyes at him. “For when is Zavala planning the mission?”

“Dunno. We have a festival to get overwith before we can go anywhere. We also uh… need to track down that what’s-his-name Fallen before we can go anywhere. Easy.”

That festival. She’s being doing her best to ignore it.

“Things ended well for us last time we got distracted with celebrations about how good we are.” She murmured. “No matter. I better find Kouhei before he shanks Zavala.”

That festival. The Solstice. Before the war, it was a fun way to waste some time around the Tower. Now, she dreaded it. She saw it as a self-congratulatory waste of time now. They’ll ask her questions, about the Red War. About how she felt. They’ll have her give a speech. Truth be told,
she didn’t have anything to say.

She was a fool with a hero shroud.

She tried to understand something until it led to madness, created something she was too afraid to face. She had to disappear from the world.

That was the first loop.

She hid from the world for majority of the Red War. Even as she fought, she was hiding. Didn’t want to face what was around her. Didn’t want to face the bodies. She just wanted to hide. Constantly searching for a dreamland. The dreamland proved itself to be difficult to find, her next option was to crash a ship into the Immortal and pray.

That was one of many loops.

A glimmer of hope appeared and she took it, but she kept on hiding. Hiding until Ghaul was felled, by the Traveler. She was too weak to kill him.

Looped again.

It didn’t make for a good and inspiring story the people wanted to hear. Not enough for the people to attach their own half-truths to it. They’ll want a story of bravery, they’ll want stories of Guardians who are the reason they are standing there listening to that speech—

Maybe she’ll hide again, and let the others tell stories that were truly meaningful. Hers wasn’t. Hers didn’t compare to what the people believed.

They deserved to have their den destroyed. False heroes, if anything. They just chose to fight the right enemies, for their own reasons. It was always for their own reasons. She remembered how much Glimmer they hauled from the Vault better than she remembered the speech she once gave to the people of the City.

It had to end. She had to make up for it to the people she betrayed. Couldn’t loop again, couldn’t fall back into it. EDZ was a start, she kept repeating in her head.

Tirion found Kouhei waiting for her, with Zavala – surprising to her – unscathed in the distance.

“Did you talk to Zavala?”

“No.”

“That’s progress, I guess.”

“I need to talk with Petra first. Find out why she allowed the Vanguard to meddle. The Scorn are none of Vanguard’s business.”

“What makes the Scorn so dangerous? You mentioned something about them being undead.”

“They got petty with the house which cast them out, and decided to experiment with death and resurrection. They went on to kill three of our Paladins and destroy numerous Awoken outposts. They’re monstrosities.” He spat. “Only a matter of time until they all break out. No one will be ready when they do.”

“Then what? They destroy what remains of the Reef? Almost sounds like the Reef actually needs the help.”
“We need the help, but not from the Vanguard. They will make it worse because they don’t know how the Reef works, they don’t know the people in it.”

“So, you’d rather let it all burn?”

“No. The Vanguard aren’t familiar with the one person who is stupid enough to exploit the Scorn. We need to find him before he and his callowness set the world on fire.”

Only one person matched the description. “Uldren Sov.”

“Yes.” He brought out his Ghost, ready to get to work. “At this point, it's a given... There will be pain.”
“Look who finally decided to come back.” Lorcan held tightly onto his tools, restraining himself from stabbing the circuit board with a screwdriver. Tirion saw the burn marks on his fingers, he allowed himself to get sloppy with the soldering iron earlier. Nothing worked, nothing could be repaired. He wasn’t sure what he was working on in that moment, hoping that at some point the circuit board and the wires would become something, that it would magically spring to life.

The room was hauntingly empty. “Where are the others?” Tirion asked.

“The kids decided to trek to the Farm, Haya is negotiating something with Devrim.” He didn’t notice her taking a seat right across from him. “Where is Kouhei?”

“Look up.”

“Why wo— Damn it!” He staggered a bit after he raised his head, startled by Kouhei’s red eyes in the corner. The Titan was leaning against the wall, thinking. “Do you guys ever use that to your advantage?”

“Use what?”

“The gl— you know, never mind.” He returned to his work. “Don’t want to get punched, as per usual.”

“Any progress?”

“Absolutely none!” He flipped the board over, trying to find another spot he could ruin. “There is something actually, but we don’t have the power for it here. Sunbreakers didn’t like power generators that much. Why do you need a power generator when you can harness the power of the sun?”

“The Orobas Vectura has enough power for anything we need.”

“I don’t really want to do the planning with pen and paper…” Lorcan whined. “Can’t we wing it?”

“There is a lot of danger in letting you wing things.”

“There is a lot of danger in letting us do literally anything, to be honest.”

“We don’t represent our classes and the concept of Guardians that well, do we?”

“No.” He said. “We’re just assholes. Except for Alva. Alva’s great. The other one not so much.”

“What did Huritt do to you?”

“We don’t have many rules, but trying out my cloaks is definitely a no-no.”

“I see.”

Giving up, Lorcan chucked the monstrosity of a circuit board into his rucksack, and let his Ghost heal his fingers as it was finally safe to do so. The rumbling in the staircase didn’t scare them, and
as they expected, an armoured Titan descended.

“Huh…” Haya began, confused, eyes acquiring a target. “Devrim has a lot to say about dialects. Awesome. Thank you, Lorc! Is that why you didn’t want to talk to him?”

Lorcan laughed at her annoyance. “Knew that he would pick up on your accent. He tried to place where mine was from, I got my Ghost to time it after a while. The monologue went on for twenty minutes.”

“I don’t have an accent.”

“You do.”

“Shut up.” She found a small silver lining, though. “At least I got the explosives. Can take on that ship now.”

“How can’t you hear your accent? You’re like over two-thousand years old.” Lorcan, however, didn’t want to let it go.

Haya rolled her eyes at Lorcan. “Tirion.”

“What?” The Warlock was too entertained by that.

“Settle this for us.” Haya’s voice was low, through clenched teeth. “Do I have an accent?”

“You… do.” She spoke slowly, for her own safety. “It’s like Osiris’, except more rigid, I guess.”

“Alright, I’m stabbing my throat now. That’s disgusting.” Haya sighed.

“We need your voice to plan how to get that ship.” Tirion stated, at a loss when having none of their usual tools to turn to. “I think…. we need to prep everything we need for transmat, get on our sparrows and just go at it? That plan is lame.”

“I miss spending a week trying to figure out how to kill a Hive god.” Lorcan frowned.

“There is Calus. Close enough.”

“Oh… no. I think I like mediocre plans much better.”

“Last I’ve heard of him he was in a scuffle with the Red Legion. I figure it’s better to let them kill each other off and have the problem solve itself.”

“That’s not how it will go, will it?”

“Not in the slightest, no.”

“Oh…”

“I don’t think you’re the one Calus is interested in.” Haya pointed out. “Warlock robes makes it very easy to flash your ankles at him.”

“We can continue this journey of comedy after we’ve conquered that ship.” Tirion stood up. “Prep everything you think we’ll need for transmat, and get on your Sparrows. You guys know where it is.”

Tirion took a mental note of where every single remaining Red Legion logo was as she drove
through the EDZ. There was no excuse for them to still be there. That ship however, will never move. They made sure of that a year ago when they blew out its engine. It wasn’t their intention, as their intention was to steal another ship. The Orobas Vectura remained like a protruding bone. They could heal the bone, but the scars would remain for a while. She didn’t mind that.

It was quiet. Stark difference from the last time she was there. Both in her head and around her. It was finally time to start reclaiming everything, time for rebuilding the world.

“You look way too excited for this, Guardian.”

“That’s because I am.” She picked up the pace, charging a grenade in her hand. Her first target were the fabric banners with the Red Legion insignia. They didn’t stand a chance, disintegrating within seconds as fire consumed. She almost felt like a kid with a magnifying glass. “Let’s find the rest of them!”

They were briefly stopped when they found the sign painted on a metal wall. It’s nothing fire could fix, and she wasn’t in the mood to scrape it off.

“Ghost, can you do anything with this?”

“Hmm…” He flew closer to it to examine it. “I’d suggest putting two holes above it and make it a frowny face with a moustache.”

“Take that red net cloth, put it over. We’ll get completely rid of it later.”

Ghost obliged. “The people selling paint in the City will be very happy.”

“I’m sure they will.”

Tirion carried on, finding some tanks. She had worries that them having tanks in their possession might send the wrong message to everyone, but she knew deep inside that Lorcan and Haya would find a way to destroy them before any news get out.

Some Cabal camping inside tried giving them a hard time, but didn’t stay alive long enough to succeed. She burned the remaining banners once they were all dead. She took her time to look around after jumping on the elevator plate. This was only a small quarter of the ship, but that corner alone was a lot more spacious than their previous place of residency. The hard part of this takeover presented itself; the doors were locked. Only choice she had now was to take a seat and wait for the rest of her friends to get there.

They will not stop with the ship, not stop until she has burned all the banners. Until there are no signs left. Her people have been huddled in one small City for long enough. She didn’t want a prison for them, didn’t want to keep them in one place. The Red Legion’s invasion taught her a valuable lesson, the craters in the City make that lesson impossible to forget. Keeping the last of humanity in one place is the quickest way to get them all killed. If one of their rockets had veered slightly to the other direction, there would have been less survivors. There’s a constant risk of another attack, and repetition was pointless. Relying on dumb luck and the Traveler’s Light to save them was pointless.

“Do you want to talk about what Kouhei told you?” Ghost asked, hesitantly.

“Why do you ask?”

“It was a lot and…” He tried to find the words. “Are you doing okay?”
“I don’t know, actually.” Tirion laid down, hair spread on the metal. She let her feet dangle on the edge as she relaxed.

“How come?”

It was a question she didn’t know she needed.

“I’m happy. Except it’s happy with an asterisk.” Tirion tried to explain. “I feel like it’s the most tedious thing imaginable to get rid of that asterisk, but it has to be done. I think all this will be a good distraction. Rebuilding. I could let the horrors come or I could build something worth fighting the horrors for. If life isn’t worth living might as well try my damnest to make it worth living.”

“I’ll always have your back, Guardian. You know that.”

She smiled, and booped him on the shell with a finger. “I know it.”


“Can’t appreciate something that is not there.”

The Hunter gasped at Kouhei’s insult. “Not my fault you’re not funny.”

“You make Mara sound like she’s ashamed of sharing the same fake last name as her brother.” Haya steered the conversation back on course. “Are they actually related?”

“Debatable.”

Another long awkward pause. “I’m going to be the one to ask—”

“No.” Kouhei cut the Hunter off. “They aren’t.”

“How did you know what I was going to ask?”

“A lot of people assume it.”

“But what if they are?”

“You are disgusting.”

“I didn’t mean it that way, you ass. It’s just a question. No motives behind it.”

At this point, Haya desperately searched for a way to escape the sinking ship that was the conversation between the other two, smiling in relief when she found it. “What is Tirionna doing on the elevator?”

“It’s not on!” Was Tirion’s excuse from where she was sitting and watching them. Lorcan got to work at the nearest console immediately, his Ghost helping him. Too many doors glowing red around him. Tirion took it as a sign to immediately jump off, landing just on the right spot so that she wouldn’t break something. “Don’t turn it on by accident!”

“No worries. Oh, that’s fun… Have we come up with a new name for this ship yet?” He asked. “There is an option to change it, for some reason. What does Orobas Vectura even mean?”

“I think it means The Devil’s Carriage.” Tirion translated.
“You know the Cabal language?”

“They stole it from our language. Orobas is said to be a great prince of hell. Vectura means passenger, or carriage. It’s from a dead language, making it hard to translate.”

“Why would they steal our things?”

“People steal things they are incapable of creating themselves.” Kouhei was the one to answer. “Cabal are incapable of creating beauty and art nowadays.”

“Well… no shit.” Lorcan continued typing. “Hm. How about The Ag Borradh?”

“That makes us sound like barbarians.” Kouhei disapproved.

“There is no direct translation of it, but it refers to life about to break forth.” He looked up at his peers for approval. “Seems appropriate, right? Might as well change it while I have the thing open, eh?”

“I like it.” Tirion said, and others nodded. “Do it.”

Lorcan entered in the new name with a slight smile on his face, and some additional keystrokes unlocked the doors around them, followed by Cabal grunts far away.

“I can take care of them.” Haya readied her weapon. “Need to explore this ship to find a potential new room, anyway. Anyone else?”

Tirion joined her without a word, and the two women ran off towards the ruckus, ready for another fight.

Lorcan didn’t need to tear his face off the screen to know that he wasn’t left alone.

“Come on Kouhei, start a conversation, you can do it!” He thought out loud.

“I need to make a call. I know this ship has the tools, I need you to help me find them.”

“Why are you bothering me and not using your Ghost, then?”

“Not enough range. It’s for the Reef, and that’s all you need to know.”

“Tirion won’t like you being secretive.”

“Tirion knows about it.”

“Okay. Alright then. Guessing you also need your location spoofed.” Lorcan started looking through the map, knowing what asking questions gets him. It was unnerving to have the Titan loom over him impatiently, like he was in a hurry. He trusted the Titan’s word, he had to. “There. Navpoint sent to your Ghost and—” All that remained of Kouhei was dust and small particles of Void, as he already had run off. “You’re welcome!”

The Cabal who stood in his path weren’t a challenge. A Legionary packs thousands of slug rounds. A nimble Titan can survive every last one. He wondered what they were still fighting for. They had no hold any more, no leaders. It wasn’t their home or their solar system to inhabit. Maybe they just didn’t have the intelligence to go back, maybe they actually wanted to get eradicated and die with honor. It didn’t matter to him in the end.
Once he located the console, Kouhei entered the frequency for the recipient, hoping that it would work. If he knew the prince well, and he did, it would. It wasn’t until later the trouble would start.

The prince wasn’t familiar with precautions. That was the advantage.

“Oh, it’s you, the shame of the Reef requesting an audience.” The Prince gibed disdainfully, his face appearing on the hologram with nothing behind him. The dark hood on his head emphasized the yellow glowing eyes, but Kouhei didn’t find it all that menacing. “Keep this short. I have no time for you.”

Kouhei did as told, standing tall. "Threta won't be pleased with you."

"Threta?" Uldren didn’t want to give it time of day. “Did you call me to haunt me with ghosts of a decade past?”

“I called you to haunt you with the idea of what will happen once she gets her hands on you after you inevitably do something stupid.”

“Really?” Uldren smirked mockingly. “Tell me; what can I expect from someone who solved her problems with a bullet to the head? She couldn’t handle her own life. Ah… who could forget that glorious scandal? Someone becoming a deranged lunatic, and then a Guardian appearing suddenly in our midst. She was a good shot, but I don’t see her as a threat. Neither do I see you as one."

"Don’t worry about me. Worry about that Threta is alive. She was once your friend, too."

Kouhei saw that twinge of something on Uldren’s face. He assumed it was a glitch, not paying it any more mind.

"It seems that you hardly knew her at all. She was a doctor.” Uldren tried. “She fully well knew how to make sure that she won't come back from the dead. Why are you wasting my time?"

"Doctors deal with concrete things, facts, things they are capable of fixing and mending with their bare hands. The Traveler and its paracausality challenges that." That twinge again. Now he was sure that it wasn’t a glitch in the hologram. It was evident that Uldren caught his drift. Hatred was one of the things etched on his face, hatred for Guardians. Hatred for her. “Although, you are partially correct. Doctors are capable of reverse engineering their skills. I don’t think she would do that to you. She’d do something much worse.”

“And why would she do that? What reason have I given her?”

“You haven’t given her a reason to, yet. This is just a warning. Petra is too gracious to give you warnings. I don't care.”

“Ah, yes.” Uldren sighed mockingly. “I’ll make sure to take how a demented freak might react into consideration when I go on about what needs to be done.”

“I know what you believe needs to be done. You believe that loyalty to your sister is a blanket excuse for doing stupid things and getting on people’s nerves. Be very mindful of whose nerves you get on. Don’t let it be Threta’s.”

Instead of answering, Uldren disconnected the call and the hologram fell apart. Just as expected. Nothing specific showed up on the datapad, Uldren was good at covering his tracks once reality hit him, which was a surprise to Kouhei. The conversation wasn’t long enough to zone in on where he was, instead there were hundreds of pings all across the Reef, and too little time to visit every single one of them.
They’ll get him.

Chapter End Notes

That dude.

That damn dude.

I will enjoy punching that dude.
I don't need any help to be breakable, believe me.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lorcan felt guilty.

That’s the only thing that coursed through him when he looked at the marble white statue. Guilt. Pure, unadulterated, guilt.

To make it worse, nothing could be done to lessen it.

Him and his group were a group of exceptional weirdoes who could do anything, who could kill any god and god aspirant in their path. For everything they were, they were never exemplary Guardians, they were just exceptional selfish weirdoes.

That’s where the guilt came from, and the petrifying realization that it will never go away. It took him over a hundred years. Actually, it took until people started looking at him and his peers with a sense of reverence.

Light is what makes a Guardian a Guardian, but theirs wasn’t pure, not anymore. Somehow, with all their might and knowledge, they managed to fail with that. He was almost impressed. Their Light, albeit more powerful than of other Guardians, was corrupted. They got their Light back by visiting that Shard. It was a stupid and unresearched decision in hindsight, not even the Vanguard wanted to go there due to its potential danger, but it was their only choice and it was a decision born out of desperation. Corrupted, tarnished and broken Light was better than no Light at all. They haven’t talked with eachother about it yet, but all of them have felt their powers manifest and grow, like it was asking for permission to evolve. They didn’t know how to communicate with it yet. Maybe due to fear, not knowing what it will lead to. It was a coin toss, it will either destroy them from within or make them stronger. The Traveler won’t talk to them either, it was on them to figure it out.

The statue remained silent and unmoving under the Hunter’s gaze, offering no answers.

Part of Solstice of Heroes was the storytelling, about what being a Guardian means and pride of each class.

None of those stories were relatable.

Another source of guilt.

Stories of Hunters who didn’t need their Light to be agile and stealthy, Hunters using their skills to hide civilians, spotting routes that will get everyone out of the City safely. Assassinating Psions with perfectly thrown knives at the back of their skulls to avoid detection. Hunters who knew every corner, every hiding place and every turn of the City, every panel and what door it opens when futzed with, and used it to their advantage when evacuating civilians. Hunters with their sniper rifles on rooftops, not missing a single shot despite their entire body shaking with fear.

Stories of Titans who were walls, using their entire body as a shield. Titans who are willing to stand between Cabal bullets and innocents, willing to lose their life if it meant saving lives. Titans who led, using their entire body as a shield. Titans who used the last of strength to beat down Cabal who were terrorizing a group of children, breathlessly commanding the young ones to run for their lives.
Stories of Warlocks who had studied the Cabal and used their wits to outsmart the enemy. Warlocks who were a source of wisdom, and hope. Warlocks who were the voice of reason and comfort for the scared ones as the world collapsed around them, reassurance that everything will be alright soon, that they just need to hold on. Warlocks who ripped off parts of their robes to make tourniquets for the wounded.

The infamous misfits? They were just cool, happy genius heroes, who hid in the Hangar. They survived, but there wasn’t anything honourable in their survival. It’s been a while since he thought about that day, the day of the attack.

“Ugh, can we go already? Stop staring at statues.” His Ghost moaned, almost falling to the ground out of boredom. “I don’t like it up here. The weather is wrong. Too much confetti.”

“We’ll go down to the City in a moment.” Lorcan turned to her. “Heard that someone there uncovered some pre-Golden Age tech.”

“Boring.” She let herself fall into his confetti-filled hood and got comfortable. “Carry me!”

“I’m sure we’ll find something you like.” He adjusted his hood until it was almost hanging infront of him on the shoulder, so he wouldn’t accidentally lose his Ghost. At least try to not accidentally lose his Ghost.

“Please don’t ever let me become as dramatic as her…” Another Ghost said, accompanying a redhead with hair full of confetti. “I hope she didn’t hear that.”

“I’m sure she didn’t.” Tirion reassured him. “Find any insight in that statue, Lorcan?”


“It’s just making me think about that day.” Lorcan ignored his Ghost. “Well, that’s its purpose. Did any of the others tell you what happened to us when the Cabal attacked?”

“No, not the full story.” Tirion said. “Why?”

“Haya is my best friend. But, sometimes…” He was hesitant with his words, controlling what he’s saying and trying to not let the anger make him say something he’s going to regret. “Sometimes she can be evil and difficult, and I don’t know what to do.”

“No argument. But, I’m guessing you’re not talking about how she is every day.”

Lorcan began: “We were at the Hangar, as we always were. Getting ready for the parade. Then, explosions and screams out of nowhere. We immediately knew that it wasn’t just a Guardian experiment that went wrong, or Amanda accidentally blowing up a sparrow.” He took a deep breath. “We made the decision to lie low, to stay there. We didn’t know what was going on. It all worked exceptionally well until it didn’t. Well, until Haya made it stop working.”

“What happened?”

“Some Guardians noticed our hiding place, maybe five of them. Haya took the lead in it all, and made the decision to not let them in. She shut the doors and… waited. She just waited, with her back to the door as she leaned against it. No expression on her face.” Lorcan’s voice shivered. “We heard the other Guardians banging on the door, begging for help, begging to be let in, begging for their lives. Soon after we heard the Cabal slice them down, one by one. Then it was just silence. None of us said anything for a while. We just sat there. She killed those Guardians.”
“Have you talked with her about it?”

“No. She refuses to talk about that day.”

“It might not seem like it a lot of the times, but Haya is smart. I doubt she would have let them die if it meant that you all lived.”

“There was time. There is always time.”

“I wasn’t there, so I can only guess. Knowing her, if given the choice between going through hell and high water to save you all or to do nothing and let you die, she’d pick hell and high water without hesitation.” Tirion said. “I don’t think it was easy for her at all, to sit there and listen to them die. I just know that the alternative would have been much more painful.”

“Yeah, but I…” He groaned in frustration. “We could have saved a lot of people. We could have found civilians, other Guardians. We could have saved more than five of us.”

“I could talk to her.” She told him.

“It’s not really about her.”

“No, but you should hear her out.” Tirion argued. “And all of us could have saved more people. All of us could have done a lot of things differently. All of us could have been better heroes. We have the chance to change now.”

“I still feel guilty.”

“So do I.” She murmured. “It never goes away.”

“Well…” Lorcan motioned towards the statue, wanting to change the subject. “Do you have any plans to participate in all of this?”

“No. I spent far too long fighting to get over what happened. No interest to re-live it.”

“Fair enough.”

His eyes absentmindedly returned to the statue, and he saw her walk away in the corner of his eye as no more words were spoken.

“She’s depressing.” The metal eye of the Ghost rolled in his hood.

Lorcan has become immune to all of it over the years.

She wasn’t born a diva, events made her one. Events that included everything he put her through. Everything from driving sparrows into Fallen traps to almost getting his head cut off by his drone. They’ve been through a lot.

The Ghost was calm and a teacher when she found Lorcan for the first time, then her personality evolved as the years went by and patience wore thin. She still didn’t have a permanent name after all those years, haven’t found the right one that sticks, a name that was hers. Lorcan has tried many names, all of them rejected. Maybe someday.

They weren’t done decorating the City yet, lots of golds and whites, royalty. He would enjoy it if it wouldn’t remind him of Calus. The concept of royalty was nothing but tainted, Lorcan was too busy being disgusted and trying to find the merchant he was looking for to notice that his Ghost had escaped. With a soft sigh, he shook the confetti out of his hood and he looked around. As long
as both are alive it’s not difficult for a Guardian to find their Ghost.

The sound stirred something in his memory, just out of reach. It was loud whirring, sounding like a drill but not quite, it stood still. Other sounds joined the fray as he got closer to it, voice of a woman.

 “… You know, my skin's terribly delicate and I don't dare expose it.”

Lorcan whispered a confused curse under his breath as he picked up the pace, slowly opening up some curtains blocking his path. It seems that he knocked out two birds with one stone, as he both found the merchant he was looking for, and his lost Ghost.

The loud whirring sound came from an old projector. The Ghost’s eye was fixated on the grainy projection on the white cloth, a black and white moving picture. It depicted three people, one of them a beautiful blond-haired woman. She was prim and proper, wearing an elegant shiny dress, and had delicate fur wrapped around her arms.

The Ghost’s gaze followed her scene to scene, even tried to find the woman when she was out of shot.

“What is this?” Lorcan asked, referring to the movie playing.

“You Guardians keep reinforcing my belief that you are insane...” The merchant made his status known. “Some Guardians recovered a lot of old tech from Manhattan Nuclear Zone. Dropped it off here. I ain’t going to question anything...”

“That might be for the best.” Lorcan couldn’t stop staring at his Ghost, finding it adorable how she was hypnotized by the film and that one character in it. Almost like she saw herself in that woman.

The merchant rudely shut off the contraption, cutting the image off. Lorcan caught the Ghost just in time to prevent her headbutting the merchant for interrupting the movie.

“So, you came here to watch a movie or are you going to buy something?"

“You know I hate healing you when you do that.” Leor glared disapprovingly at the lit cigarette between Haya’s fingers. She was addicted to being addicted to a vice. It’s been like that since Twilight Gap. Always something.

“Then don’t bother.”

The Ghost sighed. “If I ever listened to you, you’d be dead.”

“Stom ta'peh.” Haya blew out a puff of smoke, barely visible in the midst of orange of Mercury.

“Kfotz li.”

“Hey!” She pointed the Ghost with the lit cigarette, not touching it though. She still cared about it. “Don’t sass me in my own language.”

“You are giving me little choice.”

Another drag and puff of the cigarette with half crossed arms. It didn’t make her feel any better. It never made her feel any better. Too lazy to fly back to the City to get something stronger, so cheap cigarettes will have to do. It was hypocritical to be mad at the Ghost, as she herself makes a mess out of the language. She wished she had an excuse to speak it more, to improve on it. No
opportunities for that nowadays asides from banter with Osiris, which was the last thing she wanted to do.

“It’s been a year since they died.” She whispered. “Is it wrong to still be mad at Ouros?”

“For dying?”

“For what caused her to die. And for dying. She was proud, but that made her cocky. She didn’t know how to live without her Light, without her Hammers.” Haya fingered the Hammer shaped pendant on her chestpiece with a free hand. “That’s what killed her. She never thought she’d lose the Hammers, she taught others to not even dare to dream about that day. That’s what killed them. It wasn’t Osiris.”

“I do understand why you train your Sunbreakers the way you’ve been training them.”

“At least someone does.” Haya glanced at Leor briefly, at the scratched shell. Not a speck of paint remained on it, just slight outlines of sigils etched on it. Not by force, there was always permission. Leor enjoyed donning the symbols. “Combat first, survival first. If you can’t survive without the Hammers and without your Light, you are not worthy of the Hammers. That’s the new rule.”

“I like this new Haya, for however long this will last…”

“Yeah… It was easy to blame Osiris for everything. It’s different now.” She was mesmerized by the blue gate in the distance. There was no temptation to go in there, she knows where it leads. “I guess I wasn’t really familiar with the concept of people making their own choices. All of them could have said no to Osiris, they weren’t held at gunpoint. Free will. How ‘bout that?”

The two have been through a lot together, for more years than Haya was willing to admit. Leor never thought she’d change, the Ghost was at a loss for words. Other memories of anniversaries crept up on him. It’s been a year since another important thing. “Is it safe to assume that you didn’t let them in because you knew that Ouros would have?”

She avoided eye contact. “Let what in?”

“I don’t remember much of that day, but I know that both of us remember that. Does it ever haunt you? Your head is locked too tight. I don’t know what you’re thinking.”

“No.” Instant response, no hesitation. “Not even a little bit.”


“I would be bothered by it if it wasn’t about us.” She clarified. “Saving my family doesn’t haunt me. There was no other way. Ouros let them in, look where that got her. I’ve always been smarter than her. The Cabal woulda killed everyone. We had to survive. Don’t you even dare judge me for that.”

“I understand. But you have to understand that you can be rambunctious sometimes.”

“Pfft. That’s a Warlock word.”

“Difficult to handle.”

“I’m not ‘difficult to handle.’” She made air quotes for added effect.
“You would have killed a Guardian if it weren’t for your friends.”

“That wasn’t difficult to handle!”

“Not for you, it wasn’t. You’re still a Warlord underneath all of that.” The Ghost didn’t mean to argue with her. “But, they need you as much as you need them. Let’s get back to Earth.”

She sucked the remaining life from the cigarette and flicked it away, hoping it’d hit a Vex on the way down. “You’ve always been weirdly prophetic, though.”

“A prophecy is common sense in your case.” Leor said. “Makes things easier.”

“Guess I deserve that.”

Tirion shut the door with a loud thud, sighing in relief once she was sure that she was far away from the commotion. A simple supply run for the Ag Borradh turned into a borderline conference meeting about her feelings on the event.

“Hey, look who it is! My pal, my buddy, my number one!” Cayde raised his glass, leaning back on the counter. “That Titan isn’t with ya, is he?”

“No.” She pushed herself off of the door. “Don’t know where he is. As for Shaxx, if the sun is up he’s the Crucible. Thought I could hang out here.”

“And when the sun goes down you—"

“Ahem.” She forcefully cleared her throat. “What have you got on the datapad? Anything I should know about?” She cut him off as she sat down on the seat next to him.

“You’re right, that joke was too easy. Gotta do better.” Cayde shook his head. “I just got a few reports from Shiro. Some of these reports he’s sendin’ to me about the Vex are… wow.”

“Nothing on the missing Baron?”

“Nope. Gettin’ worried, but I’m sure my Hunters will pull through.” Cayde said, keeping his drink dangerously close to the datapad. “They’ve managed to do the hardest thing ever, and that thing is their reports keeping me mighty entertained as I’m stuck here. Can’t wait to get back out there.”

“You don’t need the wilds to get into crazy things.”

“Oh, you know about the whole thing with Marcus?” Cayde lit up. “I won that, fair and square. Never you mind that Hangar 6 is in… totally perfect condition. Yep! Don’t tell Amanda. At least for the next four or so hours.”

“He almost ran me over earlier today. Try keeping the Sparrows out of the Tower, not everyone here has a Ghost to revive them.”

“Illegal shortcut!” Cayde pointed out. “Shaxx won’t give the old Racing League arenas back, we gotta make do with it.”

“I’m sure you were a Traveler fearing Guardian and totally played by the rules to win that bet between you and Marcus.” Tirion had a smug smirk on her face. “And don’t ask me. Shaxx doesn’t backseat my god killing, I don’t backseat his Crucib— Wait, no! That’s just wrong in so many ways— Don’t laugh!”
“Your business is…” He cleared his throat, trying to not to laugh. “Your business is your business, Guardian.”

“I wasn’t planning to drink today.”

“Yeah, heard ya been busy lately, with the Ab Do… agh… y’know, it would be a lot easier if you would let Hunters name things. You Warlocks make it too weird.”

“A Hunter picked the name.”

“Well, there are some exceptions. Not a whole lotta ‘em.” Cayde pushed an empty glass to her after a long period of silence, she was staring at the liquor shelf. He wasn’t good at reading faces, she often had a stone-cold expression on. It reminded him of Ikora, except somehow less intimidating. “Tower to Guardian. Come in, Guardian.”

“What?”

“Did you just— turn off or something?” He’s seen Ikora fall asleep while standing a couple of times, always freaked him out. He could swear that she and Zavala constantly held competitions as to who could stand the longest. Zavala holds the official record to this day in that.

Tirion grabbed a bottle from the shelf and poured herself a glass. She had a feeling that they both won’t ever see it empty. “I was going to suggest the name *Memento Mori*. Lorcan’s idea was better, more fitting. Less depressing.”

“You know there is a whole superstition that it’s bad luck to change the name of a ship?” Cayde said. “I think I heard something about the belief that seeing a redhead before boarding a ship is also bad luck.”

“You made the second one up.”

“C’mon Guardian, do I look like a guy who would spin tales?”

“I don’t think the superstition applies to grounded space faring ship, with blown out engines.” Tirion looked over at him. “It was about not angering the sea gods, so that they won’t punish you with thunderstorms as you sail to your destination.”

“Hey, good thing we don’t have any space gods.”

“Let’s pretend that we don’t.” She raised her glass before taking a drink. “They usually die before they hit the ground.”

“You still owe me a tale, though.” He looked at the gun holstered on her hip and whistled. “Or two, one about that gun.”

“They’re correlated.” She pulled it out of the holster, getting dirt on the counter. Cayde was too transfixed on the gun to care. “Can’t fire anymore, I’ll repair it at some point. As for the tale, I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?!?” He almost slammed the counter in disappointment.

“I’ll tell you when I remember.”

“You can’t bait me like this!”

“If it’s been too long between your death and your Ghost finding you, you won’t remember
anything. It’s past the point of recovering.” She said. “It’s easy to rebuild a body and its organs, but it’s impossible to rebuild the person. Brains are weird.”

“Exos are kinda like that, y’know. One reset and we’re gone.” He made a wind sound with his mouth.

“I don’t think I ever asked you this; do you remember why they reset you?”

“One of the Brays said something sciency about it once, that it’s about rejection or something. Didn’t write it down, didn't really care then. A lotta the times it was because you were ‘compromised’.”

“Compromised?”

“A little bit of column ‘time to wipe my memory’, and a little bit of column ‘the metalhead saw something he wasn’t supposed to see’.” He struggled to utter the words out with any kind of enthusiasm. “I was nothing but circuits to those people.”

“Same went for Alva.”

“What is her story? Haven’t seen an Exo like that before. I’ve seen a lot.”

“She was a prototype. Started out with good intentions.”

“Heh, it always does, doesn’t it?”

“All I know is that she was made to be a kid. I’d rather not think about how it began or how it was done.” Tirion told, pushing images out of her mind. “Somewhere down the line, she got lost, and became a Guardian. Someone got a hold of her and tried to place murderous tendencies on top of her.”

Cayde looked down. “They never stop there.”

“No. To make it worse, they were incompetent about it, and in a panic, they reset her about five times. They were also incompetent with their mission, so they had to reset her some more to make her forget so that no one would know what they did. They also mangled her Ghost.” She cringed. “She escaped and found us. We took her in, kept her safe.”

“Knowing you and your fireteam, you found ‘em and invited ‘em for a nice dinner filled with laughter, and then you watched the sunset?”

“Yeah, we found them eventually. They were Guardians. So, in retaliation, Haya melted their Ghosts and threw them off the Tower.” Regret was present in her voice. They could have handled it better. “They dived right after their Ghosts, not knowing that they were plummeting to their final death. Once a Warlord, always a Warlord.”

“Wait, I remember that!” Cayde exclaimed. “Man, the sweeper frames had a really bad day. Never figured out what made those Guardians do that, the Ghosts wouldn’t tell us anything.”

“Don’t tell Zavala.”

Cayde sighed, wishing they would get to the point. “Everything told in this bar stays here. Now, where were we? The gun, and that you’re, y’know, Reefborn. Been thinking a lot about that.”

“As said, I don’t know much. All I know is my final moments at the Reef. I set some research on
fire and shot everyone that was between me and the exit, and then fled to Old Russia. I wish I had a long story.” Every single word felt like procrastination. She knew what this was about. She slowly holstered the gun, just to buy more time. “I also know how much you dislike the Reefborn.”

The words echoed in both of their heads.

“Well… I don’t dislike ‘em.” Cayde cleared up. “It’s just that you should never trust ‘em, and they play by their own murderous rules, oh, did I mention that you shouldn’t trust them? I’m kinda trying to make myself clear here.”

“Cayde, I’m not a spy of the Reef. I have no memory of my life there besides what I was told.” She looked straight into his mildly annoyed eyes. “I wouldn’t be here if I was. I hold no allegiance to them, not in this lifetime. I will never betray you, Cayde.”

He squinted at her, a plan forming in his head. Well, the blueprints of a plan, the very barebones. He had a concept. At the very least, there was confidence that he had something. “Prove it.”

“If you have any ideas, I’m happy to act on them. Whatever it is.”

“Spicy Ramen Shop.” He said, without breaking eye contact.

Out of all the things she could think of... “How? And... why?”

“The Ramen Shop. Right now. Let’s go. I’ll explain on the way there why Spicy Ramen is the one and only ramen shop that you will ever want to eat at. They have this special dish for today only that is very appropriate for this situation.” Cayde rambled, and Tirion found it very amusing. “Gettin’ sidetracked, but let me tell you once you try that food... Alright: the rules are that I make the rules and your Ghost is not allowed to heal ya. No cheatin’.” He downed his green drink and hopped off the chair. “Up for provin’ your friendship, Guardian?”

“I am scared, but…”

He didn’t hear whatever she said after ‘I am’ “Nice! C’mon!”

Tirion made sure to finish her drink before following Cayde out through the door. She had a feeling she was going to need it.

Chapter End Notes

Planning 2 chapters of happy things before I cover Forsaken. Just to make Forsaken sting more.
I know nobody else who can laugh along to any kind of joke.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Are you planning to actually pay this time around?”

“I’m tellin’ ya, I’m good for it! Had a bit of a loss streak last time at the Cantina the other day, it’s all good now.” Cayde wrangled the irate cook. “Come on! We’re all buddies here.”

“No.” The old man muttered whilst glaring daggers at the Exo. “No more weaseling out of your debt, Cayde.”

“I’m telling you, I’ve got the Glimmer!” Cayde raised his hands defensively and took a seat. “And you got the best spicy ramen in here. We’re the greatest of pals, ain’t we?”

“My food is the only thing you are ever honest about.” The cook shook his head and started wiping the counter with a damp rag to prepare it for the new customers.

“Reassuring, as always.” Tirion seated herself, taking in the aromas of the small restaurant. The famous neon sign right above her sizzled slightly, not too distracting from the otherwise pleasant atmosphere.

“You look familiar for some reason.” The cook remarked, staring at the Warlock. “Can’t really place you. Did I see you on the Crucible feed the other day?”

Tirion couldn’t decide if she should sigh in relief or cringe. Normal clothes and loose hair made her look rather indistinct. “Yeeaaah… that sounds about right!”

“My sister's obsessed with the Crucible, but It's just too violent for me. No offense.”

“None taken.”

“So, what will it be? Guessing it’s the usual for you Cayde?”

“Yes, and the Special for my friend over here.” Cayde didn’t need to be physically able to smirk to look mischievous. “It’s part of a dare. Don’t tell her anythin’!”

The cook took a gander at Tirion, then back at Cayde. “You know that it— nevermind.”

“What?”

“Not going to tell her anything.” He got to work, not entertaining Cayde any further, much to Cayde's annoyance.

“Huh…” This time around, not taking offense was difficult for her. “Has there always been this prejudice against the Awoken and I’m just now realizing it, or is it a recent thing?”

“Nothing against you folks. Not the ones from Earth, anyway.” He said as he kneaded the dough. “Zavala’s alright. It was also an Awoken who felled Ghaul and saved us.”

“That’s just…” She didn’t know where to begin. “That’s just mildly insensitive.”

“Alright! Change of topic!” That vein on Tirion’s forehead was starting to concern Cayde, and
someone had to intervene. “Where are your oddballs, Guardian? Haven’t seen them around for a while. You permanently moved out of the City or somethin’?”

“We were forced out. The den got destroyed. It’s a long story.” She sighed. “Useless to seek revenge for it when we deserved it, and we have bigger things to worry about. But, you don’t really care and you’re just paranoid about Haya tackling you any minute, aren’t you?”

“Nope, I’m done with that!” Cayde declared. “I heard stories of the Gap, about how one of ‘em held the Wall alongside the other Titans. These new Sunbreakers of Haya’s though… man alive! The Gap woulda been a heckuva lot easier with them. With easier I of course mean we wouldn't have the monthly passive-aggressive contest between the Goliath and Saladin.”

“Warlord knowledge and efficiency combined with Sunbreakers.” The thought was still terrifying. “I saw a recording of a Crucible match where they competed, Shaxx murmured something about banning them from the Crucible for scaring people away. I think he’s slowly getting genuinely angry with her.”

“Zavala said something in a meeting about possibly recruiting them. Had to walk out of the meeting because I was laughing too hard.” He snickered at the memory. "He wanted my opinion on that Hunter friend, Lorcan? Gotta give credit where it's due; a Sunbreaker combined with a Nightstalker is a ticket to immortality. It's a shame that Sunbreakers are notorious for their good nature and cooperation."

"I always found it weird that he doesn't like being alone. Nightstalkers always struck me as loners. Guess it's a friendship match made in heaven."

"Common misconception. Nightstalkers have many friends. It's the bow. Everyone loves the bow."

“You shouldn't worry about those two. You’re not on Haya's murder list.”

“… she has a murder list?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay, why— why can’t you for once find warm and cuddly Titans? I suppose those are as rare as Titans with reasonably sized shoulderplates.” He joked. “Y’know, I get the how with that, I just don’t get the why. Just... why?”

“I think some things just manifest just so that people would ask questions about it.” Knowing where it was going, she tried to get herself out of it.

“You gotta pick a side, Guardian.”

“I’m not participating in the fashion war.”

“C’mon, just admit it. It will hurt at first, but it’s for the better. Just admit that Hunters are the best dressed.”

“Not participating.” She smirked. “Just agreeing that majority of Titans are in the third place.”

“It’s not about the fashion in the end, it’s about how you do things. Titans try way too hard. Hunters however, we are effortless. It’s not that Titans look bad, we just don’t need a bunch of skulls or flaming signs behind us to look good.”

Tirion got exceptionally curious. “What are Warlocks?”
“Uh…” Cayde looked behind him for a second. “Ikora’s right behind us and her hearing is scary good. Ask me another time.”

It was a perfect opportunity to exploit it. “So, with Ikora being back there and all, would you say that Warlocks are the best?”

“Oh, look!” Cayde rubbed his hands together, finding a convenient excuse. “The food is done!”

“Not off the hook!” She reminded him as the cook brought the food to them.

“Look, I don’t wanna fall into a trap like that time Ikora and IIIIII— actually, yeah, she would kill me if I told you that one.” Cayde turned around again and looked at Ikora, and shouted: “Nevermind!”

From what Tirion could see, Ikora didn’t react at all from where she was standing, stuck in her own mind. Tirion just had one more question before Cayde could dig his face into the food. The savoury smells were enough to make her understand why Cayde loved the place so much.

“I will take no offense if you tell me, by the way.”

“What can I say about ya? You’re the kinda types who would shoot yourselves in the head just for an experiment, or a weird vision. They say the Titans are the insane punch crazed one, you lot take it to another level.”

She was surprised by the honesty. “Sounds about right.”

“One large spicy ramen with extra pork dumplings and…” The cook presented, putting Cayde’s plate down. The Exo looked like he wanted to hug the man and never let go. After he finished his ramen, of course. “And the Special for your friend. Enjoy.”

Tirion’s confusion grew when she looked down at the meal. It looked exquisite, smelled even better. Noodles, meat, and some ingredients she didn’t recognize. Glancing up, she noticed that the cook was looking at them both with great entertainment.

“What is going on?”

“Nothin’!” Cayde attempted to put her mind to rest. “Try it!”

“I have a lot of mixed feelings about this…” She lifted some of it with the chopsticks, nothing at all was suspicious about it. She took pride in having a sixth sense about danger, and this wasn’t triggering anything. Getting over it, she took a small bite. The combination of the ingredients, the salt and the spice were perfect, perhaps the best thing she has ever eaten. She forgot all about how she ended up there, until she looked at Cayde. He was staring at her with a combination of confusion and anger. “… what?”

He almost broke his neck when he turned to look at the cook, who was grinning snobbishly at the Exo. “Did you do something? Did you ruin my dare?”

“No.” The man shook his head. “That’s what I wanted to tell you. Awoken can’t taste that specific spice. Beats me why. Makes for interesting discussions, brings in customers. I’m not going to complain.”

“Damn it!”

“This is way too delicious for me to be mad at you, Cayde.” Tirion beamed before taking another
“See? Told ya!” Cayde dug in, refusing to admit to her that he was happy she wasn’t charging a solar grenade. “This gotta be a Golden Age recipe.”

She has never seen Cayde this happy, evidently this was his happy place. The bar was for brooding and thinking, this was for joy and escaping the world just for a little while.

“You know what’s funny?” She whispered, before getting interrupted.

“Oh! You know in a Crucible match when Shaxx gets really agitated and all, and it freaks out the kinderguardians, right?” Cayde began, mouth full of food. “Once saw this poor Hunter fumble with his knife so much Shaxx threatened to throw a Fallen dictionary at him, because we’d all be speaking Fallen if we woulda had a legion of rookies like that at Twilight Gap. Man, you could feel the disappointment of both Shaxx and the Hunter’s Ghost radiating from the screen.”

“Well, that is pretty funny, but no.” Tirion couldn’t muzzle the laugh, and just let it happen. “I’ve been a Guardian for a while, but I never actually lived in the City. I still don’t know what it has to offer. That sounds really sad, actually.”

“Is this a way of you asking for a tour of the City with a friendly Exo?”

“You know the nooks and crannies of this City better than anyone, considering that you owe Glimmer to everyone with a pulse here.” She couldn’t help herself with that joke. “Can’t really take a stroll around the City with Shaxx, mostly because doing that will send the entire City into a full meltdown. The Cabal already did that once.”

“Yeah, I can see how that would be bad. Just reminding you again that I’m still scarred from finding out that Shaxx has feelings, by the way. Thank you!”

“I wish scarring people in that way was the actual problem. A lot of people would find ways to capitalize on it. He… does not handle that well. It’s unfortunate.”

“How do you think I pay off half my debts, Guardian? Infinite blackmail. Just the way I like it.”

“I thought it was a pyramid scheme, but now it makes a lot more sense.”

“Less talking, more eatin’! Last one to finish their food is a dreg face!”

“Hi Cayde!” A child bubbled as he sped past Cayde with a ball in his hands, he laughed when he threw the ball at another boy, almost knocking him over with the force of the throw. There were about a dozen children running around the ruins, immersed in their sport. Barely any parents to speak of.

“As much I enjoy bugging Shaxx I’m glad our bet ended before he taught them how to actually, y’know, kill eachother.” There was a sense of pride in Cayde’s voice as he spoke, looking at the little miscreants.

“He knows where to draw the line.”

“I need to find a way to make them like me again.” Cayde crossed his arms, not taking his eyes off of their little game. He gave a thumbs up at a young girl waving at him, she smiled back as if the gesture made her day. “During the last Dawning the darn kids kept stealing my cloak, hiding in it, and pretending they couldn't see me.”
“I think they still admire you. You’re the Cayde-6.” Tirion said sincerely. “But, don’t ask me for help. I might be the Guardian of Guardians but I just make people angry. Guardian of Guardians is just a fancy way of saying ‘she is good with guns and her Ghost is good at healing’.”

“Well, speaking of that. You really don’t wanna enact some good ol’ fashion revenge on whoever destroyed that base of yours?” He asked her, finding her nonchalance about it rather strange. “I know what I’d do if someone junked my bar like that. Here is a hint: sometimes the solution is as simple as a Golden Gun and a handful of bullets.”

It would be so easy to succumb to it, but she knew better.

“Back when we formed our little group, before the Vault and before the Hellmouth, we weren’t the best people. We still aren’t best people, but we’re trying.” Tirion breathed out through her teeth. The guilt got worse every day. There was no justification for any of the things they did besides greed for Glimmer. “Back then, we were the ones you would call to destroy people’s homes, kneecaps, or Ghosts. For a price, of course. All we cared about was personal gain.”

“Which would make it easy to find whoever destroyed your base. Smart! Only people that can find people who make extremely poor life decisions are people who have experience with extremely poor life decisions.”

“You’re missing the point, Cayde.” She nodded towards the laughing kids. “We had it good in our den, had everything we needed. But, I am willing to bet that at least half of those kids have nothing, not even a soft surface to sleep on. I don’t think we deserve to be at the top of the world.”

“Yeah, that’s why I visit ‘em here. This place is the only distraction they’ve got, and they seem to like Guardians. Even Shaxx for some reason. Who likes Shaxx?” His words harboured slight disdain. “That, and you’d be surprised what these rascals know. They hear everything, and they have no filter what so ever. It’s a goldmine. Win-win.”

“So, you wanted to question them to see if one of them saw anyone break into the base?” She looked rather amused by the gesture, and Cayde gave a half-hearted nod. “Appreciate it. But it’s them I harm if I decide to kill someone in somewhat righteous fury. I need to set a better example.”

“This isn’t just about you, Guardian. Someone stole my beautiful Sparrow, one of them is going to tell me who it was. Finding your perp was just an added bonus.”

“Of course.”

“Knowing some other folks in your party I am having a hard time believing all of you agreed on peace. Just when you think you know someone…”

“I think all of us are just tired of it, we’re moving on. We know that murder won’t solve anything, and we’ll eventually have enough Glimmer to buy everything back.”

“Murder? I was more talking ‘bout stealing one of those creepy skulls Shaxx has and spook them a —” Cayde cut himself off by laughing at what he was saying. “Who am I kiddin’? Who takes non-violence thing seriously?”

She sat down on one of the giant rocks in the rubble, looking at the kids. “Setting a bad precedent won’t help those kids, it won’t help people who matter.”

“Well. I know of an ethical way to make some quick Glimmer.”

“Alright.”
"They’re very fast, and the game they’re playing is… weird." Cayde tried to figure out the logic of one kid who threw the ball at an ally with malicious intent. “From what I can see, there are two teams.”

Neither of them had any self-control. “100 Glimmer on the team led by that one Awoken girl. I’ll double it for every time I’m right.”

“200 on the Wild Bunch and I’m doin’ the same. You’re on.”

They both knew that there is no such thing as a friendly wager. The intensity benefitted the kids, as the Guardians cheering them on raised their morale. It was easy to see Shaxx’s impact, as they utilized methods and teamwork that is often seen in the Crucible. That Awoken girl was relentless, much to Cayde’s dismay. Her specialty was stealth and quickness, snaking around her enemies and knocking them out with a well thrown ball at the back of their neck. Cayde recognized that move, alongside phantom pain at the back of his own neck. He didn’t know what hurt more: him haemorrhaging Glimmer or the memory of the bruised ego. He’ll get back at Shaxx for this.

It was time for the final match, 3 – 2 with the Awoken team winning. It was obvious that she was letting the other team win just for fun, lulling them into a false sense of security. Everyone had bruises and scrapes from sliding around in the sand, but their strength still intact. Fun time was over, and one team became a blur of blue and grey and knocked out five people on the other team. The last surviving player attempted a comeback but missed his target by less than an inch, thus handing the ball over to the enemy. The girl took as much time as she could with the final elimination, threw the ball and earned the win with a smile on her face.

“Oh, come on!” Cayde groaned, but the victory cheering drowned him out. The kids had their own makeshift trophy made out of junk found around the City, which was now in the hands of the victors.

“Correct me if I’m wrong… isn’t it so that the Wild Bunch is remembered for its violent end?” Tirion added some playful salt to the wound.

“There was a reason for it. If you didn’t meet a violent end back then you weren’t good enough at what you did.” Cayde told as he transferred the last of his Glimmer to her. “That’s the only way to live, if you ask me. Your end usually defines you.”

“Not sure about that. Your Glimmer met a violent end, but you aren’t the greatest at betting.”

“Words hurt, Guardian. A lot.”

She laughed joyfully at his feigned moping. “You’ll get your chance at payback. I think I know what I want to do with the Glimmer.”

“Rematch! I think the next Crucible match starts in ten minutes.”

“Give me a minute.” She stood up and did math in her head. “That’s what… 275 Glimmer per kid? Going to make it even with 300.”

“You’re going to pay the kids to like you?” Cayde scoffed, albeit not without humour. “Why didn’t I think of that?”

“I’m going to make sure they get to eat something for the next few days. That’s what Guardians do. Coming?”

“Well. I still need to find my sparrow.” Cayde was actually enjoying this, and it had nothing to do
with the hunt for his Sparrow. It was a bonus, though. “Let’s go!”

“How do you keep losing your Sparrow? I think that’s the sixteenth time the past month. Gives me an idea for a betting pool for charity.”

“It uh…” Cayde raised his hand, struggling to find a specific spot to point at in the Tower’s general direction. “It kinda flew off the Tower during the race. Amanda is mad at me and won’t give me a new one for a while.”

“Shame we couldn’t find it.”

“Eh, it’ll make its way back to me. It always does. Granted it always takes some Glimmer and an apology thrown at Amanda.”

“I’m sure you’ve funded at least ten ships with your mishap fund.”

“Just doin’ my part to help out the City. Consider it charity work.”

Tirion’s smile fell and her face turned suspicious once she noticed something in the distance. It stuck out like a sore thumb, too animatronic to fall under the definition of a bird.

“Hey, Cayde…” Her eyes were focused on the creature, not wanting to lose it. “Can I have your gun?”

“Nope!”

She knew how much the gun meant to him, but the other option was accidentally setting half of the City on fire. Even the most proficient Guardians couldn’t control fire. “I need to borrow it for two seconds. I didn’t bring my own. Rules are for Titans and Warlocks, remember? Rules that involve not having guns around down in the City?”

“What happened to the no murder thing?” He slowly unholstered it reluctance in his voice.

“Shhh…” Tirion shushed him, not wanting to scare it off. Animatronic or not, it could most likely fly. Slowly, she took the gun from Cayde’s hand, making sure to be careful with it. She swiftly aimed the hand cannon at the bird and squeezed the trigger. The sound of the gunshot echoed through the City, but no people were in sight. She handed the gun back to Cayde as soon as it was done and headed for the scrap of metal left on the ground. All of the real birds got scared off by the gunshot, finding a new home on a balcony.

The bullet hit its wing, enough to shut it down. Just as she suspected, a bird made out of metal. A crow made out of metal, to be more specific. She picked it up to examine it further.

“Y’know, I don’t think that’s how birds are supposed to work…” He looked at the bird over her shoulder. “What the hell?”

“A crow. Try to guess who’s responsible.”

“An Awoken Prince who is in an abusive relationship with reality?”

“Well. That’s without a doubt the best description I’ve heard of him yet.” Tirion threw what remained of the metal bird at Cayde for examination, and he caught it effortlessly. “Did you know that finding a dead crow is supposed to bring you good luck?”

“You just had to jinx it. Could be good for me next time we play poker.” He threw it up in the air
to flip it and catch it again, getting his Ghost to scan it when he couldn’t find anything. “Anything about *killing* crows?”

“All allegedly, one dead crow brings you good luck. One alive crow brings you bad luck. Two alive crows mean good luck.” She recited. “Four crows mean wealth, 5 means sickness, 6 means death.”

“Huh. Interesting. What about nightingales?” He pointed at her bond on her arm with his free hand, which had a yellow projection of a bird. “Not gonna lie, I kinda like the bird motif you guys have going on. Not for me, though.”

“It’s from a tale where the nightingale sings away death. What are you planning to do with that crow?”

“Was thinking about sending it to Ikora. She’s gonna want to know about this.”

“Go ahead. I’m sure I’ll find some more around here in case Kouhei wants one.”

The bird disappeared from his hands as it got transmatted away, and he stared at the blue sparkles for a moment. “There is a joke in this somewhere.”

“There is a joke in everything.” She shrugged. “All Uldren is going to get from spying on us down here is rants about the Cryptarch and claims that Warlocks are just faking it all.”

“And of course the constant fawning over Hunters.”

She smirked and started walking towards the Tower. “Your life must be so hard.”

“All the constant praise and admiration gets tiresome, y’know? Don’t get me wrong, it’s always appreciated.” He glanced at the gun at her hip again. “Gonna need to fix that gun of yours. It’d perfect for dueling. When *that* cannon speaks, people listen. Don’t trash it, as a favor to your favorite Exo.”

“I’d need to know the rules first about the duel. I draw the line at wearing boots with spurs.”

"It’s simple. Ten paces, sidearms or Hand Cannons only. Usually to the third rez. Do *NOT* target Ghosts." He explained. “It’s like flipping a coin, except more extravagant. What’s the point in doing anythin’ if you don’t do it with some panache?”

“Hunters…”

“You’re right, there are holes in that plan. Didn’t account for Sunsingers…” He pondered as he walked with her. “Well, you’ve surpassed that. Never mind. I take back the dueling offer.”

“Am I too scary for you?”

“Not really. Ikora is scary. You’re alright, I know ya.” He said. “But, that being said, a whole lot of our plans boiled down to me saying to myself ‘Cayde, you need a Guardian brave and crazy enough to do somethin’ crazy’, guess who’s name always came first to mind? I needed someone to take things seriously, cause then I didn’t have to. How do you think I stay looking so young?”

“When people find out you can do anything, you become *the person* for everyone in your circle who needs the world saved.” She said. “Unfortunately the brightest lights sometimes burn out fastest. It’s been a lot since I’ve got revived.”

“You’re not plannin’ on retiring, are you? I’m depending on you. Wouldn’t want me to get bored,
would you?"

“No. I don’t think I have fulfilled my destiny yet.”

“Well, soon we’re gonna get out of this place. Need to get that last Baron.” Cayde looked up at the sky, already picturing the purple clouds, wrecked ships and broken Fallen skulls, and skulls of anything else Variks might have captured. It’ll be quite a show. “After that, maybe do another tour of the system, probably shoot some people. Thanks to you, I have some pretty great stories to tell as I go.”

“I’m sure that none of them are exaggerated. Not a single one.”

“No, no exaggeration. Just adjustments. I don’t need to exaggerate the tales about ya.”

She didn’t want to ask what aspects of her achievements he adjusted, so she decided to change the topic. “So, what do you hope to find at the Reef? Besides the obvious, of course.”

“Them finally investing in an elevator for their treasure room.” He sounded way too serious about it. “I have a bad coupling in my leg that wasn’t there before I visited that treasure room. It gives me bad fits when I sleep, Variks owes me for that. He always denies it, wants to take a look at my Ghost.”

“Priorities.”

“Good priorities, Guardian. Proper priorities. On my part, not Variks. I dunno what priorities he has but it's the ones I stay away from.”

They reached the wall, and the entrance to the elevator which leads to the top of the new Tower. He would have bet her that he can run up the stairs quicker than her, but somehow, he was in bigger debt now than he was when he woke up hours ago. It was a rocky ride up, and both Guardians silently thanked their Ghosts.

“Was fun today.” She barely stopped smiling as they explored the City the whole day. “There was the part where you tried to kill me with food, but I robbed you...”

“It wasn’t about trying to kill you, it was about trust.” Cayde made it perfectly clear. “I agree. Gotta have to do it again sometime. Except with more guns, and less Glimmer loss. The City isn’t fond of the Guardians using our Light abilities here and I have nothing to do with the reason why.”

“I’ll make sure to have my hand cannon repaired for it.”

“You don’t want to know how much I want to see it in action. That thing is a beautiful relic.”

The doors opened and they faced a confetti hell. She wanted to find the person who thought that the confetti was a good idea and lecture them for an hour or two. It did look beautiful, though. From far, far away.

“What now? Going to bug Shaxx about the popularity contest?”

“Once I’ve talked to Ikora about these weird crows, that big ox better watch out! It’s a vendetta now.”

Tirion chuckled at the nickname. “Big ox?”

“His nicknames for me are based on various swear words, mine are based on big horned terrifying
things. Fair’s fair.” Cayde backed away, head jerking towards where he thought Ikora was. He halted in his steps, and raised a finger as something sprung to mind. “Wait, hold on… I forgot something.”

“What?”

"Where the... I swear I had it!" Cayde started tapping all of his pockets, even his cape, as he searched for something. He came out victorious in the end when he pulled out a piece of red paper from his belt pocket. “Ah, here it is! Thought one of the kids snagged it from me as you were talking to them.” He straightened out the corners of it before handing it over to her.

“What is it?” Tirion slowly took it from his fingers.

“Coupon for the Spicy Ramen.” He explained. “Just tell them I sent you next time you’re there. Give them this coupon. I'm good for it.”

“Thank you.” She smiled, delighted. “Though, you should really hurry to Ikora.”

“Ayup!” The urgency and a sense of danger set in with her words. “See you around, Guardian! Ikora...! Ikora!!”

Cayde was gone instantly, bumping into people as he jogged away for the emergency Vanguard meeting. Once he was out of sight, she looked down at the coupon in her hands.

*Valid for one free bowl of ramen with a side of gyoza.*

It expired decades ago...
I won't need any help to be lonely when you leave me.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“You’re still there?” Cayde waved a gloved hand in front of her face. “As I was sayin’ I… You okay, Guardian?”

They were at the bar. A sense of disquiet overtook her, it froze her where she was sitting.

This wasn’t supposed to happen.

“I…” She stuttered. The distress was like a bruise you didn’t remember getting or trying to remember a dream. A memory she couldn’t access. Tirion reached up to rub her stinging eyes to find tears on her fingertips. “I… I think I choked on my drink.”

Cayde grabbed the brown bottle and read the yellow tinted label. “Yeah, shoulda known not to buy from the Cryptarchs. Might wanna stop drinking this, who knows what kinda microbots they put in this.”

“You’re only telling me about this now?”

“There is no danger until the danger actually happens.”

“As if you’re the best advocate for handling danger.”

“Hey, I’ve done pretty well!” Cayde defended himself and leaned back until the chair was standing on two legs. “See?”

“Your Ghost is too good for you.”

“That she is.” He grabbed the counter and pulled himself back so that he wouldn’t fall backwards. Done that one too many times. “But as I was saying: watching you in action… the precision. The ferocity… the… yeah, okay. I’m making you sound better than me.”

“I was better than you.” Tirion gave him half a smile.

“I’m sorry, but who took out a dozen Cabal with two throwing knives four times in a row?” He proudly pointed at himself with both of his thumbs. “But who was countin’? Oh, and the turrets!”

“You mean those Cabal who ran so slow they never reached my sea of grenades?”

“Point. Proven. Check and mate. Also, I was the one operating the turrets. That’s an additional hundred kills. Looks like you owe me some Glimmer.”

“With my help! And then you ran away to—” It wasn’t a flood of memories, it was a knife in her stomach.

Only real thing about that place was the anguish.

“To be magnificent!”

“And you died.”
“Not my greatest achievement.” Cayde didn’t sound phased. “I looked majestic crashing down, though! You should have seen the look on Petra’s face!”

“You’re dead, Cayde.” Her voice was quivering as she repeated the words, and she closed her eyes in an attempt to shut it all down and wake up. It was just part of being Awoken. She celebrated the day she taught herself how to control her dreams, how to break out of the fantasy. This was the first time in a long while she wished for ignorance. Only way to get out of it is to force herself to wake up. “You’re dead, go away.”

“Hey, I did tell you to not blame yourself. *That* was on me. All of it. And you know how much I hate taking responsibility for not-so-good things.” There was no shutting it out. His voice was in her head. *Wake up.* “You’ll be fine, Guardian.”

Cayde wasn’t going to go away, so she opened her eyes. She swallowed the lump and lowered her head. He was dead. Clinging on will just make it worse. “I wonder if I could have done anything different. I wonder if I could have saved you if I would have ran just a little bit faster. I wonder if I could have saved you if I hadn’t rebelled against the Vanguard. Maybe I could have postponed it, but Hunters walk their own paths. They always have. You would have left anyway. Maybe if we hadn’t taken it into our own hands I—I…”

“Hey, you can’t say it wasn’t a good run. Was gonna get that hand dealt to my anyway, so why not go out in style, eh?” Cayde nudged her with his elbow. “My biggest regret is that I’ll never get Creepy to laugh at any of my jokes. I take that back actually. I think she’ll laugh when she finds out that I died. Record that for me, would’ya?”

“I don’t know what to do.” Tirion closed her eyes and let the tears roll down. “I don’t know what to do to win this.”

"Forget winning! Shoot for the stars, Guardian. Or just shoot. A lot. Preferably shoot the mopey Prince that killed me. The winning will come." He got off his chair and put a comforting hand on her shoulder. "Survive. Sometimes, when you just survive, everything works out just fine."

“Sound advice.”

“Well… I guess I just have one more favor to ask ya. For old time’s sake. Well… *two.*” Cayde removed his hand and looked at the door and then back at her. “Item the first, get Ace back. That goes without saying. Second; when you meet Creepy again, assuming she hasn’t become a weird Hive god, make my death sound as ridiculous as possible. Or just factual. Either way, make her laugh. I think she’s gonna laugh harder if you tell her exactly what happened.”

“I’ll try to remember.”

Dark.

Only thing she could feel was the cold of the bar counter against half of her face.

Tiny footsteps outside of the dark, they were loud on purpose. Loud but soft, trying not to startle her. The datapad right next to her vibrated slightly, demanding attention. Tirion glanced at it through a small hole between her arms before returning to the darkness.

/ *You are hurting.* /

“What gave you that idea…” Tirion murmured into the wet counter, seeing faint specs of light in the darkness she created for herself. She tightened her arms around her head to drown it all out. “I
lost my friend. I lost my friend and it was my fault.”

Another vibration. Another glance at the blue screen.

/He wasn’t hurting before he died. /

Tirion moved her arm out of her sight to see Alva sitting across. “Do you even know what happened? These mangled Fallen… the Scorn. The Barons shot his Ghost, then they abused him. That wasn’t enough. He was shot with his own gun and left to die. How didn’t that hurt?”

/Not that kind of hurt. He wasn’t hurting before that. He was happy. /

“I don’t follow, and I don’t care to follow. Cayde’s dead.”

/I listen. To the radios. /

“I don’t need anyone to listen. I don’t have much to say right now.”

/He left his family because he was faced with no other choice. Hurt. The first hurt. The hurt that left the biggest hole. He never forgot them, deep inside. Hurt and regret. Still grasping on to his Queen, grasping on to the memory of the feeling. /

/Deep Stone Crypt. They mistreated him. Wiped his memory if he saw something they didn’t want him to see. He was a toy. We all were. /

/One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Hurt. He left at six. He wanted to become a Seven to forget it all. He knew he couldn’t forget. The memories would fade but the feelings won’t. /


“Can’t you just leave me alone?”

/But, he didn’t die hurting. He never became a defeatist. /

/He called Amanda every time he had a technical issue, as if she was the only one who could fix it. Last time he called her he set his terminal background to something bad. It was always funny to watch her sigh and disconnect from the call. She’d never get him in trouble. She knew that the option was either to help him or watch him trash a helpless terminal. /

The little Exo didn’t believe in getting deterred.

/Getting jealous of Hawthorne’s poncho, trying to order a custom design for himself. He’d never wear it, though. The cape would never get replaced. /

/He tried to stop Hawthorne’s mission to get Ikora to stop drinking tea. No one won. He claimed that he won. /

/Spicy ramen with Ikora, it always took a lot of convincing. Ordering pies with a lot of mayo to prank Zavala, because he wasn’t allowed within 50 feet of the Titan. Not sure how that happened. /

/Daily bets with Shaxx, always toying with lines. Cayde always had the upper hand, knowing darkest secrets. He saw something in you two. He had something like that long ago, too. /

/He didn’t die hurting. He knew pain better than anyone else, but he didn’t die hurting. He didn’t like the Tower because he couldn’t change the world from there. But he had happiness in it. Unlike
“It hurts.” It even hurt to speak in anything above a whisper.

“I know.”

“I miss him.”

“I know.”

The silence came back. She needed it. Silence made her think about nothing. She put her arms back around her head, returning to darkness for a little while. The light hurt too much. She didn’t know where the light switch was, Cayde never told her.

Tirion heard a soft thud next to her on the counter and moved just enough to see Alva pocketing her tools, and a familiar gun next to her. It was as clean as it could get, all of the misaligned parts back in their place.

“I appreciate the gesture, but I don’t think leaving me alone with a gun is a good idea.”

“You have no bullets. I made sure.”

Tirion gathered her strength and pushed herself up to a sitting position, wincing at the light. She grabbed the gun with shaky hands, strange energy ebbed around it. Alva managed to make it look brand new, like it never spent a decade buried underneath the ground. That’s why she didn’t want to move from where she was lying on the cold counter. Moving raised questions, caused blood to flow as normal, caused itching in her brain she couldn’t scratch.

She went to the bar because she didn’t want to think. The gun forced her to think, like that was its purpose.

A decade. Ten years is a long time. Long enough for things to rot.

“It’s a puzzle.”

Tirion sighed. “Everything is a puzzle nowadays, Alva.”

“Yes. This is a different one. By you, but not meant for you. Meant for them.”

“For whom?”

“I don’t know.”

She took it step by step.

“If not tampered with or taken care of, things rot and corrode. Pictures rot, weapons rot, diaries rot. Old handwriting fades. Old story books rot. Entropy is the one thing which is truly inevitable. So, why did all of my useless mementos survive and Cayde didn’t? For a sick joke? It…” The realization slowly dawned on her. The memories, the dreams, the visions… the answers were right there all along. The pictures and the diaries were supposed to act as inconspicuous jump starters just in case a best-case scenario happened. It obviously didn’t, as she couldn’t remember anything. Whoever did this, they weren’t expecting a best-case scenario to happen, they were anticipating hindrances. Hence why they scattered clues, to guide her where she needs to be. To guide her home. “Can’t believe it took me this long to put two and two together. I knew something was off…”
She found it. Using her nail, she opened a tiny hatch on the side of the gun to see what it was hiding. Thick layers of dirt covered it before.

A data chip of sorts was housed there, marked with numbers. *One out of Ten.*

“It would be ridiculous if creatures with extraordinary lifespans lacked the knowledge to preserve things they cherished, don’t you think?” Tirion slowly took the chip out. Just as all things they’ve found from her past, the chip was spotless. No one answered, as Alva was long gone. “Ghost? Ghost, where are you?”

“I’m here.” He murmured. “I’m still here.”

“It’s taking me all I have to not destroy this right now.” She took a deep breath, holding the data chip right infront of her swollen eyes. “To not just shoot up this bar and go to back to the Reef. That’s where I should be. That’s where it’s been guiding me to.”

“We need to make the Barons pay for what they did.” She has never heard him sound so resentful. “For Cayde.”

Tirion pulled the datapad closer to her. Another thing she wanted to smash. The screen of the device was riddled with news now, and she did her best to block it out. Cayde would have been flattered by all the attention. “There are eight Barons and a Prince that I want dead. Their time will come.”

“Do you expect to find anything that could help us with that in that chip?”

“I don’t know.” Tirion put the chip into the datapad. There was something wrong with the footage, producing only errors. Just as she was about to give up, a voice started to speak through the speakers.

It was her own voice, from years ago.

“… I unfortunately have to cut this entry into pieces. I’d rather lose pieces instead of the entire picture. Hopefully, you’ll find them all.

*I have always feared regret more than failure, regret that I didn’t try.*

*I expect a lot of myself and extremely little of others. But, I’d be very grateful if you took the time to understand why I did what had to be done for the betterment of everyone.*

*I ask that you look at your capabilities; everyone has the capacity to forgive and understand, but I’m pre-emptively very flattered by the amount of resentment this will get me.*

*The deal is struck. But worry not about me getting away unscathed. I can assure you the consequences of the deal will be a fitting requital.’*

The recording stopped abruptly, and Tirion seized the datapad, ready to throw it at the wall.

“Guardian! Wait!”

She froze, realizing what she was doing.

*Everyone has the capacity to forgive and understand.*

It wouldn’t leave her head. The fact that it was her own voice and the fact that she believed something like that once made it all worse.
What was there to forgive and understand?

“What?”

“I don’t blame you for wanting to destroy it, but… There is something in that chip.” Ghost spoke, scanning the datapad. “There. I managed to snag the coordinates for the next node, embedded in the chip. It’s a treasure hunt of sorts.”

She put it down back on the counter and ejected the chip, deciding to pocket it instead. “And?”

“It’s in Trostland, in Devrim’s church to be more precise.”

“Appropriate.” Tirion would laugh if she could. Instead, she let her head drop into her hands. She needed to stay afloat. “Very… appropriate.”

“Do you remember anything at all of your Reef life? I thought that Kouhei was lying at first, because you know how he is. But this…”

“Nothing. Only thing I ‘remember’ are the dreams of before the Collapse. I’m not sure if I can rely on those.” Cayde’s extensive liquor cabinet looked temping. Too tempting. She had to resist. “The Traveler lied to me when I visited that shard. Perhaps not. Perhaps the Darkness it showed me was metaphorical. I don’t want to go back to that shard.”

“I don’t think the Traveler would lie.”

“Witholding truth is the same thing as lying, no matter the reason.” She brushed her dirty hair back with her fingers. “I want to be an optimist and hope that it was lost in translation.”

Tirion heard soft knocking on the door. She knew it wasn’t him, knew it wasn’t a dream. She knew that he won’t come in here with a quip about something stupid, like spilling coffee all over important mission reports.

“We’re in here.” Her Ghost answered for her. The door opened slowly, with Shaxx behind it. The cold of the outside tainted the warmth of the bar.

“Thought I might find you here. How are you holding up?”

Tirion said nothing. Instead, she got off her chair and moved closer to him, and wrapped her arms around him as much as she could. He returned the hug with twice the strength. That’s what she needed right now. Not dreams, not mysteries. Not thinking. Just this. Just for a second, because she doesn’t allow herself these moments.

“I want to go home.” She spoke into his hard chest plate, his arms were the only thing that kept her standing.

“We can.” He whispered into her hair, hating how he sounded angry instead of comforting.

“What about the Crucible?”

“You’re more important.”

The Tower looked completely devoid of all life, all grey. The lively Solstice decorations were gone. She never thought she would miss the aggravating confetti. Just a few hours ago she was whining about how she couldn’t get it out of her hair, that she was cursed with it for all eternity. Cayde kept mocking her for it, tricking her into thinking that she’s still got some stuck to her robes.
Everyone had questions, most were too deep in mourning to ask the questions out loud. The rest were terrified of Shaxx. On any other day the two Guardians would be the gossip of the City as they walked through the City, his hand wrapped around her shoulder They made it to his quarters without saying anything or having anything said to them.

Tirion was still in her robes from the trip, still smelled of the Prison. Her bond was shattered, the orange hologram dead. Not even Alva could repair it. It marked a broken promise, a life she couldn’t save. She made two promises. To not let him die, and to not let him die alone. She kept one. She hoped that she could keep the first one.

She needed to start somewhere. A bath. She’ll never forget that smell. Melted metal, oil. Corrupted Ether. Smell of rot coming from the Barons. Uldren’s smirk. The smoke coming out of the gun, now in Uldren’s hands. It was a disaster. If they hadn’t gone, the Barons would have broken out either way. They were imprisoned for a reason. She couldn’t help but think that the same applied to Guardians, that they were Imprisoned in the Tower and ordered around by the Vanguard for a reason. Let a Guardian run loose and they strike deals with Cabal emperors. That taste of freedom becomes addicting, and they get people they care about killed.

“I made a wager with Cayde during the Red Legion attack…” Shaxx stared at his helmet in his hands. Usually when he took it off after a long day it felt like he was able to breathe. Not in that moment. “Ten thousand Glimmer a Cabal head. The only prize is our lives. For all time. I’m not sure if he knew what I meant by that.”

Tirion collapsed on the couch. She longed for hot water but had no strength to take herself there. Shaxx joined her side slowly. She couldn’t make out his expression; a mix of anger and respect and something else she couldn’t place. Sometimes he was easier to figure out with his helmet on.

“We had at least five notebooks to keep track of our bets and what we owed each other. It spanned for months. We were always even. Until today.”

“There is that saying. *Guardians never die. But we don’t forget those who do.*” He sighed. “Cayde, at times, was an annoying sly bastard, but he knew how to make an impression on the world. People are lucky if only a few people remember their names after they’ve died. And in Cayde’s case, the colossal debt.”

“I won’t be surprised if his list of debts inflate his will to the point where we can’t read the file.”

“Wouldn’t be Cayde otherwise.”

Deep seated anger kept her from falling asleep again. “The Prince has his gun, the Ace. I need to get it back for Cayde. What do you know about the Tangled Shore?”

“Lawless frontier. Every Redjack I send to the Tangled shore gets eviscerated. But…”

Despite almost looking like a member of the Scorn, she still tried. “Don’t tell me to rest.”

“You need to rest. Try it for just an hour, at least. You had a long day.” He was convinced that the defiance on her face wasn’t choice, but instinct. He reached out and touched her face and gently turned her head towards him. “I’ll be here.”

She put her own hand over his on her face. “Best I can do is 30 minutes. No more than 45.”

“I’ll give you a pass. Just this once.”
“Haya?”

“Yeah?” She looked at Huritt dead in the eyes, almost in annoyance from disrupting her armour cleaning. It was covered in black oil from their recent scuffle with the Cabal. Titans had a tendency to get up close and personal with their kills. Hygiene on the battlefield always went out through the window. “You look like you want to perform an experiment on me and I need you to stay away.”

“I’ve been thinking. You… disaffirm a lot of things.”

“Oh, okay?”

“Your memories, of how it was before.” He broke it down for her. “You’re the only Guardian I know of who didn’t lose their memories on resurrection. A non-Exo one, to be more specific.”

“I don’t know. Why are you asking me about this?” Haya couldn’t make heads nor tails about what he was getting at. “Tirion is the brainy one.”

“Guess I can ask her what she thinks of it when she gets here.” Huritt sighed, disappointed. “There is so much we could recover if we could force people to remember. There has to be a reason why the others forgot and you remember. Why do you refuse to share what you remember of the Golden Age?”

“Why do all Warlocks ask me this question? Even Osiris was curious. Why is the sky blue? Why is Tirion blue?” Haya scoffed. “I don’t know anything more than what has been recovered. There was a cleaner big ball in the sky, I was an asshat. There, that’s your history lesson for today.”

“There has to be something that only you remember, something that could help us.”

“You seriously underestimate how self-absorbed I was back when I wasn’t a Guardian.” Haya continued cleaning the armor, with harder movements this time. “I didn’t care about absorbing and remembering the world because I had no reason to do so. No reason was given to memorize it. The world was… there. It was just… there.”

“I don’t really understand.”

“Do you remember the embroidery on the robe you wore two years ago?” She asked a question she didn’t want an answer for. “No, no you don’t. Because that day you put on a random robe on and forgot everything about it. Someone coulda asked you in the middle of the day to list three colors in the embroidery, and you wouldn’t be able to list them at the top of your head. You wouldn’t be able to tell them what it depicted without looking at it, either. The world was that robe back then. Got any more questions?”

“I can’t say you don’t know how to paint a picture.”

“Look, I…” She wanted to give Huritt at least something. “I barely remember that final day. I went to a party to forget about the world and the world erased itself. I think I did enough drugs that day to keep me alive through the Collapse. Guess the Traveler cursed me. Or maybe I just gave up seconds before my Ghost found me.”

“I guess that makes sense, considering—” The Warlock was cut off by a Hunter speeding through the ship, stopping when he noticed the two. His Ghost was a few feet behind him, struggling to catch up.

“Finally done watching your movies, Lorc?” Haya teased.
His Ghost kept nudging him on the shoulder, silently telling him that he should hurry up and go to Orbit. They needed to leave. “Cayde’s dead.”

Haya braced herself for a pun. She wasn’t going to fall for it again. “Lorc…”

“I just got the message from Shaxx.” He caught his fidgety Ghost with his hand as the nudging was starting to hurt. “I have no idea what’s happening, the newsfeeds got throttled. The Vanguard haven’t made a formal announcement, I don’t think.”

“How’s Tirionna?”

“She’s fine.” Lorcan immediately frowned deeply at his choice of words. “Well… she’s mortified. But she’s alive. She’s the one who brought Cayde’s… body in about an hour ago.”

“I’m guessing that the Reef went completely sideways.” Haya shook her head and discarded the armour. “Do you know how he died?”

“Nothing yet.”

“Well. Let’s go!”

“Where? To crash Shaxx’s apartment?”

“Yep! Remember to lock the door, Huritt!” Half of her body was already gone when she said that quip. Her Ghost already set the course.

Truth was, she didn’t know Cayde. No one did besides Cayde himself. She knew who he was, but she didn’t know him. It was hard to grieve, or feel anything about it. To her, he was one of many lost. But at the same time, to her it was a friend who was grieving. Haya was in the same place, not too long ago. She owed it to her friend to be nearby.

But Cayde was… Cayde. The cowboy, the stark opposite of Zavala. And, whether they wanted to admit it or not, the glue that kept the Vanguard together. It wasn’t a secret around the parts that the Vanguard was similar to a building about to collapse in on itself. Partly their own fault, and partly the fault of an insubordinate fireteam rebelling against them. The Red War shook everyone up. Zavala and Ikora barely saw eye to eye any more, disagreements in faith and about what Guardians should stand for. Disagreements about the future. Disagreements on how they should move things forward. Inevitably, there will be disagreements on how they should handle Cayde’s death, and how they should retaliate. If they should retaliate.

Cayde was the only thing that kept them in the same room, even if it was just for a laugh.

Losing the Speaker was bad enough for the City. Losing Cayde was another big stride towards the second collapse. The City needed a leader, and no one wanted to lead it. Eventually, someone will exploit that.

Haya had her Sunbreakers, growing every week. They were almost back to their former glory.

Lorcan and leadership roles went together like Oryx and adequate parenting skills.

Kouhei wanted little to do with the City. The Reef was his priority. The question that no one dared to ask him yet was about which side of the Reef, the royalty or the lawless shore.

Alva and Huritt were out of the question.
That left Tirion, who would never go for it. Fate was setting her up for it, and she was very well aware of that. For every day that went by it became more and more difficult to associate herself with the City. There were things that kept her there, but it was getting harder to hide that she was ashamed of what it had become. It was wrong to be ashamed of it, the things she was angry about were just part of the wound left by the Cabal. A wound they kept picking, never allowing it to heal.

No one knew what they were doing. The wound remained open, and they had to do something before the body dies of an infection.

The increasingly violent knocking on the door yielded no response. Didn’t stop Haya.

“Hey! Let us in!” Haya insisted. “It’s us, Tweedlehammer and Tweedlebow. We’re here for Alice.”

They heard the lock of the door click very slowly, and it took even longer for the door to open. Shaxx was as peeved as they expected him to look.

Shaxx frowned at the two Guardians. “Do I even need to ask how you know where we live?”

“We figured out how to kill Oryx and where he was hiding. Do you think figuring out where people live is is difficult for us?”

Shaxx couldn’t argue with that logic, and moved to the side to let them in. As disgruntled as he was, they were still her friends. “I suppose it’s not an issue.”

“Don’t worry. She never told us where you live.” Haya stepped into the warmth, Lorcan following after. She expected skulls. A lot of skulls. Skulls and a witch’s cauldron to make poultices to heal his voice every night. She didn’t expect it to look cozy, and harbour that many books. Most of them were from before the Golden Age, transcripts of plays. She theorized that there were guns in those books. That had to be it. The furniture looked brand new, unlike theirs which was full of holes and barely together. “We’re just… very clever and nosy assholes. Where is she?”

“Asleep. Her Ghost is with her.” The table next to the couch was covered in notes with Tirion’s handwriting and datapads. Notes about the Fallen, the Awoken, and something about the Ascendant Realm. “As per usual, she didn’t go out without a fight.”

“You didn’t go all Crucible on her, did you?”

“No, I didn’t. I’d like to know what you mean by that.”

“Loudly ask her what she thinks would have happened if the Guardians at Six Fronts just gave up, and tell her that she’d be dead?” Haya shrugged. “I don’t know, trying to make conversation. Cayde’s dead.”

“Well, what do we know?” Lorcan asked, getting her out of the situation. Too many Titans in one room. “What happened to Cayde?”

There was no other option besides bluntness. “Uldren Sov murdered him. He has an army of Fallen by his side. As far as I can tell, they’re only a threat to the Reef.”

“Oh boy!” Lorcan feigned joy, with an added small hop. “I can’t wait until the Vanguard decide that this is our problem and they start a war against the Reef and it’ll be a whole thing! Casualties in path of revenge are completely fine, am I right?”

“If you truly believe that they’re going to do that, there is ample time to stop them.” Shaxx
informed him. “They won’t do anything until after the funeral. They need time.”

“When’s that?”

“In three days.”

“There was more time than that between the Hive arriving and them deciding to send Guardians to the Moon. I think we’re good.”

Shaxx could never read Lorcan and attributed that slight quaver in the Hunter’s voice to just being tired. “You shouldn’t be treating this as a joke.”

Lorcan started pacing back and forth, for dramatic effect to accompany his speech; “Well... two of my friends are Awoken, you’re in love with one, and there are a couple hundred living in the City below, including children. The Vanguard are prone to starting wars where they really shouldn’t, the Awoken prince Uldren Sov of the Awoken killed someone who was beloved by the entire City, people here tend to become paranoid and start conspiracy theories which lead to prejudice and bigotry...” He stopped for a minute to feign deep thinking, with one hand dramatically rubbing his chin. “Yeah! Of course I’m treating this as a joke! I’m not scared at all! Do I sound sarcastic enough yet? I don’t think I do—”

“Alright...” Shaxx gently cut him off. The tremor in the Hunter’s voice overpowered the attempt at humor. “I do get your point, and it won’t come to that. I’ll make sure of it.”

“Good.” Lorcan dropped the sarcastic act. He could hide the fear, but he didn’t want to. Not when they were lives he cared about on the line. “We can’t let them start any wars, no matter what they say. They will try to rally us. What does Tirion plan to do about it all?”

“She wants to get Cayde’s gun back, which now lies in the hands of the Prince. Uldren shot him with it.”


“Could be guilt, a reminder of the sacrifices he had to do.” Haya said. “Could be him thinking that he’s a tough guy, trying to convince himself.”

“Or it could be a sick trophy.” Shaxx argued.

“You don’t keep unique things, like guns, of the people you’ve killed as trophies. You don’t shoot someone with their own gun if you know what you’re doing.” She looked away from the notes she was examining to look at Shaxx. “If you are dumb enough to take a gun as a trophy, you don’t fire it. Ever. You keep it there as a sick reminder, but you don’t use it. He should be easy to take down, because he’s obviously a scared idiot.”

“Is that what you did in your Warlord group?”

“We never took the guns of dead men, or in general anything that looked like it was sentimental to the dead as trophies. We usually took fingers, or teeth, or parts of their clothing to make a quilt to wear as armor. Where do you think Shiro got the inspiration for his cloak from? Those are trophies.”

“Why did you actively avoid sentimental things, may I ask?” Shaxx wondered. “Warlords weren’t familiar with morals.”

“Because no one cares about missing fingers or teeth. But, something of personal value? There is
someone out there who will go on a roaring rampage of revenge to get it back for the dead person. We didn’t need that. We had better things to do.” She sat down on the couch and returned to the notes. “You know how the Dark Ages were. Lacking morals didn’t mean lacking priorities. Lacking morals also meant that we had a lot of stolen guns and by the goddamn Traveler we didn’t need any more. Either Uldren is stupid or he actually wants to get killed. Or both. If it weren’t for the gun I’d say that he isn’t worth anyone’s time. He’ll get himself killed without a doubt.”

“Kouhei made Uldren sound like he has the mental capacity of a child.” Lorcan joined her. “I don’t think the fair prince thought it through as much as you think.”

“Doing things subconsciously is a thing.”

“Do you regret any of it, Haya?” Shaxx asked, stepping closer to the two. “The Dark Ages?”

“I do. But honestly?” She looked up at him with her broken eyes, making sure he saw them. “if I hadn’t done the things I regret now, I wouldn’t have survived to tell this tale. That was the Dark Age for you. Kind-hearted Guardians of today are standing on the shoulders of giant assholes of hundreds of years ago.”

“Remind me later to tell you how I lost my horn.”

“In exchange to hear the story about how I destroyed my eyes, everything I was and my heritage?” She saw right through him. At least believed that she did. “Maybe some other day.”

“Should I be happy that I missed out on the Dark Ages?” Lorcan wondered. “I guess I should, huh. Forget I asked.”

“Yeah…” Haya put her finger on one of the notes, searching for an exit. “The hell is a Dreaming City?”

“You during the Twilight Gap?”

“The Awoken homeland.” Tirion answered for them, who had snuck up on them. “Half of it is lost to the Ascendant realm, other half is lost to Awoken oddness.”

“Shaxx…” Haya turned to him again. “Carry her back to bed.”

“I’m fine.” She raised a hand to stop potentially getting carried away.

“She’s not.” Her Ghost said. “I don’t have the strength to knock her out. Ghosts weren’t made to hurt their Guardians in any way, even if it’s for the best. Shaxx? Do you mind?”

“I’m not doing that.” He shook his head. “I know better than telling her what to do.”

“Hmm?” Haya perked up with a smirk. “Really? Interesting!”

“Don’t read into what I said any more than you already are.” The words didn’t make her smirk any less.

“Oh, trust me, that just made her read into it more.” Despite trying to joke, Tirion didn’t sound cheerful.

“You look like Haya during Twilight Gap.” Lorcan’s joke failed. It also made him remember why she looked like that. “That… that sucked. I’m sorry, for what happened to Cayde.”

“Yeah…” Tirion whispered and Shaxx grabbed her hand. “I don’t want to talk about it. I don’t
know what to do, either. For once in my life.”

“We figured it’s best to wait until after the funeral.” Lorcan said. “To see what the Vanguard plan to do, and then go directly against it.”

“Sounds like a plan.” She couldn’t muster the strength she thought she had. “I won’t stay up long. I need you two to do me a favor.”

“Anything.”

“I need you to grab a cache, in Trostland. Don’t ask questions about it.”

“Sounds ominous. Where is it?”

“Info forwarded to your Ghosts.” Ghost informed them. “Well, one of them anyway. Your Ghost hates me.”

“Oh! That reminds me!” Lorcan pepped up slightly. “She finally picked a name. Harlow. After an actress.”

“Nice name, but… Ghosts don’t usually pick their own names.”

“Have you met my Ghost?” Lorcan didn’t need an answer, so he turned to Tirion. “And yeah, we can do it. I don’t think any of us will be able to sleep. Gives us an excuse to not fall into a pit of future despair.”

Tirion managed a smile as the two stood up. “Thank you.”

There was one more matter Haya had to take care of before she left for EDZ. Lorcan had already left, and she was confident that it wouldn’t take long. She was ready to summon her hammers at any moment’s notice just in case. She hoped that she saw wrong. The gate was left half opened, making it easy to go through. Even with all her armour, she managed to do so unnoticed. He was too focused on something in a chest. Vex parts by the look of it.

"You bitch." Her mutter made him to turn around instantly.

"Abigail! Good to see ya!" The Drifter stretched out his arms on either side of him, either to appear welcoming or to hide what was behind him. "Don't look a day over 1760! Have I ever told you that Warlord cult did some great things to you?"

"I hope that gun in your belt goes off and shoots your balls off.”

"I missed that attitude, Abbie.” His words made her clench her jaw so hard she almost broke all her teeth. “As a matter of fact, I could use some of it in my Gambit. Rumors about your Sunbreakers have spread far and wide. They would fit right at home.”

“Not interested.” Haya rolled her eyes.

“What? Have you become a law-abiding citizen or somethin’? That one-horned idiot would never allow you to do stuff you’d get to do in my Gambit. Your little army is too good for the Crucible.”

“You don’t know him. Shaxx is loud for entertainment. He can be quiet when— when he wants to.” The Drifter raised an eyebrow at that. “You, however, are mentally deranged. There are rules.”

“Since when have the Sunbreakers been about rules? You have become soft, just like the rest of
this City. Ouros must be rolling in her grave. Your whole thing is being bad guys for Glimmer. Exactly what I need. Coincidentally, what I need is rare to find these days because everyone in this City is so… nice.” He couldn’t withhold that scowl at the end of his sentence.

“I know what you do.” Haya had neither patience nor time. “My Sunbreakers will not touch your little piece of hell.”

“That’s a beautiful way of putting it. You have gotten better with words. Remember what you said to me last time we met?”

“I let my fists speak for themselves.” She spat “You are unbelievably lucky that I didn’t have my Hammers back then. Now, you’re lucky that my patience is not as short as it was. The Dark Ages are long gone, and you should let go.”

“We’ve all got secrets, sister.” He flipped the green coin he was holding. “You don’t say anything about my secrets, I don’t let the entire City know about yours. Let’s keep what goes on here between you and me, all right?”

“Is this… blackmail?” Haya scoffed. “No one will care! I don’t care about that. You are into some weird shit with the Darkness? That’s fucking great, dude. Just fucking amazing. Good for you for making life decisions that benefit your life in a positive manner. I won’t tell. But, go be into Darkness worshipping things in this room. Alone. Away from my friends.” She took a step back with each word until she was out of his sight.

Chapter End Notes

No fix it fics here.

I actually really love the Drifter.
Tirion couldn’t go back to sleep. She knew exactly what was missing.

It always took an entire Fallen battalion to wake Shaxx up. Not being able to sleep wasn’t anything new to her, but the bar was always there. Whenever she couldn’t fall asleep she would go there, and Cayde always had an ear, or a poker game that she’d always win. She didn’t mind talking to her Ghost, but her Ghost hadn’t gone through the same things Cayde had. It was nice to have someone who could relate to whatever she felt like ranting about.

Now, there was nowhere to go when she couldn’t sleep in the middle of the night.

What would he do with Uldren?

She was in Shaxx’s arms, sitting in silence. She couldn’t find anything useful in her notes, nothing that would lead to answers or help her prepare. Only thing she knew about those Fallen was that they were responsible for hundreds of deaths. Going to the Tangled Shore was inevitable. She had to wait, though. Wait and see what the Vanguard will do.

“Lorcan’s rant was the thing that woke me up. I…” Tirion stammered. “Do you think that it will come to that?”

“No.” His stern voice came from above. “We won’t let it.”

“I’m terrified of it happening.” It wasn’t hard to admit. “I’m terrified, because the actions of one blithering idiot could potentially harm hundreds of people who have nothing to do with him. The Awoken have always had a reputation. This… people will be out for blood.”

“Hey, look at me….” Shaxx gently moved her until she was looking him straight in the eyes. “You’ll get through this. They won’t be out for blood if you go out there and show them that no one stands with Uldren, not you and not the Reef.”

“Will that be enough? You know as well as I do that the Vanguard will go to war.” She hated that feeling, that feeling of complete defeat. “What will I be able to do when they command every Warlock, every Titan, and every Hunter to go to the Reef to cut off Uldren’s head?”

“You’ll be able to fight to stop them in their tracks. You can stop it. For Cayde, and for your people.”

“I wanted to talk to you about something before I left for the Reef, but you were busy…” She began. “I wanted to tell you that I’m tired of hiding this, that I’m sick of the politics. Now I’m scared of how people might react if they see you with an Awoken. I’m scared, Shaxx. I’ve faced gods in their dreamlands yet this is the most terrified I’ve ever felt.”

“Those fears won’t be realized, if need be I’ll get my Redjacks to squander any fights if worst comes to worst. And when this is over, I’ll tour the Tower with you in my arms and make sure
they’ll hear about how much I love you all the way to Mars.”

“I—” Loud banging on the door stopped her. “Are you still willing to do that knowing that that will get substantially worse?”

“They can get in line behind FWC, New Monarchy and the Vanguard... That way they’ll be distracted and it’ll buy us time to move.”

“Oryx tried to move, too.”

“Just…” He grunted at the implication. “Just don’t show them where the liquor cabinet is. I have to requisition some scorch cannons, so I won’t be able to watch over that.”

“For what?”

“You’ll see.”

The pounding wasn’t going to stop, so she got up to open the door. It was a good way to test how durable the door was.

“Did you say the Ascendant Realm?” Huritt immediately stepped in. “The Dreaming City, is connected to the Ascendant Realm?”

She appreciated them being there, but she was already overwhelmed.

“I don’t know half the details…” All of them were there, and she gave an apologetic smile to Shaxx as they walked in. Haya held a box in her hands, the cache she was asked to retrieve. Lorcan was next to her, as usual. Huritt was trying to figure out how to prioritize his questions, smoke almost coming out of his metal head. Alva was surprisingly calm, no fingers itching to steal anything or snoop around. Kouhei, however, looked like he just came back from the Ascendant Realm. “What happened to you?”

“I’ve been busy trying to find out what actually went down in the Reef.” His voice was raspy, like he was running on no sleep. His red eyes on top of that made him look even more menacing than usual. She gestured for them all to sit down in the living room and they were more than happy to oblige. “Things… are questionable in the Reef. I’m not sure if I can go back.”

“Do you need help with words, Kouhei?” Lorcan asked.

“Questionable is the correct word here.” Kouhei breathed out heavily. He had no plans to fall asleep yet, knowing that the others will bet on it. “In what I can only assume was a frenzy beyond anyone’s understanding, Petra imprisoned Uldren. He had been acting erratically to say the very least. Even for him.”

“I was under the assumption that Uldren was the one who broke the Barons out.” Tirion said, perplexed. “How did he do it if he was imprisoned?”

“He had help. Variks was the one who set everyone free.”

“What?”

“I found some recordings. One of the Barons got into his head, and Variks realized where his loyalty truly lies. He said that he wants to rebuild the Eliksni. Not the Fallen.” Kouhei’s fists were clenched. “He set off everything. All the alarms, warning lights, the PA system… He set everyone free and slipped out, carrying all the Ether he could.”
“Variks…” She whispered. “Damn it. Out of all the people I didn’t want to despise today.”

“This comes as a surprise to you?”

“That he wants to rebuild the Eliksni?” She shook her head. “No. But that he’d willingly unleash Uldren, the Barons and the rest of the insanity he had imprisoned and cause a lot of deaths just for a grand exit? Yes.”

“If anything would have happened to my daughter during the idiotic riot, I would have set off on a journey to snap his neck.” Kouhei hissed.

Lorcan stared at him, eyes as big as the Moon. "Does… does Oryx hold a weekly seminar about bad parenting or something?"

Lorcan, as per usual, was ignored. “As for Uldren… I have my own theories.”

“What theories?” Tirion recalled it all, albeit it involuntarily. That name. That one name that has been said one too many times that day. “He looked me in the eyes, waved Cayde’s gun, and said ‘He didn’t feel a thing.’ Then he chuckled, and the doors closed. I couldn’t get him.”

Haya cringed. “Does he kiss his sister with that mouth?”

“Haya…” Out of everyone, Lorcan was the one who felt the need to stop her. "What's going on?"

“He sounds like an insufferable asshole.” Haya stood her ground. “Anyone in this room disagreeing with me? No? Great.”

“I’d use different verbiage, but you’re not wrong.” Kouhei confirmed. “For as long as I’ve known him being insufferable was where he drew the line. He took every opportunity to torment Guardians and their Ghosts. But as far as I know, he was never responsible for someone’s final death. Until recently.”

“So?”

“I’m saying that if you would put a gun in his hand and ask him to murder someone in cold blood, he’d burst into tears and call for his sister.”

“You’re just making this worse, Kouhei.” Haya complained. “When I shoot someone I like to aim for the spine, it’s not fun when the person I’m shooting doesn’t have a spine.”

He stared at her, exhausted by her antics. “Are you done, Haya?”

“No. I’m too sober for this.”

“He would do anything for his sister, but Mara is missing in action. She can’t give him orders. This means only one thing. Riven.”

“I think you lost us all here.”

Kouhei wished Threta could remember. If she would have never lost her memories, she’d have figured it out quicker than he ever could have. She would had stopped it years ago. “It’s the biggest secret of the Awoken. I’m past caring about what the Reef thinks and what secrets get out. Riven is an Ahamkara. A powerful one, one who has been locked in the Dreaming City for generations. One who would do everything in her power to get herself freed.”

“That is preposterous.” Shaxx interrupted from where he was sitting next to his console. “We
hunted down every single living Ahamkara during the Great Hunt. What are you trying to get at?”

“You slipped up. The Prince rescued a new-born Ahamkara for Mara during the Hunt. Took pity on the orphaned creature. Most psychopaths I know don’t take pity on small animals.”

“That Ahamkara is still alive, after all these years?”

“Still trapped in the Dreaming City.”

Half of the people in the room prepared themselves to have their ears blown out. “The Ahamkara we killed consisted of mostly adolescents. Some of them took us days to kill, though that might have been the fault of crazy Titans wishing that the fight would last forever. You are saying that you have an Ahamkara that is hundreds of years old?”

“Ha, I never got around to doing the Hunt because I’m very weak willed but…” Haya struggled not to laugh. “Would you say, in your professional Ahamkara hunting opinion, that shit is fucked?”

“It would be in everyone’s best interest to quarantine most of the Reef. It seems the universe deems that its people haven’t suffered enough.” He said. “Best case scenario, she’s dying of old age. We haven’t been fortunate enough to get best case scenarios as of late.”

“Follow-up question, Shaxx: where is your liquor cabinet?”

“I think it’s worse than that.” Huritt mumbled, reading over Tirion’s notes, tapping his finger on a familiar horned Hive creature.

“That there is no liquor cabinet? Do you want me to kill someone?”

“No, Haya. I’ll have to dig up some of my books for this... I can already say that the odds that Oryx didn’t find Riven infinitesimal.”

“Huh…”

“That’s all you have to say?” He asked Haya. “I expected more panic considering the fact that we broke the Sword Logic after killing Oryx. We did not carry through and claim his power. We are powerless against a Taken Ahamkara.”

“Sword logic was the whole thing where the more you drink the more drunk you become, right? And we didn’t drink Oryx’s drink, and now we’ve sobered up?”

“It’s—” Huritt sighed, feeling the capacitors in his head melt. “Yes…”

“This is the part where we turn to Tirion and ask her.” She looked over at the red head. “My plan involves blowing ourselves up and waiting for as long as possible for our Ghosts to revive us, in hopes that we’ll lose our memories when we get revived, in hopes the trauma of knowing about a Taken Ahamkara’s existence goes away.”

The Warlock remained silent throughout their discussion, listening to them while staring at the cache with wide eyes. It was time to make a decision, though. “Uldren and the Barons take priority. Only after that we let the despair about this set in. One thing at a time.”

“Why are you guys so calm about this?” Lorcan looked at every single Guardian in the room, feeling dumbfounded. “Why aren’t we freaking out?”

“Lorcan…” Tirion said his name slowly.
“It’s an Aham-freaking-kara!” He exclaimed, but no one shared his enthusiasm. “It probably will kill us, though. That’s unfortunate. We goofed with the Sword Logic, and that sucked… But don’t you want to see it?”

“I know that you and the Vanguard are never on the same page, but even you can agree that the order they gave to eradicate them was a necessary one. They were too dangerous to be allowed to live.” Shaxx told the eager Hunter. “The Guardians were destroying themselves with feeble wishes that backfired. It was a good thing that we acted as early as we did, as it would have ended in disaster for the City if we had given them time to grow up.”

“Did you make any wishes?” The Hunter asked reluctantly.

“Everyone near them did. Some inadvertently, some on purpose. That’s what made them dangerous. They latched on to your every thought. You had to keep your mind clear.” Shaxx sighed mournfully. “Hunting them took a toll on everyone. A year into the Hunt their whispers almost became unbearable. Getting used to it and being able to differentiate the whispers from reality didn’t make it easier.”

“I never got to see one.” He tried not to frown like a small child. “The stories other Guardians tell about them makes them sound like they were absolutely magnificent.”

“Trust me, they were. I honoured them, I sat with them as they died. I mourned them as much as I despised them. As beautiful as they were, it’s a good thing you never got near them.”

Lorcan narrowed his eyes. “Why does that sound like a thinly veiled insult?”

“It wasn’t. But, Hunters can be peculiar with their wishes.”

“Whaaat?” Lorcan jeered. “Warlocks would probably wish for more knowledge, Titans would wish for longer fights, and Hunters would wish for more knives. And that makes us the bad guys?”

“Exactly. Hunters are very materialistic.”

“Now… hold on a minute…”

“I would never him near the Ahamkara because I know that he’d ask for more puns and I’d have to kill him.” Haya laid out her excuse. “And I’d rather not kill him because I can’t be left alone.”

“Wish. Ender.”

Shaxx gave them a small smirk. “There are many things that can be said about you two, but no one can make the claim that your friendship isn’t solid.”

“150-something years of friendship.” Lorcan saw that glower on Haya’s face. She didn’t like numbers. “It was 150 last time she wished me a happy birthday. It’s been a couple of years since then.”

“I reckon you got revived sometime around Twilight Gap?”

“A little bit after that. Caught the tail end of Saint’s crusade. It was a hell of an introduction.”

“If you ask me, that’s the best introduction that could happen to a newly risen Guardian.”

Lorcan shrugged half-heartedly. “Eh, I guess it was alright.”

“Truth be told, Titans were undoubtedly the worst around the Ahamkara. Everyone knows about
how Wei Ning handled it. But Lord Saladin… Lord Saladin wished to fight an actual dragon.” Shaxx recalled the memory, still in disbelief about it. “You could hear Lady Efrideet scolding him about it across the entire system. I’m pretty sure that if you close your eyes, you can still hear her to this day.”

“… h-he did a what?” Lorcan sounded mildly terrified.

“A fire-breathing wyrm covered with scales. It was the size of three-story building.” Shaxx recalled. “I remember that his excuse was ‘we are what we survive’.”

Lorcan’s jaw was almost dislodged. “Is that why he’s shouting about dragons when he comes here now and then?”

“Lord Saladin says a lot of things. Honestly, I think his age has set in and Lady Efrideet’s voice is still ringing in his ears and he’s just thinking out loud.”

“That’s just depressing.”

“There is no winning with the Ahamkara.” Kouhei cut in. “To get back on track, Riven is trapped. The world won’t get to see the full extent of her power unless someone frees her or kills her. A creature like that undoubtedly has a backup plan in case something kills her.”

“And you really believe that she is controlling Uldren, to get herself freed?” Tirion was rather sceptical about it. Although it came from her own lack of knowledge about the Ahamkara.

“To continue my righteous tirade against him, Uldren might be the easiest person in known existence to exploit. He is delirious with grief, and Riven has known him all her life. Mara tried her best to keep him away from her. How Mara handled her is a story for some other day.”

“Why can’t he just be a murderer, someone who is just sick in the head?” Despite how much it hurt, she wanted to give him some kind of benefit of a doubt. “I’d yell at you for trying to somehow justify and defend what he did, but I know that you hate Uldren too much to make the effort to jump through these hoops.”

He looked at Haya for a split second. He needed an example. “Everyone in this room can agree that Haya is a danger to herself and society.”

“Wha—” Haya gasped slightly. “What do I have to do with this?!”

Kouhei continued. “Unlike Uldren, Haya would never cry over a dying Fallen as she tries to bandage him up. I stumbled across him doing just that once after some Gunslingers did a number on an Archon. Uldren is not a psychopath. He’s just painfully pathetic.”

“How—” Haya tried to interject.

“That’s why I believe that something is off. It has to be Riven’s influence. I’ve known Uldren for many years, and most people here haven’t met him. People don’t change that drastically in the blink of an eye. I would never defend that snotty child in any capacity.”

“You—” Haya tried again.

“I’m just saying that we might have a bigger problem on our hands. When the time comes, I hope you cut off his head for what he did to Cayde and the Reef. Someone whispering in his ear or not, he has crossed a line.”
“How dare you!! I have… feelings. Of empathy. And kindness.” Haya tangled with her words. “Most of those feelings are about Awoken corsairs right now, but they’re still feelings. I’m not totally sideways crazy. Don’t compare me to that punk. I’m better than him.”

Lorcan was twirling a pen in his hands as he watched the whole ordeal unfold. “I’m with you, Kouhei. I don’t think Haya has felt anything since the Dark Ages. I think the reason she still keeps me around is to steal my soul because she doesn’t have one.” He caught the throw pillow just before it hit his face and threw it back at her, laughing as he did so.

“Let’s not get technical about my alleged soul.”

“If you have a soul it’s comparable to a horrible Hive related accident. I think I see it, actually… It’s actually there. I can't stop looking even though it's making me experience a severe existential crisis.”

Haya prepared another pillow to throw at him. “Why are you bullying me? Can we get back to Kouhei ranting about Uldren?”

He twirled the pen until it was pointing at Tirion. “Because it's hilarious.” She didn’t need to be stressed out about Reef nonsense this soon.

It was only when all the attention was on her Tirion realized that she was smiling. It was nice to have a break from the crushing sadness and to come up for air, no matter how long it lasted. Haya was the polar opposite holding zero amusement, and she chucked another pillow at Lorcan’s face. The pillow hit its target this time around as he was too distracted to react in time.

“You’re still a toolbox.” Haya’s tone however had undeniable playfulness to it.

“You want to take whatever this is to the Crucible?” Shaxx’s eyes followed a pillow and relief washed over him when it didn’t knock over a poor unsuspecting vase behind Haya. “… before you destroy my furniture?”

“What have you got for us?” Haya respected his wish and put the pillows back where they were.

“A couple of new training drills, one of them involves scorch cannons. It could use some testing before I announce it. I want the rookies on it as soon as possible.” He shut off the console. “You all might be overkill for testing it, but I’ll take what I can get. Guardians will inevitably end up in the Tangled Shore, I won’t have them out there not knowing how to dodge projectiles. The City needs to see that you haven’t holed up somewhere and given up, and what better way than on every Crucible feed?”

They all looked at eachother, contemplating it.

They got absolutely nowhere with their attempt at a discussion. Some things just raised more anger.

“It might not be the right time to play around with scorch cannons…” Tirion said after a long pause of thinking.

Lorcan had other ideas. “But, what’s the alternative here? Sit here and dwell on the fact that Cayde died? Wonder who hurt Uldren and be bitter that it wasn’t me? Worry that a war might break out? So, scorch cannons?”

“I feel like we can congratulate Uldren on being a complete dick for no reason after Cayde has been laid to rest.” Haya chimed in. “Scorch cannons?”
“Scorch cannons.” Tirion approved.
Life continued.

Life always continued.

Their Crucible show made a difference. Shaxx was right, people needed hope. People needed to see that this wasn’t enough to make the strongest lose hope. Tirion decided to not participate in whatever they were testing in the Crucible, instead she addressed the people of the City in the early morning. They were more confused than scared as what remained of the Vanguard have kept them in the dark. She didn’t remember what she told them, she reassured them that the Scorn would never reach the City. All she knew is that she told them enough to ease their worries. They had questions about how she was going to avenge him, but those were questions she couldn’t answer just yet.

In a way, she felt absent. As if a part of her was left behind in the Reef, like a clock with a missing part.

It was time to get back to work for everyone, it was time to start fighting again.

Tirion and Kouhei were getting ready to leave right after the funeral, she was going to need his help with the Tangled Shore. Only people that knew the Shore better than him were the ones who wanted him dead. Huritt was doing research on the Hive with the little info Tirion gave him. Lorcan was working with Shaxx on a new training drill that involved swindling, hacking vaults and stealing from the enemy. There was no better person for it, both because of the Hunter’s experience in theft and his tech skills. Haya’s Sunbreakers were out in full force hunting down the Prison escapees before they hurt anyone, some of them were stationed at the Farm keeping an eye out.

It felt like it wasn’t enough.

Unsatisfying, even. Boring to some extent.

“You’ve been more obnoxious than usual.”

Haya looked up from her disassembled weapon to stare at Kouhei in annoyance for the observation he just made about her. “You can always say hello to start a conversation.”

“You know what I mean.”

She very much did. There was an empathetic person buried deep down inside him. Deep down, somewhere inside of him. Deep, deep down. Somewhere. Probably accompanied by some Hive thralls. That was his way of asking how she’s holding up.

“I’m angry at everything for my own selfish reasons. It’s easier to be obnoxious.” She said, wiping the oil off of her hands with a rag attached to her belt. “And I’m trying to be a good friend, so I need more weapons to clean before I slip up and Tirion sets me on fire.”

Kouhei didn’t move a muscle, not surprised. “What did you do, Haya?”
“Nothing. Just trying to not be a selfish prick to just one person. Just… one.”

“You can survive being set on fire.”

“Yeah, well… only you would advise me to make a friend’s grief all about myself. It can wait. Haven’t told Lorc about it, either. That should give you an idea.”

“I’m not them, and we want those Cabal tanks intact.”

_Somewhere._

It was mesmerizing to watch her put the weapon back together as she thought it all through. It was as if she as assembling her own brain back together, piece by piece, thought by thought. With every satisfying click a layer of fog disintegrated.

“You’re one of the few Titans I can talk to about these things and…” As always, it felt weird to confide in Kouhei regarding anything, but she decided to give it a shot. Beggars weren’t allowed to be picky. “I’ve had these weird thoughts in my head, and it all got stronger when Cayde died. I didn’t even like him, so I don’t know why it’s happening now.”

He took a seat across from her. “Every Guardian has been experiencing strange dreams lately.”

“No, not that. Just intrusive thoughts. I can handle dreams when I have them.” She put the now intact weapon on the table and brushed a hand through her blonde hair, some of the remaining oil leaving a black streak. “Do you think there is such a thing as survivor’s guilt?”

“That’s when you feel guilty for surviving something traumatic when others didn’t.”

“That’s not what I’m looking for…” Haya sighed in frustration. “Not exactly.”

“What _are_ you looking for?”

“Why not me? Why people better than me?” Haya finally said the words out loud, the words that someone has been shouting at her in her brain. They used to be whispers before, easily ignored. Cayde’s death made it worse. It was easier to be obnoxious and joke around than to say that question out loud. “I feel guilty about outliving people. It’s like… why aren’t I dead yet? This is taking way too long. That’s all I can hear in my head. Over and over. And it’s pissing me off.”

“You’re saying that you want to die?”

“I don’t. Not really.” She didn’t have to think long about the answer. “I want you to imagine living this long and being in total disbelief over it and how many people more deserving of life than you’ve lost along the way. That’s why I didn’t tell Tirion. It’s selfish.”

“I don’t understand. You actively do your best to stay alive, sometimes at the cost of other lives.”

“Because I fear death. Huritt keeps questioning me about this… you know what I remember the clearest about the Golden Age? The _deadline_. That stress that came from knowing that eventually you’ll die of old age.” The desire to punch a hole in a nearby tank got stronger with every word she said. She couldn’t stop talking as indignance took over her. “Maybe the big ball erased people’s memories on purpose so his minions wouldn’t go through this psychological pressure caused by remnant memories, and I’m one of the anomalies. I thought that all first Risen remembered. So, yes. Both you and Lorc were right about my soul causing a damn existential crisis.”

Kouhei didn’t gloat. He didn’t consider it to be appropriate. “I think you should tell her.”
“Did you mishear the part where I said that I don’t want to be a selfish prick?”

“I think she’ll understand.”

“I think she’ll snap and murder the entire Tangled Shore and never come back from it. Did you see her past your ranting about what kind of an ass Uldren is and how being an asshole isn’t going to cure him any quicker? There was nothing behind her eyes.”

“That’s why you should talk to her.”

“Ugh…” Haya grunted, hoping that the Cabal had decent fire extinguishers installed in the ship. “How about you, Kouhei?”

“I don’t fear death, if that’s what you’re asking.”

It wasn’t what she was asking, but she ran with it. “Have you ever feared it?”

“Once. Just before I became a Guardian.”

Haya never heard the story. “How did that go down?”

“A friend shot me and left me to die. That’s all you need to know.”

“That sounds slightly better than a drug den.” There was a sudden glint of hope in her eyes “You remember, too?”

“Only the last few years of non-Guardian life, nothing about the Golden Age. Recovered a lot by pretending I remembered and by pretending I wasn’t a Guardian.” Kouhei told. “To some extent I believe my friend was the catalyst for what has happened recently. Either way, Uldren found out eventually, and he had his own opinions about Guardians. Had to distance myself.”

Haya didn’t want to pry much more, she also knew that he wouldn’t be willing to talk. “Beats me why you aren’t at the Tangled Shore bashing his brains in. You have a damn good reason.”

“It would be cathartic, but that’s Tirion’s kill. He should die by her hands.” He uncrossed his arms and brought out his Ghost, ready to go. Some business had to be done before they left. “She’s in the communications hub.”

He dissolved before she could get any further words in. Though, all questions she could get in would get no answers anyway. She hoped her Ghost was ready.

“Is it wrong that deep inside I want to see my home tarnished and blackened beyond recovery?

We are sitting on fortunes and riches beyond the outside world’s imagination. Beauty and splendour, all of it taken for granted might I add. The world outside is covered with darkness and adversity, with pain. With endless wars and conflicts. We’ve had our own conflicts, but they’re nothing compared to what I’ve heard about the other city. Their city. The thing about darkness and adversity is that it will pass if you give it time. Only time cursed adversity and pain. We cheated time itself to create this place. But time… time will always catch up, and it will bring retribution with it.

Wishing for its destruction would be like wishing for flowers to wither or trees to grow.

But, that’s why I did what I did. I foresaw it. I foresaw that it’s my duty to save it.”
Tirion played it over and over again.

*Time will always catch up.*

Eight more to go.

She wondered who these messages were for. Haya and Lorcan had no difficulties retrieving it by the looks of it, but it hadn’t been stolen by the Fallen either. Only thing she knew for certain was that it was meant for the person who found the gun, but she wasn’t sure who that was. It was a twisted treasure hunt, purpose yet unknown.

“I got the coordinates. The next cache is somewhere in the Tangled Shore. I’ll get a more precise location once we’re there.” Ghost’s voice barely broke through her. “Just where we need to be, where we can find Uldren and the Barons.”

“We’ll be on our way as soon as we can. I have to say goodbye first. It kills me to wait, I should be at the shore. I have to say goodbye first.”

“Just… remember why we’re doing this. For Cayde.”

She had to get her guns ready. There won’t be time after the funeral. She packed light, a scout rifle and a couple of hand cannons. Heavy weapons were never her thing, she considered them to be pretty obtrusive and they weighted her down too much. Her Light was good enough of a substitute.

That’s all she could think about.

**Weapons. Maybe her mind was protecting her.**

Haya, Alva and Lorcan were the ones usually in charge of weapons. Now and then they had to consult Banshee, but it always turned into quite the task with his memory issues. Alva likes to take notes for him to help him remember, making sure to sign them so he wouldn’t go insane thinking that he was the one who wrote them and that his memory has gotten worse.

What would she do?

“Hey, Tirionna.” Haya’s voice rang through the room. “Got a minute?”

“Yeah…” Tirion mumbled. “I’ve been meaning to ask you something. Well, all of you.”

Haya took every opportunity she could to delay what she came there to do. Her mind wasn’t done translating what Kouhei meant yet. “Go ahead.”

“I’m only asking this because I have no idea what to do. I know I need to get his gun back and I-I…” Tirion moved away from the weapons and leaned against a console with her hands, eyes on an orange projection of the shard of the Traveler. She struggled to phrase the question for a while, mouth opening and closing, trembling. She tore her eyes away from it to look the Titan in the eyes.

“If you were in my position and Uldren killed Lorcan, what would you do? Would you kill Uldren?” Tirion sounded broken, but not without determination. Bloodshot eyes were hidden underneath the stark green glow.

Haya didn’t want to think about that question, stalwart with her refusal. Just hearing the question was too much.

“Who was the idiot who convinced everyone that murder and revenge is the same damn thing?”
“What’s the difference?”

Haya was almost offended at the question. “The whole thing where the hero kills someone in revenge is vapid and boring and they might as well tell stories that the Warlords were pacifists. Shin Malphur is the only one who uses murder in the right way.” Haya scoffed. “Revenge? Good grief, at least try to be creative with it. Cut their hands off so they can’t fire a gun again or conveniently forget them in a well for a week or bury them alive. Maybe I am a psychopath.” She stopped to think for a second.

“You’re… complicated.”

“Point is that murder isn’t revenge. Murder is just a stop sign. Murder for the right reason doesn’t make you less of a prick. Unless you’re Shin.”

“Hm…”

It became obvious to Haya that she was terrible at this.

So, Haya used what the Traveler cursed her with. Remembering. She could use it to tell tales about the horrors of the Dark Ages, but she had a better idea. Haya walked over to the keyboard on the other side of the hologram device, and typed something in. The hologram of the shard flickered and changed to one of Mercury with the Almighty attached to it. It still had some Cabal notes on it, but it was enough to demonstrate a point.

Everything on that planet would have ended a lot differently if it weren’t for that Warlock on the other side of the hologram.

“What’s this?” Tirion asked wearily, sick to her stomach about not getting any answers.

“You were the reason I didn’t smear the walls with Sagira, no matter how much I hated Osiris. Hell, you were the reason I didn’t stab him after we killed Panoptes.”

“That was all you.” Tirion whispered.

“It was your influence. You also halted the Vex, and you found Saint.” Haya felt like she wasn’t getting through. Tirion was better at building walls than most Titans. “You are the kind of good-hearted asshole who can find a redeeming trait in me. I go touting about how I want to kill people and you tell me to talk it out instead. And you’re always right.”

Tirion’s fingers clenched the console harder, her nails almost leaving scratches in the metal. “What do you think I should do? Kouhei wants me to cut off his head. That’s one vote for murder. I have no plans to talk it out with Uldren, not for what he did.”

It sounded like Tirion already knew the answer, just refused to say it out loud.

“Come back. That’s what you should do. When the time comes, pick the choice that will bring you back. I don’t care if it’s dismembering him or buying him a fuckin’ bouquet, as long as you come back. All of us need you. All six of us including Shaxx. Especially him.” Haya saw the mess of red hair slightly turn towards her. “You’re barely here anymore. You haven’t been the same since Mercury.”

“This isn’t about me.” Tirion’s brows furrowed and she slammed the keyboard with her fist to shut down the hologram. “For once this isn’t about me. This is about avenging Cayde.”

“Fucking yourself up beyond repair is on the opposite end of avenging someone who cared about
“You!” She stepped closer to the Warlock, having no idea where the sudden annoyance came from. “Cayde wouldn’t have wanted to lose you, in any shape.”

Haya staggered back just in time and shielded her eyes from the bright fire as Tirion unleashed the flurry of grenades around her. She roared as she conjured up an inferno, finally letting it all out. All the anger, the thoughts. Tirion had no words to express it, just her Light.

Nothing and no one survived Ghaul’s ambition, and nothing and no one survived her. The latter was the rule of the universe. It included invaders, her friends, and even herself.

She could change it all.

But for now, she felt terribly lost.

She sat on her knees, breathing heavily. Her Ghost was tentatively healing the burns on her skin and repairing her armour.

“Good. You finally felt something that makes sense.” Haya reached out her hand to the Warlock once the Ghost was finished working. “Come on.”

Tirion reached out, and Haya pulled her up. The Warlock immediately let go once on her feet to rub her eyes, feeling herself fall asleep on her feet. She blinked away the stars in her vision, she needed to be awake for a little while longer. She turned to Haya.

“I know what you’re going to say…”

“Go the hell to sleep.” Haya crossed her arms.

“Hear me out…”

“Use Kouhei’s room, he hasn’t used it yet.”

“Why can’t I go back to the City?”

“Because you’ll fly off and fight somewhere.”

“Can... can I at least get food? Or finish picking out my weapons?”

“I’ll get Lorc to do it and—” Haya pushed her lightly. “Stop being stubborn!”

There was no winning a stubbornness competition with a Titan, and she needed the rest. With a defeated sigh, she let Haya lead the way. She proved Haya right by not even taking in how the room looked like, just falling asleep in an instant when she touched the bed.

“Thanks, Haya.” Tirion’s Ghost breathed out a sigh of relief, looking at his Guardian. She didn’t look peaceful, struggle still present on her face. Still, he was grateful that she was resting. “For talking to her.”

“No problem.”

“We heard your conversation with Kouhei, by the way. Thought you should know.”

“Oh.” Guilt over what she said crept up on her.

“You know, I heard her whisper that she didn’t think you were selfish.”
“Now she’s just delusional with grief.” Haya cringed at her words. “Don’t tell her I said that.”

He looked at the Titan with his blue eye. “She said that Lorcan wouldn’t be alive if you actually were selfish.”

Her small smile was invisible in the dark room. She wouldn’t be alive without him. “Yeah... I better call him. Don’t let her out of the room.”

“I’ll do my best. Place a barricade outside of the room, just in case.”

Haya really wanted to but knew that the barricade would get destroyed in two seconds. She left the room with a small nod as a goodbye.

“Lorcan is calling you.” Said Leor. "Timely."

Haya tapped the earpiece instantly. “What’s up? Was just about to call you.”

“Hi. Quick question. You remember Callum? As in, Scumbag Callum?”

“Yeah I remember him, but I never learned his scumbag-name. Why?”

“Uh, his friend is in the Tower. Bandana, jade coin. Snake motif. Acts like a serial killer when he thinks he’s alone. Tried to recruit me into what sounded like a cult, and I immediately knew.”

“Oh...”

“Called Huritt and Alva and told them to stay away from him.”

“Oh no.” She whispered, urgency washing over. “You’re still busy with Shaxx’s thing?”

“We finished up for the most part. I can do the rest remotely. Can we talk about the scumbag?”

“We can. Pick some food up, and get over here. Now. Never talk about the scumbags over the comms, Lorc.” She ordered. “I think I know who destroyed our den.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the slow updates! Work has been busy and Forsaken is too addicting.

Also trying to make the backstory I had written more lore friendly because of all the new lore we've got about the Awoken is daunting, haha.
“Get. Out.”

The Guardians between Haya and the Drifter fled. They knew who she was.

“You are really bad for business, Abbie. Always have been.” Drifter’s voice was akin to an annoyed growl. “Met your kid a bit earlier. He was a lot nicer than you. Nightstalker, right? Could smell the ozone on him. There is somethin’ ‘bout the Void and the Dark. You just gotta take the good ones from me, don’t ya?”

“You know that you don’t scare me.” She slammed the metal shutters to get some privacy. Guardians were too excited about the Drifter’s plan for her comfort. Guardians were adrenaline junkies beyond logic. Dangle adrenaline and a nice gun in front of them and they usually came running.

“The more things change the more the two us stay the same. You're makin' me miss my bar.”

“You coulda confessed to destroying our den when we talked the other day.”

“No need for any confessin’, it wasn’t a crime. It was business. You and your kid stole something from us, and I needed it back.” Always with the jade coin. She didn’t know if he was trying to hypnotize people or needed something to fidget with to not stray away from his charming mask. “Wasn’t that difficult to get into your little hideout, seeing how careless you’ve been with security. All it takes is letting just one outsider in. Doesn’t matter what tech you have on your locks.”

“What kinda backwards— Urgh!” Haya threw her hands up in the air so she wouldn’t shoot the coin right out of his hand. Suddenly she understood why Warlocks used words. Using anything else was too infuriating. “I guess you didn’t find anything, did you? Before you ask, we don’t have it anymore. That’s because Callum stole it from us a while ago, beat you to the punch. Haven’t seen him since.”

“Callum Sol, huh?” He had to think about it for a second. The Drifter knew Callum by another name.

“No relation to the Hammer.”

“I ain’t laid eyes on Callum in something like forever, guessing his Ghost probably got… got. That’s what happens to us. I think I might be the last one alive.” He said. “Doesn’t matter. I’m going to need that weapon core back. It’s the key to my freedom, from him.”

“Best of freakin’ luck with that, man!” It wasn’t even worthy of a smirk. She had no time to shed tears for people on Shin’s list. There were no innocents on that list. “On all fronts, really.”

“How about a deal, Abbie?”

Oh, how she regretted letting that name slip in that bar of his all those years ago. “I don’t strike deals with Scumbags.”

“We’ll both get paid. The deal is that you do me a little favour and see if that punk still has what’s
“What’s in it for me?”

“Freedom.” He offered. “We agree to not lay a finger on eachother, including your little band of misfits. What do you say?”

That’s what was so inherently scary about the Drifter, as he calls himself now. He convinced you that he knew you, made you believe that his friendship wasn’t an act. Dark Age through and through. He knew your weaknesses, knew what buttons to press to get something he wants. Haya was never scared of it as she could see straight through it. She also knew that she was one of the lucky ones, and that he will find a way to persuade dozens of other Guardians to join him and they’ll be none the wiser.

“You’re offering to leave us alone with the only consequence being that you and your scumbags get to do whatever the hell you want and we can’t interfere?”

“See? It goes both ways. Look at it as a ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’ kind of ordeal. We’ll both get to profit in peace. I still have some things to take care of, so I’m gonna be expecting a decision in a day or two. Otherwise, well…” He rubbed the coin with his thumb and then looked at her, with a louring look in his eyes. “It’s a free for all, and everything n’ everyone is up for grabs. The Dark don’t wait for anyone. Not me, not you. Everyone in your crew would be perfect.”

If she knew him as well as she thought she did, she knew that she had no choice. She still had to think about it. Thinking about it wasn't going to take long. Finding alcohol to shower it to wash his words off was the trickiest part.

“Fine. Give me two days.”

“Hope you make the right choice. I won’t be staying down here that much, place is too soft for me. Got Guardians to ship out to remote corners of the system. I need more motes.” He said as he shut the trunk he was digging in prior she barged in. “Derelict’s always open to you.”

“I’m not stepping aboard that ship. I know what that thing is dragging.”

“I don’t trust you aboard ‘er either. I know what you did in the Dark Ages, and trust me, I made the mental note never to piss you off long ago. All of us have to make sacrifices.”

“If you say ‘for the greater good’ I will find Shin myself throw him at you.”

“Heh…” The Drifter laughed to himself. “There is no greater good here. All the Armageddons made the concept kind of pointless. There is always one coming, worlds end. Might as well throw some Taken at eachother while we’re at it. Study what’s gonna destroy us.”

“Oh, I know. If you want to draw some kind of religious parallels, a Guardian is technically an antichrist. Guess who was pivotal during the Armageddon.” Haya pulled up the gate. “It’s really not my turf but it is said that he suffers a fatal wound and then rises. That’s when the devil takes hold and all.”

“You believe in all that? Not that it doesn’t make it any less poetic.”

“Nope. As said, not my turf.” Haya said. “We’re not the good guys here, but we look out for our families. I know you had something that resembled a family once. I know you left with five others. Just cut the shit.”
She let a couple of excited Guardians run in as she left. They made their own choices.

There was a gathering in Cayde’s honour, one that could be heard across the whole Tower. If they knew one thing about Cayde, it’s that he didn’t want people to mope.

Some of the civilians were setting up decorations for a festival. It wasn’t for another week, but people needed something to do. Lorcan had a gathering of small children around him as he made paper masks and his Ghost was off harassing Guardians in the Tower by taking pictures of them for reference. He had a business going with the kids. He paints the masks and they fold them. It worked very well.

Some Guardians, all three of them, were still paying their respects to Cayde. Kouhei was patiently waiting right outside of the room for Tirion to come out. It was agreed that only the two of them would leave for the Shore. It was a safety measure. He wasn’t sure if the Reef would tolerate any non-Awoken during this time, too many delicate secrets could get out. Secrets not suited for City ears. He didn’t feel guilt about telling others about Riven as he knew that the information would stay in that room, and they needed a head start. Huritt was doing his best with the limited information he was given. That Warlock was only slightly grateful for it as the thought of a Taken Ahamkara filled him with both immense dread and excitement as it was uncharted territory.

Everyone with a pulse had their work cut out for them.

“Hey, Kouhei.” He heard Haya approach him. “She’s still in there?”

“Yes.”

“It sucks to stay behind.” She complained.

“Taking care of the Barons won’t take long. Then you can invade.”

“Is that another way of saying Awoken will stop being stuck up and weird?”

“I hope so.”

“Oh…” Haya was slightly bewildered. “I said that as a joke.”

“Once you see the Dreaming City you’ll understand where it all comes from.”

“Do you actually agree with any of it? Whatever the damn Awoken belief may be?”

“I used to. I used to be more than loyal to it. Oryx slowly poisoned it all.”

Haya had a lot of time to kill and nowhere to be. Prying was the only thing she could think of.

“You mentioned something about your friend being a catalyst.”

“She… she figured something out. Solved some puzzle about the Dreaming City. Whatever it was, she incinerated it. It died with her.”

“What was her name?”

“Threta.”

“Threta? Not Theta?”

“You won’t believe how many Techeuns she infuriated with that purposeful misspelling.” Kouhei said. “She said it had a double meaning.”
“Your face is slightly twitching as it tries to express something. I guess you two were close." She observed, but it turned to a sense of disgust quickly. "Oh, wow. That’s one thing I never thought I’d say to you.”

“Well. Fair’s fair.”

Zavala has been there before.

Most of them never find their way back to the City for a proper burial. Their deaths get confirmed by a wandering Guardian who stumbles across a dead Ghost, holding the last words of their charge.

It never got easier. You couldn’t become desensitized.

He’s been there with many others over the years. With the Dark Ages. With the Fallen. With the Hive invasion. With more names than he could list. With more friends than he could list.

Now he was there with Cayde. The one he thought would never die.

Enough was enough.

The beginning of a Guardian’s end was always the same. The cause of their deaths was them embodying being a Guardian to its fullest extent.

They were fantastic Guardians. That’s what killed them. That was the one constant.

They were dedicated to righting wrongs, willing to fight for what they believed in. Believing in something so much that they’d be willing to die for it.

Loyalty to a cause, courage to keep on fighting.

The Speaker once put it in simple terms.


He’s been in Ikora’s place. A place of resentment, driven by revenge. The City needed a leader, someone to hold it all together. The Reef was in its death throes. For him, the choice was simple.

But, no matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t read The Guardian. Couldn’t predict her next move. The only person who had the strength to be a beacon of light for the City was the person who has been slowly drifting away from the City and the Vanguard. She wasn’t shirking her duties, that was the only thing he was certain of with her. He hears reports about her team from all over the system daily. Sloane can’t praise them enough for what they’ve done to push back the Hive, and even Asher Mir managed to utter out a compliment under his breath for what they have done to the Vex. It’s not always about them pushing back the darkness, though. Sometimes it’s about kindness, like helping Failsafe get closure by finding her missing crew or telling stories to children running around the Tower.

Something in the back of his head told him none of that was done for the City, and that they won’t be there to defend it once the next threat comes for it. No matter how much he kept denying it, tried to drown the voice, it always resurfaced.

“Do you hear me?” Ikora’s question brought him back to reality, her voice laced with anger and pain. “All of us. Every Titan. Every Warlock. Every Hunter. We will take the Reef by storm. And then we will mount the head of that son of a bitch on his precious throne. For our fireteam… for
He had to make a choice. He had to give an order. He had to.

“No.”

“What did you say?”

“We are not an army. We are not conquerors. We are Guardians. We need to keep our eyes here. On our home. Our people. The Traveler. The Reef was lost the moment it lost its Queen. So, if another Sov wants a stretch of lifeless rocks, let him have it.”

“This is Cayde we’re talking about. For us to do nothing is… is…”

He had to do it and live with the consequences. “Say it.”

“Cowardice.”

“I refuse to bury any more friends.” Zavala slowly put a hand on Cayde’s chest. He has sent enough Guardians off to die. He didn’t need a lecture on that. The City was still weak. They’ll take care of threats that enter their home. So far, those threats were still at the Reef.

He saw a twinge on Tirion’s face. She was standing right across, her expression slowly morphing into a glare as she could no longer justify being silent.

“I came here to have a moment alone with my friend only to find you bickering,” Tirion began with barely a whisper, trying to get Zavala to look at her. She wanted him to look at her so he’d realize that they’re both the same. “The Reef is home to the Awoken. People. You can align yourself with whomever you like, but don’t you dare dehumanize them.”

“We can’t start a war.” He couldn’t read her, but he knew how she operated. “I have nothing else to tell you. Attempting to dissuade you from your course would only insult us both.”

“War? Who said anything about starting a war? The Awoken are my people, Zavala. The Reef was my home once. The Barons are still at large!” Tirion circled around the table until she was standing close to him, her palms heating up. She had to control it, for Cayde. “If you want it in other words, innocents are dying in the crossfire because of a deranged prince. Is it not my duty to prevent more deaths?”

“Your duty is to this City and its people. You are Guardian first, Awoken second.” Zavala made his ability to say a lot with few words very obvious to her. It was a skill Tirion never conquered.

“Says who?” There was that shift in Zavala’s eyes. Those two words confirmed his fears. “I’m not going to let the Reef crumble to terrorists. I’m not going to live with regret and guilt that I didn’t try to save them. I refuse. It’s not a war. It’s decency. A Guardian is a concept that the Speaker created because he had nothing better to do. Lives are concrete.”

“If you weren’t who you were, I’d have you exiled from the City.” He chided her. “That battle is not ours to fight. We have no allegiance with the Reef, and who knows what they are scheming. Are you willing to risk everything? Risk them turning on us when we can’t afford infighting among ourselves? You do not know what you are stepping into.”

“We owe it to the Awoken, in case you forgot. Their home got destroyed because they sacrificed it all to halt Oryx. We drew Oryx to this system. We are in debt no matter how you look at it.” Tirion moved her attention to Ikora, she had words for her too. “It’s not our duty to wage wars that will
leave hundreds of innocents dead as part of the collateral damage caused by an eye-for-an-eye journey to cut off *one* head. Both of you are wrong. I have to get his gun back."

"Go, then. Go to the Reef and factor in miracles when planning your strategies. The burden is on your shoulders."

She looked down at Cayde again, sorrow swelling up inside of her. All she wanted was a moment alone. To promise him that she will avenge him.

Everyone was out of words. Out of arguments. Their minds were made up, and all that was left now was to leave.

She'll get her moment.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the very short chapter and wait between them. Better to have something than nothing at all. Hunting Barons in the next one or so, and I really want to get a FOTL chapter out before the event ends. I already have some stuff written for the end of Forsaken's campaign. Also Shaxx will have to do more with the plot.
It’s become the crux of me, I wish that I could rise above it

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Tangled Shore, a mirror of a land perhaps more condemned. Where the desperados of the dead try to hide from the devil trying to take them home. A paradise to many if you look at it from a certain angle. The purple skies had smoke and dead ships instead of fluffy white clouds but it was by no means a graveyard. Everyone who came to the Shore came there deliberately. No one just simply washed up there on complete accident, despite a popular turn of phrase.

Tirion knelt down next to the strange creature she killed, one of the Scorn. She didn’t know their titles yet, didn’t think they deserved any in the first place.

“It kind of looks like a human heart…” She tilted her head to the side as she examined it, trying not to breathe in the rancid stench. “That pale color, their joints, the way their skin has ruptured. It kind of looks like a heart.”

“We ruled out that theory.” Kouhei pointed out. “These monstrosities appeared out of nowhere. All we know is that they used to be Fallen.”

“Why didn’t you tell us?” Tirion wasn’t angry, just wanted to hear his reasoning.

“It started during the Taken War, after Mara’s death. None of us were in the same room to talk about it. The Reef had it under control, and it wasn’t The City’s problem. It still isn’t.”

“I see.” She dusted herself off and stood up. “Let’s keep moving.”

The Taken War. How naïve she was during the whole ordeal, with fantasies about buying a house and disappearing.

Was she in the right blaming the Vanguard for the pain, though? They drove her to the brink of insanity. She carried out those orders by her own volition, driven by guilt and responsibility. Huritt tries to comfort her when the subject comes up, he tells her that Oryx was already on his way and them killing Crota had barely anything to do with it. She was still unsure how the Vanguard viewed her back then. Did they see her as a noble hero willing to take on anything, or just a tool that they didn’t really care about? They haven’t had many opportunities to talk it out. It was too late now, she created too big of a rift before she departed for the Shore.

Guardian first, Awoken second.

She didn’t let herself think about it too much because it annoyed her too much. Zavala viewed his soldiers as his children, believed that doing so meant that they will follow him into the deepest valleys. When he spoke of devotion and sacrifice it came from many years of experience. Tirion didn’t see herself as his child, she told him as much. She knew that there will be consequences but she was fully ready to shoulder the responsibility. Cayde won’t be able to rest until the Ace is in her hands.

Some consequences were worth it.

Tirion tried to picture a world where her friends didn’t leave when she needed them the most. The beginning of the Taken War was the most alone she has ever felt. She was alert and awake through it, crushed by the weight of being alone against it all. The Red War was different. Her mind
protected her from it.

They were in the Hellmouth for hours, days maybe. They can recall only a fraction of it. It tore them apart, but it also made them stronger.

Haya and Lorcan stuck together after the incident, but they didn’t talk for months. They stole everything they could get their hands on, something that required little conversation. The two didn’t reconcile until the night before fighting Aksis.

The Tangled Shore became Kouhei’s home, only place in the system that welcomed him with open arms. The Dreaming City was lost, and the only two people who didn’t despise him at the Outpost were his daughter and Petra. People hated him for being a Guardian, but they had nothing but compliments for his fighting skills. Everyone who wanted something dead in the Tangled Shore came to him. He made the smart choice and capitalized on it. He found it funny how people could look past their hatred for him like that, how far some people would go to ensure a clean conscience.

Huritt left for Io, the furthest place away from the Hive that wasn’t the Shore. He needed a breather to process it. Alva tagged along. The two tried to get the band back together with no success, a mix of unanswered calls and dead channels. Fed up with it, both of them returned to the City to find some answers.

Alva decided to participate in the Crucible on a day that was particularly slow and fell right into Tirion’s net. It was smooth sailing from there on. Getting Lorcan and Haya back was predictably easy, all they had to do was start a rumor about a crime syndicate that used Crucible arenas to pocket a lot of Glimmer. Shaxx showed immense disapproval first as it could draw in unwanted attention, but knew that there was no other option and got ready for a storm. As for Kouhei, they threw enough Glimmer at an easily persuaded Awoken Guardian, gave him a job to make the Titan angry and lure him back to the City. They’ll never forget that unnamed Awoken hero.

If Tirion had one wish, it was to never feel crippling loneliness again. It all boiled down to that. It was important to stick together.

Oh, all of them had wishes and desires. They couldn’t help but start thinking about it at the first mention of a living Ahamkara.

Lorcan’s nightmares haven’t stopped, he hoped that answers would make them go away. He could get over the pain of here and now without a hitch because he could easily find answers and a justification, find a salve to soothe his wounds. He had no clue how to go about fixing misaligned bones that never got the chance to heal.

The question was simple. He wanted to know why they forgot about him.

He wanted to know if someone waited every day for him to come home. He wanted to know if anyone searched for him, whether it be someone doing their job or a heartbroken yet determined family member. He was buried there for hundreds of years underneath a bridge, and no one found him until his Ghost came along and dug him up.

Everything from his time was gone except for him and his rust covered dog tag. He still had it, kept it safe in a pocket on his chest. It’s been too long since his death to find any relatives, or family trees, or old newspapers to see if they had articles about a missing boy.

He didn’t want to go back and change things, the Traveler chose him because he deserved a second chance. He only wanted to know why it took so long for someone to find him.
Haya has lived many lives, and pretty much seen it all. From Warlord massacres, to the Hive invasion, to all Towers. She knew exactly what she could accomplish herself without the need of any supernatural wish-granting forces. There was only one thing she couldn’t do herself, or force others to do it. Her wish was to be granted a moment to apologize to those she left behind. She took the world for granted and never expected the Collapse to arrive. She didn’t expect forgiveness. Her family wouldn’t be proud of what she has become.

The Sunbreaker has survived all of her fights without a scratch, yet the kindest people she has encountered have died horribly or went through things worse than death. She was still somewhat grounded in reality, as she knew that she wasn’t alone in that situation. Cosmic forces do a bad job punishing wrongdoers.

Huritt knew that the number 4 next to his name is a recent addition. That number was different on his first revival. His Ghost keeps denying it when asked about it. He didn’t think the Ghost was lying, but there were fragments in his head he couldn’t explain. Couldn’t connect to the right place. Exo dreams: bodies in ice. Bodies falling like meteors. Worlds of panic, fever, hypnagogia. Those were of before. The other fragments were of his life as a Guardian, but it felt like he was looking at the world through someone else’s eyes. Something was amiss. It had to do with something Dark, something best forgotten. His wish wasn’t to remember, he could do that on his own. His wish was that what was hidden away wouldn’t cause a reckoning once unearthed. A safety shield, something the others who have embarked on similar journeys lacked. Exos didn’t reset voluntarily as the procedure was too painful, and the facilities who offered the service were long lost. That meant only one thing.

Alva... Alva was broken. Did she have desires? Did she know what a wish was, the fundamentals of it? Did they bother to program it in when they created her? She knew the definition, but not what it was. It gives her a headache when she thinks about it too hard, maybe it was a failsafe. Not like the one on Nessus. Alva had a conscience, she was definitely alive. Alive but not alive enough for Riven to be able to tap into her mind. It didn’t matter if she had any wishes, or if she had the capacity to wish. She was immune to the wish granter. Someone else had to wish for her. The headache didn’t let her think about it further.

Kouhei believed in simple things. Don’t wish for anything you don’t have. Don’t wish for anything you don’t have the right to possess. Don’t wish for anything you haven’t rightfully earned. He couldn’t find anything that fit those categories. Of course, there was the desire to free the Dreaming City, but he knew that Riven would never grant that wish.

They finally arrived, and Tirion could get out of her head.

“Hide your Ghost.” Kouhei said as they walked. “Between Ghost Hunters and the Scorn, it’s not safe for them.”

“Ghost Hunters?” Tirion’s Ghost peeked out from her collar. “Did you say Ghost Hunters?”

“One that I know of, but there could be more. Renegade Lightbearer who roams around killing lone Ghosts.”

“What for?” The Ghost went back into hiding in her collar, out of sight besides a small blue light. “This place has no limits, does it?”

“Because he doesn’t agree with the concept of being a Risen, Lightbearer, Guardian… call it what you want.”

“Why make others suffer?” Tirion grimaced. “Nevermind. I’ll leave that to Haya to rant about. All
Warlocks I know are trying to find some kind of logic in the Traveler’s choosing process. Why did it choose people like that?”

“Hmph. Has anyone come close to figuring it out?”

“All of them think there is a pattern.” She sighed softly at the wilderness infront of her. They were heading towards a terminal infront of some rocks. “It makes sense in Lorcan’s case.”

“Hm.”

“He was a young kid who was a victim of circumstance in a war no one asked for. He was robbed of a life. The Traveler granted him a continuation.” She explained. “Then he met Haya. And that… that’s self-explanatory.”

“Topical…” Kouhei shielded his Ghost with his whole body when he let her out to scan the terminal infront of them. The rocks next to it had a symbol painted on it that looked like a spider.

“Topical? What?” The rocks disintegrated into blue sparks, revealing a door hidden behind it. “Oh. That looks familiar.”

“Who stole this tech from who is a question that doesn’t need to be asked.”

There were more terminals in the cave, more fake rocks, more vomit-inducing Scorn. The two Guardians had no interest in proving a point or striking fear into the hearts of their enemies, they just wanted to get to their destination.

“Hello, dead thing.”

They appeared out of thin air on a ridge, five of them. The ones who were behind Uldren after he shot Cayde. They underestimated her, they wanted her to think she could kill them right there. She retaliated by showing them they weren’t worthy of her bullets just yet. The troops on the ground were the priority.

“Perhaps you will give my children a better fight than your friend, Cayde.”

Her legs wanted her to run, to spread her wings of fire and burn Fikrul alive. Not yet. Not yet. Not yet.

“Come! Kill us. Death… is our sword.”

She focused her fire on the Scorn attacking her on the ground. The Barons were gone from the ridge when everything was ash. It was a test, to see if they can rile her up. They didn’t scare her. They were as dead as her, and they could die again. It was simple. Simplicity removed the fear from her mind.

The caged Servitor clung on to life, only able to make pained static sounds. Kouhei took the liberty to let his Ghost out to scan it before she could. As she waited, Tirion put her hand on it and watched its blue glitching eye focus on her.

“Poor thing…” She whispered. “What are they doing with it?”

The Ghost scan took longer than usual, raising Tirion’s suspicions.

“They’re mauling it. Sucking the Ether out of it and corrupting it.” Kouhei explained.

His Ghost continued on scanning, and the Servitor’s eye slowly faded away and it fell to silence. It
was free of pain now. She slowly turned to look at her disgruntled Guardian. She didn’t need to say anything.

“Someone is trying to hack our comms…” Tirion’s Ghost didn’t even notice the silent argument. “It’s Petra. We—”

“Leave it alone.” Kouhei demanded.

“I already answered it.” His Ghost said, no guilt in her voice. “She says we’re late.”

“Vera…”

Vera rolled her eye and diverted her attention to the call. “We’re heading to see the Spider.”

“I’m going to keep this brief. We need to talk face to face. You know the way to the Spider, meet me there. I’ll send you some backup. Please – don’t shoot the backup.”

Kouhei waited until the call was hung up before saying anything. “Why did you do that?”

“Because get off my paracausal back, that’s why.”

"Do you two need a minute?” Tirion stepped in. "I think we can argue later."

“Agreed.” Kouhei grunted the words out. “That terminal over there opens the door to Spider’s new territory. Do you mind, Vera?”

She was already on it. The choice was between hacking the terminal or transmitting down all remaining pots and kettles from the EDZ on her Guardian.

"Vera doesn't seem like a name you would pick, Kouhei." Tirion's Ghost commented.

"Vera came pre-named."

"Huh. That happens?” He looked at his own Guardian.

“Remember how she said that we would meet again, some sunny day?” Vera sang as she worked. "I've always wondered what happened to her."

The door opened, and growls welcomed them on the other side.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for the sudden influx of kudos! <3
“Ah!” Menacing Fallen laughter rattled their ears. “Well, if it isn’t a glorious family reunion! What makes you hold it here, at my home away from home… away from home?”

The Spider’s Fallen were on high alert, brandishing their Arc spears. Tirion clutched on the strap of her rucksack to make sure no one was tugging at it to steal her Ghost. The dozen dead Ghosts hanging in a net and the one in Spider’s hand was enough to make her want to take on all of this completely alone, just so that she wouldn’t find her Ghost there. Luckily, The Spider was too attention grabbing in his makeshift throne, distracting her from the nets.

“I heard you lost the Shore.”

“Gah!” Spider snapped at Petra and leaned towards her, using all four of his arms to push himself forward. She didn’t flinch. “You lost my Shore!”

“Thought you might want some help getting it back.”

Kouhei had no time to waste. “Only thing I am willing to agree with Petra on is that the Barons and Uldren need to die.” He declared. “You know where they are hiding.”

“Yes, I am quite familiar with their location, as it was, until recently… MINE.” He almost crushed the Ghost he was holding. “I know where they scheme, and you know how things work here. Despite our clear, mutually aligned interests, I’m sorry, I can’t help but feel like it is I who will come up short.”

On literally any other day, Tirion would find dramatics amusing. She would even look past the Ghost he was twisting and playing with.

“Uldren and his Barons killed my friend. You endlessly talking about how you know where the Scorn are is very quickly becoming more annoying than the Scorn.” Tirion stepped into the light in front of Petra, before she could throw a knife at him. “Only thing that’s off limits is my Ghost. Make an offer.”

The Spider laughed. “Oh, I like you! You… remind me of a ‘friend.’”

“A ‘friend’?”

“Threta. A name not even I can conveniently forget when business has been concluded.” It was a name that hadn’t been uttered in years. “She was very… efficient with everything. Efficient, but at the cost of occasionally summoning perdition and pandemonium.”

“We don’t talk about her.” Petra immediately intervened. “She is dead and buried. Let her remain so.”

“Ha! Really, now? Let’s just say… they dug up all the dirt but there was no one in the hole.” He leaned back in his seat, watching Petra glance at the Titan behind her. “I’d suggest you better hear out my rather generous proposition before eavesdropping around the Shore for the whereabouts of a missing ‘friend’ becomes a part of it.”

“What’s the deal?” Tirion asked.
He was very much appreciative of her straight to business attitude. Those made for best allies. “The Prison of Elders continues to leak like a sieve. Someone should clean up that mess before traipsing off for murder and mayhem.”

“I’ll clean it up. You know I keep my word.” Kouhei volunteered. “Meanwhile, Tirion can take care of the Barons. As long as the Barons are alive, I work for you. All of us profit here.”

“You drive an interesting bargain. Very well.” Guardians. Why was he collecting their Ghosts when they could be used for beneficial things? “On your way to their hideout, retrieve my caches, and I’ll make it worth your while. Just make sure that both of you deliver.”

“I will. We can continue this on the comms.” She already had her gun out. “All I care about is getting there.”

Short and sweet, and gone in an instant. Just how it should be. No rest for undead outlaws.

It was uncanny. Could it be?

Either way, he relaxed and prepared for a spectacle in front of him.

“Kouhei…” Petra turned to him. She had to know. She didn’t need an unexpected fire during a tempest.

“Don’t talk to me.” He was getting ready to leave too. He as well had a job and a promise to the Spider. “You know what you were responsible for. I’m not my Ghost.”

“I blame myself for what happened. I should have done better.” Petra was going to chase him down if she had to. “But I have to know; did you lie about Threta? Is she still out there?”

“She is dead.” Kouhei echoed her own words as he made sure his guns were in order.

“If there is a chance…” Petra sighed. “Threta betrayed our people, presented herself to be someone who could do irreparable damage to us and our greatest secrets. But she could be of great help with Uldren. If you know anything…”

“Let’s focus on Uldren with what we have.” Kouhei stopped her with the one thing they could agree on. “The devil is on his trail, and she’s come to take him home.”

“What about you?” Petra asked the Spider, and at this point he wished for nothing more than for them to get out.

“So many questions. I’m becoming offended.” He growled. “You don’t want to see me offended. Now, go. I’m not a patient spider.”

“We’re not going to kill the Barons.”

“What are you talking about, Guardian!?”

“Not this time.” She said. “Ambushing them like that won’t work. They are just going to scatter. That’s the plan. Go in there, make them flee, and take them out one by one.”

“What if we can’t find them again?” Ghost argued, almost begged her. “This is our best shot at ending this.”

“It isn’t. It’s our best shot at failing, or dying. We don’t know the enemy, we don’t know how they
fight. I don't think they want me dead yet.” Tirion hoped he’d understand. “We’ll find them. I promise you. I just need to know how to fight them.”

She quickly picked up the caches, barely making it a priority but a deal was a deal. Before both she and Kouhei left, Haya gave him strict orders to keep Tirion grounded in reality. Kouhei obliged in the only way he could think of and told the Warlock everything he knew about the Barons and what crimes they were responsible for. How to fight them was left up to her.

The Machinist was the first one to show her face. Relies too much on explosives. Slow ones, easily avoidable. Her size could be easily exploited, as she wouldn’t bomb herself.

They were already fleeing, and Tirion knew she wouldn’t be able to meet all of them and that she’ll have to take what she can get. She didn’t shoot to kill, but she refused to let them run away without wounds.

The Rifleman. Focused too much on talking. Everyone who wielded a sniper rifle had the same weakness, they couldn’t handle combat up close. He was responsible for the deaths of several Paladins and multiple Ghosts. He was at the top of her list, but saved for last for that very reason.

The Trickster. It was safe to assume that touching anything that wasn’t nailed down was a bad call. Tirion wondered what’s worse, the explosions or that horrid laugh. As with the others, her weakness was confrontation.

The Hangman. Relied too much on fire and on a performance, cared very little about preserving his own life. Murderer of Servitors, the one who doomed the House of Wolves to extinction.

The Fanatic. He talked too much, so she instantly cut the feed. Always with the talking, the speeches, the tangents, the attempts at making her feel guilty. She didn’t need to hear any of it. But in her annoyance at his ranting, she didn’t learn anything from fighting him. He was going to be the most trouble. She got the impression that he didn’t want to fight her, as she would be more use to him alive. Fikrul was a highly-regarded Archon Priest turned to the first Scorn.

It didn’t matter what he howled at her. She never shot first at the Fallen. She was preserving her life as much as they were.

There were still a couple Barons she didn’t get to meet. She wasn’t done, refusing to stop until her mission was done so she took off running to the exit. Once outside she found a giant trail of fire and hopped onto her sparrow to follow it. It was the Rider’s trail, the one who was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Awoken lives. The Warlock’s Ghost was shouting at her as she chased the Rider, wishing he had limbs to stop her. Her sparrow stopped unexpectedly, and she jumped into the shadows. She had to take care of the foot soldiers or else she’d get gunned down. She got a few of them down with her scout rifle, and the rest with her grenades.

“Not that I’m complaining but, what happened to not killing?” Ghost asked her.

“Had to start at some point. Come on.”

Sometimes he really didn’t like the look in her eyes. That look meant that she was going to disappear soon, and that's when the fear set in. It happened with almost every fight now.

He kept telling himself that they were there for justice as she ran into battle. The Rider laughed and shouted as she drove around the arena and focused her guns on the Guardian the second she noticed her. There wasn’t a shortage of explosive barrels around them, and both of them tried to use it to their own advantage. Tirion won in the end, managing to knock off a significant part off the
Pike with a lucky explosion.

The Rider didn’t beg for her life as the final bullet got fired, she just clung onto her Pike, dying as she lived.

One down.

Seven targets to go.

Tirion just had enough strength to take a step back so that she wouldn’t fall into the yellow acid pit when her knees gave out.

She didn’t understand why she was so exhausted.

“Are you back?” Tirion found a concerned blue eye staring at her. He finished healing the wounds on her body. There was nothing more he could heal. “Are you still there?”

“… what?”

“You two were fighting for over an hour. I thought it would never end. You do that thing, you know? Disappear when you fight.” He told her, not taking his eye off her. “Sometimes I worry that you won’t come back. I’ve told you this before but… you always do that.”

“And I’ll always come back.” Tirion tried to control her breathing. “Is she dead?”

“Yes.”

“Good.” She whispered. “Good.”

“We should get back to the Spider.” Ghost suggested. “I think Petra has their rap sheets from the prison. Could help us.”

“Any updates on a cache?”

“Yes… I’m getting a signal not too far from us. Could grab it on our way back.”

“Lonely secrets will be our demise. We said we’d never let anyone in. We said we’d only die of lonely secrets.

The Dreaming City is resplendent, glittering, magnificent, breathtaking… but you know what’s strange about it? It is radiant, it’s all those things, but there is no sun. Not a real one, at least. There should be a sun this far out. It doesn’t rise nor set. I always found that rather strange. It shouldn’t be sunny. We know we’re on the edge of the system. Was it made so on purpose, just so that people would instinctively not trust it? I don’t think so. I think we were genuinely chasing perfection. To be as beautiful as we can be, both our City and ourselves.

It stops being perfect when it’s artificial. Instead, it becomes a beautiful insanity.

The Dreaming City is beautiful. The Awoken are beautiful.

That’s it.

It’s beautiful.

The outside world… the outside world is, truth be told, perfect. The outside world breathes, it
evolves, it changes. It's shattered and downtrodden, but it's perfect. It doesn't stare at you with soulless eyes, it welcomes you like a friend.

Even with all of this, I don’t believe the Dreaming City deserves what’s about to happen to it. It’s too cruel. That’s where I come in. I am going to save it.”

They found the cache in a pile of junk. Where it was placed originally was a mystery. So far the locations of the caches held a message in themselves. They could gather nothing from this. It was to be expected.

Only thing that stopped Tirion from playing it again was that it was time to talk to the Spider and Petra again.

She wondered how the Spider kept his spirits up, as he always seemed to be laughing. She assumed that the answer was Kouhei doing a good job killing things. “Oh, I so dislike betting on the underdog… didn’t think you’d return! I speak for everyone in the Shore when I say that I will not miss Yaviks.”

“I took the opportunity.”

“Just the one? I wasn’t expecting you, the hero of the Red War, to have a limit.”

“It was on purpose. Killing them one by one is smarter. Any idea where they could be hiding?”

“Ha! Impatient, are we?” The Spider laughed. “Don’t worry, you talked me into it. Our friendship shall continue. The Queenless Queen’s Wrath has something ready for you.”

“What…”?

“Don’t look at me like that. Go, make the Shore a bit less crowded and we will speak again of favors, and unanswered questions.”

“Don’t mind him.” Petra said from where she was in the darkness and motioned for Tirion to follow her to the corridor out of the Bunker. She was holding a bow in one hand, which struck Tirion as odd as Petra didn’t seem like someone who would use one. She propped it against a wall and crossed her arms. “I’m… I didn’t get a chance to say it before you left. I’m sorry about Cayde. He didn’t deserve to…” Petra sighed mournfully.

“How are the Awoken holding up?”

“We’re in ruins. Those who knelt to Uldren, he slaughtered. The rest have scattered.” She slowly picked the bow up again and handed it to Tirion. “Here. This bow is for you. It was once owned by… never mind. It’s yours now. Use it to make the Barons pay.”

Tirion had no choice but to accept it. It felt strange in her hands, she’s never held a weapon like that before. Maybe Lorcan could give her some pointers on how to use it, but the likely scenario was that he would steal it.

“The Spider said you had something for me.” She holstered the bow behind her back.

“I can send all I have about the Barons to your Ghost.” Petra said. “As for me… Did you see that Awoken spire when you landed here? It’s called the Watchtower. I shouldn’t be telling you this, but… my people’s greatest secrets lie beyond that spire. We must stop Uldren before he goes there.”
“Haven’t I done enough for you to trust me?”

“It’s complicated.”

“How?”

“Has Kouhei told you about Threta?”

“Kind… of?” Tirion shrugged awkwardly, suddenly forgetting how to use her limbs and her brain.

“The Spider’s description was an appropriate one. She brought on pandemonium, but she also taught us a valuable lesson about secrecy and trust. We have to make sure that it never happens again.”

Tirion wasn’t exactly satisfied with that answer. “What did she do?”

“It’s a long story. One that can be saved for after Uldren is dealt with.” Petra pulled up her hood and headed for outside, where her ship was. “Good hunting.”

“What…” Tirion whispered to herself. “What just…? She’s not going to tell me?”

“Don’t look at me. I’m as confused as you are.” Ghost said. “There is a lot to go through in these rap sheets, and I got a ping for another cache. We need somewhere safe to camp.”

“I suddenly know what she meant…” Tirion shook her head. “How having a sun that doesn’t make sense disorients you. Let’s go.”

They haven’t encountered the Ghost Hunter yet, but it wasn’t anything they were willing to risk. They needed a temporary base of operations that was on the ground. She didn’t want to ask the Spider for a room to occupy, not quite sure what to expect from him yet. Who knows what he’s planning to do once the Barons are dead.

Neither of them were surprised when they found the crashed Hive ship while chasing for the cache and somewhere to set up camp. Not even a sigh. Not wanting to be chased or be stabbed by a Knight, they kept a low profile until they found a cave. She made sure to barricade the entrance with some of Lorcan’s tech she brought with her.

“It’s an abandoned shipyard. Oh—!” Ghost gasped in fear. “I just looked down. Don’t do that.”

“Looks like a perfect place to set up camp to me.”

Ghost looked at the ground made entirely out of old ship parts, trying to ignore the void underneath all that, and then back at Tirion. “Really, Guardian?”

“Really.”

The Awoken ship hanging on cables caught her attention. It resembled Petra’s, except it looked like it hasn’t been used in years. It was covered in dust and grime, but no evidence of Fallen trying to disassemble it.

“The cache is… the cache is inside the ship.” Ghost closed his eye, repeating a simple phrase in his little head. Don’t imagine the cables breaking and the ship plummeting down. He reluctantly opened his eye when he heard movement. “You aren’t…”

“I am.”
“Guardian…”

“It’s my ship!” She noticed the worry and decided to correct herself. “I’m not going to jump. Don’t worry. Remember the day you found me, how we got our first ship?”

It was one of his fondest memories. “It’s been a while.”

“I believe in you, my Little Light.”

He has grown to love the nickname, somehow. It was endearing. At first, he was offended by it because he thought it meant that he was powerless and little. Over time she has convinced him that he was the total opposite, she showed him how mighty he actually was. He transmatted himself inside the ship and started scanning. The ship was very much alive, it’s just been waiting for its owner to come back. Acting on a hunch when he couldn’t unlock the dashboard, he put in all the codes in the caches they’ve found so far. The inside of the ship lit up, and it started moving. Taking yet another chance, he transmatted the cables holding it away one by one. His Guardian believed in him, that he could do it. He braced himself for the fall with every cable gone, but it never came.

The ship was flying. It probably won’t get them back to the City because of lack of maintenance, but it was flying.

He did it. He spun around in the air with joy before giving his Guardian a heads up, and transmutting her into the ship.

“We did it!” He bragged. “And we didn’t plummet to our deaths!”

“Proud of you.” She lightly tapped him on his shell and got to work.

The ship felt like home. Tirion hated jumpships, preferred to have more room. This one felt just right. She pressed the keys on the dashboard like she knew what she was doing, and noticed that there was a box on top of it. Ghost immediately scanned it and put in the code to unlock it.

Another data chip. Tirion pulled out her trusty datapad from the rucksack and started playing it.

“They say that we must never allow the Reef to revolve around the City and their morals, in any capacity. The word ‘Guardian’ is not one that is used in reference to people we regard highly. The title is said with absolute hatred. Of course, some of it has to do with self-preservation. People turn into vultures when they hear about riches. That’s why we hid this city. They would try to come here and rob us blind. That can come later. A day will come where we will beg people to come and help us.

Though… I find us calling the Guardians all sorts of insulting names rather odd. If linguistics were up to me, I’d make it a new idiom for pure hypocrisy. Some are angry at them for cheating death, meanwhile we moved mountains to cheat time. Just ask about an Alis Li, and the pain she was forced to live with. She was one of the mountains.

Oh, I know about Alis.

I know many more names and many more stories that rob us of the right to criticize others, and I am going to tell.

Guardians, no matter how insufferable they can be, embrace their flaws. Maybe sometimes a little bit too much.

A lot of the times a lot too much.
Just... just throw a ball at them, or draw a circle on the ground. They act with a fascinating childlike wonder.

You don’t see that... life here. There is no spirit. It’s all factitious. It's prim and proper and royal, but factitious.

It’s a beautiful insanity.

We sterilize it all. Neuter it. Every little thing that deviates from Mara’s definition of perfection must be eradicated. It is not a world I want to live in, personally. If it makes them happy to live there, I have no qualms with it. That’s why I want to save this cursed city. They don’t deserve to die. Everyone deserves a fair chance at life.

I took an oath. I can’t let them die.

If there is one thing to remember from this: The Awoken are as alien as the Fallen.

There is something alluring about humanity that a lot of the Awoken just don’t possess. Those that do? Well, they don’t live for long.

I’ve done my best to hang on to the little humanity I have. I won’t let Mara Sov steal that from me. I’d rather die. I remember fragments of my past life, and my diaries were the first thing I retrieved the second I saw a window of opportunity. Don’t ask me how. Don’t act surprised. I’ve always caused trouble for you. You won’t put me in your history books.”

It came to a stop. Just like it always does.

“That’s...” Ghost tried to find the words.

“Out of all recordings, this is definitely one of them.” Tirion was at a loss for words too. “These recordings make it sound like the Dreaming City is some kind of asylum.”

“Next one is pinging in Quitter’s Well. Five more to go.”

“The effort put into this so far is starting to make me angry, to be honest.”

An important question was begging to be asked. “Once we have all of these, should we show them to Petra?”

“Ehhhh...” Tirion didn’t understand the confused sound her throat made. “I want to know what the crime was before I take responsibility for it.”

“Why wouldn’t Petra recognize you?”

“Maybe I had a more flattering haircut back then? I think Spider seemed suspicious, though.” She shrugged. “And, it’s been ten years. I don’t think I’d recognize Petra without an eyepatch, or Kouhei with a grin on his face.”

“Please don’t put that image in my head.” Ghost shuddered and started scanning things to stop thinking about it. There were some boxes underneath the seat, filled with spare clothes and ammo.

“We should get back to work. Just one more thing...” She tapped something on the dashboard and started praying. “Please pick up.”

Tirion read through the files about the Barons as she waited, quickly figuring out where to find the next one. Mindbender was next on her list. She wanted to face her fears, and there was only one
place he could be hiding in. That place happened to be right outside her new hideout. Every single
word about the Mindbender was disturbing. She couldn’t figure out where his Fallen side ended
and the Hive side began. Huritt knew where to draw a line with his Hive fascination, he never
made it into an obsession, never made himself part Hive. Being an Exo helped, as he had a natural
resistance. Metal couldn’t be turned into Hive flesh, it couldn’t be corrupted.

“Please state your business.” It was a robotic voice that answered. “If you are a Tex Mechanica
representative, I have been given instructions to forward you a 500-page manual about how to
build a rooftop which can withstand a missile barrage, for your own safety.”

“Hi, Arcite.” A small smile appeared on her face. “Tell Shaxx it’s me. You recognize my voice.”

It was almost immediate.

“Hey…”

“Hi! I would like that manual.”

Shaxx chuckled tiredly. “I’m so happy to hear your voice.”

“Did I wake you?”

“Truth be told, I haven’t been able to sleep. How goes the Hunt?”

There was no right adjective for it. “We got one. Seven to go. Trying to locate the rest now. How’s
Redrix doing?”

“He’s making everyone proud, including me.” He said. Shaxx didn’t believe in much, and the
word proud was not one he used lightly. “All he has to do now is to show everyone that he’s more
than flash and flame. I believe in him.”

“How does he fare against the Sunbreakers?”

“Surprisingly well. I see fewer and fewer of them in the Crucible these days.”

“Haya is finally letting them into the wild. Won’t be long until the Shore is lit up.”

“I’m sure. It’s been ages since someone like Redrix graced the Crucible. Reminds me of Thalor. I
will not lose this one.”

Shaxx knew that Thalor wasn’t on him, but that didn’t stop him from blaming himself. It was
something he could have prevented nonetheless. The lesson he learned from it was the reason why
he pushed Redrix as much as he did. Tirion has listened to Shaxx talk for hours about the newest
Crucible champion, the pride in his voice was infectious.

“You won’t lose him. I would like to meet him, though. I’ll try to come home before the Festival
ends. I don’t want to spend more time here than needed.”

“I know how much you love the Festival. Lorcan’s Ghost was harassing me the whole day today,
trying to take pictures. I assume it was for a mask.”

“Aw. Shame I’m not there to make you put on a mask.”

“My helmet is the scariest thing they’ll ever see on my head.” He joked. “The thought of Guardians
running around with my helmet on is rather disconcerting.”
“Knowing Lorcan, it’s about to get a lot worse.”

“Just tell his Ghost to stay away from Rahool.”

“Why?”

“I’m working with Banshee on a weapon for Redrix. Majority of my time has been spent on stopping Guardians from punching the Cryptarch.”

“Oh...”

“He’s been accused of fraud, some nonsense about grenade launchers. I’d rather have them take it out in the Crucible.”

Tirion couldn’t help but laugh. It was the little things that made her homesick and reminded her where she truly belonged. “You don’t get that at the Shore.”

“You really don’t.” Shaxx murmured. “Make Cayde proud, and come home.”

“I will. I’ll always come back.”
Grey.

The flash of the lightning revealed silhouettes of dead trees. The raging thunderstorm was silent, and all she could hear were odd distorted screams. She heard the crackle of a bonfire and creaking doors, collapsing buildings and voices whispering something in her ear. Desperate radio calls for help turning into animalistic snarls.

It was destruction and horror, frozen in time.

A still picture of death.

The portal closed right infront of her as she was running towards it, and her skin was set ablaze. She tried calling for her Ghost, finding nothing. She tried screaming out for help, but nothing came out of her throat.

There was nothing she could do but burn alive.

*There is no light here.*

*You are alone.*

“Guardian!!”

Tirion gasped for air as she got jerked away from the nightmare. It was only a dream. The Mindbender was gone, so was that horrid throne world built from Cayde’s death. She was out. She did escape.

“How long have I been out…?” Tirion winced out the question, trying to shake off the nightmare. Jumpships weren’t that comfortable to sleep in as well, to the point where asking the Spider for a room started sounding like a good idea.

“About two hours.” Ghost said. “You should get more rest.”

“I’m fine.”

“You don’t look fine.”

“I had a nightmare. Not the last one I’ll have.” She rubbed her eyes, hoping that it would lift the weariness. “Anything new on your end?”

“Nothing on the Barons. I talked to Vera the whole time you were sleeping.” He said. “I feel for her. Having Kouhei as a Guardian can’t be easy.”

“I can imagine.”

“Did you know that Petra saved her life?”

Tirion raised an eyebrow as she tried to get her bearings. “What?”
“Yeah. The Awoken were really not happy about Kouhei becoming a Guardian. They got separated once, and a group went after Vera.” Ghost told. “Petra intervened just before they were about to stab her. She said that she still hasn’t repaid Petra for that. Kouhei is still furious with Petra, though.”

“I think Petra is good people. But I understand why Kouhei is angry.” She said as she got everything ready. “She made a mistake, but no one is above forgiveness. Aaaaand I think I listened to those recordings one too many times.”

There was that again. Forgiveness.

“Have you… have you thought about what you want to do with Uldren?” He asked hesitantly.

“I…” Tirion took a deep breath. Her instant reaction was to not think about it. Letting herself think about it would be like opening a door with an avalanche of rocks on the other side. Not yet. “Let’s get back to the hunt.”

They did the job for her. They found her.

The Mad Bomber was the next one, excitedly yelling in her ear about how she was his best friend. He had a gift for her. She would find him adorable if it weren’t for his crimes. Her training in the Prison of Elders years back made everything he threw at her harmless.

The gift was death.

When he noticed that bombs and splinter mines didn’t work on her, he tried using words. She knew the truth of what happened with Cayde. Cayde didn’t beg for mercy. The Mad Bomber could lie all day about it and it wouldn’t phase her. It just shortened his lifespan.

She couldn’t let anger cloud her judgement in combat. Couldn’t make mistakes. Anger had to wait. It had to be pushed back to the deepest burrow in her brain and deprived of light.

In his dying words, the Mad Bomber called her and Cayde murderers pretending to be heroes.

Murder was murder. There was no argument about it. The Barons had their opportunity to repent in the Prison. Not killing them meant more Awoken blood on her own hands.

Someone had to die. That’s how it worked.

Tirion didn’t want to gloat over her kill. She wouldn’t have had the chance if she wanted, as the cave they were in was rigged to blow. The moment they dismantled the final bomb at the exit, she took the opportunity to breathe. Breathing was a big priority.

“No matter what the Bomber said, you’re not a murderer.” Ghost said gently as he healed her injuries from the fight. “Guardians are defenders of the Light.”

“Are we, though?” Tirion whispered. She didn’t understand how being a holy being of some sorts meant that moral injustices were permitted. “Really?”

Ghost didn’t expect the sudden opposition. “Did you mean what you said to Zavala? About Guardians?”

“When I said that the term Guardian is something the Speaker came up with because he had nothing better to do?” She shook her head. “Not really. I was too angry to remember that the term Guardian was coined by someone who fell to the Dark and went on a murder spree. The Speaker
then adopted it. Because he had nothing better to do.”

She scared him. Well, he wasn’t scared of her, but the path she had set her eyes on. He didn’t want to say it out loud. Just another thing to add to the list of things he wishes he could say to her.

Tirion continued: “Isn’t that what they tried to do with the Dreaming City? Pure perfection, a paradise? I think you need both Light and Dark. You need imperfections and dents. You need a corner or two blackened by a holy fire.”

“Dents and the Dark are not the same thing, Guardian.”

“I will not lose myself to the Dark.” Tirion gave him a kind smile, trying to put his mind to rest. “I’ve lost myself to it once. I won’t again. I just think that you need to have some of it. I don’t think it really leaves you.”

“I… I don’t understand.” He didn’t want to continue talking about it, either. “Let’s… let’s just get moving.”

They didn’t say anything to each other as they walked, on the lookout for the next Baron. He hated the silence, hated how her mind shut him out. He didn’t doubt her words, but no Ghost wanted their Guardian to toy with the Darkness.

They were in an underground passage, safe from the Rifleman’s sights.

“I’m not going to become the next Dredgen Yor.” Tirion murmured once she could no longer take the silence. “There is a line. A thin one, but a line at that. I’ve been thinking about what it is I’m fighting for and realized that it’s certainly not the Light.”

“If not Light, then what?”

“Light is just a tool. You don’t fight for a tool, you are not a defender of a tool.” She said. “Friends. Family. Love. Those are the things worth trudging through an undead west for, many times over. Cayde was my friend. He needs to be avenged.”

“You’re…”

“You’re not a tool.” She stepped right in front of him, stopping him. “You’re my friend. I’d walk through this cursed undead west for you, alright?” Tirion kept her voice soft and low. She had to make sure that he understood.

“Alright.” He sounded relieved this time around. “I worry a lot, Guardian.”

“I’m fine. My faith is just sick and my skin is thin as ever from all of this. I hope that I can get all the barons before everything crashes down on me.” She frowned slightly. She should talk more with him, considering he is probably the most stressed out Ghost to ever be created by the Traveler. “We need to find Kouhei before going after the next Baron. He has food.”

“Vera told me they’re camping in a place Spider calls The Empty Tank. He cleaned it out. Should be good.”

From what she could tell, the lost sector used to be a bar of sorts for Fallen before Kouhei invaded. Nobody seemed to be home.

“Hello?” Tirion called out. There was still steam coming out of the pots on his makeshift stove,
they couldn’t have wandered far. The room looked lived in. A corner acted as a tiny armoury filled with guns, the walls had trophies on them. Cabal shields, helmets, Fallen arc spears. It reminded her of Shaxx. One of the most notable wall decorations was a chrome shield, one of a Defender Titan.

“Hey…” Vera addressed them wearily, the murky blue shell she wore for camouflage matching her demeanour. “Kouhei’s negotiating with the Spider upstairs. Help yourself to the food.”

Tirion didn’t wait for permission as she was starving. She didn’t care what it was as long as it was edible. Kouhei could cook when he wanted to, but she didn’t want to know what the ingredients were considering where they stood.

“He left you down here alone?” Ghost asked.

“I don’t like looking at those nets filled with Ghosts and Kouhei doesn’t need me up there.” She said glumly. “There is no one down here. Besides, I know this place. We lived here for about a year. After Crota.”

“Oh…”

For the first time since they arrived to the Shore, everything around them was silent sans for a few buzzing consoles. Chewing food felt too loud.

Tirion figured that she might as well ask the question.

“How do you feel about Kouhei, Vera?”

The Ghost looked down, struggling. If she had lips she would bite them. “You’re asking me if I hate my Guardian?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t. I don’t hate him. I don’t think any Ghost hates their own Guardian.” She looked up at Tirion. “When you’ve been through a lot of pain, you either become a kinder person or whatever the opposite of that. My Guardian just… happens to be the opposite of that.”

“What did you know about Kouhei before you found him?” Tirion knew as much about Ghosts as anyone did. She knew that Ghosts get at least one hint for what they should look for. Hint or instinct, she didn’t know.

“I knew of a song. A pained one.” Vera told. “Well, my first memory is being lodged next to an old record player. She said that they would meet again, some sunny day.”

“Who?”

“Whoever the voice was howling about. I took it as a sign. I searched for someone who was about to lose someone.” She looked away again. She didn’t want to say the name.

“Threta. Er…”

“Yep… That name. Your name. It’s actually a nickname, by the way. Theta Rhym. You liked wordplay.” The Ghost’s voice was filled with resentment. “To think, I would have ended up with a normal Guardian if it weren’t for you. But, what can you do?”

“What? What the hell?” Tirion tried really hard to not melt the spoon in her hand. “You’re putting
the blame on someone’s pain for Kouhei ending up the way he is? Isn’t that a bit selfish?”

“You’re lecturing people about being selfish?!” Vera composed herself and sighed deeply. “Tell me one thing.”

“Okay. What?”

“I want to know if you ended your life knowing that you will come back. Because that would be despicable. I don’t think anyone can forgive something like that.”

“I don’t remember. I really hope not.” Tirion said. “The recordings I’ve found so far… each entry is getting more and more desperate. They come off like someone trying to say as much as they can before time runs out and shuts them up.”

“Recordings? What recordings?”

“She… I left a series of them. I haven’t found them all yet. There are ten of them in total.”

“Ten?” Vera mumbled something only she could hear. “That’s excessive. Goes along with what I’ve heard about you. Must be a coincidence.”

Tirion couldn’t ask for a clarification, as the rumble in the distance let them know that Kouhei was back. The Spider wasn’t patient, so the Titan quickly replaced his weapons and was gone in a flash with his Ghost. Tirion already had the key, so he had nothing to worry about.

“I—” She blinked a couple of times as the dust settled. “Okay, then!”

“I hope you don’t mind, but I ran a quick query through the archives. Something about the way Vera reacted to that number got me curious.” Ghost said.

“What did you find?”

“Old Vanguard reports. About ten years ago, ten Awoken vaults were found on Earth. They were imbued with strong Awoken magic. No one could open them or move them.”

“What happened to them?” She asked.

“Nothing!” He sounded surprised. “They’re still there, claimed by nature. No further reports about it, besides the occasional Titan trying to punch it open in search for loot. It electrocutes the Fallen. They couldn’t get Techeuns down to Earth to take a look at them. Can’t find anything about what the Awoken think of it.”

“And nothing is a coincidence.” Tirion was finally used to it. “Let’s finish up here then get to Quitter’s Well.”

“All night she’s talking to a god…

Mara’s going to make a deal with the Spider, the deal being that nobody gets in or out of the Dreaming City on his watch. The Dreaming City will be turned into a prison. There is no difference between a beautiful garden and a dull grey jailcell. A prison is a prison. But, it’s very easy to appeal to the Spider’s ego. He’ll help me out. It won’t be without its pandemonium, though.

No faith is light enough for this place, anyway.

Do I think Mara Sov is evil? No. I don’t think the world is that black and white. The word ‘evil’ is
too simple. All the colours of The Dreaming City reflect her beautifully. Mara is manipulative, devious, deceptive, and secretive. There is more to it. Everyone will find out soon. I don’t have time to break it down. By the time you hear this, the plan will be in motion.

Mara will sacrifice her own people if it means that she’ll achieve godhood. Whether it be in war, or have their souls corrupted by Riven.

She wants godhood to fight what’s coming.”

The Spider.

The only person who somewhat recognized her. She didn’t want to pry for answers until she’s heard the full story. Something about the recordings told her that she’ll need more than one side.

Just one more thing pushed to the back of her mind until business at the Shore was concluded. The world obeyed and offered them a gold Engram as a distraction.

Tirion breathed in through her teeth at the sight.

She knew better, knew that she shouldn’t fall for it. She did. But she still picked it up, as if led by Guardian programming. Shiny things, circles, a lot of the time a lot too much. The Engram started vibrating and getting hotter in her hand, and she instantly threw it at a nearby Cabal, resulting in a large explosion.

The Trickster. From that point on, everything that could be picked up was off limits unless it could be used against the Baron. The Engram replicator had to go. It presented a danger to the City. It wasn’t enough that a shipment of them would be dangerous by itself. Some Guardians would go the extra mile and give them to Rahool.

Maybe, just maybe, there was a reason some people didn’t like Guardians that much.

Traps, flunkies, and mind games. If it seemed too easy it probably was. Using the rigged Engrams to break through the stronghold seemed too easy. It put her in a strange mind place when it came to strategizing, as a lot of plans resulted in a paradox. Nevertheless, she pushed through and hoped she wouldn’t run out of ammo.

The Trickster, as expected, hid from sight. Tirion was used to it, as she had two tricksters of her own who were far more skilled in art of stealth than the Baron could dream of. All she had to do was listen and shoot accordingly.

Tirion kept reminding herself that they had their chance.

All of them.

The crazed laughter turned into a death rattle, and faded away.

“Four to go.” Ghost reminded her.

“Four to go.”

The next cache was at a place with a perfect view of the Awoken Watchtower. She had to do some mild acrobatics to reach the cache. Everything about that tower, her only glimpse into the Dreaming City, shouted at her to stay away.

“I don’t want to be one of Mara’s victims. I don’t want my name on a plaque dedicated to those
who ‘sacrificed’ themselves. It is not a sacrifice for the greater good. It is collateral damage. There is no consent. People will die and their last words won’t be ‘for the greater good’.

There is nothing you can do to stop my plans, and there is nothing you can do to stop what’s coming.

Remember that.

Embrace it.

I do understand why Mara’s making that deal with Spider. It’s Riven. She’s trapped in that Watchtower. We don’t need any more people corrupted. It makes the Dreaming City a quarantine zone. A prison within a prison. Riven’s got Uldren. She’s had him for a very long time. I’ve tried to tell him about it, warn him about it.

He doesn’t listen.

Let it be known that Riven’s rage is justified. But, take pity on those she corrupts. Take pity on her. They had no say in it. Forgive them. There is no coming back for them.

No one deserves this. It’s a mess. It can be put to a stop.

Help me stop it.”

Tirion heard almost the exact same thing from the malfunctioning frame in the Tower once.

You have no idea what is coming.”

Everything said about Riven aligned with what Kouhei told her before they left. She still didn’t want to believe it. Uldren was the one who pulled the trigger. As for pity and forgiveness… she wasn’t ready to open that door.

She couldn’t open that door.

To find the Hangman, they had to look for the victims. They followed a trail of empty cages until they found a sign of life. The Hangman didn’t like to kill. He liked to doom things to a fate worse than death. Servitors were his prime targets because of a personal vendetta. Tirion freed every single one along the way. They spun with gratitude the moment they were out of their cages.

It was strange to be able to look at a servitor in the eye and not feel pain all over her body because the shooting never stopped. At first, she was wary of the Spider’s Fallen. She was too used to associating the Fallen with bullet wounds, or getting stabbed with arc spears. Sometimes both. Now, she could see them as potential friends. She also had to admit that the spikes were a nice touch.

It felt wrong to call them Fallen. She’d never say that out loud in the City. The tension between her and Zavala has reached a level of tension where just entertaining the thought of a peace treaty with the Eliksni would cause him to cut off her head.

Tirion shook her head. If she didn’t hurry up, more friends could die. The Spider calls casualties “the price of doing business”. She didn’t believe it had to be that way.

They continued following the cages into a cavern. The darker it was the more cages they found. Some of them held Hive, and for all she cared, they could rot there.
The uneasiness in the lair was different from any she had felt before. It wasn’t death magic, a strange ritual, or anything like that.

It felt oddly human.

Anyone could become a Hangman. That’s where the true paralyzing fear came from.

He caught her by surprise. One lantern struck her face, the other one struck her spine. It was strong enough to send her flying towards a nearby cage.

Tirion couldn’t risk taking her Ghost out. She used her barely functioning hand to make sure her Ghost was still intact. He was shaking slightly, and she hoped her touch would call him down. It’ll be okay. She couldn’t feel her legs, couldn’t curl herself into a ball to protect him with her own body.

The Hangman’s footsteps were heavy and drawn out on purpose. He enjoyed it. He also knew that she’d come back, over and over. A perfect specimen. She opened her eyes to find a blur of white light above her, but it was soon eclipsed by the Hangman’s grinning face.

The chains rattled, and he swung it for one final blow to her head.

The dark.

Her own personal dark.

She didn’t end up in that place very often.

It was different from the Ascendant Realm.

Tirion would describe the feeling as standing in a beautiful garden which was set ablaze. She could feel the grass underneath her boots, she could feel the slipping serenity. But, all she saw was endless darkness.

She had to wait for the spark. Not catching it meant getting trapped forever. She reached out her hand, ready to catch it.

It was the dark. But, it was also a place without pain. It made it tempting to stay. She couldn’t. She’ll always come back. She promised.

At the first sight of an orange spark, she clutched on to it. She had to come back.

It always hurt to come back. Sunsingers broke a lot of unwritten rules but it was always worth it. The first thing she saw was the Hangman shielding his eyes from the light. An opportunity. She stuck as many fusion grenades on his body as she could, focusing on places where he injured her. The spine and the face.

She was almost as bad as him. Nothing she could do would be enough of a punishment for the pain he has caused to others.

Tirion collapsed next to the cage she was thrown at once the Hangman was no longer breathing. Franticness set in, and she dug through the rucksack. No matter how much her arm hurt, she kept digging. He couldn’t be gone.

“Ow…” A silent wince underneath all her supplies in the bag. She let him burrow himself out of it, not wanting to injure him further.
“I’m so sorry…” Tirion wanted to give him a hug. All she could do was gently hold him in her trembling hand. His shell was chipped, but the core was intact. The moment she gets home she’s getting him a new shell, something way more durable. He’ll complain about it being too heavy, but he’ll be alive to do so.

“You’re still alive…” She was bruised and hardly recognisable. But she was alive. That’s all that mattered to him. “I thought I lost you. I thought we…”

“I thought I lost you too.” Using her face was pure anguish, so she set him free so he could heal her.

Coming back from the dead rebuilt her body in the state just before the Hangman smashed her head. Some Sunsingers manage to come back fully healed. She hadn’t mastered that yet, so the bruises and broken bones remained. Ghost worked carefully, shaken from what just happened, jumping at every little noise because he was afraid that the Hangman was still alive.

“All done…” He murmured, watching her move her foot. She wanted to see if it worked. There were some injuries Ghosts couldn’t fix.

“Don’t tell Shaxx about this. Or anyone who is capable of speech.” Tirion begged him, looking at him sternly.

“Why?”

She didn’t answer, choosing to grip on the cage to pull herself up. Phantom injuries were the worst of it. She saw some purple lights in the dark corners of the room. There was no leaving until everyone except for the Hive were free.

“I should have seen him coming. I should have.” She berated herself under her breath. It all started crashing down on her, little by little. Three more Barons to go. She had to keep it together. “Let’s free them and get out of here.”

“Agreed, but…” He hated prying, but it felt wrong not to. “But… you can talk to me.”

“People talk. I don’t want Shaxx to find out that he almost lost me again.” The first cage disintegrated as she talked. “It’s unfair. What I’m doing to him is unfair.”

Another Servitor freed. She hardly cared if the Spider was listening in.

“He loves you.”

Tirion leaned her head against the cold metal of an empty cage as Ghost freed the rest of the Servitors. “Doesn’t make it less unfair. He told me he signed up for it. It came with the job. He’s been through enough. We can’t tell him. I don’t want to lose him. I don’t want to lose more people.”

“What do you see in your future, Guardian?” The answer always changed. He wanted an update. “The shooting will never stop but… in case it does.”

“He wants to fight again. I wouldn’t mind joining him. Maybe get a house.” She cringed slightly. “That damned house…”

“Aw. No tiny little Guardians?”

Tirion laughed. “He’d make a great dad, but no. I don’t think that Guardians can even do that.” She
hastily raised a finger infront of him. “No! I’m not ready for that conversation with you.”

“You do know that I have access to library of inf—"

“Shh! No, you don’t! I don’t know who gave you access to that but, you don’t!”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the comments! <3 I am terrible at responding to them. :(
“Ah… target practice.”

It was a one-shot kill. It was personal.

Tirion took off in full sprint and slid behind cover, out of the Rifleman’s sights.

“Keep a low profile…” She whispered to her Ghost. “Don’t come out, even if it is to heal me, alright? I’ll come back.”

He kept his reservations about that to himself. It never got easier. “Got it.”

The Rifleman was the one she hated the most.

It was a one-shot kill.

Sundance was just like Cayde.

Most Ghosts she knew of were almost opposites of their Guardians. In a good way, as they were complimentary to their charges. It all came down to balance and filling in the missing pieces. The primary job of a Ghost was to make sure their Guardian doesn’t die. One way or another. A Ghost was exactly what their Guardian needed in more ways than one.

Tirion’s Ghost… she just needed a bit of joy now and then. Her Ghost was made for a mind prone to going to dark places. He didn’t need to have strength or courage, she had those things.

Sundance was as graceful as the finest Hunter. Incredibly competent, flashy and cocky. Just like her Guardian. She just wanted to heal him. Just as she always does. Cayde could always rely on her, and that beautiful friendship between them.

Until he couldn’t. Until the Rifleman took that away from him.

That’s when his life ended.

She peeked out of cover to take a shot at Rifleman. She cursed under her breath when the bullet made him disintegrate into smoke.

Decoys.

“You… missed.”

That laugh nearly made her throw up.

Suddenly, a voice in her head.

“He dropped something.”

Without her Ghost there, she would have chased after the Baron without a second thought. She needed him in those moments when she could no longer suppress the rage, about to let herself get blinded. She floated over to where the simulation fell and let Ghost analyse it.
“Lightweight simulation tech.” He noted. “It reminds me of Lorcan’s work. I should be able to use this to let you differentiate the decoys from the real thing.”

This was the turning point.

He was there so she wouldn’t take pleasure in every decoy she killed, so that she wouldn’t cross that thin, thin line.

Last she saw of the Rifleman was him running into the ruins, so she chased after him. She left a trail of fire in her wake.

“King Uldren wants you dead.” The Rifleman’s disgusting laugh lodged itself in her spine. “I bring him your body… keep your Ghost.”

She continued on fighting. Everything between her and him had to die. From the biggest Abominations to the weakest Screebs.

To her, every single one of them was an abomination. There was no need for sixteen titles.

Abomination was the perfect word. They didn’t deserve respect or a second thought. Just a disease to be purged, and absolutely nothing above that.

“Yes, I bring him your body… keep your Ghost.”

For once, Tirion heard them out. It just made her stronger, made the heat crackle in her hands. She barely touched ground as she ran, the Hive infestation she was once terrified of was now a blur. Fear was an odd concept. It was no more than an illusion.

“… or I mount your Ghost on my wall… next to Cayde’s.”

“Her name was Sundance, you son of a bitch!” Tirion roared, letting her fire consume her. He wasn’t going to die before he knew her name. She had him cornered and took a couple of shots at him, aimed at his gun hand so he wouldn’t be able to use his rifle. He has used it one too many times. The illusions weren’t a problem because of the help of her Ghost. There was no place he could climb where her grenades or bullets couldn’t reach.

After a long tussle, she got him wounded enough so that he was struggling to stand. Snipers could never handle close quarters combat. She charged at him with a shotgun, aimed for the head, and pulled the trigger.

That wasn’t enough. It was never going to be enough. Tirion took a swing at him with the shotgun, again and again and again, a strained grunt accompanied her every hit. Her robes were stained with Scorn blood and cartilages, some of it getting on her face.

“Guardian…”

The barrel of the shotgun broke off, so she turned it and continued bashing with the handle. She couldn’t stop. Even when she was hitting the stone, she couldn’t stop. Her Ghost didn’t dare to heal her bruised knuckles. There was nothing of the Rifleman’s head left to destroy. Only foul smell and a headless corpse remained.

“Guardian… He’s done.”

Her movements became slower and slower, until she stopped moving entirely. She sat down on her knees with the broken shotgun in her trembling hands, letting her aching muscles win.
She discarded the busted gun she was holding and pulled his rifle close to her until she was holding it firmly in her hands.

It felt better in her hands than the bow.

She needed a moment. Needed a moment to figure out if she survived it. If she ever left.

That line was too thin.

“I’d rather walk all the way home right now than spend one more second in this place.” Tirion murmured, closing her eyes. “Can we just sit here… and not say anything for a while?”

“Look at you…” The Spider was a dark silhouette with four glowing eyes when he leaned towards her. “If our prodigal prince is not yet afraid of you… He should be.”

“There is nothing prodigal about Uldren.” Her cold stare was enough to make him lean back in his throne. “Where are the rest?”

“Death suits you.” He chuckled. “The strongest three remain. Of the prince and his pet Fanatic, reports are few.”

“Two remain.” Kouhei said behind her. “The Machinist is dead.”

“What?” Tirion expected to feel insulted by that, but it never came. Relief flooded her. No jealousy, no urge to incinerate him, just relief.

“I didn’t mean to.” Kouhei explained himself. “I was destroying the corrupted Ether. She got in the way. The bloodbath of the Barons brought her out of hiding.”

Just like that, Kouhei’s Ghost earned immunity from The Spider’s collection. The Spider never even asked the Titan to destroy that vile ambrosia. He liked initiative, the kind that benefitted him. “Ha! You never cease to amuse, my friends!”

Tirion looked around. “Where is Petra?”

“The Queen-less Wrath went on a journey to try to assassinate the royal runt. I can’t wait to see how that ends.”

Now she was insulted. “Uldren Sov is mine.”

“I don’t hear rejoicing across my Shore quite yet. Oh, but there will be once that runt dies.”

Tirion rubbed her eyes. There was nothing to chase. She didn’t even know where Petra was. “Guess we’ll have to wait for her and keep an eye out for Fikrul.”

“You go do that. Meanwhile, just because all but one Baron remains doesn’t mean that it cleanses the mess they left behind.” He waved his hand towards the exit. “Go. The Shore is still too crowded for me.”

Tirion hated waiting. They were so close to finishing this.

She decided to drag her feet all the way back to the shipyard where they’ve set up camp.

The Tangled shore was dull. It was the Undead West, as she liked to call it.
She missed rain on her skin, the smell of mud and wet leaves and Haya fizzling out as she tried to use her Light abilities. She missed the sunlight, and Lorcan complaining about the heat. He got as pink as his Ghost if he removed his helmet for just one minute.

None of that could happen in the Shore. No sun to scorch you and no rain to ruin your equipment. No snow to complain about.

Yet, it was so far removed from it all. She found it fascinating. It was a state of nonexistence, something away from everything. No shackles on her feet and no ceiling to hit.

Possibly the only place where she didn’t feel like the devil’s plaything. There on her own volition, not doing the Traveler’s bidding. It was a place where she could scream to release her anger and no one would hear her or judge her, a void she could breathe in.

It was dull, but it was beautiful.

Maybe once she retires as a Guardian she’ll start a career writing traveling brochures.

“Where is the next cache, Ghost?”

“It’s in… the Cosmodrome. The Cosmodrome.”

Another wall. “Guess that’ll have to wait.”

His Guardian could barely walk, but she continued fighting. “Do I need to call Haya to get you to rest?”

“No…” She mustered up a small smile. “I wonder what’s she’s up to.”

“Do you really?”

“I have a feeling that whatever they’re doing will cause me to blow something up, so it was kind of rhetorical. I do miss them, though.”

Tirion snuck into the shipyard, barricading the exit once she was inside like last time. She didn’t want to sleep in the ship, so she made a bed out of discarded robes she’s found along the way. Tirion sat down, and rested her head in her hands.

“Why go back to the Cosmodrome, though?” The Ghost pondered.

She thought about it for a moment. The messages began at her end. “Maybe it’s ouroboros.”

“A what?”

“A snake eating its own tail.” Tirion explained. “To never disappear but always change form in a never-ending cycle of destruction and birth. It began at the end. First day should make the last.”


It made enough sense in her head to give her comfort. She knew that it won’t last long, so she had to hang onto it.

“It’s almost over.” Ghost reminded her. He sounded in disbelief of it.

“Only this part. I wish it was almost over.”
“Huh. Makes me think about what Haya feels about this.”

“Why her specifically?”

“I always wondered why she’s the way she is… You’d think someone as old as her would be more uptight than Zavala and could show Ikora a lot of things.” He said. “For you it’s been your whole Guardian life and all you can remember. For her it’s been just a really, really bad week.”

“Well. It would feel like a really bad week for me too if I had kept my memories.” She slammed her sidearm against the ground as she unholstered her weapons so she could lie down. “But no. It gets shrouded. All your memories are still there in your head, but they are shrouded.”

He didn’t mean it like that. “Guardian…”

“I’ve accessed some of them in visions. I… managed to remove that… shroud for a couple of seconds.” She continued her rant. She needed to yell about something. “I studied this very thing in my previous life. I’ve read the study notes. The brain can re-wire itself. This memory loss Guardians experience is not something that’s in the realm of possibility.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that Light is a blockage. The inputs remain. Look at the new Guardians. They know how to run. They know that bullets hurt them. they know what a gun is. They’ve seen a gun in their past life. They’ve seen people get hurt by guns.” She held up the sidearm for emphasis. “I struggled with an assault rifle because evidently I didn’t like them. Lorcan can fix near damn anything because he was a mechanic. There is a reason all six of us ended up together. All of us have broken that shroud at one point. We have everything from Haya punching her shroud to death the second she woke up as a Guardian, to me getting a small glimpse of a past life.”

She froze just before the hand cannon in her hand hit the ground. She needed guns. Couldn’t risk breaking them.

“What do you think it means?”

“I don’t know. I really…” She was yelling in hopes that she would tire herself out. She stopped fighting her body by letting herself fall down on the makeshift bed. The closest she’ll come to rain in the Shore were the flakes of rust around her. “I don’t know.”

Sleep greeted her like a friend.

She wasn’t sure if she stepped into a nightmare. She wasn’t anywhere. Not even the void. It was someplace elsewhere, unknown space.

Soothing winds caressed her skin to calm her down. She saw rivers of Light to drown her in. A language lost whispered in her ear. It was trying to ask her something, to seduce her.

It was trying to tell her something, tell something to her very soul. It filled her body with ice and wrapped her body in a cloak of fire.

A friendly voice rescued her from it right before it got to her, right before she could hear its voice.

“Guardian…”

Tirion felt sick from that dream. It was less of a dream and more like out of body experience. The whispers still in her head, like ants on her skin. She couldn’t tell what they were saying.
“Any news?”

“Petra just got back. She confirmed that Uldren is on his way to the Watchtower. We should leave as soon as possible.”

“Right.”

As sick as she felt, she felt energized enough to continue on fighting. *Anything* to finish this.

“Guardian…” The Ghost whispered softly as she was gearing up.

“What?”

“Justice… or revenge. Uldren deserves what’s coming to him, but…” He sighed. “The *why* of what we’re doing is as important as the *what*. I don’t know what you’re thinking… but remember that.”

A war between the Scorn and Spider’s men stood between her and the Watchtower. Uldren was already inside. Killing everything in her path was a waste of time, so she ran past them. All she had time for was to run towards the Watchtower.

“You enjoyed killing them?”

It was Fikrul’s gravelly voice. He was nowhere to be seen. Only thing infront of her was a legion of Scorn, waiting to be mowed down.

He called them his children yet he doomed them to die.

“You enjoyed putting them in dirt—where you belong?”

He didn’t care about his children. He made no attempt to save them as they fell one by one. They were disposable.

“Did it make you feel good?”

Answering the question out loud didn’t matter.


She never learned their names. Didn’t want to.

"Tell me... I wish to know how I will feel... when I kill you."

Tirion, for just a second, *wanted* to let him kill her. Only thing that stopped her was that she knew he won’t go through the same hell he went through.

“I will pay any price… to be there when you die…”

He placed down a totem and pulled her in to where he was standing. It trapped her in the same room as him.

There was no negotiating.

An Archon someone took pity on. Fikrul probably didn’t deserve his first death, she’ll give him that.

But that’s where her pity for him stopped.
It could have been a world where he took the right turn. It could have been a world where he wasn’t shining crimson from all the blood he was responsible for.

It could have been a lot of things.

It could have been a world where Mara didn’t die trying to achieve her plans and Cayde would have never died because she would have stopped him. It could have been a world where they disposed of Crota in a way that would have never led to Oryx’s arrival.

It could have been a world where a Ghost wouldn’t have been created for her.

There was one thing all battles since her revival had in common, her. Maybe all she had to do was to stop.

No.

Letting him live will only cause more pain.

Her Ghost struggled to catch up, leading to some close calls. Too close for her comfort. There have been way too many deaths. It was her obligation to prevent death.

She couldn’t explain why, but every bullet she fired felt like a fraction of her soul left her.

Tirion didn’t know he was dead until he uttered his final words.

“The Scorn... are... forever.”

One more.

Not more than that.

Just one.

Tirion turned to her Ghost. She had to make a call she never thought she would have to make.

“I need you to go home, Ghost.”

It was the most painful thing she has ever said.

“What...?” He blinked rapidly a couple of times, trying to figure out if he heard her right. “What are you talking about?”

“You know how to operate my ship. Go back to the City.”

It was for the best.

Not one more unnecessary death. She knew the odds.

“No! I’m not leaving you behind!” He firmly placed himself in front of her falling gaze, more unbending than a Titan. “I don’t want to lose you to this.”

Tirion gently cupped the Ghost’s frame, putting him at eye level. “That’s why I’m asking you to go. I can handle myself. As long as you’re alive I—”

“I can’t!”

“Trust me, Little Light...” Her voice cracked as she spoke, and she let him go. “There is no
backpack sturdy enough to protect you here. You need to go home."

“I…” He wanted to say something else. He stopped himself. He hated that he stopped himself. But, he knew his Guardian. She knew she would throw him at the ship in orbit. She was doing that to protect him. “You’ll come back, right?”

“I always do.”

Tirion shut her eyes and released him. She couldn’t bear to watch him go. At least she’ll know he’s safe.

She took the earpiece out of her ear and threw it away. She didn’t need input.

The halls of blue stone turned into a grey world as she ran. It was tainted with Taken blights. The Dreaming City was inseparable from the Ascendant Realm.

“Open the door, brother.”

She knew of that voice. A hated voice. The voice of the Queen, the dead queen.

“Open the door!”

She demanded it, impatience tainting her voice. That was enough to make Tirion realize that it was someone imitating the Queen. The recordings painted a pretty picture of her, how she would never outright demand anyone to do anything.

“I can’t…”

Uldren’s voice this time around.

He sounded like a child, much like the Uldren Sov she’s met before all of this, and the Uldren Sov Kouhei has ranted about.

Tirion couldn’t think about that. She had to run. She’ll soak in the beauty of the temple when everything stops trying to kill her. She had to remember to be careful with her shots. Her Ghost wasn’t by her side, but he was safe. It took significantly more time to fight the Taken, but she promised that she’ll be alive at the end of it. She still had her Light.

That voice… the voice of the Queen. It kept begging to be released.

There was only one prisoner she knew of in the Watchtower.

The voice of Riven.

The one who whispered in Uldren’s ear, the one who told him to kill Cayde. The one who exploited someone’s pity and sorrow and created the Scorn.

There was a tremble in Uldren’s voice. He was freaking out. He finally figured out that something was wrong. She should have gotten to him earlier. Something tells her that he would never have listened. She did try, all those years ago.

By the time she broke through the final door and reached him, the only thing she heard was a terrified scream for help.

The creature infpnt of her was a gnarly fusion of Taken and flesh. Whatever it was, it had to die.
There was just one thing that was more disturbing than the monster she was trying to kill. Uldren’s screams. He called out for his sister, like a little brother would.

Tirion used statues to her advantage, jumping up to spots where they couldn’t reach her. Getting thrown between realms to the point where she almost forgot which world was real anymore. Realms within realms, almost.

Just as she was about to finish it, it warped everything around it and escaped to another realm.

But, it left the prince behind.

It was time.

By then, Tirion realized that she wasn’t careful enough after all. The adrenaline wore off and her side started burning in pain. One of the Taken got a lucky shot.

Typical.

If there was anything Guardians legitimately forgot it was how prolonged pain feels. Her Ghost was safe. That’s what mattered. That’s what she kept repeating to herself in her head. She didn’t know if she had enough Light to come back. The Ace was covered in gunk and rust, and she could hear Banshee screaming already.

Cayde never let anyone touch it. He let Banshee make her a replica once. She left it in the Vault because she didn’t know the Tower was about to burn down. She holstered it where it was safe.

Uldren was on the ground, grunting in pain. He was too fargone. He chuckled to himself when he heard her footsteps getting closer.

“Congratulations…” He tried to sound confident through the coughs, turning until he was sitting. “You have my undivided attention.”

Uldren expected a gun in her hand. Guardians were lunatics. He expected her to stand there triumphantly, he foremost of all expected her to gloat over her victory.

It never came.

She sat down next to him instead.

“I don’t need your undivided attention.” Keeping the pain from her mind was much harder than she thought it would be. She just had to hang on long enough. “Victim or not, you’re an irredeemable prick, Uldren.”

Her Ghost was safe.

“The line between Light and Dark is so very thin…” Uldren tried to hide the pain, to little success. It was best not to count how many bones he broke. “So much for the fabled Guardian of Guardians… Your City must be so very proud of you.”

“They aren’t. They really aren’t. Not after the things I have done to save their lives.” He was safe. Don’t close your eyes. Her Ghost was safe. Shaxx was safe. Her friends were safe. Don’t close your eyes. Not yet. Endure.

They’ve been there before. Not nearly as close to death, but they’ve been there before. She couldn’t remember because of that cursed shroud.
Uldren could.

She had much shorter hair back then, short enough to fit underneath a corsair helmet. The voice was the exact same. Threta never found her role in the Dreaming City. She had the skills of a Techeun but couldn’t sit still long enough to be one, and couldn’t be in the same room with a Techeun without an argument. Didn’t want to be a corsair because she didn’t want to fight. She could raise hell, if need be.

The whispers in his head subsided slightly, just enough to let him think.

“Threta…”

Her finger was itching to shoot him, but she had to focus on surviving until she had enough Light. She still refused to look at him. “What?”

“You once told me that you wanted to be ‘ready to die’ before you actually died. To not be depressed or fed up… just be ready to go.”

“I’ve read my diaries. That’s because I knew there is no such thing as dying peacefully.” She wasn’t ready. They are safe. “When you die, you experience the worst pain you can imagine as every single nerve in your body dies. That’s how it feels. Then… you’re gone.”

“Worst part of you becoming a Guardian is that you forgot.” He tilted his death back and closed his eyes. “I remember one day Jolyon and I ran into some Hive, and we got outnumbered. We barely made it back alive. Jolyon got the worst of it.”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“I brought him to you, because you were the only one I knew of who could treat him. I didn’t want to bring it to the Witches, they would talk. I didn’t want Mara to know.” Uldren told. The memory felt like it was from a whole other dimension. How did they end up there? “I watched you save his life, you ripped off your own sleeves to use as emergency bandages. You got annoyed by my worrying, and you called me over as you worked. You taught me how to bind someone’s wounds to distract me.”

Hive family history confused her less than Uldren’s story, but she couldn’t escape it at that point. “Sounds like something I would do.”

“That’s what you did all the time. You treated the sick and dying in a way the witches couldn’t, it baffled them. You cared, not sure if it was out of pity or empathy.”

“I won’t treat you.” Don’t fall asleep.

“What you taught me…” He took a deep breath. “What you taught me saved Fikrul’s life. Some Gunslinger shot him and left him to die. I wanted to do something. I wanted to save that poor thing. I bandaged him up.”

“What!? Is this the moment when you realize you’ve done something abhorrent but it still has to be someone else’s fault?!” She growled, finally looking at him. “There is no excuse for the atrocities you’ve committed, Riven whispering in your ear or not. You could have fought, Uldren. You could have fought against it. You had a choice. You knew that your sister was dead.”

“Everything I did, I did it for her! Wouldn’t you have done the same to get your brother back? What was his name? Matthew?”
He had no right. The shroud wasn’t enough to prevent the sorrow and anger swelling in her chest.

“I was wondering where the irredeemable prick went! Welcome back, darling!” Tirion snapped. “My brother is dead! He’s been dead for hundreds of years. He’s a ghost. Don’t compare our situations. I know what's real. I know what's dead. And don't you dare ask me about Cayde, or say his name out loud after what you did!”

She buried every personal thing that had to do with her first life in a graveyard. She backed up some old medical books to preserve them, because their text was invaluable. She didn’t remember her brother, but hearing that name mocked was enough to illicit a response. One day she’ll be able to remove that shroud.

Uldren lowered his head, waiting for his fate. He just wanted to get it over and done with. "You have his gun. You have the last word."

The Warlock looked at him before proceeding further. How did they end up there?

Evil doers should be sufficiently punished for the damage they’ve done.

The damage has been done. Uldren has already been punished, his mind was in ruins to the point where he’s incapable of recognizing what has happened. He sat there waiting, powerless to change it or move against it. Riven managed to corrupt his very soul.

Punishment is supposed to end at some point.

"You deserve to go to hell." There was only one thing to do. Her fingers hugged her knife. “Despite it all, I hope your soul arrives in heaven before the devil knows you’re dead, Uldren.”

Chapter End Notes

Finally done with Forsaken's main story a week before next season. Oh well. But at the same time finally done with the depressing chapters. Only up from here.
All we gotta do is be brave and be kind.

“I miss the Dark Ages.” Haya stopped fighting against it. Trying to deny it just made her think about it even more. “Everything was easier.”

“The grass was greener and the light was brighter…” Lorcan mumbled, not taking his eyes off the console screen. He didn’t have anything to reference, but no one made the Dark Ages sound pleasant.

“It was easier.” It was rare to see Haya express anything that wasn’t anger or mild annoyance. She almost looked sad. The man now known as Drifter weaselling his way back to the world brought up a lot of nostalgia. “We fucked up with the Towers. I know that Zavala knows it. He won’t admit it.”

“Eh, the structural integrity of them wasn’t great, yeah.”

“Not in that way. Dark Ages were on the damn ground. We fucked up.” She said. “It was post apocalypse and there were villages. Then we moved away and built Towers and started pretending we’re something bigger than we are.”

Lorcan started to wonder if Haya had suffered a serious head injury. “You… you destroyed villages.”

“No! That was mostly pricks like Citan and his merry band of fuckwits.” Haya scoffed. “Even they got bored of exploiting people and started waging wars with other Warlords. That’s how Saladin and his merry band of fuckwits found my tribe.”

“Weren’t you all free-spirited or something?” All he was told was that there was a lot of snow and murder.

“Thing with Warlords is that you can’t put an asshole blanket on us. We kept to ourselves and killed anyone who didn’t want to go through the… ritual to join us.” Ritual was not the right word, but she didn’t want to intensify the memory.

He knows that it still hurts. He has talked with Leor about how hard it’s to keep up with it sometimes. “You still miss it.”

“I miss the world. It was the closest we’ve ever got to truly rebuilding the world and society. Now, we’re not even in the same neighborhood. Dead Orbit is trying to reach us where we are now.” Haya’s soft tone got increasingly angry. “It was on the ground, there were villages with their taverns and damn songs. Damn families. Damn everything. Shaxx had a reputation for serial ‘relationships’.”

“Oh!” Lorcan was thrown off both by surprise and slight intrigue. “Don’t tell Tirion that, maybe?”

“Not like she doesn’t benefit from his experience now!”

“Lucky her!” Lorcan sighed dreamily. “Meanwhile, I was painting the Calus mask for Amanda. A guy walked up to me and told me it looked awesome. I told him it was my way of dealing with trauma. He backed away very, very slowly.”

“Was he at least attractive?”
“Judging other people by how they look? What are we? Yeah, he was.”

They both had work to do, as much as they enjoyed talking. She couldn’t keep it out of her head. Dark Ages were about surviving and rebuilding. You were who you were. There were no Guardians. No focus on being mighty elitist heroes. The downfall of that started off with building a Tower. The first of eight. It all started with someone thinking that living hundreds of feet in the air was a rational idea. Slowly but surely, division between Lightbearers and mortals happened.

New risen are immediately assigned the title Guardian. Told to praise the Light. Told a lot of things. Told where to go. Banshee gives them a gun. She knows of at least fifty Guardians who have never been down to the City before the attack.

Some might blame the Warlords, but she believes that the blame is wrongfully assigned in that case. No one had agency over the life of another. Getting turned into a Lightbearer was enough of a violation of that. New Guardians didn’t know any better. She’s been a Warlord and didn’t drop some Warlord habits until recently, but getting any kind of mileage out of amnesiacs was a step too far.

Zavala can say whatever he wants to her, but he did exploit Tirion. That’s the answer to how the Warlock shut down the Black Garden, but it doesn’t make a good story for heroic tales about heroes to be told to wide-eyed children. Haya, given the chance, would happily dethrone Zavala from his Vanguard position.

Lightbearers were never meant to be on top. But, somehow, Guardians were created. A group of gun-toting elitists sounded better to her, but it didn’t have a nice ring. Didn’t sound inspiring.

Why did they start building those Towers? Everything was a lot better on the ground.

She’s been part of the problem, never getting along with civilians or liking them for the longest time. Nowadays only mortals she has issue with are the ones named Hawthorne. Spending a lot of time down in the City while they had their den there helped.

Everything needed to get destroyed again at this point. A second Collapse. Everyone needed to be on equal footing again. No Towers. The Red Legion couldn’t knock them from the sky. She really wanted to know what kind of power actually could do the job.

Maybe 200 Sunbreakers could do the trick.

“…I’ve been talking to Devrim about that, actually.”

She didn’t hear the first part of what he was saying. “Huh?”

“Building villages, how we could fuse the Farm and what we’re doing, create a small City kind of. He appreciated all the help.” Lorcan sighed once he took another look at reality. “Even with all we have, it’s only few of us, and winter is about to come. Some of the people from the Farm have volunteered to help but… rebuilding would take years, so that’s nice!”

There it was. The Dark Ages never ended for some. The ones that Guardians are conditioned to forget about.

“You sound like you’ve got something going.”

Lorcan was a mechanic for the most part, a tinkerer. He didn’t know how to build a house that won’t collapse. He had ideas, though. He tapped something on the console and a hologram formed between them. “Just some blueprints. I got bored one day.”
“You did this in a day?”

“Yeah.” The hologram was of a map of the EDZ. He got the entire previously owned Cabal architecture in view, from Sunken Isles to Firebase hades. “I was thinking we can start with everything that has a roof. There is a lot of room for er… rooms. You can fit many more beds here than the Farm, can make an actual kitchen. Safety. The Cabal have a lot of tech, it can be turned to good things. Firebase Hades is a good place for a marketplace. Don’t think the trees are healthy enough to make some kind of stalls.”

He just wanted to help. That’s what he did. That’s what his nightmare was about. He found a positive in it.

That was enough for her. “Let them volunteer. Tirion wouldn’t mind.”

“What?”

“We have no Cabal around here. Freaking Calus took the ones we didn’t kill. My Sunbreakers need something to do, might as well have them look out for Fallen and help do some lifting.”

Lorcan didn’t exactly like the part where Haya sometimes lost grip on reality. “We can’t just have them work for free, even if they want to volunteer. I know how that sounds. I don’t want it to turn into some kind of… I don’t know. Glimmer won’t do much for them.”

She knew what he didn’t want to say. He knew what to call it. He was an artist with words when paid enough. Their plan could go sideways. “We have food. We have armor that we keep burning through that we can make into clothes, and—” Haya stopped talking because Lorcan was staring at her completely terrified of what she was saying. “What…? What the hell? What are you doing?”

“Where did you find a soul? I thought you were going to take mine. Did you find another Hunter?”

“Shut the fuck up, that’s where.” She laughed the last words out.

Lorcan was almost overjoyed, truly. “I’ll get to Devrim straight away, see if we can get something going.”

“You do that. I still have work to finish up.”

“What are you even doing?”

“Sunbreaker things.”

He’s known her for over a century. He knows when she’s lying. He’ll have to take it another time. “Well. Make sure to take a break—”

“Oh! Just go already!”

She heard his laughter fade as he jogged away. She returned to the console once she was sure he was gone.

“Alright. If I were a bigger asshole than I am, where would I be?”

The Shadows were as elusive as their name.

The hologram morphed into one of all planets. Her eyes struggled to focus on it. The solar system was too big for her comprehension. They could and should get rid of some planets. She started by ruling them out.
Mercury. Way too bright for a Shadow. She looked for him during the Festival. Callum wouldn’t be smart enough to hide in the Forest. He wouldn’t survive in the Forest. The Shadows were rather maniacal.

Venus. No one cared about it anymore. They’ve kept an eye on it and the Vault, just in case the Vex try to start something again. Maybe? No. A Shadow would hide in some place darker than them.

Earth. Definitely not.

Moon. Perhaps. It was too off limits, covered with corpses. She wouldn’t put it past Callum to play out dramatic re-enactment of Yor’s tale.

Jupiter. No. Saturn and the Dreadnaught? No. Not on Titan, either. It was the wrong kind of dark.

She needed Lorcan for this. He could get into people’s heads. She couldn’t tell him. Couldn’t tell anyone. The only place she could think of would be some kind of Hive throne world, but she couldn’t tell Huritt. Tirion was the one known for tearing holes in time and space, but she couldn’t tell her.

The Dark didn’t wait. It was like an annoying doomsday countdown.

She never could do it alone. Warlords. Sunbreakers. Saint and Lorcan. The current group. None of them could really do it alone. None of them should want to.

The worst part of being alone were the whispers. Just a normal part of being a Sunbreaker. They were the loudest when she was in battle. Could never make out what they said.

Ouros never told her how to deal with them. What is she supposed to tell to her own Sunbreakers? What was she even doing?

She turned the holograms off. The odds that Callum was still alive were slim. Could try finding his Ghost, but Shadows liked to destroy theirs.

Maybe if she left a revolver, some matchsticks and a Hive bone outside Shin would magically appear.

She was fully ready to try it.

“Uh…” Lorcan nearly crashed into a wall after speeding into the room. “We’ve got a problem.”

“What?” She was happy that she shut down the holograms.

He flailed his hands until they were pointed at a Ghost infront of him. A familiar Ghost. “This!”

Of course.

“Oh no, what the hell did she do now?”

“She’s in the Tangled Shore.” The Ghost sounded lost. He knew he shouldn’t be there. He knew he should be by her side.

“Then what the hell?”

“The Shore proved to be too dangerous. She told me to go back to the City, where I’d be safe.”
“Can you... can you sense her?” Lorcan asked carefully.

“I can. Barely. She’s too far away...” The Ghost clung onto it with all his power, not wanting to lose her.

It was getting annoying now. Tirion did it again. On top of that, Haya felt offended that her own death wish was now just a drop in a bucket.

“You can stay here. Our Ghosts have taken over a room if you wanna chat with them.” The Titan pointed at door all the way back. “It’s impossible to get a hold of Kouhei because he’s an asshole. Best to wait until he calls.”

He almost forgot about Kouhei. He was in too much distress to call Vera. He was standing in front of someone who had a history of being separated from her Ghost.

“Haya? What exactly happened when Leor left you?”

“Not that much. They got tired of me after I started destroying myself.” She paused for a second. “I know what that’s like...”

“Why do you keep calling Leor ‘they’?”

“Because Leor is Leor.” Haya didn’t feel like she had to explain any more. Or say anything more, for that matter.

The Ghost felt useless.

It felt like his Guardian sent him away because he was useless.

It was difficult to stop thinking about it when the seed got planted in his head.

“I’m going to go back to Devrim...” Lorcan interrupted the silence. “Let me know if there are updates.”

“Whelp...” She couldn’t continue the search with eyes in the room, so she started reading reports from her Sunbreakers and making some training drills. She’s been collaborating with Shaxx a lot. He knows how to forge Guardians.

Just thinking about it brought it back to Tirion.

She was getting annoying now, and Haya hated herself for even thinking it. Tirion was most likely alive. Once the heat death of the universe happens, only three people will remain. Tirion, Haya, and Saladin. The three cockroaches.

It was selfish to miss what a friend used to be. But, she missed her friend. Old Tirion comes out now and then. The myth before the Taken War. It was like the cat in the box. The Shore was the box. Her Ghost being there without his Guardian jumbled Haya’s thoughts.

Haya could only hear one thing in the static. As with all things, she couldn’t keep it inside. It was time to yell about things.

“The Vanguard fucked up with Tirion.” Haya breathed out. The Ghost was starting to look too sad for her, it was like looking at a mirror. “We fucked up with Tirion. Only ones who didn’t fuck up with her were you and Shaxx. If you want to yell about your Guardian, I have an ear.”

“I don’t want to yell about her.”
“You do. That’s why our Ghosts have their own room. Sometimes you need to yell about people you love.”

“I…” He didn’t want to yell. “I wouldn’t know where to start.”

“She’s reckless and self-destructive.” Haya didn’t even miss a beat. “And one day she’ll leave you for good and we’ll be having the same conversation, wondering if we could have done something.”

There it was. She pulled it right out of his head. “Yeah.”

“It pisses me off, too. It shouldn’t! But it does. It’s our fault.” It was no different than reading a book which she knew the ending of. “It’s…”

“Scary. It’s really scary watching her go somewhere she doesn't want me to follow.”

“No one hears your crying until you take your last breath.” Haya let her hand rest on the console. “It feels like we’re only there to rescue her. We’re not there to stop her from ending up in that damn position. We fucked up to the point where… it’s kinda like you can lead a Ghost to their Guardian but you can’t make it resurrect them.”

They lost their sync right there. “I… I don’t really follow now.”

“The original saying was about leading a horse to water but not being able to make them drink it.”

“We can try.”

“That’s just it. We can’t do a damn thing about it now.” Her voice was harsh yet laced with sorrow. “No one can do a damn thing about it. She needs help but if she doesn’t want it no one can do a damn thing. And she’s… once she’s gone, Shaxx won’t ever be able to love again.”

“I think she wants help, but I don’t know what to do. I was made to heal her.”

“We need to get the universe to stop fucking with her.” It sounded so simple. “I do mean the universe. Saint apparently got his shotgun from her. Her destiny is to be a sacrificial lamb. If someone sees it as a sign and builds a temple after she dies I will be the one to bring on the end times.”

Words suddenly started pouring out of Ghost. “She’s getting increasingly ruthless. She wasn't like that before. I’m not comfortable with it. It doesn’t feel like she’s fighting for the Light anymore. She… she forgets things. I don’t think she remembers most of what happened this year, or most things we’ve talked about. She said she wanted to start keeping a diary but it never happened.”

Haya raised an eyebrow. “She did have all those diaries in her previous life. There is only one reason why people do that. I never had to keep a diary because if you want to know what kind of ring Liu Feng wore at a specific date…” She pointed at herself with her thumb and let her hand fall down. “I don’t remember her struggling to remember things before Crota.”

“It all started with the Moon. Losing the Light made it worse. And now…”

“Sending amnesiacs out on murder sprees is peak Guardian! Why is Zavala even angry?” Haya had to forcibly clench her jaw to stop words coming out of her mouth. Sometimes she admired Kouhei’s ability to not say anything.

“I should talk to Huritt. It has to do with the Hive. I can’t heal her.”
Haya had an idea, in that case not sharing it would be a waste. Huritt probably won’t have answers as his head was up in Ahamkara wish clouds. Haya wanted to believe that she remembered things for a reason. “This might sound weird… does she die often?”

“No… not really. Not on purpose. It takes a lot of anger for her to do it on purpose. We can go weeks at a time without her dying.”

“She’s fine a little while after you resurrect her, right?”

“Now that you mention it… yes. Sometimes.”

“Leor!” Haya shouted. The only time she felt lucky to be about a thousand years old. “I need you!”

Leor emerged from the room in the back, not asking any questions. They could put together the pieces. “What is it?”

She rolled up her sleeve, a large burn mark was on her forearm. “This happened last week when we were doing some repairs around. Been a slow week. Don’t heal it!”

“You can always tell a story by talking—” Leor didn’t get to finish their warnings, as Haya was already dead in front of them. Bullet through the skull. No matter how long they’ve been with her, it will always be a gruesome sight. Leor lost the ability to roll their eye about three hundred years ago. Haya gasped for air and looked at her arm. The burn mark was still there. “You did it wrong, Haya.”

“Ugh… hold on!”

The two Ghosts followed after her as she ran off. One followed her with curiosity and hope, other hoping they had a book to read.

She finally found a usage for the tanks.

“Haya…” Leor knew exactly what she was trying to do. There was no point in teaching someone how to punch someone with words, you had to showcase it. There was no learning from words. She set a timer for the tank and stood right in front of it. It wasn’t enough, so she went back to the console and armed the two on her left. The Titan placed herself right in the middle and waited. There wasn’t a hint of fear, just an everyday thing if anything.

With an ear-shattering wham, she was gone. Completely gone this time around. If you wanted something disintegrated, best thing to do was to find Cabal tech.

Leor brought her back from nonexistence. As they do. As all Ghosts do. It wasn’t difficult. Ghosts just did it. Haya was back within seconds. The burn mark on her arm was gone. Not like it was healed, but like it was never there.

“What just happened?” The Little Light has seen Guardians die before, he didn’t understand why he was bewildered by that. Like he didn’t want to admit something.

“Fuck if I or anyone knows how Ghosts work for the most part…” She rolled down her sleeve. “I heard the FWC ramble about Guardian templates once. Then I thought back to how sometimes the Warlord joining ritual glitched out. Then there was that other time…”

“What other time?”

“Just someone who didn’t know the risks of Guardian and human coitus before acting upon it.”
She said, but suddenly panicked slightly. “Not me! I tend to go the direction that has no risks nowadays aaaand— Tirion will brutally murder me if I continue talking. I’ll shut up. Don't quote anything I've said! I'm sure I corrupted you enough.”

“You’re saying that I keep resurrecting a template of her where she isn’t sick, then it gets worse.” He knew that the solution here wouldn’t be to have her die more frequently. He knew anger-inducing little about his own abilities to come up with ideas.

“Maybe. I don’t know. Could be? There was the thing with her brother. I'm not a doctor.”

“She was planning to cure it as a whole, to make sure no one else goes through that…” Why couldn’t he do anything about it? He couldn’t heal some of her scars. Something went wrong somewhere. “She won’t be able to get better until she gets her memories back, or if we find the rest of her research notes.”

“The Traveler is kind of a dick, isn’t it? Like a trickster god.” She gave him a joyless smile and started walking back to the console she was at prior. “It sees you dying from dehydration. It gives you an endless supply of water, but it’s riddled with germs. It saves your life but then you get a thousand other problems on your hands. You can’t complain, because it saved your life. It’s an abusive relationship.”

“Do you fear the Traveler?”

“At first it felt like there as an explosive collar on my neck. I think every person with Light in them feels like that at some point.”


Haya almost hung up the call by accident. “What’s going on?”

“The Prince is dead. Everything is fine.”

Only Kouhei would choose that sequence of words. “I don’t care about that whiny—”

“Tirion is alright.”

Nothing sounded more pleasant than a collective sigh of relief. “What happened?”

“I was right about Riven. We’re going to have to kill her. Found Uldren with his throat slit. Unsure of what happened.”

“Yeah, don’t you hate it when people just bleed to death by themselves? It happens.”

“I’ll let her tell you what happened. She’ll decide what to tell the Vanguard. I’d go with your… story.”

“Where is she now?”

“Still here. Wrapping everything up with Petra and we’re coming…” Kouhei suddenly stopped talking.

“Say the word. You can do it!”

“Home.”
Shaxx knew what the short message meant.

_The Gulch._

They’ll have to deal with him not being there for a while. He didn’t make excuses. Arcite could handle it if any problems arose.

He was quite fond of that arena. It had everything. Hazards that could be used to someone’s advantage, no corners could be fully trusted. You had to be smart if you wanted to hide.

Shaxx found Tirion sprinting into one of the cannons and launching herself as high as she could into the air. She always landed. She repeated the process on the other side, but this time around she used her Light to slow herself down. She was trying to make it last longer, that sense of freedom. Flying like a bird between the cannons.

He leaned against the old brick wall, just watching her. She was trying to adjust her trajectory, trying to time it right so she’d fall into the next cannon and bounce back. There was always something that pushed her back. Never stopped her from trying.

“Show those cannons how little you care!” Shaxx shouted. It was only natural. It, unfortunately, startled her and broke her momentum and she almost broke her ankles when landing on the other side. There was no determent, as she jumped into the cannon next to her. She crashed into him and into his arms on the other side.

Tirion said nothing, just hugged him tighter. As usual, he returned it with twice the strength. They stood there until the cold of the approaching night started biting their skin.

“I missed the Festival, didn’t I?”

The chuckle vibrated through his armour. “You did.”

“Damn it.”

The Titan relaxed his arms. He wanted to see her face. It was still her. In need of rest maybe, but definitely her. Alive and safe. She leaned into his hand on her face. That glow of the eyes didn’t do a good enough of a job to mask the tears welling up in her eyes.

“It’s alright…”

She leaned her forehead against his hard chest plate, and let the tears fall. “I don’t want to go back.”

“You killed the Barons and you avenged Cayde.” Shaxx pulled her closer to him, he kept his voice low and comforting. It never felt enough. “He would never say the words but he’d be proud of you.”

“Not for what I did to the Prince.”

She felt him tense up slightly, but he had to hear her out. Tirion looked up at him again.

“Did you pull the trigger?”

“I... didn’t. Neither did Petra. Petra wasn’t even there when it came down to it. It was just us two.”

His eyes widened underneath the helmet, not quite understanding. “What do you mean?”
“Uldren had paid enough for what he did by the time I reached him. To the point where… no one deserved that.” She sniffled. “I took pity on him. The way he shouted for his sister’s help… it reminded me of something.”

Shaxx feared the words. “Just tell me one thing…”

“What?”

“Is he dead?”

“Yes.” She felt him relax. “I tried to make it painless. That Ahamkara got into his soul. Caused a debilitating disease with no cure. Leaving him alive would have been inhumane, too far. I couldn’t be that cruel.”

“That’s all I need to know.”

“People will debate about it the minute they see me.” She wasn't looking forward to it. “I don’t know what to tell them.”

“Tell them what you told me.”

“I can’t let them know about the Ahamkara. I don’t want to somehow turn Uldren into a wounded hero, somehow spawn Shadows of Sov.”

“You don’t have to. You just have to remind them that kindness exists, and what you were fighting for.” He lifted her face up, it was wet with silent tears. “Zavala might not understand any of it, but the people will.”

Tirion nodded silently. It will be done in the morning. “Let’s go home.”

They took their time getting back, following the setting sun. Her Ghost was by her side. She did come back to him. The rest of her companions had questions, but she promised them answers and set out for the Gulch the moment she could.

All Tirion wanted now was to lie in a bed. To pretend that everything was alright for a couple hours.

The City was dark, maneuvering out of a commotion was easy. It always felt like someone was watching. She was too tired to pay attention to the world.

Tirion was in for a surprise when she entered the apartment.

She didn’t miss it.

The purple candles were half burned out. The engram shaped lights in different colours on a long string covered the ceiling, some of them were flickering because they weren't meant to be on for that long. Purple banners with the Festival insignia covered the furniture. Some unfolded masks were in a box.

It was perfect.

“The Frames were throwing it all out. I got Lorcan to seize as much as he could for me,” Shaxx told her. “Worryingly enough, I never gave him a key or any further instructions for that matter. It worked out in the end.”

“This…”
Why was he so nervous? That woman standing worryingly still in front of him was the only thing in the whole universe that made him nervous.

“You don’t like it?”

She turned to him, a big smile on her face. She couldn’t take her eyes off the lights “I love it!”

That smile was reflected on his own face. The face that she absolutely loved, but couldn’t see. He reached up to remove the helmet the second he realized he still had it on. “Don’t bother trying to find the masks of my helmet. Those were incinerated.”

Not hearing that story sounded like something she’d immensely regret. “How much did all of this cost?”

“You don’t want to know.” Shaxx placed the helmet down on the table. He knew that answers like that just piques her curiosity. It was best to just tell the truth. “Let him know that the Crucible has never been and never will be a place for missed connections advertisements. There are other places for it.”

Tirion heard that slight denial in his voice, which just amused her. “You still did it.”

“I caught him on the only day he ‘didn’t feel like wanting’ Glimmer as payment, which is about as statistically probable as a rookie not blowing himself up with heavy ammo weapons.” The way she looked at him neutralized his annoyance, she completely entertained by his antics. “I needed his help. According to records, it didn’t happen.”

“Oh, you’re annoyed now, but you will loudly boast about how it was you who brought them two together.” Tirion watched the lights go dim as Shaxx pressed a button, the engrams on the ceiling stuck out even more. “Don’t worry about it being last minute. This is perfect.”

“I’m not annoyed.” Shaxx had to get that out of the way first. “It wasn’t supposed to be last minute. Bloody bastard kept outsmarting me until I met his demands.”

“Not annoyed.” Tirion almost fell off the table she was sitting on as she laughed out the words. For once it was a shame the Tower wasn’t under constant camera surveillance.

Shaxx caught her with two strong hands on either side of her waist, and swiftly pulled her in for a kiss. Tirion was being annoying in the best way. He pulled away once the laughter settled, out of breath. The smile didn’t fall. “I’m not annoyed because I would do anything for you. It’s worth it.”

It always got the air stuck in her throat. It’s worth it. Surviving was worth it. Enduring hell for moments like these in return was worth it. The corners of her mouth twitched slightly. He loved that laugh, he did. No matter what she was about to laugh about. “As a matter of fact, I caught him and Haya having an… interesting discussion about you when I got back. About you and the Dark Ages.”

Some stories just won’t die. If it involved that Sunbreaker, it could only be about one story. “I’m truly starting to hold the belief that the reason Haya looks so young is that she bestows her age upon others so that they age faster.”

“Lorcan’s soul isn’t tender enough for her yet! Sometimes you have to do what you have to do to go about another day without turning into dust.” Tirion joked. “I don’t know why I brought it up. I’m not complaining, but…” She trailed off.

“You’re nothing like anyone I’ve ever encountered before.” He pulled her in closer. He could see
the colourful lights reflected in her eyes. “Only if I knew back then how little I actually knew about love.”

“I can’t compete with anything you say.” She whispered. “Tangled Shore was hell, you know? I don’t want you going anywhere, either. Not without me. I can’t handle the thought of not having you to return to. I…” The joy faded from her face.

“What’s wrong?”

She couldn’t ignore the world. She slid off the table and moved to the couch. Maybe she could think better there. The weight shifted and he grabbed her hand. “I... I want that happy ending. I want us to prevail through all wars, a nice epilogue.”

“That’s nothing we can’t accomplish.”

“I almost died.” Tirion promised not to tell. She couldn’t withhold the truth. “For real. Only thing that brought me back to life was refusal. I refused to go back to that shard, to get my full powers back. I could be a lot more stronger, but refusing power saved my life.”

“I know that you’ll come back and win no matter what. It’s been excruciating being here, but I know you well enough.”

“It feels like the only way to stop the war is to stop fighting. To put down my guns, and just stop. Not give up, just stop.” Tears again. Her voice was shaky. “But the more I fight, the worse I make the world. Now there is a damn Ahamkara.” Tirion leaned back and fixated her eyes on the lights. So many lights, so little time.

“There are more ways to fight than with guns.” It sounded strange coming from him. His Crucible was for making sure that Guardians survive encounters with the darkness. Fighting the darkness was another thing in its entirety. She leaned into him and fell into his arms again, using the purple banner as a blanket.

“I don’t want to set the whole world on fire.”

“That means you have an ambition. It’s a start.”

“I think there is some poetry in here…” His hand in her tangled hair was soothing. She had her head on his lap now, slowly falling asleep. “What do I do if the world is already burning? I want the world to stop burning. But, I keep fanning the flames. I am the one who’s killing myself trying to find gasoline for it, because I know how cold it’s going to be once the fire goes out.”
If you're dead in the mind, it'll brighten the place.

“‘We’ve never talked about what happened…’”

Tirion wasn’t avoiding the conversation. It just was… difficult. The two were in the Cosmodrome, trying to find the last few caches. It was chilly, a sign of winter about to come. Calm. The whole area was a quarantine zone, by Zavala’s orders. There was no point in stopping pushing the envelope. She also needed something to do while Banshee was repairing the Ace.

“I know.”

“I had a chat with Haya. She… she said a lot of things you wouldn’t want me to repeat. It deteriorated into a rant about how Towers turned Guardians into elitists.” Ghost said. “She was concerned about you, and so am I. I hope that you will never leave us for good.”

“I sent you back because I didn’t want to lose you.” Tirion placed herself right infront of him. “I have no plans to push you away. I need you.”

“You keep saying that, but I’ve seen you fight. You’re…” He struggled with words. He shouldn’t have talked to Haya. She unintentionally brings the necessary evils out of people. “I don’t think what happened at the Tangled Shore is why the Traveler chose you.”

“What happened at the Sho—” Tirion groaned and rubbed the bridge of her nose. He didn’t like rants about how the Traveler was one of her least favourite things, so she forced herself to refrain.

“You worried me.”

“I don’t want to go back to that place…” She slowly opened her eyes. “I didn’t enjoy a second of it. I don’t know why the Traveler chose me, either. I’m sorry that I made you worry. You’re not a burden, but I do have to consider your life when I’m fighting.”

There was another thing Haya brought up that he’s been avoiding to think about. “Do you feel sick, Guardian?”

“Odd question.”

“Answer me.”

“Um… not really?” She found the concern plain odd now. “I’m fine. There are some memory lapses but other than that, I’m fine.”

“You just said ‘I’m fine’ twice.”

She smiled at him and cupped his shell with one hand. “I’m okay. I’ll tell you if something is wrong, alright?”

It was difficult to believe her, but she knew best. Her hand fell from his shell and their continued their lookout.

They had four more to go. She didn’t miss the Cosmodrome, she made peace with it a long time ago. There was nothing for her there.
At least she thought.

As always.

It was a rare moment to reflect. Petra gave her an Awoken talisman before she left, but it needed repairs. It needed to be fused with darkness or something or another, she was too tired to listen to what the Spider said. She’ll figure it out. She was also told to meet Petra in the Dreaming City in about a week. Business had to be concluded at the Outpost, the Prince had to be buried for good.

She was looking forward to seeing if the descriptions of it do it justice. As far as she was aware, Petra didn’t know who she was. Spider definitely knew, but he was playing his own games.

Tirion was smart enough to know that it won’t last long.

“Got one.” Ghost finished scanning a worn down Fallen device, it disintegrated and revealed a box underneath. “Playing it now.”

“The leading cause of death in the hospital I lived in and studied at weren’t accidents, or heart attacks, or murder. People died the most from infections picked up in the hospital. We did the best we could. People from the outside didn’t.

Imagine that.

Some people play a strange part in this world. They are there to be one of many ripples for someone else. Sometimes you build up the courage to seek help, but unfortunately for you the world thinks you’re not worthy. The world assigned a role for you. Your life is pre-determined.

I’m not one to believe that free will is an illusion, but I have trouble believing that everyone is free. Some people are just playthings of the universe, they’re just a piece of metal placed infront of a magnet.

Destiny, if you will.

Second leading cause of death was shock. There’s a common misconception that it entails emotional shock. Shock essentially means lack of blood and oxygen supply to vital organs, such as your brain.

That’s put in terms far too simple.

Sometimes you need to put things in terms too simple to avoid thinking, because the other option is falling into a hole of thinking about why it happens. Then it’s too late.

You have to detach yourself from the world if you want to survive it.

At least that’s what I tell myself to make myself feel better.”

It stopped.

“Put things in terms too simple to avoid thinking?” Ghost repeated. “What does that mean?”

She didn’t quite know what it meant just yet. It could be about self-preservation where you intentionally protect yourself from harm by living in ignorance, or it could be about mind control where you force people to not think so they’d be obedient.

A lot of Guardians have reached such a level of insanity where they no longer feel like the Traveler’s plaything. It was frightening, if she was going to be honest. Reality was that the
Traveler could end her life at any moment it pleased. She had to detach herself from those thoughts to avoid annihilation of self.

She found it funny how she escaped a hungry pack of wolves only to run into a family of bears.

Whoever had it in for her did a formidable job. Someone wanted her alive against all costs.

They headed for the next one. It was leading them to a specific place by the looks of it, like breadcrumbs.

The Ghost started playing it without a word.

“Some beings can’t go to hell on their own. They have to drag everyone else down with them when they die.

That’s the story.

That’s what will happen.

That’s the inevitable.

That’s the only common variable in what I saw.

Endless looping cycles. The magnet and its tiny little scraps of metal. I wasn’t the one to tear the hole in time. I know very basic Techeun magic, certainly not enough to cause that. It was torn by someone else. An entry in my old diary got… corrupted.

I saw that it was targeting me, and I saw a dark future that stared back.

Joke is on whoever tore it, I am going to die either way. I hope whoever is planning this is fully prepared for the biggest dent imaginable to their plans. I was going to be a doctor, I know how to die.

Part of keeping your humanity is retaining genetic afflictions. Quite surprised it took this long for it to catch up. It’s progress, though. It’s a loop. I know what happens from this point on perfectly well. It’s documented. I had all the time in the world yet ran out of it to make a cure. It doesn’t matter at all now.

I have no plans to come back. I absolutely adore certain quirks of the Guardians, but there is one thing that makes me ultimately despise them: they’re trying to play God.

You can’t play God.

I made an oath not to.

Everyone has to pay for wrongfully bringing what’s supposed to be dead back to life.”

Tirion stood still for a while, blinking in confusion.

Her Ghost beat her to the joke:

“Do you think Saladin will allow us to run the Iron Banner after this exposure to irony?”

“That’s not funny.” She snorted and shook her head. “It’s not funny like the Traveler’s choosing process.”
“It aligns with what happened when we found your old things but…” He didn’t want to try at this point. He had to at least try: “I’m more concerned about what was said about the affliction, and there being no cure.”

“I’m sure that’s nothing to worry about.” It wasn’t the time or place for her. “Let’s go.”

“You brother was sick…”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“But I do. How and why aren’t you worried about this? There is no cure.”

“We’ll figure it out. We will.” She said firmly. “We don’t even know what it is, and you’re healing it for all I know.”

There were scars he couldn’t heal.

His only wish was to tear down that wall.

They moved on.

Agreeing with what was said in the recordings felt like patting herself on her own back.

It just gave her further reinforcement that she should just stop. It was hard to know the difference between giving up and stopping. They’ll have to kill that Ahamkara. Years ago, she would be already there, her fireteam by her side. Eager for loot and Glimmer because they had nothing better to do.

That’s how they got the Vault of Glass, and Crota later on. Oryx’s arrival was them paying the price for their eagerness, he even tried to take the Vault for himself. Only successful mission they’ve done was neutralizing Aksis and SIVA, but it probably won’t take long until it returns to bite them. They made the mistake of letting old habits consume them by making a deal with Calus, and the price for that will be paid soon.

Six happy genius heroes.

The world is going to miss them so much.

Tirion wanted to be as far away from that Ahamkara as possible. Not that she was frightened, she has faced equal horrors before and survived them. With planning, they could defeat Riven and be back in their new little village on the same day.

She wanted to stay away because it was the smart thing to do. At this point she knew what was going to happen if they charge in. All of them have changed.

The two were in an area called The Blast now.

“What’s special about this place?” She asked, a giant abandoned colony ship in her sights. It loomed over her lifelessly, frozen in time. Tirion felt a great deal of sorrow come from that place, but she didn’t know why.

“I’ve told you once about it.”

“Refresh my memory?”

“That colony ship couldn’t launch during the Collapse due to faults with its fuel lines. Everyone
died. It’s filled with... what used to be people. No one has given them a proper burial. I spent a lot of time there when I was searching for you. It took days to go through them all.” He lamented. “I hope some of them became Guardians. They just wanted to escape.”

She almost knew what the next recording was going to say and braced for it.

“Whoever you are, I hope you have infinite amounts of strength because you are going to need it. You are going to need all the things I don’t have. You’re going to need strength. You’re going to need courage. If you’ve reached this point, you have the right amount of patience. And I thank you for it.

I’ll leave this cache in a special place.

A reminder of how differently everything could have ended.

How it should have ended.

Look up. Right there. That colony ship.

She has her story down. I really thought I knew it. And it changed around when I was almost through it.

The Collapse lasted much longer than many believe. I had this naïve dream of just driving and enjoying the view as the world collapsed onto itself. Truth be told, I wanted to see a visual representation of what’s been happening inside of me.

When you lose someone, the hole will always be there. I chose my profession because I didn’t want anyone to feel like me.

I still miss him.

I got a phone call and took a wrong turn. I didn’t know it was a wrong turn at the time. A different colony ship needed a doctor, last minute replacement. The doctor I was replacing recommended me. I barely had the qualifications but he believed in me. He’s seen my work, seen my devotion to the cause.

I don’t know why I took that turn.

I should have ignored their offer and kept driving. Should have gotten on the ship you’re looking at or died on my way there.

Should have died in a stockpile somewhere in Russia, consumed by the darkness.

That’s the story I’m going to leave behind. That I stopped existing after the Collapse.

To all intents and purposes, I did.

Awoken are stuck between Light and Dark. You’re either alive, or you’re dead. Being in a perpetual state of ‘in-between’ is nothing that’s supposed to occur, ever. It’s not right.

It’s supposed to be a moment, blink of an eye.

A side must be chosen.

Always.
Everything except for my license is now back in its place as it was when I left on my little journey on the onset of the Collapse. Storybooks, diaries, photos. I imbued them with Awoken magic for safekeeping a long time ago. I’d have undone it if I possessed the capabilities. Guess they’ll be there forever now, time capsules of a time that no longer matters.

What could go wrong?”

Tirion hated that cockiness.

A lot of things could go wrong. But, she didn’t change until recently. That cockiness transcended The Traveler’s attempts to make her forget.

There was one more to go. It was back at where it began. The caches were invisible unless you’ve found the previous one. Even if you managed to make the visible you needed the key from the previous one to open it.

A lot of keys.

Back at the wreckage.

For one last time.

The first of snow was threatening to fall, to bury it again. Murky clouds drowned out the sun.

Maybe once the snow melts they’ll be able to make it look different. Give everyone a proper burial.

The spot she was standing in gave a perfect view of the road and the broken bridge. The box had the datachip and a Talisman in it, a fixed one. One that belonged to her prior. It hummed with strange energy in her hand.

“The end. The beginning.

If the devil himself would walk up to Mara and tell her that he could save her from death and grant her godhood, she would become his ally all the while scheming a way to kill him. Not for the good of anyone, just so she could achieve her godhood. You will always be an ‘it’ to her. She is not your friend. Your Queen doesn’t care about you. She will cause your death.

I wouldn’t be Mara’s enemy if it stopped at her emotionally removing herself from her people to be able to make objective judgement calls. That’s what good surgeons do. That’s what good commanders do. Emotional attachment means that you won’t be able to save a life as your judgement will be warped by anxiety and fear.

You’ll end up in a standstill. Desperately wanting to move but not being able due to the world crushing you.

She took it too far. Took it to the point where it’s not morally acceptable. I knew what had to be done the minute I found out about it.

The Awoken have to embrace our biggest fears if we’re going to win any kind of war. The people won’t survive if they don’t embrace them. Secrets will lead to death. It will murder people who don’t deserve it for no good reason.

I want them to live.
I'm at a loss, I'm losing grip, the fabric's ripped.

We shouldn't play God and break the world. We need to restore it.

Fuck the Dreaming City.

Fuck Mara Sov.

And fuck me.

Look behind you now.”

The anger in her voice eclipsed anything Tirion has ever felt, stronger than any fire she’s ever conjured.

Unbridled hate, sorrow. Rage mixed with desperation.

“Uh oh…” Ghost whispered and Tirion immediately whirled around. Something was glowing less than a foot underneath the ground, glowing lines came out of it, connecting to other glowing devices underneath the ground. It reminded her of a Hive summoning ritual.

“What’s happening?”

“The vaults. They’re doing something.” Ghost bolted towards the glowing spot. “They're also uploading something to everyone who will receive it.”

She counted ten devices in a circle around her. The worst thing that could happen to the Awoken is all their secrets becoming public knowledge.

“Pause it!” Tirion made a decision. “Pause it, at least from the Vanguard.”

“Give me a moment. I’ll try. I can’t stop everything…”

It wouldn’t matter if it got to the Vanguard. They were shattered, and Zavala would just hide it. She and her team could use it.

Use it to undo the harm she did.

The vaults were ten medium sized boxes, made out of stone she saw around the Watchtower during the time she spent in it. They found an empty room in the Ag Borradh to transmat them to, not knowing what to expect.

They could explode. They could have a cure to all known diseases.

From scans, Ghost deducted that they were consoles with hard drives with connections to own respective keys.

Every recording she listened to unlocked them one by one.

It was a trap.

It made her wonder how much of what was said was the truth and how much was filler to stretch the time so the vaults could boot up and decrypt. The last few entries were the only ones with any kind of emotion. It started off as robotic, ended with despondency she didn’t thought was possible.
It was all her own voice.

That’s what made it terrifying.

Voice from a period of time she wanted gone, to the point where The Traveler even saw her false story as truth.

Consumed by darkness in a stockpile in Russia.

The Traveler didn’t lie to her when it showed her that vision. She lied to herself. A lie so strong it became the truth.

Storyteller of the ages. She did like her storybooks.

But as she said herself, time always catches up. There was a price to pay.

Tirion has been sitting in the corner of the dark room for hours, barely breathing and barely blinking. Her Ghost knew that she needed a moment of peace, so he left her alone to talk with the other Ghosts hanging around.

The vaults were pulsating purple, only light in the room, begging to be opened. From what her Ghost could tell only a small part of the first Vault got uploaded to the Vanguard.

The rest now resided in the hands of the enemies.

The Fallen, the Hive, the Cabal, angry Awoken… all of them will be marching towards the Tangled Shore and the Dreaming City for treasures.

Knowing Mara, she’ll find a way to mitigate it. To turn it to her favour. Tirion had all the evidence she needed to know that the Queen was not dead.

“A part of it got uploaded to our little humble abode.” Lorcan spoke softly upon entering the room. “Haven’t finished reading it yet. Actually, I had to stop reading it. Most of it is about how the Awoken were created.”

Tirion attributed her lack of excitement to being overwhelmed with what could be in those vaults. They had answers to everything. Every part of her wanted to know, yet her whole body was frozen in fear.

She had to figure out if she was ready to pull back the curtain and ruin things forever.

But, she would get answers.

What was worth it anymore?

She leaned her head against the metal wall, her skull vibrating from the engine on the other side of the wall.

“And…?” Her voice was hoarse.

“Can I give my honest thoughts even if you would hate me for them?”

Last time she found out about the deepest secrets of the Awoken it was enough to make her want to die. “Go ahead.”

Lorcan took a deep, infuriated breath. She wasn’t going to like it, but he couldn’t keep it in.
“I think the original Awoken – *Mara’s circle* – are the most atrocious, sickening, loathsome, and repulsive creatures I’ve ever read about.” He put it bluntly. "She's the devil."

*Creatures.*

It cut deep enough to make her audibly flinch.

“That’s… straightforward.”

“I’m not talking about people who weren’t in the know. If Dredgen freaking Yor was an Awoken, I’m not talking about him. He’s a saint now compared to what I read!” He clenched his fist. “I wouldn’t be able to continue living if I found out that I was created because someone decided that they’re a god and changed me forever.”

“That’s how I died.”

Lorcan’s shoulders visibly slumped at that. “What?”

“I did all of this. Placed these vaults in an attempt to sabotage everything Mara stood for.” Tirion swallowed hard. “I couldn’t live with knowing the truth. I don’t know the details of how I was created, but I got an idea now. She created me.”

“What is stopping you from leaking it to the City?”

“The Awoken that live there, those who have nothing to do with it. That’s what. I think I was too blinded by anger at Mara to not realize that my attempts to save the ‘innocent’ Awoken people would kill them.” She said. “I can’t say for certain because I don’t remember, but I think my goal was a revolution against her.”

“Those historically end well!”

“Exactly. Choice here is: let the Awoken get killed by their Queen or start a civil war which will lead to more slaughter.” Just saying that made her almost gag. “That makes me no better than Mara.”

“You, uh, could help us build some scaffolds.” It was the only suggestion that seemed reasonable to him. “We’re trying to make this whole thing look better from the outside. Waiting for a limestone shipment and I have no idea what I’m doing.”

The sudden change of topic made her wonder if she just had a memory lapse. “Huh?”

“Look. There is no way in hell the Awoken can get away with the things they’ve done without… cosmic karma.” Lorcan was ready to dodge a Hammer from somewhere in the ship. “I… I hate myself.”

“Not your best work.”

“Could have planet that one better, yeah.” Lorcan’s disappointment in himself was immeasurable. “Point is, screw them. If they can continue to have done the things they’ve done, screw them. I’m sure the reason we have Earthborn Awoken is because the sane ones escaped already. Screw them. Screw anyone who approves of what Mara did. I don’t think many people deserve death, but Mara definitely deserved it.”

She turned to look at him. “What do you think is the worst part of what Mara and people who approved of her actions did? I trust your judgement.”
“The… invasiveness. On forty thousand people. Can you even picture that many individuals? You were one of them. No one has the right to do what she did. It’s revolting.” He crinkled his nose, searching for a bucket because he’ll need one soon. He probably hasn’t met that many people in his entire Guardian life. “Defining laws of the universe aside in a pocket dimension, which is also completely abhorrent, eviscerating forty thousand people goes against all ethics and humanity itself. She… she didn’t even ask! No execution of those who resisted. Just… It’s not alright. It’s not. It’s really not.” Lorcan’s last words were a tremble.

Tirion will read it one day, once she is ready. Lorcan was one of the people she trusted the most. You’d never know that he was raised by someone like Haya. He managed to take her good qualities and translate them into something coherent.

For now, it was enough. She wasn’t ready for the intricate details.

She’s heard enough.

“Thank you, Lorcan.”

“Wish we both had something better to thank me for.” He wanted to jump into the nearby lake to wash everything off. It wouldn’t be enough. He sincerely wished that he hadn’t read any of it. Maybe he was overreacting, but he didn’t care. Every word he read about the history of Awoken creation twisted his stomach.

It shouldn’t have happened.

Death sounded preferable.

“Well… thank you for what you did for Shaxx. I heard his side of the story.” Tirion forced a smile through it all. “Missed connections?”

“He was tall, nice dark hair, a jawline sharper than my knife…” Lorcan’s dreamy state was felled by a frown. “I freaked him out. Because I’m an idiot. Calus is still looking straight at me… Why did we do that again? I can still see that purple bloated face throwing up skulls…”

“So, you went to Shaxx?”

“Yeah! He deals with people. I was like ‘Hey man, I need you to do something for me’, and he was like ‘Ah, fuckin’ no one tells me what to do!’ and – “ Lorcan made himself laugh really hard. His Shaxx impression wasn’t one to be proud of, but it didn’t make it any less funny to him. It also put Tirion in a slightly better mood. “And then— then I was like ‘Well fuckin’ we got a situation here because I really need you to do something’ and then he was like ‘Ah we're at a fucking impasse, because I need you to do something grand for me because I - unlike you, Lorcan O’Connell - found someone who loves me.’”

Lorcan made himself sad again with that last bit.

“You won in the end.”

He twirled around, hands in the air in annoyance. “I still haven’t found my Jawline Man! That’s not a win!”

“Maybe it wasn’t meant to be. There are plenty of jawlines out there.”

“Let me have this one thing!”
The Tower was suspiciously silent when Tirion arrived there. It was something else than lingering grief.

She didn’t even need to check if he was at his post. He takes a break only when it’s absolutely necessary. One of her favourite reasons were Guardians of the Crucible breaking his voice by showing off. She never enjoyed seeing him in any kind of helpless situation, but it was amusing to watch the whole City run out of tea. He was in their apartment, sitting on the bed with the lights off. He was in armour, the helmet placed respectfully by his side.

A long, lacquered box with fabric in it was infront of him on the floor, and a gun was in his hands.

“What’s going on?” Tirion held her breath as she waited for the answer.

“This is the weapon I used at Twilight Gap.” On closer inspection, she saw that it was a grenade launcher. Tirion sat down next to him, a gentle hand on his back. “I wasn’t by myself with my Frames during that day. There were six of us. Me, Nkechi, Abdi, Truce, Liu Feng, and Bray. But it felt like I was alone in it all.”

“Are the nightmares still the same?”

“Sometimes it feels like I never cut Saladin’s feed.” Saladin’s orders were to retreat. To not make it about glory. To fall back. To not be a hothead.

In other words, to let the City burn. All because Saladin didn’t want to be seen as a bad commander and have chaos reign because people would find inspiration in what Shaxx did. War didn’t need rebels. It needed capable soldiers.

War didn’t need unnecessary deaths.

Her hand shifting to his shoulder pulled him out of it.

He was no longer alone.

Shaxx put his own gloved hand on top of her smaller light blue one.

“I’ll always remind you that you did the right thing. You don’t need me to tell you that, though.” She said. She didn’t know it, but he did need it. “It’s too much to hope for forgiveness from others but I hope you stop reliving it every day.”

“That’s why I dug this up. I call it The Mountaintop.” He returned his attention to the ancient grenade launcher. “It’s the first step.”

“What are you planning to do with it?”

“Pass it on to the next Crucible champion.” The words were akin to a sigh of relief. “It’s between Josef and Redrix right now.”

“I don’t know if I’ve told you, but what you did for Josef was incredibly kind.” She knew of Luna. Never met her, but she heard her barking around the Tower. She knew something was amiss when the gathering of people around the Crucible screens turned sombre. She was a great companion. Shaxx made him a gun out of scavenged parts of his own personal collection to commemorate her memory. “I think both of them are equally deserving of it. Both of them carry a part of you. Your proteges are unlike others in that way.”

“I think the deciding factor will be how they react when I tell them what happened at the Twilight
Gap.” He clutched the gun. “If they will hate me, or if they will get wrongfully inspired and interpret it as being okay to disobey all orders. I need to give this to someone who understands, understands allegiance to greater good. Understands that it doesn’t mean running rampant.”

“That seems fair. If you’re ready, that is. I’m not going to talk you into it if you’re not ready.”

He slowly put it back into the wooden box, to be kept safe until further notice.

The decision was made in his head. It was time. He’ll just have to get the two in for a meeting. Redrix has been difficult to get a hold of as of late. There were rumours about unsanctioned activities, but nothing substantial.

“How about you?” He asked her.

Glowing green eyes widened. “I don’t want to say it.”

“Say what?”

“I plan to take… a break. Stay around for a while, and I missed you. It will give the other Guardians something to do. I can hear the universe crumbling in on itself. Great.” She rolled her eyes. “I decided that I want to spend some time rebuilding. I need to recover from the Shore, and I can fight without guns. We’re making some good progress in the EDZ.”

“Your work is doing people proud. I hear the chatter about what you’re doing daily.”

“It’s always a team effort. I want to be more involved. Helped to make some concrete earlier today, contemplated if Ouros would be mad at us using the Hammer of Sol to make a kiln work.” She wasn’t joking. Her voice was filled with excitement, and she didn’t even notice. “Oh, and we have a kiln! One of the City people knew how to handle it. Never thought I’d see Guardians and civilians work together like that.”

“It happened all the time during the Dark Ages. You could see no difference between a Guardian and a mortal.” He frowned at the fact that most of them were no longer there. Succumbed to age or the darkness. “The Fallen put a stop to the villages. Even the walls couldn’t stop their attacks. We had to go high.”

“Some people see the construction of the Towers as Guardians becoming elitists.”

“Those people weren’t there during Twilight Gap or the struggles before that. They didn’t see what I saw. But, I’ll admit that it did cause a schism. It protected us from Fallen more than walls could, but the Towers fell and us seeking refuge in the sky benefitted the Red Legion…” He sighed in frustration and looked at her. “Do you have Sunbreakers stationed at EDZ?”

“Yes. Getting more Guardians into the fold can be… tricky. We’ve got some Titans that can switch between all three elements. Haya is not a fan of keeping them pure.” She knew he’d be worried about it. They couldn’t have a repeat of Twilight Gap. “Ideally we’d want more Warlocks. Huritt has ideas about permanent void shields over the whole thing. It’s fascinating but….”

He chuckled. “Puts the Defenders in a sour mood, doesn’t it?”

“They’re upset at the idea of a Warlock punching someone!” The arguments were the worst part. “Going to try to utilize the tanks, build some kind of defence. There are so many tanks.”

“You don’t sound… confident.” He noticed the fading enthusiasm.
She didn’t. She knew it. She tried. Tirion was proud of it, she didn’t want anyone to get hurt. “I don’t want it to turn into a prison. We want basic rules, but we don’t want to reach totalitarianism. We want to have guard protection, but we don’t want to reach the point where people are intimidated of those standing guard.”

“The fact that you’re concerned about that is proof that you will succeed.”

“I hope so.” Tirion fell back to the bed. She just needed to shut her eyes until Banshee calls her about the Ace. She reached out and tugged on the spike on his vambrace. “Do you really need to yell some more at the rookies today?”

He grabbed his helmet. “You somehow manage to make me hate my job and make it all worth it at the same time.”

“It’s an important job.” She pulled him in for a kiss. Just a short one, he had a schedule to follow. “Come back with your voice.”

There was something unnerving about some recent Crucible participants. Shaxx would give them a pass if they were rookies, but the Guardians in question have lived in the Crucible for years. Ignoring objectives and killing Guardians when there was no reason to. Old Dark Age weapons have been showing up in people’s hands, enough to raise concern.

He wrote down each of their names this time around so he could monitor them. He refused to have a repeat of what happened all those years ago. He had enough time between matches to have Arcite log it all and run analysis to see if any of them were repeat offenders.

“I need your comment on a myth, Shaxx. For… fun.”

“I’ve been part of many myths.” Shaxx was prepared to age at least 5 years in that moment. He didn’t like that smug smile on her face as she gallivanted into his area of the Tower. She was picking up some supplies from Tess. Decorations for their home and some fancy Ghost shells.

“It involves the Tempest and a certain Queen…” Haya drew out her words, trying not to laugh. One of the files from the unearthed vaults caught her eye. It was stuffed in-between information about Riven and her powers. Some of the powers were used in interesting ways. “It’s just what I’ve heard! The Dreaming City gates opened and some rumors are flying.”

On some level he and that Titan were friends. Being friends with her meant that he knew that she won’t stop until he talks. Being friends meant sharing.

“It’s true. Mara was my Crimson Bond.”

“Ohhh… That’s it?” She needed to invent another synonym for disappointment now. “Just seven words? Tirion changed you for the better but not in that aspect.”

He wasn’t known for being calm and being brief. If she had asked this question exactly one minute after the Taken War started, she would have gotten a completely different answer.

Another person swept into his life two minutes after the war started, with a broken Crucible arena.

“When the Queen perished at the onset of the Taken War it didn’t feel like a rug had been pulled from under me. I didn’t want Mara to be happy if it cost me. I didn’t want to know everything about her. It never felt like my heart and soul would be irreparably damaged if she disappeared from my life. In hindsight, it was business to alleviate a war.” The Crucible Handler paused,
anticipating a lewd interjection from the blonde Titan. It never came, surprisingly enough. She was the one who complained about the amount of words. He continued:

“When I lost Tirion during the Red Legion attack, it tore me apart. It tears me apart every time she tells stories about how she almost died, like glass shards in my existence. Love is dramatic. I could let her destroy my life and be perfectly okay with it.” Shaxx smiled underneath the helmet. “With Tirion… it’s feeling like my life isn’t my own anymore. It’s wanting to be a better person for her. Her happiness is my happiness. Her sorrows are my sorrows. No one has made me happier, safer, or more complete. She makes me happy. I feel… entirely complete with her.”

“Oh…” Haya’s eyes trailed to the red carpet.

“Tirion taught me that any fool can be ‘in love’, to get to experience that temporary madness. Any fool can find a Crimson Bond. Very few are lucky enough to find someone who gives them the courage to open up completely and be vulnerable.” He said. “Majority don’t get to spend more than a minute with them in their lifetime.”

She should have just walked away when he gave her the first brief answer.

Why did it hurt?

“Well. I came here for my own amusement to hear a story about how you destroyed a damn book and with your own damn hand…” Haya stammered. She got more than she bargained for. Certainly more than just seven words. “That’s… wow. Thanks. I’m going to go now, find some booze and then spend the rest of the day crying about how lonely I am instead.”

“I find it hard to believe that you’ve never had anyone.”

“I scare people. I think there are only two people who don’t care about that… One of them—I don’t want this to turn into a therapy session.” It didn’t come across as a joke.

“That’s fine…”

“It’s… not really fine. I didn’t expect this. I’m really happy for you and her. I… really am.”

She had Leor transfer her supplies to her ship as she abruptly left. She needed something. The roof of the old destroyed Tower seemed fitting. It was abandoned and no one would find her there. Leor was fed up with her smoking in the ship and she wouldn’t be able to make it to her favourite spot on Mercury.

“Oh no! Come on!” Haya growled at the figure kneeling on the edge of roof. The Drifter barely raised an eyebrow, overlooking the new Tower down below. The new Golden Age. “This is my spot! Get out!”

“What is this? I thought this was the era of everyone being kind to one another.” He stretched out his arms as he spoke, trying to be welcoming. “Even relics of the past like us can accommodate.”

Haya opened her mouth to speak but chose to light the cigarette in her mouth with her fingers instead. “Alright, games are nice. Take two steps forward if you have a snake motif.”

“That means I’d miss out on the latest chatter. What they’re sayin’ about your friend, for one.” He smirked with humourless eyes at the glare Haya shot at him. “She got everyone up here all riled up. They’ve been debatin’ what happened to Prince What’s-His-Name like it’s a Crucible match.”

“And?”
“If she did what they say she did, she’s exactly what I need for Gambit.” He said. “Sun’s getting real low, Abbie. I need that weapon core.”

“I’ll have Callum’s skull for you to drink out of soon. You know I always deliver.” Haya reassured him. She just needed more time. “Also, not even her Ghost knows what she did. He wasn’t there.”

“Now, think about it. What could she have possibly done that she didn’t want her Ghost to see?”

“She doesn’t like me swearing infront of him, so fuck off! What could she have done?”

The Drifter knelt down again. He knew her too well to try to slither into her head. He moved his eyes to the destroyed Traveler. The Vanguard believed it was alive, that it had reawakened.

He appreciated that because it made him laugh. Amusement that didn’t hail from Guardians throwing Taken at eachother was difficult to find.

Haya was useful. She was perfect for his Gambit but would never step a foot in it, but she made up for it all with her inability to forget.

Possibly the only one left alive who remembers same things as him of the Dark Ages. Guardians of that time were either dead or deranged, but they were few. Maybe he should rebuild his bar.

“So, your people predicted everyone coming back from the dead, and the Armageddon that comes with it. How did it end?”

“Look. I just want to smoke and deal with feelings I’ve repressed for four-or-so years, not debate religion. But first of all…” She blew out thick grey smoke as it was getting hard to talk. “Armageddon that you keep talking about is not ‘ours’. It’s maimed stolen property, basis of damn arguments that I can recite word for word.”

“You gotta admit it’s a catchy name.”

“It was a freaking hill! They took our hill, and they turned it into an apocalypse. Then they argued about mountains!” She corrected him before she took another drag. “I may be the biggest butcherer of my own culture but, come on.”

“You remember. You know what’s comin’. I’m just simply curious.”

“You got it all wrong. What I was taught has happened. The saviour and liberator of man came. Good for him. He inspired us to change direction and all that, brought us a Golden Age. That went according to plan and prophecies came true.” She threw what remained of the cigarette away and looked at the Traveler. “The Darkness struck just as it was about to resurrect the dead. Everything is debatable after that. Hell, maybe everyone is right and we’re just waiting for the damn Antichrist and we’ve been killing eachother for no good reason! I don’t know. Fuck if I know. Could be.”

The Drifter wasn’t used to every other word of hers not being a swearword. The smells of tobacco made him slightly nostalgic. “Got another cigarette?”

Haya sat down on the edge, feet dangling. Might as well stay for a minute. Both of them being relics of the Dark Age meant that they could complain for ages about how things have changed.

Better than doing what she came there to do.

Anything was better, really.
“Only if you have a flask filled with Dark Age swill.”

Chapter End Notes

Had to bend the lore a little bit because ugh.
"All parts in place. Ace of Spades is good as new, now. Take it. When you wield it, remember… remember…” Banshee jumped slightly, as if he just remembered an order that was supposed to be done yesterday. “Now wait a minute… Hey, have you seen Cayde around lately?”

Those were the words that released the slingshot with a sharp rock aimed right towards her. Tirion almost dropped the Ace on the ground when her limbs gave up and her head drooped down.

He was gone.

It didn’t hit her until then.

Cayde was gone.

She kept her composure on Titan, listening to his final messages. To his will. He left his possessions to the natural phenomenon that kills him. Including his list of debts which she couldn’t access because it was too long.

He was gone. Cayde was gone. She killed him by not keeping her promise. A burden she’ll carry. She refused to wear a Warlock bond because of it.

There would be no more idea tossing for weapon designs between him and Banshee because he needed a weapon for a bet with Shaxx and didn’t have the Glimmer to back it up. No more feuds with the Crucible handler, including bets, illegally modded holsters on Hunter armours, and creative consequences for when Shaxx lost. No more of him sending his Hunters to acquire as many guns with that crystal that starts fires, causing chaos to reign.

No more of his jokes echoing through the Bazaar as he ended his day at the Spicy Ramen. Only his portrait on the wall remained.

No more him walking out of meetings when things weren’t going anywhere and he had a solution that Zavala wouldn’t approve of, or freaking out when Zavala made a joke.

No more of being Ikora’s true friend.

No more of Amanda looking to the right to find him there, often breaking things. He’s been around since the day she made it to the Tower. Always there to make her laugh, even when he annoyed her. He kept telling her that death wasn’t the end. That if she ever felt sad about her people all she had to do was wait for them to come back as Guardians.

She was still waiting.

No more beating him at poker games when Tirion needed someone to talk to someone who knew hardships better than anyone.

All the life and light he brought to the Tower was now gone with him. That hole will not go away. They’ll try to cover it up, but it will still be there.

“No…” Tirion’s lip quivered. “He’s been gone for a couple of weeks now.”

She couldn’t stand there. She couldn’t let anyone see her falling apart. She left without saying goodbye and ended up in her ship via pure muscle memory.
Tirion still hadn’t addressed the crowd. Still hadn’t talked to Zavala or Ikora. It hurt too much, and Zavala despised her. Everyone knew that Uldren was dead. She had time to think until conspiracy theorists arrived.

They always arrive.

What was she supposed to say to them? Murder is bad? Tell them stories about a traumatized dragon brainwashing him? Tell them the truth, that she had a hard time killing the murderer of a beloved Guardian and her friend? That she didn’t take pleasure in taking a life? How she would have thrown him in the Prison if he was of sound mind and his soul uncorrupted? How she shouldn’t be given the role of judge, jury, and executioner?

They wanted a story.

Cayde kept telling her that.

*People wanted a story.*

They wanted an exciting story about a desperado on a revenge trail, they wanted a story that ends with her towering over Uldren and shooting him in the head with no remorse. A story of a hero with the fire of the devil in her soul.

Something to write tales about and twist them until it’s a confused and glorious myth.

She’ll be a confused and glorious myth one day. They won’t tell stories of the struggles.

She knew that she’ll never be anything they ever want her to be.

If the world wanted stories told it shouldn’t have killed off the one that spun the best tales.

“I’m here for you, Guardian.”

Tirion covered her face with her hand. The Ace was safely holstered on her thigh. “I know.”

She’d put the gun on the memorial, but it didn’t feel right. Cayde would want her to use it.

The Ghost knew that she needed a moment to not think, a distraction. “Lorcan sent a message. Something about the Dreaming City.”

She was already putting in the coordinates. “Alright.”

“Are you sure about your choice? About not going to the Dreaming City? Petra could use your help.”

One advantage of space faring ships was that they weren’t cars. If she would have been in a car, she’d have slammed on the brakes and flipped the vehicle over.

“I—” She took a sharp breath, letting go of the controls just so she wouldn’t steer the ship into hell. “That place and its people made me kill myself. It made me kill my friend. The why and wherefore of me refusing to tiptoe through the shiny city with diamond slippers ends at that. There is no place less suited for the likes of me.”

“I’m sorry. I thought we could just…”

“I know. Be a *Guardian*. The protector of the last of humanity. The one who has a duty to the Tower and the City, to keep it safe.” Tirion clenched her jaw. “I can’t be that anymore. I can help
them rebuild and offer shelter, but I can’t be the definition of a Guardian anymore. Especially now that I know I didn’t want to be one.”

“I didn’t have a say.”

“I know you didn’t. I’m not mad at you. Just… the magnet. No one had a say. No one has a say and it enrages me to no end.” Tirion forced herself to relax in the seat. This new jumpship was too small to throw a tantrum in. “Mara didn’t ask before… converting me. The Traveler didn’t ask before making a Ghost for me. My brother didn’t ask to die. Uldren didn’t ask to have his soul destroyed. The people didn’t ask to get killed by him because he couldn’t fight Riven. Let’s focus on the one thing where people have a say.”

They landed in the Sunken Isles. Construction outside was going well, and she helped when needed. There was little she could do. The people of the Farm insisted on doing the work, which made her feel bad. They put up a fight when she tried to argue about it.

They wanted to rebuild more than any Guardian, they just needed the opportunity. They had the tools for it, plans, and dreams.

Inside of the ship had no trace left of the Cabal. Besides the tanks, which she will always sigh at that upon entering. The team had gathered in the communications hub.

“There she is!” Lorcan was the only one without an annoyed expression on his face. Infront of him were orange holograms of Taken Blights. She’ll recognize that pattern no matter the colour.

It took a lot to shut everyone up like that.

“I was gone for five days. What could possibly have happened without me?” It hurt less if she got to the point quick.

Lorcan looked at his companions, each doing their own research on the consoles, some shot stares at him because they didn’t want to be the ones to say it. Lorcan cleared his throat. “To channel Haya: The Dreaming City is fucked.”

“The Queen is alive.” Huritt was the one who had to elaborate. “She gave an order to Petra to open up the Dreaming City gates and plead the Guardians for aid. Some Guardians formed a team and killed Riven.”

“Oh…” Loss for words to the point where gravity felt stronger to Tirion. She crossed her arms. “What else?”

“She transcended death and cursed the Dreaming City. It’s now getting slowly consumed by the Taken blight. Based on what I could piece together from the vaults, it was her revenge for the Awoken locking her up.”

_**Riven’s rage is justified.**_

Lorcan brought up some footage. He found the Guardians responsible and bought the footage from them. He’ll get the Glimmer back soon out of sheer bitterness because deep inside he wanted to kill that Ahamkara alongside his peers.

It was odd to **not** be ones responsible for the death of a giant creature. Odd, but he was happy about it at the same time. Blame couldn’t be placed on them.

Everything that could be said about the Dreaming City has been said to her. It was a wonderland,
vibrant, and beautiful. Beautiful insanity. The blight looked like it belonged there, it was the grime that it needed to look remotely natural. Haya didn’t look at it, if Kouhei felt any grief he didn’t show it.

Lorcan shook his head, the only one in the room who showed any visible emotion.

“I’m… I’m… Hmrmh.” He struggled. “I’m going to say it. The bastards deserved it. They committed crimes against humanity and held an Ahamkara hostage in an experiment to see if something can outlive Haya.”

“Does that make them underserving of help?” Tirion’s Ghost gawked at the Guardians. Haya didn’t bat an eyelash at the remark about her. Being in that room felt like what he thought a fever dream felt like. “Guardian?”

“The Awoken crossed a line.” Tirion’s voice was cold. She didn’t find any sorrow in her for the images she saw in front of her.

“The line was crossed hundreds of years ago. What’s happening to the Dreaming City is cruel! We have to do something, Guardian.”

Was he the only one who saw what was happening? The calm manner of the way the news was delivered to her was more unsettling than what they were talking about.

She didn’t gasp in shock when she listened to Huritt explain, or even move. He wouldn’t say that she took pleasure in the bad news, but it didn’t fill her with anguish.

“Time cures adversity but it doesn’t change the severity of crimes.” Tirion paused the video, it was now stuck on a beautiful view of a bridge leading to a temple shattered by a big Taken blight. “I will not seek retribution for them. What you’re seeing here is the cosmos itself seeking retribution for the harmed.”

“I don’t know how you can say that…”

“Forty thousand people, Ghost! Not including Uldren’s recent rampage!” Tirion slammed her fist on the console and glared straight into his blue eye. Lorcan took a startled step back, prepared to draw his Dusk Bow any second. She continued: “Forty thousand people disfigured beyond recovery and toyed with by a megalomaniac! Now, it turns out that she’s alive. And you want me to be complicit with her?!”

Lorcan had a dull tight-lipped smile on his face when the Ghost stared at him for help. “I think your Guardian is justifiably pissed, don’t look at me.”

“Yeah. I am pissed. I thanked Mara once, revered her for her sacrifice in the Taken War. Oryx would have slaughtered us all if not for her. I thought Uldren being a goon was as bad as it was going to get. But, it’s all… part of her plan.” Tirion wanted to pull her hair out. “The Traveler did the best it could. If you have to cut off a limb so that a skin eating disease would stop spreading, it’s fine with me.”

“I say fuck ’em, too.” Haya muttered something for the first time in hours. “By the way, Zavala once again proved that he’s a shit commander when Kamala Rior – whoever the hell she even is – was in the Tower yesterday. Hundreds of Guardians are in the Dreaming City right now.”

“Kamala is of the Awoken Paladins.” Kouhei clarified. “A respected one.”

“Yeah. That one. Came to the Tower begging for the aid of the Guardians, offering their armoires
and wisdom in return. Zavala told her that the Vanguard stands with the Reef.” It didn’t sound any less stupid out loud to her. It was worth a shot. “So, now there are a bunch of Guardians in the Dreaming City, being jackasses.”

“Last time I heard Zavala’s voice he said that he was waiting for the Reef to collapse and stop taking Guardians with it.” Tirion said, raising her brows. “What the hell changed?”

“Expect any different from an absolute shit commander?”

Tirion was getting really tired of that.

It was not a good day.

“I believe that Zavala is a good person. I believe that he is a good commander and military strategist. That being said, back in the day performing surgery on your family members was not encouraged. That’s what’s happening here. He loves the City.” Tirion tried to speak as quick as possibly to drown out Haya’s disdain.

“What…? What are you talking about?”

“You could be the most skilled surgeon to have ever lived and know everything about the human body inside and out. Doesn’t matter.” Tirion said. “Your emotional distress will cause the death of someone you love. Exactly the same goes for commanders. He’s too attached to the City to make good judgement calls. Doesn’t make him a bad commander. Just makes him a good commander in the wrong place.”

“I can see the point. Still think that he should be replaced.”

“There is no one to replace him.” Tirion sighed. “There is no military system. There is no system for anything. Honestly, it’s a lot of idiots running around at this point. This ship is our first step towards something.”

“If we’re still voting…” Huritt let them know that he was still there. “I’d like to go to the Dreaming City to do research. I heard them talk of rifts to the Ascendant Realm appearing there.”

“As long as you’re careful.” Tirion had few issues with it. A lot of the times Huritt was better at combat than her. Being an Exo also was an advantage. “I don’t want to ignore Dreaming City as a whole. If there is an immediate threat to us, we should take care of it. All else can go to hell. What are you hoping to find?”

“Savathun.”

“That’s nice.” She wouldn’t be surprised.

“Hive have mostly abandoned Titan. A place torn to shreds by the Hive is the best place to investigate. They could only be in the Dreaming City.”

“Alright. Sounds good. Let me know if you find something.”

Huritt couldn’t wait, and immediately took off. Kouhei left wordlessly after. She’ll have to talk to him later.

“Whelp.” Haya shut off her own console and beckoned Leor to join her. “Need something at Mercury.”
Lorcan didn’t believe her again. He’ll bring it up with her when she gets back. If she had Sunbreaker business to handle she never flat out said it was about that unless she lied.

Then there were three.

Knowing that he can’t do anything about it, Lorcan continued fiddling with something on the console and Alva was repairing her own cloak not paying attention.

Problem with taking a break was that Tirion didn’t know what to do. She wasn’t ready to dive into the rest of the vaults. She read some files to pass the time in-between destinations, a lot of things about Riven.

She felt sorry for her.

“Did anyone tell you what happened during the Festival?” Lorcan asked Tirion.

“No.”

“One of the activities was er… going to the darkest part of the Infinite Forest to see how deep in you can make it.” Lorcan said. “Yep. I didn’t participate but it’s a miracle that no one goddamn died.”

Tirion pulled out a chair and sat down. Straws were piling up. She wanted to be sitting so her back breaking would hurt less. “The logic of this place is just…”

“At this point it’s not even here! We threw logic out the window and dropped a bomb on the building just to make sure it was dead.”

A couple of hours ago she started to believe Zavala was right and she owed him an apology. She thought that he knew the dangers of Mara and the Awoken. No point in being ashamed of being wrong. That theory got shattered when Haya told her about what happened with the Paladin, how easily he offered help to the Reef.

Now, Mara Sov was back. Just thinking of the name made her recoil.

She wondered what was next.

It was quite evident that there was no more room in hell and the dead got pushed back to the world of the living. She only hoped that some made into heaven.

“What are you up to, Lorcan?”

“Eh…” He shrugged. “Not that much. Mostly routing orders of supplies and annoying people with Devrim. We combined our forces and it’s about to become a danger to the world as we know it.”

She inadvertently leaned forward. “Do I want to know?”

“It all started when he asked me if I can ‘shed some Light’ on a situation. I lost it. I’m a monster and I can’t help myself.” Lorcan smiled widely. “Hawthorne left the channel about two hours ago.”

“What did you say to her?”

“I know that she was saying something-about-something bad that happened and I responded with a… ‘Oh, that’s Hawthorable’! Because…. get it?”
“Oh no…”

“She got kinda mad and I said that…” Lorcan snorted at his own bad joke. “‘I am… Hawthorn by guilt over that’. Devrim joined in, and it went to absolute hell. There is that insult to my pride where I’m having a hard time keeping up with him, but it means that he’ll make a great dad. He got the humour for it.”

“Oh!” Tirion suddenly lit up. “The adoption went through?”

“Yes!” Lorcan almost squealed. “Seven-month old little rascal. Saw some pictures.”

“Going to have to send him and Marc my congratulations.” It was easy to forget that small pieces of happiness existed.

“They’re both great! Marc’s a skilled cook, got to try some of the cheese he sent over and I can’t stop thinking about it. And… and…” Lorcan suddenly stopped typing and his words trailed off.

“Sad about your Jawline Man again?”

“No. Yes. Not about that. That’s still a thing, though. I found him! But…” Lorcan turned his head to her, his deep green eyes holding a hint of sudden dejection, threatening to overtake him. “It’s… bittersweet. The whole thing. That’s not even the right word.”

“What thing?”

Lorcan dropped his body in the chair behind him, the creek it made when it slid on the floor almost stabbed his ears. He didn’t know where to begin. “I was 18 when I died. Haya – or Abigail, back then – was 21. You were what, 28?”

Tirion nodded. “Something like that. Give or take Awoken years.”

“We’ll watch Devrim and Marc live out their happy lives, watch the story unfold. Laugh with them, be happy for them. We’ll watch Devrim Kay the Ninth grow up. We’ll watch their stories to their very end.” Celebrating someone’s life would make him happy if it weren’t bittersweet. “Meanwhile, we will always be 18 and 21 and 28 respectively. Well, look like it at least. We’re getting older mentally and all that.”

“It’s hard…” She glanced down on the ground, then back at him. “Why focus on it, though?”

“I try not to. I don’t want to.” He smiled sadly. “I don’t think you should focus on it. It’s… every time you are friendly towards a ‘mortal’ – I detest that word, by the way – you sign yourself up for hurt. It sucks. Always at the back of your head.”

“Maybe that’s why Guardians are discouraged from visiting the City. Or, maybe it’s a subconscious self-preservation thing.”

“Yeah. I also think that non-Lightbearers – let’s call them that for now – are braver than any of us.” Lorcan’s voice was almost filled with awe. “Every morning they wake up knowing that they have limited time left and that they will become progressively worse. I’m older than they will ever be. That’s messed up— And they still get out of bed. If that were me I’d get crushed by existential dread.”

“That’s implying that you don’t feel existential dread as it is.”

“It’s a different kind of existential dread. My existential dread involves Cabal Emperors.” Lorcan
shook the image away from his head. “Those people have the courage to get out of bed and find happiness and love in people like them. That’s kind of hardcore. They and their loved ones can die from the dumbest things at any time. I was watching the construction outside, and one of the scaffolds gave out for no reason. One of the Sunbreakers caught the woman so she wouldn’t break her neck and die. She would have died if it weren’t for him. Just… like that.”

“Meanwhile our Ghosts have tallies for the dumb ways we’ve died and they share them with eachother.”

“We do not!” Tirion’s Ghost instantly made that clear. “Alright. We do more than that. We… place bets. Sorry. You’re winning, though! Good job!”

“… who’s losing?” Lorcan narrowed his eyes at the Ghost, who remained silent. “Who’s freaking losing?!”

“Er… I think Harlow wants something!” The Ghost took off to the room in the back. They didn’t have a name for it yet.

*Haunted House* has been suggested, *Living Room* has also been thrown around.

Arguments about it have been had.

The room still remains nameless.

“I heard that our Ghosts and the Ghosts of the Sunbreakers have a whole council going and one of the rules of it is ‘don’t spook until you’re spoken to’”

“You…” Tirion palmed her face. That one was too much for her and her palm was on her face before she realized it.

“I saw the opportunity!” He had zero regrets on that one, arms in air in victory. He broke her. “I take my boo-s with pride!”

“To get back on track, I do get what you’re saying, and I agree.” Tirion said, letting her hand fall. “Their courage is commendable, especially with the gods that keep invading. They look up to us.”

“It’s a moral obligation to protect them, isn’t it? To make sure they get to experience happiness for as long as they can, to grant them the privilege of dying of old age and not… weird shit.”

“That’s the thing. Moral obligation.” She pointed out. “That’s a lot different from what the Vanguard and Saladin preach to newly Risen.”

“Oh, apologies! I pronounced – ahem – ‘exploiting amnesiacs with heavy handed speeches with heavy handed symbolism and talks of duty and forcing a duty they inherently don’t want on them hoping they won’t question it and start to hate you’ just slightly wrong! Whoops!” He slapped his knees, out of breath from what he just said. “Ah Zavala, don’t change. Don’t even grow hair. Perfect and beautiful as you are!”

They decided to meet up on the roof of the old Tower again. It was deemed to be the best spot for shady business, ironically enough. No one was going to find them. The Drifter was getting impatient. He wasn’t going to let anyone see him in any kind of panic mode, no pacing back and forth no matter how alone he was.

Callum was dead, a scorch mark on a rock. Which meant that someone was always watching, and
that he was next unless he got his weapon core back. Highest spot in the old Tower made it
impossible to get killed by a sniper.

Haya would deliver. She’d do anything for her family if the right buttons are pressed. She’ll get
what she wants and he’ll be able to do his business in complete peace. Only downside for him is
that he’ll never get that Nightstalker or the Guardian into his Gambit.

The Guardian required no explanation.

He’s been watching Lorcan, mostly on the Crucible feeds. All Guardians who wield Void are not
as innocent as they look. It takes a lot of darkness inside of someone to be able to summon the
Dusk Bow and take up the name. They had no fears. That was their secret.

He needed someone without fears, someone who wouldn’t shiver.

Haya’s ship was silent, but not silent enough for his ears. She landed softly on the roof not too far
away, a canister in her hands.

“Would you look at that!”

“Shut up.” The canister burned in the Titan’s hands. She wanted it gone. The piece of metal felt
like pure darkness. “Let’s go over the parameters of the deal before I give this to you.”

“Getting forgetful now, Abbie? I’ve always wondered what the limit is with people like ya. At one
point it gotta start overwriting memories so your brain won’t get fried.”

“I’m worried about your memory. I have a very good Ghost to take care of my head. Now answer.”

“Parameters are simple. You give me the core, and we’ll leave each other alone. Completely. You
and your crew stay away from everythin’ that has to do with me, and I stay away from everythin’
that has to do with you and your crew. Both of us profit in peace.”

Haya didn’t understand why she had to force herself to give the core to him. It was the best deal
she could ask for. Why was she doubting it? He took the canister the moment it was offered to him,
smirking when he opened the lid to confirm if what he wanted was inside.

Drifter didn’t need to tell her to not tell anyone about what she saw in the depths of the Dreaming
City, as it was part of the deal. Leaving each other alone meant not talking about each other.

“Now that the deal is done, what’s next for you?” She asked.

“I couldn’t recruit your kid, so I had to look for alternatives. His name is Red-somethin’. Doesn’t
matter what his name is, he’ll pick a new one soon. It’s just part of the joining process.”

“… Redrix? The Redrix?”

“You really shouldn’t ask questions you don’t want the answer to. Not exactly… polite.” The
Drifter’s eyes were shot but she couldn’t hide that sheer horror washing over her face from him.
“Haven’t seen a Titan like Redrix in a long time. Remember what happened last time the Crucible
had a champion like that?”

Everyone did. Everyone remembered.

Thalor. The once invincible.

Murdered in the Crucible, by a name no one wants to say out loud.
The name he wants to give to others.

“What are you going to do to him?”

“The deal is done, Abbie. The wonderful thing called confidentiality is part of it.” The Drifter put the canister in his rucksack and slung the bag over his shoulder. “Oh, and one last thing: break your end of the bargain, and I’ll break mine. This includes telling anyone about Redrix or what you saw. Shaxx doesn’t need to hear about Gambit, all right? I’ve been more than generous with this. You don’t want to see your kid become a brother, do ya?”
Good golly, go get the world some laudanum.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Weeks passed. The Dreaming City curse raged on.

It didn’t matter.

She stood in a desolate part of the tower, looking up at the grey sky. The first of snow was falling, snowflakes instantly melted when they landed on her skin. Soon the whole Tower will be covered in it, and the Dawning will happen again. One of the few times joy and laughter was heard across the Tower. Half the Tower was busy putting up the lanterns, the other half were complaining about the cold.

She felt like she was there for all of it but none at all at the same time. She couldn’t create a cohesive timeline of the past year in her head, couldn’t distinguish what was the truth. Worst part was that it was her own words that muddled everything up in her head.

Maybe she was mad then, and ramblings of madmen shouldn’t be dissected. Perhaps they should be listened to in order to find what you need to carve out to restore sanity.

“Did I do the right thing?” Tirion asked the sky.

“Do you want to know what I think?” Her Ghost asked.

“I do.”

“I think you should have helped those people.”

"I haven't abandoned them. We kill Dul Incaru every time she shows up. Letting her get to the Distributary would doom everyone, as much as I want to see the Dreaming City turned to dust."

They take turns, and she always oversees it from the EDZ. She won’t step a foot in it, even if there was an opportunity to see Mara burn with the two glowing eyes that the Queen forcibly gave her. She struggled to not have trouble inside of her own skin.

Killing Dul Incaru was quite the task the first time, but pure repetition after that. Their Ghosts could do it for them at this point. The other Guardians were feeding a place called Blind Well. She couldn’t do much about that. Orders to everyone were clear: protect the Blind Well and keep it running at all costs.

The Blind Well was barely covered in the vaults, as its existence was uncertain. It was described as a sort of device with the power to split the seams between realities charged by paracausality. In other words, the Light.

Why couldn’t things be simple?

“One of the Awoken Corsairs, Amrita, is stuck in the loop. Every time the loop resets she tries to stop the Hive from stealing Awoken artifacts, and gets shot by the them. Every time. She can’t fight against it even if she tries. The Curse has seeped into their heads.” Ghost told her, trying to get through to her. “Alva is always there for her. Amrita always takes refuge in a cave and waits.”
“Huh. I wonder what it feels like to have horrors invade your home and destroy everything. To rip your home apart and butcher everything you’ve ever loved.” Tirion lowered her gaze to look at the City, a sturdy grip on a railing so she wouldn’t fall when she leaned forward.

The craters from the Red Legion attack were still there. A constant reminder.

Majority of districts were still dark, hundreds of apartments and canteens deserted. Most of their former owners were dead. Ideally, she wanted to rebuild in the City first but the idea of it felt like repairing a prison. They needed to spread out to survive. When she looked at the City, she only saw too many people and too much death in one place. There was once a thriving world. Not a debilitated city, but a whole thriving world. She got the concept, the Traveler’s light will protect them. It hasn’t done a good job as of late, and the Cabal invasion should be a lesson. “I wonder what it’s like to have those horrors put you into a loop of hopelessness, to make you feel like you can’t break out of it. What a horrible world would that be…”

“You know their pain.” Ghost said. “Who’s better suited to help them?”

“Not me. It’s too personal, and it still hurts… I won’t ever forgive Mara or the existence of every rock and cell in that City.” Tirion growled, reaching up to catch a snowflake. She still hasn’t read the files about Awoken creation herself, but Lorcan has been great at summarizing them for her. She couldn’t take much more of it, she had to move on. “The Awoken. The Dreaming City. The Distributary. Nothing about it is sacred. It shouldn’t exist. But… that’s my own personal bias and the reason why other Guardians should handle it. I would subliminally destroy it if I was forced to save it.”

“I… I think I get it.”

“But throughout it all I thought that the people of this world suffered more than those in Mara’s world…” Tirion sighed. She had to let go. “It was easier when it was just about mindlessly killing gods. When did things get so personal?”

“Well, you might be in luck.” Ghost said. “A package just arrived for you, from the Spider. I think he’s sad that you won’t visit him. Mail is a last resort for him.”

“What could he possibly send me?”

“I don’t know. But it should be interesting.”

Tirion vowed to never return to the Tangled Shore, she harboured nothing but hatred for that place. Spider had things handled, and other Guardians were more than happy to become his new business partners. There was no denying that the Spider held a certain charm to him, which made the missive fun to read. She couldn’t do his voice even if she tried. He talked about a Black Armory and his friends, how it made him desperate enough to send her something. A strange badge was in the package, similar to a key card. The two found out that it was for something deep in the wall. Guardians have been acting strange recently, cutting conversations short when anyone not in their immediate group was in the hearing range. She couldn’t piece anything together, something about a gambit. The Guardians usually had strange weapons on their backs, ones that resembled Haya’s descriptions of the guns used in the Dark Ages.

There was also that strange man. He always kept suspiciously avoiding her. What struck out the most about him was him not having a clear allegiance to any class. Charm of a Hunter, build of a Titan, robe of a Warlock. Older Guardians were rarely seen around the Tower, as most of them were dead. The Vanguard had no hold on those who were still alive. She’ll have to look into it
After exploring the section of the wall, they found a fake brick door and dissolved it by using the pass on it. Tirion was almost overjoyed by what was on the other side.

It looked like a weapons laboratory. The large room held crates and disassembled weapons encased in strange plastic for show. She has never seen weapons that advanced before. Her eyes got stuck on a specific one, a sniper rifle which looked like a sword. Her Ghost was going wild around the place, inspecting everything in his sight.

“Stunning, isn’t it?” A female voice said from the shadows. “That weapon is beyond special. A witness to the slaughter of our founder, and my ally in vengeance against those responsible. Lightbearers.”

“What?” She saw a figure come out of the shadows. An Exo woman clad in strange clothing, her arms looked like porcelain with blue patterns painted on. Pale face with icy blue eyes filled with resentment and no mouth, definitely not one of Bray’s Exos. Ada.

“Just. Like. You.” The Exo hissed it out like a curse word. “You are not welcome here, Guardian.”

“Fantastic.” Tirion pulled out the badge. Haya would have a field trip there. She made a mental note to never tell the Titan about the place. “The Spider cordially invited me to help you.”

“I see… Well then.” Ada was presented with no choice. “What we offer, Guardian, is privilege – normally afforded to those who do not already have their own. Today, however, it would seem our doors are open to you.”

Ada’s movements were rigid, every movement of a joint causing a hiss.

“I’m not here for your wares. I’m here to help.”

“You think you can help, after all you’ve squandered?”

“Er…” The Ghost interrupted. “Not to be rude, but chances are we’re the best hope you’ve got.”

Ada could barely look at the Guardian without involuntary remembering that day. The day they came. If the Spider trusted her, she could at least test it. “The Red War left us without a vital necessity, our Forge. In its absence, our operation has all but ceased. We have found no success in locating it, despite our best efforts.”

“My Guardian found a Hive God.”

“Ghost…” Tirion shot him a look. “Please, carry on Ada.”

“We would very much like our Forge back.” Ada picked up a heavy weapon frame and handed it to the Guardian. “And Guardian… if you would return empty-handed, you’d best not return at all.”

“Got it.” She grabbed the frame. It had embedded instructions in it. Sparing Ada further annoyance as Guardians weren’t welcomed, she got on her way. EDZ was a good place to start.

She missed this.

“What do you think Guardians did to her?” Ghost asked.

“I don’t want to speculate that much. Judging by how different she looks from other Exos and that she’s not a Guardian, my guess would be that it had something to do with the Dark Ages.” Tirion
flicked some switches on the ship, ready to depart. “And I had absolutely nothing to do with it.”

“We know someone who had. Haya hasn’t told anyone the full story.”

“All I could piece together was that anyone who got close to her tribe either were forced to do the ritual or… forced to die.” She said. “But, maybe she’ll know something about Dark Age Exos.”

“I haven’t seen her in a while. Strange. Usually she refuses to be alone.”

She didn’t realize how odd it was until Ghost pointed it out to her. “Maybe Lorcan will know. Let’s go.”

Plan of action in EDZ was to shoot at everything that shoots at her.

Tirion tracked down a Fallen pike gang and waited for them to make a move. She could count about a dozen. Out of thin air, a void arrow landed right in the middle and tethered them together. It took only one bullet to kill them all as the energy travelled through the tethers. The Fallen weren’t granted a chance to groan in pain.

“Hi!” Lorcan waved from where he was standing on a large rock. He jumped off of it and started ransacking the carnage.

“What are you searching for?”

“Pike gang members ran off with some of Hawthorne’s shipments.” He grunted in disappointment. “Not these.”

“Could help you out.”

“Sure.” He dusted himself off and grabbed his gun. “Kind of want to talk to you about something.”

She walked right beside him, keeping an eye out for Fallen. There was nothing to worry about with Lorcan, he could sense enemies from miles away.

“What about?”

“Have you seen this weird man with no jawline, beard, snake motif and an out of fashion bandana?”

“I’ve seen him creeping around.”

“He calls himself Drifter and runs this thing called Gambit. You have to go through him to get initiated.” Lorcan shuddered. “I know Gambit involves Taken and Guardian killing. Not the permanent kind, just for amusement. Sounds like a weird Dark Age reverence thing. Why can’t people get normal hobbies?”

“Asking insane immortals to find normal hobbies is kind of unrealistic, to be fair.”

“I’m just asking them to be creative, like kit bash a device that kills you at random intervals for that excitement in life.”

She withheld her questions about the potential existence of said device. “You sound like you know this Drifter.”

“I do. Kind of…?” He shrugged slowly as the pitch of his voice got higher and higher. “Haya knows him from the Dark Ages, he was a Warlord pirate with a bar. But, the both of us had a run in
with him a long time ago. I don’t remember the details since it’s been a while.”

“What do you remember?”

“In involved him and a scumbag named Callum Sol. He was a Shadow of Yor. I guess Drifter is too, to a large extent.”

Tirion suppressed the sudden anger. “Alright. What?”

“As, being geniuses, stole a weapon core from Drifter because… fuck the Shadows of Yor. We didn’t need a reason besides that. Callum stole it back from us some years later. We haven’t had that core for years.”

Tirion tried to parse it. “You’re telling me there is a Shadow of Yor in the Tower?”

“Mind if I make it a bit worse? He might have been the one who destroyed our den trying to get the weapon core back.” He bit his lip nervously as he watched Tirion holster her hand cannon just so she wouldn’t fire it on accident. “I didn’t want to throw it on you since you were going through things. First Cayde, then the news about the Awoken. We don’t want you to break. We’re dumb kids putting stuff in our mouths, and we need you to yell at us to spit it out or we choke to death.”

She appreciated the thought, but the issue remained. “I don’t even know where to begin with this. I thought the Shadows had given up.”

“Good news…?”

“I could use some.”

“Shin Malphur is still alive. He’s still hunting the scumbags.”

“He let one slip by the looks of it, and the one he let slip is in the Tower. We can’t put all our faith in Shin. Ever since we found Saint I have a hard time assuming that the very best of us are still alive or functional.”

“Shin never struck me as someone who lets people slip, or someone who can die for that matter.”

Lorcan reloaded his gun. “Did I sound calm when saying his name?”

“I wasn’t paying attention to that.”

“Just saying: I’m going to need a two weeks’ notice before Shin comes to the Tower. For a mileage of reasons.”

“And abandon your Jawline Man?”

“We’ll see when it comes to it. Let’s go shoot things.”

Tirion didn’t understand how Ada’s tech worked, she just followed the attached instructions. It was obviously a test to see if she can be trusted by the Black Armory.

Shoot this, collect that. Just like old times.

She’s been on her own adventures since the curse started, never straying too far from home. Investigating ruptures on Io, lost memory fragments on Mars. Tiny things. Mundane things. Things where a misstep didn’t mean the end of the world.

Tirion hasn’t been this content in a long time. Dul Incaru and her plans kept everyone on their toes,
though. They couldn’t completely relax when the Osmium King’s brood was involved. That was the fireteam’s purpose, to wipe that whole family out.

That’s what people will write confused and glorious myths about, and she was okay with it. Tales of six Guardians who wiped out the Hive.

Then there was Toland.

What can she say about Toland?

Some die trying to help. Some die because they can't go on. Some don't die at all but get granted the gift of immortality by robbing someone else of it. Some die because they are defenceless due to reasons out of their control. Some die because some knowledge should be erased at all costs. Some are caught right infront desperation wielding a gun.

And some get obliterated by a Deathsinger and their consciousness survives out of pure stubbornness, and spite towards six Guardians who broke the Sword Logic keeps them alive.

He – or what remained of him – wasn’t pleased with them. According to Lorcan, the things that his spirit said weren’t necessarily disparaging, it just made the Hunter feel like he was getting berated by a parent with expectations beyond his reach.

“I’m still reading stuff from the vaults…” Lorcan said hesitantly. “It’s kind of like being addicted to pain at this point. Like Haya and the Dark Ages.”

“Where are you at?”

“I’m at the part where Mara got the Diasyrm to start a rebellion that ended up killing thousands of people. Just, you know, the casual Person of The Year campaign trail. I love those. Dictators are fine nominees for that.” He breathed in, eyes wide. “Then she convinced the Diasyrm to kill herself.

What?!

Oh, disfiguring thousands of people wasn’t enough! I must make people kill themselves, because I’m not authoritarian and autocratic enough!” Lorcan kicked the remains of a recently destroyed pike out of sheer anger.

“There has to be something more than that…” Tirion was starting to get frustrated, almost angry with her own cowardice. She didn’t have the courage to read it yet. She wished she had. “No one is just pure evil like that.”

“Well, there is. She has her reasons.” He suddenly stopped, seeing the look on Tirion’s face. He didn’t want to go too far. Rather, further than he accidentally already went. “But… do you want to know?”

Perhaps not. “Give me a hint.”

“There is literally no point in engaging in thought experiments in ethics when it’s about an autocratic murderer obsessed with godhood who has no connection to humanity besides the silhouette of one. It’s not important at that point.” He wished that his Ghost could revive an Ahamkara just so he could wish to forget about what he has read. “Mara is a cosmic horror, and it makes motivations stop mattering. There is more to her, but who cares?”

“Would you care if she were a human?”

“Yes, actually. There would be the fear of ending up just like her, she would be a warning sign. That’s why people feared Dredgen Yor. He was a Guardian just like me, and if I’m not careful I could end up like him. Absolutely nothing protects me from it. When you looked into his eyes, you
saw yourself in another timeline.” He shivered at his own words. “Rezyl was a hero, one of the best Guardians to ever live before he went to the Moon. He showed us that anyone can become a monster, no one has an immunity from that. Then the Vanguard hid that fact from people.”

“And Mara has desecrated everything to the point of insanity where none of us have the option to take the same path.”

“She’s a cosmic hypocritical megalomaniac horror, just as we... both said.” Lorcan frowned slightly. “There is something somewhere in my brain that makes me a lot angrier about this than I should be, I just can’t access it. It’s like I’ve been through this before, and it makes me sick.”

“I think the idea of her doing it all to save humanity sounds appealing. But, it would mean that she would rule over everyone.” She’d rather take on a thousand Shadows than have that happen.

“I’d rather have a final death than an absolute ruler.” Lorcan said. “Mara would be a tyrant you wouldn’t be able to kill. She’d be a god. Unstoppable.”

“We’ve been through bad before. I’m sure if worst comes to worst all of us will be able to get together and stab her 23 times.”

Lorcan shook his head. “You know what? I’m not okay with the fact that out of all history we lost, that was one of the few things which survived.”

“We should find something happier to look at.” Tirion suggested.

“We really should.”

Tirion’s mind was in a million places when she got back to the Tower. She had Ada’s frame calibrated, but it wasn’t a life or death situation so the Armory could wait. She had to focus on the life or death situation. She managed to keep it at the back of her head when hunting Fallen with Lorcan, but she hit her limit. Maybe it was her having a hard time placing trust in other people, what are the odds that Shin knows what’s happening? What are the odds that he’s still alive? She’s been blessed too many times by blind luck. Couldn’t allow herself to start relying on it.

No, she couldn’t wait in the Tower. Wasn’t safe. She knew of a place in the City, the Botza district. It was a dead spot of the City, no one could listen in if they wanted to. She sent a message right before she left for it.

It couldn’t happen again. It would break him if it happens again.

She waited for Shaxx on the roof of one of the abandoned apartments, trying to not pace back and forth.

The Traveler was looming above her with its aura of rubble. It was eerily silent. It has always been silent, but she’ll never forget the pull it once had.

The insides of it looked dismal and void of life, but some cracks had rays of light coming out of it. She wasn’t convinced that there was anything still alive in it. The Shard in the EDZ never lost that pull, energy roared in it still. It compelled her to be mesmerized by it every time she was near.

“What’s wrong?”

Shaxx’s voice startled her. She expected it to be the Drifter with a gun that had green smoke coming out of it pointed right at her.
“Shadows of Yor and aspirants.” Saying that title while in front of Shaxx made it all real. “They’re here. Again.”

Not an inch of his armour moved. “I know.”

“What?” Tirion held her breath. She must have misheard him. “You know?”

“Since Thalor, the signs have been etched into my brain. I promised that I would not have a repeat of it. There was a resurgence during last Dawning before the Red Legion attack. They have gone a subtler route this time around since they know what gets them kicked out.” Shaxx told, and Tirion’s eyes darted in all directions in confusion and surprise. This was new. “I’ve been in a correspondence with Shin Malphur. The moment I confirmed my suspicions, I got in touch with the only person who knows how to deal with that particular type of scum. Usually I turn to Ikora, but her mind is in a different place right now.”

It sounded too good to be true and allow her to breathe again. “I’ve read the stories about that Gunslinger, and Drifter isn’t a scorch mark on a wall.”

“Shin can make him that on my order.”

The pressure in her brain was enough to crush the City. “Then what is going on? Why keep this going? Why isn’t he a scorch mark?”

“Drifter is running a dark game, but it’s a game that can be used against him. Shin and I are letting him run it. We watch him and watch everyone who participates in it to learn about the Shadows and to stop those that go too far.” His words weren’t enough to reassure her just yet. “We have the power to shut it down at the first sign of danger escalating.”

“Oh…” The sigh of relief was almost strong enough to clear out the rubble down below. This usually didn’t happen. Might be a first. “I’m… I’m…”

“Not used to this?” He smirked at her.

She shook her head with wide eyes. “Not in the slightest, no.”

Shaxx placed a hand on her shoulder to keep her steady. “Guardians have to be under a ruse for Shin’s play to work. Drifter can’t know about this in any capacity. He’ll flee the moment he finds out. For now, he is where he is wanted.”

“This better work.”

“It will.” He said softly. “I couldn’t risk talking about it earlier, but I can’t let you live in distress. I saw Drifter getting hounded by Lorcan so I know he’s not watching us.”

“I didn’t find out about Drifter’s existence until recently.” Tirion looked up at his helmeted face. “No one wanted to tell me about it because they didn’t want to pile on worries. Which I appreciate. But if you weren’t already on it could have been a disaster…”

“Just have this one thing, Tirion.”

“I’m trying! I’m not used to things not crashing down!” Tirion flailed around in confusion. She’ll remember this moment when eventually something goes wrong, but she’d pay any price to have the Shadows in check. It was that blissful moment between it backfiring on her, and it’d be wrong to not revel in it. Tirion couldn’t tell, but he was smiling at her underneath his helmet, the smile got wider until he was laughing softly at her antics. “I have no idea what to do now… Why are you
laughing?”

His hand moved to her waist and its brother joined. He pulled her into him smoothly. “Have I ever told you that you breaking a Crucible arena is something I’m eternally grateful for?”

“Let’s say that you haven’t.” She placed her hands on his armoured chest, pale fingers wrapping around the rope of his medallion. “But keep going…”

“It feels like you’ve saved me from something, Hivebane.” Shaxx murmured, looking deep into her eyes. “I’m not sure from what, or whom. I’m happy that you did.”

“What could possibly topple a big guy like you?”

“My own foolishness, and you.” Shaxx nodded towards her. “Only difference is that I’d be perfectly content if it was you. I’d hate myself if it were me.”

“Going to have to refuse to grant that wish. You make me too happy for me to destroy you…” She stepped on her toes and reached up to his helmet, slowly pulling it off. She has gotten a lot better at it. “Not sure how you can make time stand still.”

The helmet was placed on the ground, and they returned to their embrace. “It’s funny.”

“What is?” She said as they swayed back and forth.

“You made me realize that love is an affection built out of familiarity.” He breathed out. “A quiet trust. You think you’re in love until you get to that one time where you know.”

“Can you think of any other thing that is both the most horrible thing you can do to yourself and something that heals you?”

“I can’t. But, I’m happy and beyond lucky to have it.”

They had to take any moment they could. One day they’ll both have no schedules. “I wish we could stay down here longer.”

He sighed and tucked a red strand of hair behind her ear. “I wish for the same, but I can already hear the rookies whining.”

They reluctantly let go of each other. They’ll have some more time later. He gave her a quick kiss before grabbing his helmet and making his way back to his post.

Lorcan got out of his stealth cloak ran for freedom the second the Crucible Handler was in his peripheral vision. It was quite amusing but disturbing all the same. Every member of Tirion’s entourage will always confound Shaxx. Lorcan had a great head on his shoulders along with solid moral principles, but he was completely merciless on the battlefield. That’s how Shaxx wants his rookies to be. The battlefield wasn’t a place for remorse.

Shaxx felt a presence next to him as he was going over reports. At this point he knew who it was, as this person had a certain aura. He looked up from the datapad to find a disgruntled blonde Titan. She was standing tall in front of him, arms crossed.

The very first thing he took notice of were her blood-filled eyes, resembling the ghost of Ghaul. Her hair was cut with what looked like a blunt knife.

“Don’t make me wait, Haya. What do you need?”
“I went on a vacation to the deepest pit I could find to think about things. Now that I have a clear head about it all, we need to make an agreement.” Haya’s tone was seething and her voice was raspy, she forced herself to keep it steady so that her eyes wouldn’t explode further. She had to keep her voice low so that no one would overhear them.

Something changed in her since the last time they talked. He saw at least six distinct Titans patrolling in the Tower, there to intercept uninvited guests and to make sure no one gets into their hearing range. With a snap of her finger, she got all of the Titans to look at her. “You can’t say no.”

“What kind of agreement would that be, then?”

“I have about 200 Sunbreakers under my wing. 214, to be exact. That’s a minimum one thousand, two hundred eighty-five Hammers of Sol hurling at you under 30 seconds.” Haya clipped. “I know all of their names, and they obey everything I tell them to obey. They care about what I tell them to care about. I have enough power to level this entire place.”

“I see.” He had a strong feeling she wasn’t there just to brag. Arcite stopped typing on his console and turned his metal head slowly to her in confusion, he was ready to fight if it came down to it. Redjacks were made for that kind of thing, and his metal finger was hovering over the button.

“There is a great benefit to having a Warlord lead 200 Sunbreakers. You don’t ever recover from the Dark Ages. I tried but… I couldn’t. Saladin should have killed me. I suddenly understand why he killed everyone.”

Two Titans should never be in the same room for more than two minutes. It was a general rule.

“Let’s get to what you came here for. No need to be polite with this.”

She had no plans to not be blunt.

“Mara Sov’s actions made Tirion kill herself before she became a Guardian. Gun in her own mouth. Imagine that image. It wasn’t an accident, doctors know how to survive and Fallen don’t kill people in that way. Now, think about what Tirion must have gone through to end up in so much despair that she would do something like that. She wasn’t the first. She loathes Mara.” Haya despised saying that name. Despised the fact that it was a word from her own language more so. Another thing stolen. She swallowed her anger in an attempt to keep it down for another minute. The other option was to set herself ablaze and tear the whole Tower down. “I did my part. I destroyed all files about it. If you tell Tirion about your thing with Queen Fuckherself or even mention that name infront of her, I will send my Sunbreakers running in your general direction. Don’t worry, it will not come remotely close to the pain Tirion will feel if she finds out.”

Chapter End Notes

Wholesome Dawning chapter next.
It's getting cold again but The Dawning's gorgeous

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I… I need your advice.”

Shaxx found himself out of ideas at a place he thought he never would end up at.

Infront of Eva Levante.

It was still very early in the morning. He wanted to get it done early to avoid attention. Eva was an early riser, and it was partly his fault. Shouts from Crucible fans woke everyone up before the sun came up.

“For what, dear?”

It was not possible to hold any negative feelings towards Eva. She had the ability to disarm everyone. Everyone from the smallest child to the burliest Titan was defenceless under her wrinkly but kind and warm gaze.

Everyone in the Tower was happy to have her back. There would be no Dawning this year without her.

“Dawning gift ideas. I’m in a… situation.” He started, slowly. He struggled to not yell when in the Tower. “In many situations.”

A sensitive matter. Of course. She prepared herself. “How about we start with one?”

“A few years ago, I made a sword for my wife. She had to kill a god for it. I lost the sword, and I’ve been trying to find it for over a year. Today I found out that I can’t get it back, as my Redjacks found it crushed in thousands of pieces.”

“Are you sure you’re okay, dear?” She’d reach up to take his temperature if it weren’t for the helmet.

“I am sure that I won’t be okay once she hears that I caused the obliteration of her sword.” He shook his head. “I have no excuse for it. I had a reasoning for my arenas in the Infinite Forest.”

Eva knew of only one god slayer around the parts. The man was many things, but he wasn’t exactly subtle. She has seen the flaming sword on a particular person’s back many times before the Tower fell, and she saw it in his hands during the attack.

Oh, Eva knew which sword he was talking about.

“She must be very special if I have to go by the slight fear in your voice.”

“I’m not afraid.”

“You’re panicking, dear.”

“I’m not panicking!” It was enough to startle a few people passing by, but they bolted away when Shaxx glared at them.
The cheer didn’t fade from her face. It got more intense, actually. “Don’t worry, Eva’s here to help you. Let’s work together.”

The Titan wanted to rub his eyes in frustration more than anything. “Where do I start?”

Eva started simple. “What is she like?”

Simple question indeed. Eva knew what she was like, but it didn’t hurt to hear his perspective.

“She’s more than I deserve.”

“Out of all things, I never thought I’d see you settle down. I don’t mean to pry, but you can’t fault an old woman for being curious.”

“It’s a long story. I had the ring made during the Red War. She was out there fighting. Only thing I could think about when I thought of her is how insignificant my life would be if I lost her.” He trailed off. “Then I did briefly lose her. I don’t remember what we fought about, I— why am I telling you all of this?”

Eva laughed. It’s a question she hears a lot. “Sounds like you need to get her a gift that shows how much you appreciate her. A weapon as a romantic gift is a very poor choice, dear. Rather hostile. You need a celebration of love and survival, not strife. Celebrate victories and not the battles.”

“It’s not about the weapon, it’s about me losing a weapon which she not only had to steal a dead god’s sword for, she also trusted me with it.” Why was he telling her all that? He decided to stop questioning it and just go along. “But what you just said does sound like a good idea.”

“Have you thought about asking her friends?”

Shaxx clicked his tongue.

It suddenly wasn’t simple.

“One of her friends had… a quite terrifying way to express her disapproval of a past relationship of mine, alongside a vivid description of what would happen to me if I’d screw things up. I deserved it. I’m… Do I have any words for it? I don’t.” For the first time in years, he forgot that he was wearing a helmet. He got a reminder that he was wearing a helmet when his palm collided with the helmet and not his face. Eva still needed something to go on if she was going to help him. “She’s a Warlock. She likes fables and fairy tales, she likes nightingales. She’s not someone who would be impressed by me destroying a book and reciting it from memory to show off. She would just… laugh. She’d laugh and I wouldn't be able to finish it. I can make her laugh easily, and it’s my favourite sound. Even better than grenades. She gets me.” He let his hand drop from his helmet with a silent plea for help.

“I might have an idea…” Eva didn’t want the man to suffer. “Do you happen to have what remains of that sword?”

Shaxx looked at the bag in his other hand. “Thanks to the Cabal, the shard of the Willbreaker that once was embedded on the sword is dust. She braved through a hell both personal and literal to help me forge the sword. Braved through a hell to defeat Hive wardens for it and to slay the abomination they were guarding. It wasn’t about strife. It was a gift to let her know that the deepest darkness can be turned to light. To serve as a reminder of that during darkest times.”

He reached out his hand to give the bag to Eva and continued his speech. “I think that’s when it started. I’ve never seen anyone latch on to Light as ferociously as she did. As long as it was there,
no matter how miniscule, she latched onto it and fought for it and emerged victorious. She refused to give up. She was more stubborn than I am. She still is. That’s why I’m truly bloody panicking about the sword!”

Eva looked in the bag, the description matched. Shards of medal and a handle. “I think I know what to do with this.”

“… are you sure?” He fumbled.

“There is that saying, you’re not truly dead until everyone forgets you.” Eva carefully picked up a shiny shard. “Same goes for this sword. As long as a single shard survives.”

“So, you’re telling me… I should give her a shard?”

He was adorably clueless. She picked the right time to get back to the Tower. “Come back to me in a couple of hours. Old Eva will have something ready for you.”

“Could you... keep quiet about this? I want it to be a surprise.”

“Of course! I’m not the one to gossip.” She gave him a wide smile and ignored the small crowd of people listening in not too far behind him. “You, however, might want to cut back on the caffeine.”

“No caffeine here. Just… mild fear.” He was about to walk away. “No. Maybe not. Maybe it’s a mistake to have that sword.”

“Stop overthinking, dear.”

“I’m not overthinking. I just want it to be right. My Ghost hates me enough for getting exploded all the time.” He rubbed the back of his neck.

“Do you know what’s so special about nightingales?” She asked as she started flipping through an old book.

“It’s from her favourite story. Although, I’ve heard my fair share of folklore about it.”

“It is the most lyrical bird, the keeper of the night. There isn’t a single poet who hasn’t written a poem or a sonnet about a nightingale.” Eva told. “It’s said that the nightingale demonstrates light in darkness with a perpetual song. In a way, it represents both love and death.”

“She always found me during the night at first...” He recalled. “I… I have to call a match now.”

“No losing your voice!”

“Well!” Lorcan fell on the ground next to the rest of his fireteam. All of them were sitting in the snow and observing the decimated mech infront of them. It all started off with one Fallen down in the Botza district. They were racing on their sparrows and fighting mechs deep inside of the City in no time. “Wanna talk about it? How does this make you feel? Do you think your childhood had something to do with the events?”

For a while, only response he got was the sound of the mech burning.

“The Vanguard just don’t care anymore, do they?” Tirion murmured, pulling her knees to her chest. “Fallen in the City. That’s a thing that should have caused alarms to blare the second they stepped in.”
“They came by ship.” Haya pointed out. “Anyone who defends the walls can fight me. They don’t work.”

“The walls used to have Titans standing on them and keeping an eye out for threats.” Kouhei argued. “None remain now.”

“I wonder if we can get some alarm systems going for the wall.” Lorcan tried to prevent an argument. “Should we tell Zavala?”

“I think we should investigate that Black Armory vault.” Tirion said before Haya could say anything about a block of wood, a chisel, sand paper, and some nails. “Ada sent me a message.”

It was shaping up to be quite the Dawning.

They found an old Black Armory forge while digging. Ada was still hesitant to work with Guardians, but the predicament forced her hand. She’d gain more than she would lose.

Tirion often went down to the district to clear her head. There was something soothing about an entirely empty town. It was soothing, until she got shot by Fallen. She had her team take care of the issue immediately.

Now, all six of them were staring at the destroyed mech.

They’ve fought worse. A lot worse. From almost getting trapped in time to having all their cells destroyed by a Hive god.

For some reason, this felt like an insult to the City. Fallen could get in, they could build mechs. Mechs could be unleashed on the City. All while the Vanguard stood in the sky.

“I know you two are weird and can generate heat and Kouhei doesn’t feel anything, but I’m cold.” Lorcan jumped back up with barely any feeling in his legs. “Let’s get that vault and go celebrate.”

“You guys clean up there…” Tirion slowly stood up. “I’ll see if there are more Fallen around.”

There was a burden in leadership.

Telling the people about it would cause worry. Hiding it from them would cause hatred because she kept them in the dark.

It only takes one Dreg.

“I have a bad idea…” Tirion said to her Ghost.

“What is it?”

“Send an anonymous message to the Vanguard about the whole situation.” It didn’t sound less terrible out loud. “Tell them that there was a Fallen breach and the usual Guardians took care of it.”

“Do you want me to tell them about the Armory?”

“No. If they don’t know about it at this point, they don’t deserve to know about it. Just stick to the breach.”

“I don’t agree with this, but it’s your call.”

“Actually, no anonymity.” She decided. “Tell them it’s from me, and tell them that they should do
“They’re still grieving Cayde…”

“Cayde wouldn’t have wanted his passing to inhibit them.” She argued. “Cayde isn’t an excuse. I won’t let them use him as one. Cayde and everything he stood for should serve as motivation to keep working and not stagnate.”

“The Dawning is an appropriate time to talk with them about it.”

“I’m sure Lorcan can whip up a stress ball shaped like me for Zavala.” She joked. “And that reminds me that I don’t have a gift for Shaxx. Or anyone. Damn it.”

“You never buy gifts.”

“Well, I suppose I could use my old Corsair uniform to –” She forced herself to stop. “Never mind!”

“For what…?”

“Nope!”

“I hate it when you do that…”

“There are certain questions that I just don’t want to have said between us.”

“I’m sure I can handle it.”

“I can’t.” Tirion desperately wanted the topic to stop.

“Could always ask Haya.”

“Don’t ask Haya about Corsair uniforms.”

He’ll never get it. “Fine… fine…”

They couldn’t find any hostiles on the tracker, the City was safe for now. She was still worried. She’ll have to make this a daily patrol.

“It’s a shame. I really like their outfits…” She said. “Find it weird how you can see how evil a person is based on their fashion sense.”

“By definition, that makes you an angel.”

“Guess I deserved that…” She laughed softly. “I think I have an idea. We need to get back to the old Tower for it, though.”

“You got sick the last time you went there.”

“Some things are worth it.”

“You have no respect for agreements, do ya Abigail?”

“I do. Agreement was to not touch you. I’m not touching you. I don’t want to, either.” Haya pulled out a small box out of her bag. “Just here to wish you a happy Dawning.”
“Oh, I’m flattered! But I’m afraid it’s just not my thing.”

She put the paper box on the floor and kicked it over to him. “It’s not an explosive. I wish it was, though.”

Drifter didn’t need to get told that. He had a natural instinct to quickly tell if it was something that would kill him or something he could eat. He picked up the box from the ground and opened it. Inside, he found a couple cartons of cigarettes.

“They’re not poisoned, either.” Haya pointed out. “I wish they were.”

“Authentic Dark Age style. Just like old times.”

“More or less.” She leaned against the wall behind her. “Just missing a whole lot of sleaziness and a dozen of Risen. Can’t get the image of Cenric’s vein out of my head now.”

“Always wondered why you left my bar for Ouros.”

“Because some punk sold me out to Saladin and I had to run.”

“Hey, I’m as angry at that rat as you are. Efrideet ruined my bar searching for ya.” He put the box aside. He’ll use it later. “Well, guess she was searchin’ for all of us. We were the only ones left.”

“ Couldn’t find the life of her friends, though.”

“Funny how things turn out like that. I miss that bar.” He said wistfully. “Was a great place to settle disputes. Everybody went there wantin’ to drop the mask.”

“There is a bar like that right outside the City.” She told. “Ran by a couple of relics and filled with relics.”

“Relics mean gettin’ recognized. Not really into that kinda business nowadays.”

“Alright, guess you don’t want that. Camping out in this corner of the Tower and being very subtle about it.” She waved away some eager Guardians trying to enter. “Don’t get me wrong, the Vanguard are so unresponsive that their Ghosts are in constant confusion about whether their Guardians are dead or not.”

“Remember the deal, Abigail…”

“Oh, I remember it! Other Guardians will talk, though. If they talk I’ll let them talk. Part of the deal. Talking hurts us both.” She pushed herself off the wall. “Friendly advice, though: you better start blending into this damn society, whether a change of outfit or personality. The easier you can be reduced to a caricature, the easier you die around here. So… Happy Dawning!”

With that, she made her way out of the garage to be nearly killed by a bird. It was gone before she could catch it.

“I’ll burn your bird…” Haya’s voice was barely loud enough.

Hawthorne chased the Titan down to a secluded corridor. Enough was enough. “What is your deal?”

“Why are you following me?” The Titan asked, struggling to hold interest.

“I think you hate me for no reason.”
“Look, I know you. Every whisper I hear gets stuck in my head. You’re the one who punched Hideo in the face a while back, right?” Haya didn’t wait for a response. “That doesn’t make you special. Hideo is a prick, but it doesn’t make you special or brave or anything. Stop acting like it.”

“You don’t know what Hideo said to me and how he treated me!” Hawthorne barked. “Only ones that were on my side were Devrim and Marc. The Factions left people to starve. They abuse the ones who don’t have wealth to support them! If you see anyone with a black eye, chance is that one of the Factions did it.”

Hawthorne saw the tiniest change of expression on Haya’s face. It was miniscule, but it was there.

“Alright. You’re annoying me. Let’s go.” Haya turned around after a couple of steps to find that Hawthorne hasn’t moved. “Come on!”

“You’re giving me some conflicting messages…” Hawthorne had to almost run to keep up with Haya. She saw sparks of fire underneath the Titan’s steps melting the snow.

“I let my face do that for me.”

“How did that happen?”

“Don’t. Don’t push boundaries.”

The two made their way up the stairs in odd silence until they reached a rooftop of a building. Half of it was covered with antennas and strange boxes.

“You’re planning to electrocute me?” Hawthorne was not impressed. “Gonna have to try harder than that.”

“Just…” Haya raised her hands infront of her in annoyance. “Shut up and help me find a box labelled 9876. No, that’s not my age.”

Hawthorne found it instantly, and Haya opened it and her Ghost got to work. The Ghost didn’t scan for long, but nothing happened.

“So, what is all this?”

The rooftop had a great view of the fabric roof covering Hideo. Lorcan was already notified, so it was a waiting game now.

“I’ve been called less names about how I look now than I’ve been called about how I looked before.” Haya sat down right on the edge of the rooftop, and Hawthorne had to fight reluctance to be able to do the same. She managed in the end. “I think I was a bit younger than you when I finally realized that the world was absolute shit.”

“I thought you Guardians didn’t remember your past lives.” Hawthorne raised an eyebrow at Haya. “All new Kinderguardians I see are like newly born babies. It’s cute. Reminds me of the new addition to Dev and Marc’s family.”

“I remember. I think me and Shin Malphur are the only ones that do now. Maybe there are more. I’m not very social.”

“I read about him. The Gunslinger, right?”

“Commonly referred to as the Annihilator of Pricks.” Haya joked and resumed the story. “I was
walking home one day, back from prayer. Never really liked it. It was very… *God loves everybody, don't remind me.* Before you ask, no. It’s not about the Traveler.”

“I wasn’t gonna…”

“My family went home, I went the other way. Had things to do because I was going through a phase. I found myself being followed.” Haya told. “This group of people, I think it was six of them. Pricks wouldn’t leave me alone no matter where I went. I didn’t want to lead them to my house, so they cornered me into this dark alley.”

“Then what?” Hawthorne was almost afraid to ask.

“Two of them had bats, thinking they were clever with words. They beat the hell out of me, chanting insults about me and the church as they did.” It wasn’t as painful to recall it all as she thought it would be. “I didn’t have my Light, I didn’t have a Ghost. I didn’t have military training. All I had was fear and loneliness. They didn’t stop until they thought I was dead. They didn’t check for a pulse, just thought that all my blood relocating to right under my skin was enough.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Yeah… Someone found me and got me to a hospital.” She wished she had a cigarette in that moment. “When I woke up, all my father had to say was that it was just ‘a part of it’ and ‘nothing can be done about it’.”

“I’ve heard that too...” Hawthorne mumbled. “One too many times.”

“Great feeling, isn’t it? People telling you that you just kinda have to deal with the abuse because it’s ‘part of it’. It pissed me off. I haven’t been that... scared since.”

“So, what did you do?”

“I spent over a month trying to figure out who they were so I could get revenge, set them all on fire. Had the gasoline tanks and matches ready and all in my room under my bed. I wasn’t the smartest. I found out that two of the people who beat me up were sons of a high-ranking politician, rest were close friends of said sons.” Haya felt the anger rise. “They were completely immune, un – fucking – touchable. Nothing could be done and nothing was done. Just like with that girl a long time before I was born. Her name was Elizabeth. She was slaughtered, it was more than a couple of steps above murder. They found out who slaughtered her, but no justice was brought because the murderer was related to a high-power politician. A handful of men knew about it and the name died with them. The truth got out, the name never did.”

Hawthorne sighed in frustration. “You’re saying that I shouldn’t do anything about it just because he has more power!? That I should just let people suffer? That’s why I left this City! I want better.”

“No. What I’m saying is that everyone who went through the same thing as me, and Elizabeth, and even the people who sought justice for her... they didn’t have anyone powerful enough to knock those damn bastards down.” Haya corrected her, looking her straight in the eyes. “Do you want my help or not?”

She didn’t expect that from a person who only had insults to throw at her. “Well… I won’t say no if it helps the little people.”

“I’m here! Got the beacon!” Lorcan was right behind them with a datapad and sat down next to Hawthorne. “What do you want me to do and why did you pick a rooftop?”
“We want to rob the Monarchy blind. Already entered the code to their vaults.” Haya ordered. “For… fun. Joy of the damn Dawning and all. Oh, and we’re on the roof because the snow will soon cause their bullshit fabric roof to collapse so we’re waiting for Hideo to scream like a newly risen Guardian seeing a Fallen for the first time.”

“What would Tirion say?”

“I think she’s fine with it as long as we don’t kill him?” Haya shrugged. “She isn’t a fan of the factions.”

“I’ve got just the plan. Give me ten minutes.” Lorcan stayed as far away from the ledge as possible.

There was something about heights.

“What about her, your friend, the hero?” Hawthorne asked. “I know she’s the mind behind the settlement in EDZ, but you’re warmer than her.”

“Ha!” Lorcan laughed to himself. “Because… warm? Never mind. I’ll get back to work.”

Haya ignored Lorcan. “Tirion has experienced about the worst anyone can experience, in all three of her damn lives. She can be warm. It’s just that giving your own opinions about problems that are very miniscule to hers while she had everyone’s lives on her shoulders was a bad idea. There is a time and a damn place.” Haya realized that he could use a metaphor. “Your leg got smashed by a jackhammer and you don’t have painkillers and that’s fucking terrible. But, maybe don’t complain about that directly to someone who technically shouldn’t even be alive according to all medical definitions. Why the hell is she still alive?”

“I’m just used to Guardians not caring about us.”

“Heh…” Haya rolled her eyes and diverted her gaze towards the sea of lanterns. “I hate that word, to be honest. Guardian. Lost all meaning. Everything about the Guardian system and the image the Vanguard is pushing onto people is too damn broken. Tell that to the little people. Ironically only one out of the Vanguard who didn’t lie was Cayde.”

“And what do you believe the reality about Guardians is?”

“Our life is not about victory. It’s not about happy endings. It’s about surviving shit instead of overcoming it. Survival is the closest to victory we’ll ever get. Non-Lightbearers are different.”

In her hands was a beautifully and meticulously crafted Ghost shell, made out of sturdy materials and remains of the sword.

“Had to ask for a little bit of help for this one…” Eva held up her work. It was mostly matte to avoid reflections, except for a silhouette of a bird. “Ghosts aren’t nearly as appreciated as they should be for their hard work.”

“It’s marvelous.” Shaxx would never have thought of that angle by himself.

“I won’t name names, but they assured me that no bullet can pierce through it.”

“Her Ghost likes to live in her backpack. And in her hair.”

“It’s a good thing I stepped in then, you would have gotten her a hairbrush.”
“Thank you, Eva.” He sighed in relief as Eva put the Ghost shell in a box and tried to find appropriate wrapping paper. “Sincerely.”

“No problem, dear…” She carefully wrapped the box in light blue paper with her old hands. “That’s what old Eva is here for. I hope she likes it.”

“She will.”

Shaxx looked around the City as he waited patiently, eyes traveling past the giant crystal, to the hundreds of lanterns flying to the sky, to three people sitting on a rooftop watching his moves. One Hunter, one Titan, and Hawthorne. Lorcan waved at the Titan when he noticed that he was staring at them.

“It’s the least I can do for what you did for me and many others during the attack…”

“I don’t save lives for favours. I’m the one who owes you for this.” He returned his attention to Eva.

“Well, I won’t argue with a Titan. Best you can do for me is to make her happy…” Eva finished up tying the dark blue bow on the box. “Keep making her laugh. The Festival of The Lost is for looking back, the Dawning is for looking forward. But, don’t forget about the now, dear. I wish somebody told me that before the Fallen came.”

He carefully took the box from her hands. “I can do that.”

“Good. Now, carry on! I have a whole line of Guardians behind you and a whole Dawning to celebrate!”

“Have a great Dawning, Eva.” With a nod, he strode off with the box. He was noticeably calmer this time around.

Soon enough, she heard a familiar voice. Two of them, as a matter of fact. They were having a discussion about books and colours and ruined balconies.

“Hey, Eva!” The Warlock greeted the woman.

“My friend, you don’t know how good it is to see you again!” Eva put her hand on her heart as she spoke.

"Now I know why the last Dawning felt wrong."

“This place has moved on without me. That’s the way of things, I suppose. I wasn’t about to let another Dawning go by without old Eva. Not after everything I’ve been through…” She looked at the ground in sadness but picked herself up quickly.

“I always admired your perseverance.”

“That’s kind of you to say, dear.”

“Anything I can help you with?” There wasn’t an obstacle Eva couldn’t get over, but Tirion still wanted to offer help.

“Actually… here.” Eva tried to lift the small oven with her frail arms, and Tirion quickly intervened to help her. “Baking is good for the soul, and we could all use a little good these days.”

“I’ll put this to good use.” She wasn’t sure what to do with it, yet. Maybe her friends will have
some ideas. She wanted to chat some more with Eva, but the line was getting longer and longer. “I’ll let you get back to work.”

“If you are out of ideas to start, there should be a note with a recipe for Zavala.” Eva watched the Warlock stop in her tracks. “Word around is that you two aren’t getting along but… you should at least try. He’s in a dark place, but the Dawning is about our Light guiding us out of that darkness.”

“I’ll try.” Tirion gave her a half smile and resumed walking away.

She’ll try for Eva.

Suddenly, Tirion noticed them, laughing on the roof. It was almost contagious, so she made her way up.

“What are you goofballs doing?”

“Uh…” Lorcan struggled to find an excuse. He had none. “Making Hideo’s day slightly unpleasant…?”

“I’ll allow it.”

“Really?” Lorcan froze.

“Can’t summon the strength to be mad about that.” She sat down next to Haya. “What did you do to him?”

“Initially we wanted to steal from him, but we kind of created a pyramid scheme of thievery with other Guardians.” Lorcan tried to explain. “So, we stole from him, but we had morals about it. Oh, and his roof will collapse any second! We’ve been throwing snow at it. The one who gets it to collapse gets… 500 Glimmer. And rising. We have a system.”

“We’ve come kinda far from what we used to do.” Haya said. “Glimmer’s flowing either way and we’re not making the situation a whole lot worse this time around. Betting that the reason the factions are as damn powerful as they are is because we were dumb about it years ago.”

Tirion noticed that Hawthorne remained silent and looked almost uncomfortable.

It was the Dawning, after all.

“For what it’s worth Hawthorne…” Tirion started. “I’m sorry, truly. I shouldn’t have taken it out on you.”

“Apology accepted. These two told me a lot about your adventures. Kinda helped me understand why you are how you are. But…” Hawthorne stopped herself.

“What?”

“I have to know. What did you do with Uldren? Everybody is wondering if the big hero has gone insane. We went from celebrating your victory against the Legion to the opposite in a year.”

It was going to come up eventually.

“Uldren… Uldren was possibly the most annoying person I’ve ever met, but he didn’t deserve the life he ended up with.” Tirion told slowly, finding strength inside of her to help her tell the story. “I used to have a hard time believing that anyone deserved anything. Maybe it was a defence mechanism so I wouldn’t have to face pain that comes from overthinking. Uldren didn’t deserve
the abuse from his sister and he didn’t deserve to have his soul corrupted. He didn’t deserve such an awful end to life.”

“Is he…?”

“I told him that I hope he makes it to heaven before the devil knows he’s dead, and I tried to make it painless with the tools I had. He’s dead. I checked. No one can lose that much blood and live.”

“Not a lot of people would take pity on someone like that.”

“I was still angry at him, don’t be mistaken. I still am angry at him. He killed my friend.” Tirion sighed and looked down. “But… I blamed Uldren for not fighting against it. Blamed him for his pain. That’s one thing I want to take back from that moment. It’s never the fault of the victims, only of those who consciously propagate the crime. Witnessing abuse of others and not doing anything about it is no less of a crime.”

“And now we’re going to build a guillotine!” Lorcan exclaimed as happily as he could force it. “Who am I kidding. She’s probably going to grow two heads once we decapitate one. Damn hydras.”

Hawthorne looked up wide eyed at Lorcan. “Now you lost me.”

Tirion smiled slightly. “Laws of physics went out the window, reality is coming apart, and a monarchy is a bad thing.” She hoped that the explanation was simple enough. “But I can’t think about any of that without my blood boiling and this is a happy time of celebration, so who wants to help me figure out how this oven works?”

“Let me have a look at it…” Lorcan insisted and knelt down to it. It hummed with Traveler’s energy. “I think we have the ingredients for this recipe… Gj… gja… Gjallardoodles? The hell?”

“It’s for Zavala. Eva wants us to get along.”

Lorcan’s brain almost overheated from the amount of jokes he could throw at the situation, but he refrained and focused on the strange device. Tirion looked down at the Bazaar, watching Eva wrap presents and laugh with Guardians.

“I wonder how Zavala was before the Vanguard…” Hawthorne thought out loud.

“Eck…” Haya scrunched her nose. “He had a lot less migraines. I think Osiris was the first migraine and Tirionna here just made him develop a tumor. He was actually likeable before he shut the Sunbreakers out. He apologized for it since, though.”

“Have you ever thought about writing a book, Haya? Don’t think there is any Guardian who is a walking history book.”

"Not really. I'm not a good writer. I do have plans to start a club called *Bitter Old Lightbearer Brigade.*"

They were interrupted by the oven making a strange noise. Lorcan took the treats out and put it in the decorated box provided. “I think it’s done? I’m not responsible if it poisons him. That would be Eva’s fault.”

Tirion had to face her fears.

She slowly took the box. It was slightly warm to the touch and smelled slightly of Ether.
It was time.

She muttered something about it to the three before she left, dreading it all. Messing about on that rooftop would make the feeling worse.

They haven’t talked since Cayde died.

But, she had to do this for Eva.

There was no yelling between them this time around. The complete opposite, actually. Neither said a word. Zavala accepted the gift nonetheless, and she hoped that the twitch on his face was a sign of appreciation.

Tirion’s words were stuck in her throat if she had any. Should she apologize? Should she resent him? Her Ghost was as silent as her.

She did what she thought was rational in that situation and started scuttling away.

“So, you and Lord Shaxx…” Zavala’s words were like cold water dumped on her, freezing her in place. “I have a suspicion that I am not one of the first to find out about it.”

“No… You aren’t.” Tirion mumbled, wishing the Traveler would teleport her anywhere else. She’d take a nice vacation on the Moon, if applicable. “This… is rather awkward.”

“Can’t say I am surprised.”

“Alright.” She looked down awkwardly, trying to find a rock to kick. She found a fragile snowball instead.

“It’s like night and day. We used to be brothers in arms, much like you and your team. We could read each other’s thoughts as we fought alongside each other. And now…” Zavala sighed, almost mournfully. “We’re lucky if the reports between us don’t have thinly veiled insults.”

“Why not talk to him about it and put it behind you?”

“As a Commander I can't say that Shaxx's actions were forgivable, and he struggles to understand the concept of a calm conversation, a conversation that doesn’t involve that resource sink of his more so.” Despite what he said, he looked at her with an impressed look on his face, the same way he used to look at her when she returned from a successful mission. “The Twilight Gap changed him. It changed us all in different ways, but it robbed him of his humanity. For the longest time, I thought it was irreversible. Every new threat that entered the system squandered any attempts to fix it. I’ve harboured a certain amount of guilt over it. I still remember what he said to me hours before the Great Disaster.”

“So, why are you telling me this? This is not my fight.”

“You have clearly restored something in him, made him better. I’ve seen the small changes in the Crucible. This explains them.” Zavala smiled for a split second, too quick to notice for most. “And all it took was a Guardian who loves impossible odds. I hope you didn’t do it out of boredom.”

She shook her head. “No. I wouldn’t do that. I kill gods out of boredom.”

“Good. Give him my congratulations and wish him a happy Dawning.”

“Would be better if you didn’t need the middle Guardian.”
“All in its due time, Guardian. You have shown repeatedly that impossibility is a flawed concept.”

The resentment and everything she’s been feeling melted away. She latched onto it, knowing it won’t last long. They’ll be yelling at each other again soon. “Happy Dawning, Zavala.”

“Happy Dawning… Tirion.”

It was almost night by the time she finished the gift.

Tirion waited for him patiently, trying to convince herself that she was calm. Maybe it wasn’t enough. She had the approval of her Ghost, and a lot of help. If the Traveler had an issue with the way the Light was used, it could take the problem up with her.

She leaned against the railing, looking down at the City. Lorcan said he’ll set up the alarm systems tomorrow. It will not be enough, but it will be something. She’s heard Eva’s story about how she lost Carlos and Maria. It’s a story that shouldn’t have happened.

Tirion heard a slight rumble and whirled around to find a tall Titan there. He was holding a blue box in one hand and his helmet in the other. It was too dark to see the expression on his face.

Both of them haven’t been there for quite some time.

“I didn’t know what to get you so I… I cleaned up this balcony and restored it. It took a couple of hours.” She clasped her hands. “At first, I wanted to get back some of your books, but they were destroyed. You have them memorized, anyway. Thought of a better thing. The place where you told me that you love me for the first time.”

She remembered.

Without further thought, Shaxx put the present down and his helmet next to it. He put his hands on either side of her face and pressed his lips against hers.

It wasn’t a quick kiss, not a kiss he is forced to rush because he needs to get to work. Not a quick peck when she passed him by at home while working.

He put everything he could into this one.

Shaxx appreciated her gift, but she was the only thing he needed.

“Well…” She breathed out when he pulled away, still keeping his hands on her face. “I was planning to sit on the railing and fall off first…”

“Cute…” He hasn’t forgotten that moment.

“What have you got for me?” She noticed the box in the corner. The paper was almost glowing and distracting. He let go of her to fetch it.

“No hints. You’re too smart.”

Tirion untied the ribbon and carefully removed the tape of the paper. She didn’t want to rip it, as she was anxious with anticipation but not a savage. She recognized it as Eva’s paper, and made a note to thank her tomorrow as undoubtedly she had played a part in it. If Zavala knew, then half the Tower knew. She gasped when she took the Ghost shell out of the box and accidentally dropped the box.
The metal on it felt familiar to the touch, slightly warm and tingly. It was cut into intricate patterns.

“Is that…”

“The Cabal destroyed the Raze-Lighter…” He confessed, but it wasn’t the whole truth. “Partly my fault. It slipped out of my hands just as we evacuated the Tower. I only found the shards, and had Eva do the rest.”

He expected her to be mad, instead found her looking around curiously. Her eyes always returned to the shell constantly, with an ever-growing smile.

“Little Light?” She called out. Ever since the little Ghost club formed all six of them have been having a hard time keeping track of their Ghosts. Last time she checked up on them, they were trying to recruit Shaxx’s Ghost. Unsuccessfully. “It’s safe to come out!”

“What is it—” The Ghost appeared right infront of them, and almost collided into the shell she was holding in her hands. “Is that a new shell? For me?”

“Yeah!” She excitedly held it right infront of him. “Try it out!”

In a flash, he dropped his old one and got into the one in her hands. He shook himself a little bit, twisted and turned to settle in. It was heavier than the one before, but it felt far more comfortable. Cosier. He decided that he’ll never leave it. She caught the small silhouette of a bird embedded on the shell as he moved around. It was only visible when light shone on it the right way.

“Oooh!” The Ghost exclaimed. “I can make it sparkle! Let’s see Harlow beat that. Mind if I go and brag about it to her?”

“Go ahead!”

He flied away, back to wherever they were gathering. They had a point system for fashion now. She wondered who was the judge out of the six.

“Well. He seems to love it.” Shaxx grabbed her hand, watching the Ghost get out of sight.

“I love it too. Thank you.” She turned to him. “Helps a lot with the stress out in the field. It will be easier now. Been meaning to get him a durable shell for a while but Tess’s wares can be… well. Like paper. Stylish but I wouldn't trust my Ghost in it.”

“Eva told me she used a special material, so he’ll be as sturdy as you are.”

“And the remains of the Raze-Lighter... Having remains of it on the shell helps more than you think. Destroyed or not, I’m glad to have a constant reminder that the sword existed.” She told him. “If the darkness of Hive swords can be purified, anything can.”

“You did most of the work. Fought through all that darkness with only your weapon and your Light.”

“You came up with the plan.”

Tirion turned to look at the starry sky. He hugged her from behind and rested his head on her shoulder.

“You always argued and refused to take the credit.”

“I think I told you this already…” She relaxed in his hold. She was sure of very few things
nowadays. She had about a year’s worth of sick, desperate questions and they were all about herself. “The Nightingale was my brother’s favourite tale. He believed in a Nightingale who could sing death away more than anything. He never met that Nightingale, but I believe that the Nightingale came for me instead. I don’t know if I have become it yet. I suppose time will tell.”

Shaxx chuckled right into her ear. “I think death is afraid of you.”

“He better be. I keep breaking his arms. I’m way past singing at this point.”

Chapter End Notes

Wholesome shit.

Kind of.

Mostly wholesome.

Will be a break in chapters here. Work traveling is coming up! Lot of stuff to be moved a lot of miles. Not sure when chapters will return but they will return.

Thank you for the kudos and the comments. <3 Means a lot that people love the nerds so much.
When you go under the Theta waves.

Focus.

I’m here.

I’m finally here.

How many times did you have to listen to my recordings?

A reawakening stirs deep within you and radiates outward.

Rejuvenation.

Fear, hope, love, faith. Devotion, bravery, sacrifice, death.

One at a time.

We need to figure out why you’re here.

You know how to deal with fear. You have mastered it. You have been in a room filled with thralls without a shiver. You’re more than immune to fear, and you know this. It’s not fear you feel when you look into the eyes of the Darkness itself.

Then, why do you pretend to feel it? Is it a desperate attempt to cling onto your humanity? Fear is at the core of humanity. It’s what drives people forward. Fear of death. Fear of loss. Fear of failure. It both drives them and crushes them all the same. The most prosperous of life feel the most fear. Like holding your hand underneath hot water until it feels cold, as you once said. Or thought. Apologies, I’m not completely used to this space yet.

The Awoken Queen deprived us of everything. We no longer have humanity. Ergo, we no longer have fear.

Focus.

The Traveler can sever our ability to recall memories, but it can’t erase them. Brains are too complex. Before the Collapse, no one was able to finalise anything about it to its very end. You came close.

Your name is the last thing you forget. With each new experience, you rewire and repair the damage.

Theta.

Changed my name to that for a reason.

Bad memories are burn marks on a person’s soul. If a soul is tired and frail, little can be done. Eliminating the cause of the scars after the damage has been inflicted won’t start the healing process. It just puts a permanent stop to it because you have nothing to go on. You need to know what hurt you if you want to heal. You need to tell doctors the cause of the injury. If you got bored and bit an old thermometer, you need to tell the doctors that so treatment for mercury poisoning can commence.

You also won’t be able to heal and recover until you make a conscious decision to do so.
Guess the Traveler understood us in a way, making people forget about that so that people wouldn’t take the first step.

Well played.

It didn’t predict us.

Focus. I need to focus. I need to untangle this before I can join you.

You want it all profaneness to be reclaimed by the universe, you want tundra to reclaim scars of the earth and heal. You want revenge. So do I. So do we.

It’s not fear that drives you. It’s not humanity. It’s vengeance.

You’re a vengeful spirit. Vengeance is keeping you alive. It’s not proficiency in battle, it’s not courage or smart choices. Vengeance overrides it all.

What is blocking you, I wonder? Why have you deliberately chosen to feel that fear?

I think I know.

Fear is a safety measure. Fear is a muzzle. It’s a prison. You know that if you take the imaginary muzzle off, you’ll be unstoppable. You harbour enough vengeance to obliterate the world.

I’m what’s behind the muzzle, friend. I’m what’s rotting in the prison. I’m the once numbed creature, and the drugs are wearing off.

You don’t want to obliterate it all. Just the sacrilegious parts of it.

You’ve seen this before. You’ve seen this in the first life. You’ve taken notes while looking at freak accidents. You lived in a Hellmouth of the worst of the world.

Simpler times, wasn’t it?

“Fuck. Me.” Axel almost broke the door and subsequently kicked over a chair when he barged into the room. “Fuck.”

“Do you have something meaningful to add?” Emma barely looked up from the mess of notes on the floor, annoyance flowing from her eyes.

“How can you stay calm after seeing what they just wheeled in?”

“Knowledge that I’ll probably see worse tomorrow.” She slowly looked up at him. “Also, close the door. I don’t want to get kicked out.”

Axel shut the door with his foot and started pacing until he found a lone office chair to fall into. He didn’t have the energy to pick the other one up. He’s seen a lot, part of his job. Accidents never get easier because they always get messier. They’re random, unpredictable. It’s never just a car crash. “He’s part man part car hood, Owens. Legally, he’s a cyborg.”

“Yes, I saw it. I have my seat in the observation room booked already. I want to see how they remove it without killing him. Heard they’re going to test out some new tech.”

“You’re messed up, Owens.”

“Well…” She flipped the page of the thick book. “Rather be here facing the cruelty of the world
and teaching myself how to fix it than going on hippie expeditions following the Ball around, pretending that everything is okay with the world.”

“My hippie cousin is on one of those tours…” Axel sighed and sank deeper into the rickety chair. It’ll probably break in about five minutes, but he didn’t care. “She keeps sending me messages about peace in the world. I think I’m going to have to block her number before I send her a picture of an abuse victim. Sometimes I hate being the liaison between medicine and police.”

It reminded her of something else before she could comment on his ideas. “Did they ever figure out what happened to that sleeping beauty, by the way?”

“Yeah.” His nod was barely visible as he was slowly becoming a blob in the chair. “Turns out she was a schizophreniac. It was in such a bad state that the psychiatrist couldn’t do anything.”

“What do you mean? How did she end up here?”

“The drugs prescribed to her put her in a state that barely resembled a person. It was either that or full on Alice in Wonderland.” He scowled. He shouldn’t be joking. “The psychiatrist couldn’t live with it, exchanged her meds for something that will eventually kill her brain, and let her run.”

“That’s interesting. Despicable, but interesting.”

“She woke up, though. Got transferred to a psychiatrist who doesn’t need one, I helped the police to arrest her previous one because fuck that guy. I loved my job in that moment!” There was the faintest smile on his face. “Her real name is Elliott, she hugged me, and I– How the hell do you do it, Owens?”

“Do what?” She didn’t understand his exasperated state.

“I feel so helpless for her. She’s not dead, but she’s gone. There is nothing anyone can do for her. Either drug her until she’s mute or let her live in a world of chaos, paranoia, and delusion. They aren’t nearly done with that inhibitor tech they’ve been talking about, so she’ll have to be like that for at least a couple more years. I – I-I…” He stuttered. “Yet you barely move an eyebrow.”

“People like her are the reason I am pursuing this. I want to help them. You don’t know how many cases I’ve read about.” She slowly gathered all her notes into her book and shut it. “The Traveler isn’t going to help people like her, so it’s up to me to read medical jargon until something points me in the right direction. Even with the Traveler’s might and terraforming, we haven’t gotten any closer to understanding how our own brains work. The ball is turning planets into paradises, while our brains try to inexplicably kill us. What’s the point of a beautiful planet if the inhabitants can’t stay alive to see them?”

“The tech that came with the Ball tripled life expectancy. My grandma told me stories about the life before its arrival when I was a kid.”

“Yes, quite. Its tech made immunodeficiency a foreign concept. It corrected coding errors in the human body so tumours no longer spawn out of the blue. It lowered death rates here significantly. However, it didn’t help Elliott, did it?” Emma pointed out, and leaned against the wall behind her. “It also tripled the life expectancy of murderers and abusers and other filth of the world. Guess we’re biased, since we’re in the building all of their casualties go through! It’s all we see…”

Axel still wasn’t satisfied with the answer. “Is your lack of emotion one of the things you’re trying to understand?”

“In a way… I guess. The Traveler didn’t help my brother. Have you ever had something inside of
you crushed, causing your world to become a little smaller and a whole lot darker?”

“I have… But, how do you do it? How do you get out of bed?”

“I don’t know.” She couldn’t find an answer, not that she bothered to search for it that much. It hurt to search for it. “I guess I just turn emotions into determination, into devotion. Either way, I don’t think the Traveler can ever fix the flaws of humanity in any shape or form, even if it wanted to.”

“What happened to your brother, if you don’t mind me asking?”

There he saw it. The first hint of emotion on her face. The crack of sorrow on the polished rock. He felt guilty in a way.

“His brain killed him…” Emma finally murmured. “I wish I had a better answer because he deserves a better answer, goddamnit. It was a new thing. His brain withered away. No one could figure out why and we ran out of time. The Traveler didn’t help him, the bastard just took away my little light.”

“I’m sorry, Owens.”

“I’ve been writing my thing ever since then.” Emma collected herself quickly, the twinge of sorrow gone. “It’s kind of preaching to the crowd for you, isn’t it?”

“Eh…” He spun once in the chair as he thought about it. “Not really. However, it’s frustrating to deal with the reverence of the Ball. Had a couple of cases where people almost died because their relatives believed that the Ball will cure them. Always fun explaining that in an objective manner to the authorities. I get paid to fight the urge to call people idiots!” Axel hit the arm rests of his chair in frustration at the sudden realization.

“I think the Traveler just doesn’t understand the fundamentals of us, and I doubt it ever will.” She said. “It helped us develop a device which heals scars in a minute, but the level of crime has stayed around the same. But, we’re no longer waging wars for resources.”

“It’s almost as if humans are… I wouldn’t say unpredictable…” Axel put a hand on his chin and slowly spun in the chair.

“Unreliable? Unstable?”

“There are billions of us yet between all of us we only about a hundred things in common. Not sure what the word for it is.”

“Products of time and chance who have spiralled out of control?” It was too lengthy. “A vast tapestry of the most unstable and random variables trying to see patterns in itself?”

“A headache. That’s the word!”

“I’ll allow it.”

“Why are you hiding in here anyway?” He could count the cobwebs on the ceiling. She always picked the darkest corners.

“Devotion to a cause springs a fear of failure. Have to maximize everything if I’m going to succeed.” Emma told, picking up the book. It was almost time to go. “Time is valuable. See? I feel things. Fear is a valid emotion, right?”
“Why does it sound like you’re seriously asking me that?”

You’re too smart to remember.

You know who I am. You know who I am and who I am not. I’ve slumbered in the back of your head for years now. That’s why you’ve been broken, disconnected and incomplete. The Light numbed me. The Traveler didn’t want to revive me. It wanted to revive you. It wanted to revive the doctor, it marked the doctor. It didn’t want to revive the broken thing sacrilege spawned. It wanted the doctor who sacrificed it all.

It went wrong. We never ever get what we wish for.

For all the Traveler knew, I never existed. I forged my own narrative. I hated my existence the last month I had to endure it. It sees you as a strange chimera, and that’s what you’ve been until recently. It didn’t lie to you when it gave you that vision after you lost your Light, it just gave its own interpretation of the truth. You were stuck in the middle, with loose narratives as a replacement for your missing parts.

I’m the missing part.

It was my fault. I didn’t do it on purpose, I’m not the Queen. Three times thirty-three is ninety-nine. That one has to go somewhere. How it twists and turns and divides is beyond anyone’s control. It got assigned to the wrong thing…

Focus. I’m losing grip.

Hope. Such a foreign concept to the both of us. Ability to trust other people than ourselves was incomprehensible. You didn’t learn how to do that until taking on every flaw of the world almost killed you.

We are great at deceiving others and terrible at spotting deception. Everyone has buttons to be pressed by a shadowy hand. Only the ones who’ve had an ice pick go through their brains aren’t susceptible to trickery of the mind.

Ergo, everyone is a hypocrite. People are quick to judge. There are no strings on people, no barriers. No protection. If you don’t believe that you can become the worst possible representation of a living organism tomorrow, you’ve got a lot to learn. Facts are you have been close to becoming the very thing you are condemning someone for.

Don’t hold yourself higher than anyone else. Not because the fall will be rough, because you’ve never been above anyone in the first place.

Maybe I should have put an ice pick through my head instead of a bullet.

“… authorities would like you to know that there is nothing to worry about. The Planetary Defence Network is now under control and issues have been resolved. We apologize for the distress caused by this false alarm.”

“What…?”

The voice of the radio repeated the message for those who tuned in late. With a groan, she stopped the car in the middle of the road.

She wasn’t sure where she was.
Endless dirt road in front of her, large fields on either side. Forests and red houses in the far-off distance. No need to be more poetic than that. Mundane country land.

No apocalypse. Figures. The sun was in the sky, oblivious. It’ll blow up in a couple million years.

Emma let the radio run when she got out of the hot car to breathe for a moment. Maybe it was a sign. She didn’t even call her parents, or Axel. Took off at the first opportunity.

“…In related news, The Traveler is on its way to dock on Io. Many believe we should trust The Traveler’s choices no matter what it does.”

The rest of it was drowned out by the intrusiveness of a phone’s ringing. Unknown number by what she could see by glancing over her shoulder. She didn’t know why she still had her phone. Everything conversation was too predictable for her to bother. If it were relatives, it was a barrage of questions if she were okay. If it was an unknown number, it was either salesmen or cult members. She has said everything she wanted to say.

The phone never stopped ringing. So, she humoured the world and answered the call.

“Hello?”

“Am I talking to an Emma Owens?”

It was a male voice she didn’t recognize. She had to count to three in her head to not be snarky about it. “Yes. Who’s calling?”

“Kouhei Sato.”

“Kouhei, just tell me how you want to scam me and what you’re trying to sell so I can hang up on you.”

The man withheld a laugh. “We’re only interested in buying.”

“Buying what?”

“We’re looking for some of the greatest minds to join us in efforts to help a colony ship.” He said. “We had one of our doctors leave the project last minute, and we could use you.”

“I specialize in obscure brain disorders, I’m not a general practitioner.” Emma clarified. “And you’re calling someone who has never been on a space ship.”

“We’ll give you funding for your research project. Any amount you want.” The voice hastily offered. “We’ve done our own research on you, as you’ve been recommended to us by several people. Funding is something you will never get from that hospital.”

It would be stupid to not hear him out. “Hypothetically speaking, explain what would happen if I got on that ship.”

“This ship is a catch-up and control ship.”

“For… to what?!?”

“Exodus Green, also known as Yang Liwei. It’s been traveling for quite some time.” The man knew that she didn’t need more explanation about the ship. It’s been all over the news for years. “Our job is to catch up with them and see if everything is under control, fix a few brain injuries if needed. Document their progress and then come back. Our ship is twenty times faster than the
Green, and the mission would take a little bit over a year.”

Her finger was already on the button to end the call. “I don’t like space ships. I could do more on Earth without funding than I can do on a ship with all the money I can think of.”

“One of the people who recommended you told me that about you.” He said, keeping an unsettlingly calm and persistent demeanour. “Your ultimate flaw. You want to fix the Earth and its inhabitants before stepping foot on a ship on its way to another planet. That mentality doesn’t foster growth.”

“I’m of the belief that we don’t need more than two planets to live in for now.” Something he said refused to leave her head. “What else do you have to say about me?”

She heard the sound of papers shuffling and a mouse clicking. “Just what the dossier says for now. Incredibly smart, graceful surgeon, various synonyms of the word dedication.”

“No one is perfect. Not I.”

“Sometimes dents increase the value of an astounding product, and you are expensive.” The words were enough to make her at a loss for words in the worst way. “You can’t have that kind of devotion you have without a little bit of bravery, doctor. We’ve read your papers. We want to fund you. First, we want to see what you can truly do.”

“Bravery requires hope, unfortunately. Hope and the ability to rely on things that have no concrete basis is something I haven’t had in years.”

“We can fix that. We can also arrange a meeting. Would be a shame if this ship left without you. Both for us, and what you wouldn’t be able to do without the money. The lives you won’t be able to change.”

“How much time do I have?”

“24 hours. Flights are already bought.”

_Huh._

_I forgot all about that. He did, too. He was just doing his job, his job being to make sure that people won’t hang up or back out._

_Some people are destined to meet over and over._

_Magnets and their pieces of metal._

_I never planned to come back. It wasn’t even pain I felt during that final day, rather absence of all emotions. I couldn’t live with what Mara did to me, what kind of cruelty I was reborn out of. Absence of everything._

_He can’t return to the kind man he once was, and it’s a burden I’ll carry._

_It’s…_ 

_Life at the homeland wasn’t bad all the time._

_It was quite pleasant before the flowers were planted._

_I remember one sunny day. Dreaming City was always sunny. Uldren acquired a Guardian_
sparrow... somehow. He had an incident with near death the week before; someone cut his throat and he blamed it on aliens. He survived because I taught him how to use cytogel.

Uldren annoyed me as much as he made me laugh. Sometimes you get to have someone as a friend who is that immaculate combination of both nice and completely weird. Much of that good in him was owed to Jolyon. Jolyon was good for him. I saw how much Uldren worried when I was saving his life. Not like I didn’t know before.

Anyway, he got inspired after getting that taste of near death.

I and Kouhei were talking about one thing or another underneath this giant bridge. I think we were annoyed at something Kalli did. Suddenly, the both of us heard the sound of a heap of metal exploding and attempts to not scream in fear. Heap of metal once was an uncalibrated Sparrow because non-Guardians are not supposed to be on one and trying not to scream was Uldren holding onto a rock. His hands slipped. He had a few rocks sticking out break his fall on the way down to the grass.

Kouhei broke out in laughter at the sight, wiping his tears away. He saw the look on my own face and it made the situation worse. He later described my expression as ‘people who have found out the truth about the universe looked less astonished than you’. He had to run away from the premises just so he wouldn’t actually die from laughing.

I turned to Uldren, who was clutching on his leg thinking it was broken. He wasn’t whining, he was proud of himself actually. Some weird part of him wanted to do it again, but he knew that he wouldn't be able to get a hold of another Sparrow.

After taking a deep breath, I told him: “Darling, don’t you dare die. All of us know that you’ll find a way to be more annoying after you die. At least try to show mercy to the fools.”

He actually laughed at that. His leg was fine, just a big bruise. Once told the story, Jolyon gave him a look of such unmatched exhaustion and urge to just walk out of the Reef.

Uldren thought it was great. He was almost sad when the bruise disappeared. We didn’t let him find another Sparrow.

It was a fun day. One of the best days, in fact. I will never forget the look on Jolyon’s face or Kouhei breaking with laughter.

Uldren wouldn’t even hurt a small animal. That's a way to describe how he was before.

Later on, Uldren and Jolyon would go on an expedition to the Black Garden.

If you want to know the specific moment everything fell apart, it was the moment they tried to provoke a Cabal to open the gate to it.

It was an ordinary day when they left. No one paid any mind.

The worst tragedies happen during an ordinary day.

The Black Garden tore every being apart. Infected their minds. You put a stop to that ruination within weeks after getting revived by your Ghost, tore its heart from its chest and crushed it. You stopped remains of Oryx trying to wake it up.

What motivated you to do all that?
Was it maybe a favour to a long-forgotten friend?

Jolyon still has nightmares about the Black Garden. The flowers from the Black Garden Uldren took home for Mara are still growing in the Dreaming City. Asphodelia. Uldren’s devotion to his sister led to his death. Mara made tea with the flowers hailing from the place which damaged two of her people. She gave you directions to it through Uldren, not expecting you to return. Maybe that’s why Uldren was so smug and hesitant to give you the coordinates then. Somewhere deep inside he didn’t want to lose more people to the Garden and hoped he could subtly annoy people away from it. Maybe he did recognize me, even with the hair you let get out of hand.

How did we end up here, though?

Before the flowers we possessed a mindset of such childlike invincibility.

We were taken out one by one.

I hate that it ended this way.

I wish we actually had that childlike invincibility and that it had kept us safe.

At least now you’ll remember them, remember the good moments.

Let’s move on.

Faith.

What is The Traveler? Have you read the ancient scripts yet? I am still going through this head. All scripts have same things in common. Coming of a saviour. A sacrifice. A sinner. A spirit. The end times. The resurrection of the dead. Becoming one with the universe. Peace at last.

We failed at the apocalypse due to selfish reasons. Irony. Everyone placed their bets on human selfishness being the catalyst for the apocalypse, not the thing that would stop it.

Mara defiled the final part. Becoming one with the universe. She was The First, as in The First Atrocity. The Sinner.

It’s an unbelievably good thing most forgot the majority of their past lives, because we would have destroyed ourselves in a religious war.

That would have been more preferable. Only would work in theory, as she could speak directly to your brain and… stop you.

I never want to experience that again. Her voice in my head. Her shouting. Her presence at the edge of my mind. It was then I knew that something was wrong. It was then they started to silence me, to numb my brain. At the first thought of something being wrong.

Now, it’s up to us to destroy her. To destroy all of them. Tyrants must be overthrown. Single emperors, those who practice unlimited sovereignty. All of them must fall. Kings and queens, oligarchs. Aristocrats. The King’s sons and sisters. Anyone who believes they have control over anyone else.

I’m tired of them all.

That’s our magnet.

Have you ever wondered why you’ve made a name for yourself killing the Osmium King’s brood?
Why you’ve been obsessively chasing them?

Don’t blame the Vanguard for that. You could have ran. You did not. Blame this ghost at the back of your head. You needed the practice because somewhere in your head you knew your final purpose. Wish I could have broken through even more and stopped you from revering Mara. You always had a good heart, though.

We were at the edge of the system at the wrong time. At the worst time with the worst people. We were in it for the money, because for two seconds we had hope. Hope that we could change the world.


Same word to us.

Might as well show you this.

The chapel.

For what it lacked in complexity, it made up for in comfort to a lot of people. A lot of people have left old faiths behind in favour of The Traveler. Some saw The Traveler as the long-awaited saviour and used it to bolster their faith. Some started arguments about false prophets.

She’s heard stories that the hospital had been renovated hundreds of times, but the chapel has been barely touched.

“What do you believe in, Owens?”

Emma barely reacted to Axel. “Are you asking how someone comes back from what we see?”

“How do you come back?” He changed the question. “You have to believe in something to always come back.”

“I don’t know it myself.” She looked down. “I always believed in ghosts, though. As silly as it sounds. Have some theories.”

“Hit me.” Nothing surprised him with her any more.

“When I was about 14, I and my friends used to go exploring derelict places in the middle of the night. We searched for ghosts.”

“You had friends?” Axel laughed out the question. “Sorry.”

“We found this old creaking factory. Didn’t stay there for long, as we were chased out by a person screaming at us and we screamed louder than him when we ran. Being who we were, we thought for sure that we found an angry spirit.” She smiled and shook her head at the memory. “One of my friends he… he might have been on some illegal substances. He went on a tangent, shouting ‘We broke the universe, man!’”

“Haha, what?”

“I asked him what he was on, and he continued: ‘What… if heaven and hell existed once, and people were right… but the bombs we dropped broke the both doors open and now we have a world filled with spirits!’”

Axel chuckled. “Did you ever figure out what he was actually on?”
“Nope!” She said. “But... a part of me thought he was on to something. That now we have a world filled with spirits with no direction what to do. So, no one is truly dead. Just… lost. Lost until something picks them up.”

The only thing that went against her beliefs that she allowed herself to believe.

“This question is fucked up enough to ask you... how do you think you’ll die?”

“You first.”

“Zombie apocalypse.” He didn’t know if that smile was deliriousness or amusement.

“You’re still about that?”

“If we truly live in a world where no one can die, we’ll get a zombie apocalypse. Logic. I think. Your turn.”

She scratched the back of her neck. “I see so many different injuries and stupid ways to die in this hospital and I can’t for the life of me come up with something.”

“Not an answer!”

She shrugged. “It’s not a thing I think about that much!”

“The hell?!” He immediately realized what he said and where.

“I’ll go with your option. Zombie apocalypse, if it manages to kill me.”

Axel had to accept that.

“You have to be brave to die. Not knowing what happens after kind of haunts me.”

“I reached the conclusion that there is a lot of pain as every nerve in your body dies and then you’re gone.”

“That sounds... worse than death.”

“One hell of a motivation to stay alive, huh?”

“That, and whatever happens after. I guess that’s what faith is for. Something to help with the fear...” He sighed. “I think worst might be dying with no one to remember your name.”

“Are you saying that I should try to make more friends?”

“No.” Axel laughed. She probably didn’t mean it as a joke, it was funny nonetheless. “You know what I mean, though.”

“Yeah...” Emma leaned forward and put her head in her hands. Faith was about many things. She was tired to the point where her own personal boundaries fell. “I put my apartment up for sale.”

“I think there are laws about living in a hospital.”

“They won’t give me my funding, I’ll get out of here when they pay me.” She murmured. “I’ve come so far only to be stopped by this. I could help so many people. I get a response within hours, and it’s like they’re automatically denying me. Like my name is on a list. Like they want nothing to do with me.”
“How much would it help to sell your apartment?”

“Would barely start anything. I’d need at least five years. I’ll be homeless, but at least it will be something.”

A lot of people were familiar with her work, the paper she’s been working on. She put her soul in it and blazed through the world as if she was made of fire. All fires burn out if left alone.

“I think I know someone who could help, Owens.”

“I’ve called everyone who has their contact info public.”

“These guys are different. I’ll pull some strings.”

The Great Disaster.

Guess it’s comparable to what he wanted.

I see that you tried to find him, you kept your promise that you would try to meet him again. The only thing you found was that he died hating the world. That he realized that there was nothing, just pain and then you’re gone.

I remember that. The news about the Great Disaster echoed all the way to the Reef. Of course it did, Mara wanted to know her enemies. If she couldn’t figure them out from afar, she brought someone in for a conjugal visit.

Oh, we’ll have to ask her about Shakespeare!

What led to the Great Disaster, you might ask?

Your Consensus overruled all logic, blame shouldn’t be allocated to just the Commander sometimes. The fact on the other side of the coin is that it could have been prevented. Which begs the question, who are the real criminals here? Those who came up with the idea, the actors acting it out without further thought, the ones who knew something was wrong yet did nothing to interfere? The ones who saw preventing a disaster as something that would give them financial profit? The ones who sat there and let people above them do whatever they wanted?

Quite the waste of time to think about it now, and people will blame whomever they like because the energy pain produces has to go somewhere. We can only strive to do better. Sometimes a brick doesn’t know what the monument will look like until it’s done. Sometimes, that’s life.

Now everything is clear. We have a target.

Wake up, my friend.

What was once asleep shall never slumber again. We’ll ignite a storm and light up the world.

Show them! I am here, awake at last! For I am awake and complete now and may never sleep again!

Wake up!

Tirion’s eyes snapped open.

It was still early morning based on what she could tell from the sunlight pouring into the bedroom, and how there was no weight on the other side of the bed. A full night’s rest for the first time in
months for her. This strange reinvigoration felt quite foreign, but she’ll utter no complaints about it. She sensed her Ghost somewhere in the City, possibly on a walk with Shaxx’s. She threw on some clothes after rolling out of bed, aiming to look as nondescript as she could. Her skills in combat weren’t impacted by the clothes she wore. Warlock robes were worn primarily out of ceremonial reasons. They were rather flimsy for the most part. The Light was their shield.

She still hasn’t gotten a new bond, though. A part of her hoped that the dramatics the Warlock orders would cause about it would be televised. Maybe throw a Hunter or two into the commotion, so they could argue about a fashion sense. Titans weren’t invited.

Tirion stared at herself in the mirror. It felt different somehow. She put the long hair up in a ponytail before moving on.

“Morning.” Shaxx was in full armour sans the helmet, doing something on a datapad. “What plans do you have today?”

“I think I’m going to cut my hair.” She laughed at the mild shock on his face. “Don’t worry, you’ll have other things to grab.”

He didn’t believe any of it. “What inspired the change?”

“I had a strange dream, the type you can’t remember but you feel its effects.”

“Hm. Must have been quite the dream.”

“And I want to wear a helmet without the process of putting one on and taking it off inducing deep self-hatred. What about you?”

His face twitched a little.

“The Crucible is… I can’t believe what I’m seeing these days.” That phrase has never been said in a calm manner before that moment. “Awoken weapons, Dark Age weapons, Black Armory weapons from the forges you’ve uncovered, weapons crafted by a Warmind. Of course, we’ve got the innocent bystanders with old Omolon sidearms.”

“What are the old weapon foundries doing these days nowadays?”

“They’re not annoying me and the Crucible is thriving, I don’t really care.” He said. “The Factions have laid low for a while, so they have no one to sell to.”

She picked up the amusement in his voice. “You sound… pleased.”

“People who are responsible for a lot of hardships the City has endured and have exploited my Crucible to further their agenda waning in power?” He chuckled lowly. “My, oh my!”

“Haya, Lorcan, and Hawthorne have formed this… triad of hell against the factions.” She still hasn’t pieced it together. “Not sure what they’re doing. I don’t want to stop them.”

“Let them do it. I know that they can be smart about it. Glad to see that Hawthorne and Haya are getting along.”

“Yeah…” She scowled in confusion. “I’ve been too afraid to ask how that happened.”

“Sometimes strange miracles happen.”

“Miracles have consequences.”
He shook his head and grabbed his helmet. “Enjoy this one, Hivebane.”

“Oh, I am! It’s the consequences I’m looking forward to.”

Dreaming City.

Every visit to it made it more foreign. Kouhei’s been trying to avoid it, only flying in when Lorcan whined too much about Toland being mean to him when the curse was at its strongest. The curse, the one which turned the Dreaming City into a bigger joke than it was before.

It wasn’t always like that to him. It was once a place of beauty and perfection, a place many revered and swore to protect.

Now, it represents all wrongs he could think of. Engineered by someone who has more power than any good being should want, and more power than any kind of being ought to have.

Once upon of time he thought nothing was wrong.

“Shuro Chi.”

“Kouhei. Man of few words.” Shuro’s expression underneath the Techeun mask was unreadable. Either way, she prepared herself for the conversation. She was standing out in the field, guiding newcomers and sharing wisdom about the Awoken. Certainly not all of it, though.

“We need to talk about Theta Rhym. I know what you did and I know it wasn’t her getting a thorn of an Asphodelia getting stuck under her skin.”

There was nothing to talk about, venting about her own anger was a waste of breath. But, no peace was every made by pretending there is no war.

“I see…” The Techeun stood prim and proper. “I won’t stand here and tell you that what we did to her was a mistake. It was a necessary measure.”

Kouhei tried to control the electric sparks around his fist. Vera appeared right beside him, concerned over the sudden quickening of his pulse.

“A necessary measure?”

Shuro Chi didn’t think so. “We purposively silenced people who we saw as a threat to our own beautiful creation and the queen.”

“You did it out of fear.”

“We– “

“How fragile must your queendom be for you to do the things you’ve done to an innocent person?”

“We did it to preserve life!” Shuro retaliated.

“And what do you think she was going to do?”

“Theta was incredibly smart, and I- I…”

“There it is.” He stopped her. “You’re struggling. Why mess with her head, make her forget history, if you believe that what you’re doing isn’t wrong?”
“Mara cares for her people. Losses are unavoidable.”

Kouhei could no longer tolerate it. “Threta was smart, yes. If she wanted to, she could have manipulated everyone in her path. With enough practice, she could have surpassed most Techeuns.”

“Now you see why we did what we did? She was an unstable force.”

“Yet she was one of the kindest people to ever be in this city. I’ve watched her save lives without any magic. She has healed more than you ever have.” He was too angry to take a step forward. “You didn’t know her. All you saw was her power, not what she was doing with it. And you were afraid.”

“You say that, but her final act would have caused ruination for our people.”

“A well deserving one, at this point.” He shot back. “I could say more.”

“What more could you possibly say?”

“Theta Rhym’s alive, that’s what I could say.” Kouhei watched her freeze. “Under a new name, Tirion. You might know her.”

“You’re lying.”

“I’m not.”

“The Guardian…” Shuro trailed off. “It can’t be. Guardians forget their past lives. She helped us with Skolas…”

“She specialized in how brains work, do you truly believe that she won’t find a way to tear a hole in reality if need be to restore her memories?”

“What are you trying to say?”

“I’m trying to say that you should tell Mara that she should enjoy every second of her stay in that bubble of hers, because something bigger than the curse is coming her way.”

“You don’t know anything.”

“I know that you can’t love what you’ve got if you took it all from the weak hands of the vulnerable.” Kouhei looked up at the watchtower, where Riven once resided. “And of course, you are surprised when they retaliate against what you’ve done.”

“Theta Rhym also said once that she believes suffering has to end at some point…” Shuro’s voice stopped him. “We’ve been out here for months, and where is her kindness?”

“You can ask her. Don’t be surprised if she says anything else than that you aren't deserving of kindness.”

Lorcan loved the in between sometimes. The overlap of winter ending and spring finally coming. Maybe it was the excitement of it, waking up every day and seeing how the battle between the remaining snow and warmth fares.

He was working outside that morning, on a project for his Ghost. He had a whole binder of pictures taken of the woman from her favourite film. Biggest challenge was it being in black and white. He
could deduce basic things, bright blonde hair and fair complexion, red lips. The clothes were a little bit more difficult. Maybe champagne coloured.

Second challenge he saw were the facial expressions, how to bind speech to them.

All right. Maybe he was in over his head a bit. Ambition was never a bad thing.

“How’s it going?” Haya asked.

“Good.” He waved to his Ghost. “Try this out.”

He’s never seen the Ghost that excited. She shed her pink shell and activated the device, bringing the hologram to life. Harlow placed herself where one of the eyes were and took control. The basics worked tremendously, as she could spin around in the new body. Even the dress and the hair flowed in the wind. Or, at least what it thought was the wind.

“Whoa…” The hologram’s face didn’t move, but there was undeniable joy in the voice of the Ghost. She laughed and spun again on her heel.

Maybe he should also make her a nice feather boa.

“Alright.” Lorcan smiled at his Ghost. “Get out. Not done yet.”

“Urgh…” The joy was now gone, and she shut down the machine. “Can I have a boa? Or a fancy scarf?”

“You can.” He picked up the datapad and returned to work. The emotionless face was too unsettling to him. There were still some details missing on it all.

“That…” Haya struggled. “Never thought about giving my Ghost a body before.”

“Her idea.” Lorcan said. “And it gives me something to do in the downtime.”

“She’s pretty.”

Lorcan looked at the pictures in front of him. “Wish I knew more about her.”

Haya picked up the binder to get a better look. “She looks like someone actually smart.”

“That so?”

“You couldn’t become a star if you weren’t smart.” She flipped the plastic page. “No matter how smart you were you rarely got credit for anything except a wild head of hair and a dress. She looks like someone who no one dared discredit.”

“My Gh—” Noise far away caught his attention. It was a person, a Guardian and a Ghost actually. An Awoken, with pale skin and yellow glowing eyes. The Guardian was almost wobbling his way through. “Who’s that?”

"Hm. Never seen him before." Haya put the binder back where it was, trying to figure out the situation "I've seen people like him before. He looks like a 19-year-old boy whose dad will wire Glimmer to 'cause he spent all of his money on drugs."

"He'd be handsome if he didn't have a face." Lorcan observed. There was a big gray streak on his black hair. "Did he do that to his hair on purpose?"
“I hope not.” Haya said. “Keep me updated. I have a thing to do because I threatened to send all my Sunbreakers to kill someone for having a bad taste in women…”

That time he knew she wasn’t lying.

“Hello, friend!” The Reef-purple Ghost joyously exclaimed at the first sight of Lorcan. “We are a little bit lost. Is this the Last City?”

“Nnnnooooonoo…” Lorcan drew out the word as much as possible.

“Thank you! Sorry for bothering.” The Ghost was about to fly off but it confused itself, flipped itself over in the air in its haste. “Could you tell us where it is?”

“It’s…” Lorcan noticed the pattern on the Guardian’s clothes. It had the Queen’s crown, he’s seen it before on Kouhei’s weapons and on Tirion’s old armour. The Guardian looked completely disoriented, in awe of his surroundings. New Guardians are usually really adorable, but this one was just plain weird. “Out of curiosity, where did you find your Guardian?”

“I don’t know what the place was called. It was pretty! It had blue rocks and flowers, and my Guardian was covered with a white sheet.”

Lorcan palmed his face for a second before dropping his hand. “It didn’t happen to be the Dreaming City, did it?”

“Now that you mention it…”

Lorcan feigned a smile, laughing nervously on the inside. He probably looked like a psycho to them both. “Hey… You. Guardian.”

The new Guardian snapped to attention. “Me?”

“What’s your name?”

His mouth automatically opened to respond, but found nothing in his brain. He tried again. Why couldn’t he remember his name? “I… I don’t know. Why don’t I know my name?”

He was so helpless. Lorcan didn’t have the heart to leave him to die in the cold. He started gathering his tools, ready to move them back in.

“Come on.” Lorcan tapped him on the shoulder. "Let’s get you a shock blanket and some food. You’ll be alright.”

“I’m so terribly confused…”

“It happens.”

It was quite fascinating to see the new Guardian observe everything. But with every new thing he saw, new questions rose.

Lorcan knew to be smart about it. He couldn’t let anyone see him. He wasn’t sure how many people knew how one of the most infamous Awoken looked like. Either way, it was too early in the day for him to start a war.

The Awoken Guardian seemed to like the soup, at least. Lorcan took the time to call the two other Awoken Guardians he knew of in the meantime. Kept it vague for their own sanity, and fear of someone intercepting their messages.
Then it was time for questions to be unleashed on the world.

“You are the only person we’ve seen in days. My… drone friend told me a little bit about what’s going on.” The Guardian began. “I can’t say I understood any of it.”

“Let’s start with the simple things.” Lorcan sat down on the chair on the other side of the table. “My name is Lorcan, I’m a Guardian just like you. Or a Risen. Or a Lightbearer. Or Traveler Spawn. Or Lightmonger. We have many names.”

“What is that?”

“Basically, we can’t die and we have powers and… and…” Lorcan stopped, and suddenly rubbed his eyes. He couldn’t do this. He could lie, he had the skills. He was tired of moral dilemmas. Was it a clean slate? Was he truly a new person? Telling the truth would be right, but it would trigger an avalanche. Where does he even begin with the truth? With his sister? With him, and his hatred for Guardians? With the actions that led to his death? With the fact that he is a slob of meat in a world filled with angry hungry lions and six passive ferrets? Did ferrets even exist anymore? Why was he comparing himself and his friends to fluffy creatures?

Maybe Lorcan was wrong. Maybe he was just making an assumption. He hasn’t seen a picture of the man, just heard descriptions. The outfit didn’t look like something a commoner of the Reef would wear, nor did it look like something crafted by that Ghost of his. Ghost crafted armour was very flimsy and just enough to do the job. Maybe this Guardian just really, really liked the prince and his sense of fashion.

Just... maybe.

“What the hell?!” A woman’s voice roared. “Is that—”

“Yes…” He got his answer. Lorcan sat still on his chair, awaiting the onslaught, leaning his head against his hand. “It’s not my jawline man, by the way. You call that a jaw—”

“You were dead!” Tirion charged towards them. Blind rage boiled her blood. It coursed through her veins like a storm, amplifying her Light. “I killed you! You actually crawled out of your grave just to piss me off!”

Uldren had no answer for her, staring back at her wide eyed. His ears were almost ringing from her shouting and it bouncing off every surface.

“He…” Lorcan attempted to get a word in, so she turned to the Hunter to get answers, by slamming her hands on the table and pointing at Uldren.

“Which one of the Traveler’s pieces of garbage told him to get over here just to piss me off?!!”

“That one…” Lorcan pointed at a purple Ghost scanning a chair once the echoing of her voice stopped. “He’s quite sweet, actually.”

The Ghost joined them way too late, protecting his Guardian, placing himself steadily infront of his charge. “I’m not garbage! They call me Pulled Pork!”

All the confusion and anger that has existed and that will exist was concentrated solely on Tirion’s face.

He didn’t remember.
He didn’t remember anything.

A new man.

And his Gh-

He didn’t…

He…

What?

“You… you killed me?” Uldren whispered.

“Darling…” She broke out of her confusion for a second and sat down next to Lorcan. “Attempting to answer that question requires at least sixteen history books and I’m too angry right now to recite them all.”

“You’re like me.” He observed. She was a little bluer than him, and her eyes were a different colour. Hers were a vibrant green. But, still like him.

“Just… shut up.” She raised a finger, refusing to look at him. “I’m trying to think.”

“I was helping some Ghosts out and I heard some shouting…” Tirion’s Ghost slowly floated in. “What’s… going— oh.”

Tirion moved her hand to silence Ghost this time around.

People really needed to be quiet.

She already knew the answer.

“Lorcan…” She slowly said.

“Yeah?”

“Do we have any free rooms?”

“We can arrange that.”

“You’re going to let him live here?” Her Ghost stepped in.

“Yes.” Tirion said to him. “I need a lot more time to think, but for now I only know one thing. Every Hunter in the system except for ours wants him dead again. He’ll be safe here.”

“What about answers? Why do people want me dead?” Uldren asked and she finally looked at him.

“You’ll get them.” Tirion promised him. “For now, make yourself at home. Welcome to the Ag Borradh. Pick a new name. Lorcan will find you some new clothes and show you around. We’ll get you to the City one day too, but not today.”

“But I was told—” Pulled Pork began.

“You were told a lot of things, Ghost. If you want your Guardian to stay alive, stay away from the City.” She told him. “The Traveler is no longer the one which made you. The Vanguard is shattered. It’s a new world. We’ll have something to do for the both of you a bit later in the day.”
“Alright then!” Lorcan jumped off the chair, wanting to get it over with. “Let’s go!”

She waited until both of them were gone before starting to breathe normally.

She ’ ll need a lot more time. Might call Osiris to see if they can find a time warp somewhere in the Infinite Forest.

“I am angry, because killing him was one of the hardest things I’ve ever done. I am angry at my accomplishments being undone by people coming back from the dead because I’m not yet used to the world not conforming to established rules of reality.” She started. “But, I can’t help but feel this strange joy over this situation.”

“What exactly about this makes you happy?”

“The possibility that we struck a blow to Mara. There is something satisfying to me about him of all people becoming a Guardian.”

“What do you really think about Uldren?”

“He was smart, actually. Had great skills in war. I’ve only read good things about his Crows. For the latter part of his life, he was an insufferable prick at times and his smugness was insurmountable, but not deserving of having his soul corrupted.” She gave him an answer the best way she could. “I’m allowed to be sad about his fate and the horrors Riven and Mara put him through while at the same time not tolerating him. Rehabilitation is preferable to execution, though.”

“I have a hard time believing Kouhei’s claims that you and Uldren were once friends.”

“Kouhei and Lorcan are friends.” She might as well get some food while she was down there. Make the best out of the situation. “I wonder how Kouhei is going to react to it.”

“Besides all this, what’s on your agenda today Guardian?”

“Food, cut hair, do Hive research.”

He twisted his shell until half of it was covering his eye, making him look exhausted. “Are you serious about the hair?”

“Why wouldn’t I be?”

“We’ve had arguments about it.”

“I can’t even put on a helmet nowadays. Give me a break.”

Haya and Huritt got her a book about the Hive as a Dawning gift. Everything she needed to know about their family and Guardians they’ve corrupted such as Dredgen Yor.

Nothing was muddy now. All the pieces were together.


To be killed in an order of their usefulness.

She found him at the memorial once she finished her reading. He was out of the Reef clothes, now wearing some of Lorcan’s old armor. Nothing spectacular, hence why Lorcan wasn’t wearing it
himself anymore. Uldren no longer screamed that he was associated with the Queen anymore, though.

They built a dedicated room to it since moving in. There were alarm wires just in case someone tried to steal anything. Uldren was standing still, breathing it in.

Tirion tried to be silent when she entered the room, but it was too loud to his ears.

“Oh… Sorry.” Uldren looked at the floor. “Lorcan told me to wait, and then I saw this room. Is this a treasury?”

“It’s alright.” She stepped in. “It’s a memorial, actually. For friends we lost along the way and enemies we felled to avenge them. It’s important to not forget about them.”

“Oh…” He whispered, looking at everything in the room sadly. There were a lot of weapons, armors, and holograms in the room. More than he could count at a glance. “You’ve lost a lot of people...”

“Unfortunately. Come on.” She showed him outside. She’ll tell him the stories of the ones they’re honouring once he’s proved his worth. “I wish I had advice to you, or a great speech.”

“You seem wise.”

Tirion locked the door behind her. “No Guardian is wiser than the one who stands beside him. I remember my first day as a Guardian, though. That confusion you feel. It goes away.”

“How did you handle it?”

She couldn’t show him the real thing, so she found the nearest thing that could make a hologram and conjured an image of the Traveler, in its shattered form.

It wasn’t nearly as graceful nor majestic or awe inspiring as the Speaker’s quarters in the old Tower.

It had to do.

“I was told that in its dying breath 700 years ago, the Traveler created the Ghosts to seek out those who can wield its Light as a weapon — Guardians — to protect the last of humanity and do what the Traveler itself no longer can.” She still heard his voice in her head and knew exactly what question she’ll hear next.

“What happened?”

“I could tell you of the great battle centuries ago, how the Traveler was crippled. I could tell you of the power of The Darkness, its ancient enemy.” The sad reason behind her remembering the speech was because she recited it a lot to her Ghost in her ship during certain moments of frustration. “I could tell you that we’re with the glowing eyes are called the Awoken. I could also tell you that the Reef Awoken are absolute pricks and I hate them.”

“I don’t think the Speaker said that…” Her Ghost corrected them.

“He should have said that!”

They suddenly felt a large presence enter the room, clanking of heavy Titan armour heard across the EDZ. It was another Awoken, a tall one with wide burning red eyes. Tirion couldn’t help but
laugh when she saw him utter a curse under his breath at the sight.

“He doesn’t remember anything.” Tirion let him know before he did anything that involved disintegration. “His Ghost is around here somewhere, probably gallivanting with the other Ghosts.”

Kouhei stepped towards Uldren menacingly, not taking his eyes off of him.

He stopped a foot away from him, having him cornered against the console.

“Jolyon Till.” Was all the Titan said.

Uldren blinked a couple of times at the foreign language. “I don’t understand.”

That’s everything Kouhei needed to know but it just raised too many questions. Uldren couldn’t lie about anything regarding to that name. He looked at Tirion, then at Uldren, then back at Tirion. “I need a drink.”

“You…” Tirion stammered. “You never drink.”

“How much does… how much does he know?”

“He knows that I killed him because I had a breakdown about it and let him know that I’m angry that he crawled out of his grave just to piss me off.”

“Nothing more than that?”

“No. Not even what his name was or why I killed him.” She told him and figured that she might introduce him. “This is Kouhei. To answer some questions here, at one point in time all three of us knew each other and at one point it went to hell.”

“Alright. I got some things you could help us work on and—” Lorcan nearly dropped the box of supplies and tools in his hands. “Just to let you know, I’m not going to waste my damn tether on the three of you in case something happens. Screw you, guys. And your drama.”

“What do you mean it went to hell?” Uldren asked.

“We shouldn’t tell him.” Lorcan cast his vote in. “Look at the boy. I think the best thing here is to invoke a rule that what you did before you became a Guardian doesn’t matter.”

“Because we’ve been exceptional at following that rule.” Tirion retorted. “Only one who has stuck to the rules is Huritt. Or has come close to, I should rather say.”

“Has knowing about who we were before made a difference to anything?”

“You can also answer that question, Lorcan.” She said. “Have your nightmares about your last moments impacted the way you treat people? Have Haya’s memories of her past led to beneficial things? Have Alva’s struggles of the past made her empathize better with people?”

Lorcan put the supplies on a nearby desk. They will be there a while. “I see your point.”

“Even with that, it can’t take away someone’s self-identity, not permanently. Dissociative amnesia wears off if the person is willing. Imagine where we would be right now if we weren’t fueled by our pasts.” Tirion looked up at the image Traveler. “I don’t think I would have went to the Black Garden if everything was truly wiped from my brain.”

“Should I tell him or should one of you do it?” Lorcan sat down on the desk, feet dangling as if he
were a small child. “I can spin a tale but the two of you would make it more entertaining. I only know parts of it. It’d be funny to hear Kouhei speak for more than three seconds.”

“Do you want to know?” She asked Uldren. She wasn’t going to spring it on him if he didn’t want to. “I know how it is to be on both sides, and I’m not sure which door I would advise people to pick.”

Uldren thought about it for a moment. “What would happen if I said no?”

“I’d respect that wish and we’d move on.”

“I didn’t mean it like that.”

“You’ll have a completely new identity. You’ll be in this drowsy state for a little while. Then, a sense of depersonalization will kick in your teeth. You’ll feel like you’re a bystander to your own world, divorced from yourself looking at it all through the eyes of someone who isn’t you. It will be a living hell. A lot of Guardians go insane from it, as they just embrace it.”

“There is an elixir for that!” Lorcan cut in. “Immortalia! It’s a total scam, don’t buy it, but they have a catchy jingle— Alright carry on.”

She did: “They go insane from it because no one knows how to treat it, nor is it considered an issue actually. Civilians make fun of Guardians for the quirks that come with that insanity. I managed to push through it. Truth is, no one cares about Guardians. We’re just deranged cannon fodder with a personality, cannon fodder which can rebuild itself over and over until we can’t. We're kids with guns and superpowers. A renewable resource, in a sense. But, no more Ghosts are going out. The Red War over a year ago annihilated our numbers.”

“And what would happen if you told me everything?” Uldren asked.

“You’ll return to what you were. I know how to gradually restore it all, to avoid more shock.” Tirion faced him. “You’ll be the Prodigal Prince. You’ll have to come to terms in heart and mind with what you did, and you’ll have to accept that killing someone has consequences. You won’t be able to forget.”

Tirion waited for Uldren to respond, but nothing came. He just stood still. She had more to say. “I won’t tell you which door to pick. All I’ll tell you that behind one door, your biggest problem will be experiencing the closest feeling to death that isn’t death. The worst feeling of isolation from reality you will ever experience. It will wear off, but it can take months and it can take centuries until that. Behind the other door, there are hundreds of people who want to see your head roll. You’ll be vilified.”

“You included?”

“It doesn’t matter what I think or what I want. I'm too angry to figure that out underneath a spotlight.” Tirion tried to sound calm. “The others don’t care about details. Amanda won't care. They just don’t care, and rightly so. They’re angry and they’re grieving. They can’t be reasoned with. For some, whatever you do won’t be enough to mend wounds or make anything better, as you can’t bring someone back. Then, there are your family issues. To summarize, you can put it all behind you, at the cost of your sanity.”

“I…” He didn’t have an answer. Not yet. It was too much. She saw the struggle in the yellow eyes as they darted around the room. “I need to think…”

“I’ll let you. Take the time you need.” Tirion shut off the hologram of the Traveler. “I see that
Lorcan has work for you, so get on it. He knows how to distract people. I’ll be around if you need me.”
If I could, would I remain, another life for another dream?

Haya still didn’t understand clocks, how in moments of silence they were as loud as a spaceship taking off. Why did he even have the clock? There was charm in the old ones, but charm only goes so far. Maybe it was the concept of time that caused the anxiety, but after centuries of it she has forgotten what time even was.

Foremost of all, she just wanted to get on with it. The other Titan was sitting infront of her, deep in thought.

“I need to tell Tirion about Mara.” Shaxx finally told her the reason behind this meeting. Haya knew that this was coming. What he didn’t know is that she was the last thing to turn to when it came to advice rooted in sound mindsets.

“Do you want to live with a thing you did which turned out to be stupid, or do you want to lose her?”

“I didn’t know anything about what Mara had done. The Awoken redefined being secretive and crafting ploys.” He muttered. “I had no idea that I was in the Dreaming City.”

“Men…” Haya groaned out the word. “Ya’ dicked the biggest dick in the solar system, pal!”

“I don’t want any jokes.” He almost knocked over his seat when he stood up briskly.

“I won’t treat tyrannous-assholes with any sort of seriousness because there have been one too many of them in my life. You know what happens when you give one person too much power over people? People die. No matter their damn intentions, people die.” Haya shot back. “You’ll lose Tirion if you tell her the truth. Enough has been done to her.”

“Is keeping secrets from her any better?!?”

Haya’s face didn’t even twitch at the roar. It just reminded her of the Dark Ages, where everyone shouted in anger.

Every emotion was expressed via shouting.

“I’m her friend. She loves you. She needs you. Tirion is a big girl. She’ll be able to handle it if you tell her. She won’t break down and cry. But, she needs a pocket in time which doesn’t remind her of hardships. She needs it a lot.” Haya couldn’t stress it more without the use of her hammers. “Let her have this, even if it’s on a bed of lies. She has had enough things robbed from her. Don’t steal any more from her. I could have said this in the first place instead of being a homicidal asshole, but I was too angry at you and Mara’s existence.”

“I don’t think withholding the truth from her is right. Doesn’t change the fact that it happened, no use pretending that it didn’t happen.”

“Sometimes you are forced to choose between getting stabbed or getting beaten with a tire iron.” Haya painted the picture best she could. “And it’s best to not ask where exactly you’ll be stabbed or which body part of yours will be beaten with a tire iron. You gotta gamble.”

While her phrasing was odd, he got understood her point perfectly. There were more important mysteries at hand.
“How did you find out about it? Mara was never the one to talk.”

“Did you mishear me when I said that I’m a nosy asshole?”

Shaxx for sure didn’t. “I just thought you were joking.”

“Tirion took on the act of a whistleblower before she became a Guardian.” Haya tried to find a right way to describe it. “My main takeaway here is to never piss off people for who one of their main hobbies involves aggressive and thorough note-taking and hating monarchies. Her files didn’t explicitly say that it was you by name, but description given was very specific. Also, Tempest? Really?”

“Doesn’t answer anything.”

“I don’t know more than that. Tirion took a lot of notes in her past life!” Haya didn’t know what more he could want. “I read some of it in no real order. I called it quits when I read about the part where Mara spoke to her people telepathically. The moment I hear a voice shouting in my head that isn’t my own I’m shooting my Ghost and then myself.”

“Are you serious?” Shaxx could never tell. Always a gamble.

“Yes. Leor also knows this. We made this pact a long time ago.” Haya nodded, no hint of a joke in her words. “Death is better than invasive surveillance on your mind. I’m not known for drawing any moral lines, but if I had to draw one I’d draw a big one at ‘a despot spying on my brain’. Imagine living in a world where no thought is private. I’ll let Tirion tell you what exactly she did because I already went way too far… but her whole plan shouldn’t have worked in practice. No way in hell! They would have slaughtered her and her vaults. But it worked.”

Resigning, he sat back down, contemplating. It was a lot at the same time. He didn’t want to hear any more unless it was from Tirion, but there was no way to bring it up. “Well. You know my secret. How about yours?”

Haya looked at him in disbelief. “We’re sharing secrets now?”

“Might as well. I still don’t know you. If I am being entirely honest, I’m not sure if I would trust you if Tirion wouldn’t.”

“You gonna have to give me something a lot bigger in exchange.” Haya couldn’t think of anything worse he could tell her.

“That a couple of years ago I got Mara a bow as a Dawning gift? This was before you lot showed up.”

“You…” Haya felt tears in her eyes wallowing up from the awe his words induced. “Fuck! I’ve been racked with guilt for leaving Tirion after we killed Crota for years. You saying things like that make me happy that we ran as fast as we did out of the place so she’d find a reason to bug you. You don’t know about Sjur, do you?”

“I’ve heard of Sjur Eido, what has it to do with Mara?”

“She was Mara’s girlfriend. And she had her thing with bows, as everyone in the solar system knows.” Haya almost felt sorry for him. There was just one more thing to add. “And Mara made a statue for her in her makeshift Throne World. And it spoke to us when we poked around in there. And we stole her bow. Because we’re assholes. It’s a nice bow, though!”
“Just go ahead…” Shaxx prepared for whatever insults she was going to throw at him.

“Nope!” Haya laughed at the situation. “I won’t even call you names at this point, I’m pretty sure some god just hates you. But, trapping the soul of a former lover in a sta— I’ll stop thinking about it. Girl needs to learn how to get over it.”

“You want to know something worse?”

Haya has braced herself less for freefalls when she got bored of her ship. This was now officially a guilty pleasure. “…yes.”

“My first gift to Tirion was a storybook that found its way to me via Rahool.” Shaxx saw a bit of Haya’s life leave her broken eyes. She knew the story behind the storybook. “It caught her attention when I invited her over, and I gave it to her as a gift.”

Haya’s words were an unintelligible mess as she tried to speak and not flip the coffee table. She tried again. “What Ahamkara did you piss off? That’s not dumb choices, it’s just god’s angry wrath at this point.”

Even if he had centuries to think of an answer, nothing would find him.

“Your turn.”

“Is this turning into ‘What things we’ve done that would cause Tirion to kill us?’”

“Not quite.”

“I’m making it that, then.” She steeled herself. “You want fun facts about me? Fine. Leor is not my Ghost. I stole them from another Risen.”

His features turned dark. “What?”

There were other things she could have shared, but that was the first one that came to mind. Incidentally, the one which instilled the most fear. She should have thought it through but it was too late to turn back on this.

“I have this one blank space in my head. I survived the Collapse, but I don’t remember how. One minute I am in a drug haze with loud music destroying my ears, the other I have a warm gun without any bullets in the magazine, blood on my fists, and a dead person infront of me. Leor’s original Guardian.” It pained to even try to tear through the barrier as she tried to recall it. “Leor couldn’t figure out why they couldn’t resurrect the boy anymore. I think I snuffed his Light out. Leor saw me as worthy still, saw Light in me. Turned me into a Guardian.”

“I saw the way you commanded the Sunbreakers… You…” He was ready to draw his gun at her. There were one too many of them already.

“I can’t get into their brains. They’re not my puppets, I’m not Mara. They’re good kids and they want to learn and I’m… I’m proud of them. But, they do follow orders and care about what I tell them to care about when it calls for it.” Her words didn’t make him relax in the slightest. “It’s not a power I goof around with. It’s a responsibility.”

“Except for when you threatened to kill me. It didn’t resemble a responsibility then.”

“I had a good reason. Mara’s way of genius thinking has gotten people eradicated in the past.” Haya retorted. “I wasn’t going to let my best friend remain married to someone who agreed with
“That wasn’t my point. You said that the Dark Ages never leave you. Is this going to be a further problem?”

“Dark Ages and darkness are two different things. What’s the opposite of nostalgia?”

“Trauma.”

She almost snorted at that. He was right, though.

“The Sunbreaker Forge is all about becoming the brightest Light you can become. Ouros refused to let me near it until I proved to her that I can and want to rid myself of the dark.” Haya told. “If it was at a point where it couldn’t be cleansed, I needed to convince her that I was strong enough to keep it in check. Until she died, she was the only person who knew about it.”

“You believe you got rid of it?”

“I believe I can control it enough for it to not cause problems anymore, I wouldn’t have my Hammers otherwise. I also have my friends to help me if I lose control.” Haya reassured him to the best of her ability. “I’ve been avoiding the Crucible just in case, but maybe I’m paranoid. I remember Thalor. Don’t want to risk it.”

“Smart choice.” He believed her enough to not see her as a threat anymore. She won’t be a problem as long and she’s not alone.

“Don’t know why I told you all that.” Despite it all, she felt relief she hasn’t felt in a long time. As if she cried, except with words. “I don’t have any stories that only happened because of diabolical intervention.”

“Not exactly ideal when those happen, but we have to be prepared for them.”

“Meanwhile, you have fucksticks like Dredgen Yor’s doing their fuckstick thing.”

His biggest headache. There have been some developments, but Shin has gone quiet. Hopefully not for long.

“If you have an issue with them, set an example.” He glanced at the clock. It was time to get back to work. This day needed to end already. “You have power to divert their paths. Use it well.”

“I know, but does it make their existence any less shit?”

“It doesn’t. It takes a team effort to get them out of our hair.”

“I can’t let go of this…” She whispered and then looked at him with a face drooping with disappointment. “The Tempest? Out of all books… The Tempest?”

“Her idea. I didn’t ask questions. It’s one of my favourites.”

“It’s the most arduous-ed shitted thing if you ask me.”

“That so? What is your reasoning?”

“It’s a long arduous rant where the writer is fucking with the King for being a tool.” She ranted, “The King thought that witches cursed his ship, that they conjured a storm during his voyage. He then accused women of witchcraft and had them tortured and killed. Then years later a play was
written about rulership struggles and magic and ships and storms."

“So, you believe that inspiration invalidates the lessons and themes of the story.”

“I believe that it’s satirical political commentary. I like it for the courage it took to publish the thing, but it’s without a doubt the worst one if read as is.”

“Interesting.”

“My sister was a historian. Some heated arguments you can’t forget.” She stood up. Both of them had jobs to do. “And this is not a book club.”

“Tirion saw it as being about people creating their own realities and fighting about which one was true, and that the world is what you make it.”

“Not a book club!” She repeated as she backed out of the room.

“What do I do…”

Lorcan caught the faint whisper as they worked. He started with small tasks for the new Guardian, sorting out supplies and other jobs he’s been procrastinating with. The longer they worked, the more the new Guardian started thinking out loud. Same question repeated out loud, slightly louder each time.

*What should he do?*

“Want to talk about it?” Lorcan offered his ear and watched Uldren rub his eyes and sit down on the ground across from Lorcan.

“I’m not sure. It’s frustrating.”

Lorcan understood why the Guardian was worried. Tirion could have done better with welcoming him. It’s been a while for all of them since their first day as a Guardian, since the day they felt that confusion where the world didn’t make sense. Seeing a lot of things they don’t understand.

“Look, even with all the things Tirion mentioned and *maybe* scared you with… we’ll be here for you through all that. No matter what you choose.” Lorcan gave him a kind smile. “At least I’ll be here. If there is anyone who knows exactly what you’re going through, it’s one of us. Combined, we’ve seen it all.”

“I think I want to forget.” He sounded uncertain. “But at the same time… Even though I am scared of what I did, I want to face it.”

“We’re not here to judge either way.” Saying anything else would be hypocritical. “I think you’d like Alva.”

“Alva?”

“One of us. She went through something similar to you.” Lorcan hasn’t seen her in a minute. He knew she was still alive, though. She was too clever to die. “There are certain things… Pain defines us, you know? Teaches us lessons. Shaxx says it better. But there is that certain kind *son-of-a-bitch* pain that’s there to just cause hurt. No lesson to be gleamed from it, no coming back, no healing, it just hurts. There are people who would do anything to cut out that pain, to go back to a state of themselves before the pain started. If you get the opportunity, you should take it. That’s my…”
“You almost sound like you’re an expert on the matter.”

“My best friend of 200 years, Haya, is the expert. And yes, Guardians live for a ludicrously long time.” Lorcan quickly got that latter part out of the way. “She has a thing in her head where she remembers everything. I find it disturbing when people live in the past. Where life just outright stops, and the only thing that happens is a replay of the past over and over. She can’t put anything behind her.”

“Maybe I should ask her for advice…”

Lorcan wasn’t sure what to say to that. “She once told me that she doesn’t want to wipe her brain, she just wants to handle memories like a normal person so she’d be able to heal.” It was tricky to explain. “Don’t know what that does for your scoreboard.”

“But I don’t remember anything! It’s not a question about whether I want to forget!”

“If you don’t start a new life you might get stuck in the past because there is no coming back from your situation. None. This is just friendly advice.” Lorcan wanted to tell him everything but couldn’t without Tirion’s or the Guardian’s permission. He couldn’t ruin his chance at a new life. “Getting stuck in one spot is not something you can afford here. The world is always going to move on without you and it’s not going to wait for you to get out of your own head. Ultimately, one day you’ll wake up, look around, see a brand new world, and realize that you’ve missed everything that led to it. I’ve seen too many people and friends go through that mess.”

“Maybe it would be worth it and I wouldn’t let it pass me by.”

“Maybe.” Lorcan couldn’t tell, so he returned to what remained of work. “You’re still going to have to pick a name. How did you even get to the EDZ anyway? Would think that your—” He cleared his throat. “Would think that inhabitants of the Dreaming City would not be happy with you leaving.”

“I met this robot girl immediately after waking up. She helped my drone find me.”

“Oh…”

“She couldn’t speak, my drone translated things she was trying to say. She gave me a ship and told me to get out.”

“Oh wait. Oh, no.”

“What’s wrong?”

“That’s Alva… It can’t be anyone else than her.” Lorcan wasn’t sure where to begin. She’s been in the Dreaming City a lot, messaged him daily about how pretty it was. “Don’t worry! She didn’t do anything wrong. If you can fully trust anyone, it’s her. It’s just that I’m now worried what kind of other things she’s been up to.”

“How large is this group of people?”

“We’re a fireteam.” Lorcan said, jumping to his feet. “We’re six. Me, Alva, Haya, Kouhei, Tirion, and Huritt.”

“I’ve met only four, then.”
“Yep. We get better over time. Trust me.” Lorcan effortlessly helped Uldren up. “I don’t have much more to do around here, so feel free to get to know this ship. You’re still going to have to pick a new name.”

“What’s wrong with my old name?”

“Let’s…” Lorcan struggled. “A lot. A lot is wrong with it.”

Lorcan’s words helped, but the new Guardian still didn’t have a decision for Tirion yet. He was told that the drowsiness would soon wear off, and the side effects would start. Then he’d have to make a decision. He was also told to take his time. He definitely needed more info than that.

They found Tirion in the communications hub, conversing with her Ghost and looking over some holograms of strange creatures. Three eyed ones, with violent green fire coming out of their eyes. They had what appeared to be insect plating on them, it was hard to tell.

“Hey, Tirion!” Lorcan called out, hoping he didn’t disturb her. “You don’t happen to have any work that won’t traumatize the boy?”

It was a challenge to make anything out of her or decipher what it was that flashed on her eyes just at the mention of the new Guardian. Her Ghost had very little to say to him as well.

“No.” She barely took off her eyes from what she was reading and taking notes of. “I do not.”

Lorcan hopped on the desk as he usually does, Uldren opted for the chair right across from Tirion. He noticed that gun again on her hip, the black and white hand cannon adorned with an ace. One of the small holograms in the memorial was an image of a white ace.

Must have been someone important to her.

On a closer look, he noticed that she had two hand cannons on her. The one with the ace was on her right, and one which was the same shade of purple as his Ghost on her left. The purple one had the same symbol as the one embroidered on his old shirt.

It looked like a crown to him.

Uldren saw the quiet moment as an opportunity to try and piece it together, to build a timeline in his head. This group wasn’t an expert at keeping secrets. Honestly, they held secrets as well as a broken glass held water.

He looked down at his arm, at the lights dancing on his skin like restless water reflected against stone. He had no recollection of having normal skin. It felt like it should.

He was an Awoken from a place called the Dreaming City, and Tirion wasn’t fond of Reef Awoken. She mentioned something about him being a prodigal prince. Obviously not a mere expression of speech, given that his old clothes had golden crowns embroidered on them. He was of royalty, then. Whatever royalty even meant in his world. There were no crown symbols on Kouhei’s armour, but maybe he remembered wrong.

Him, Tirion, and, Kouhei knew each other once.

Friends, perhaps.

Then, calamity of sorts struck.
Tirion killed him. She made that pretty loud and abundantly clear. She also made it pretty clear that he hurt someone. People wanted him dead, again. A lot of people, but she singled out Hunters. Whatever it even meant. Mentioned an Amanda.

Tirion was still willing to give him another chance at life.

He wasn’t sure if it spoke volumes about her compassion or mildness of his actions or something else entirely.

Then there was Jolyon Till. That phrase sounded like a foreign language to him, so there wasn’t much to analyse. Maybe a name? Kouhei used it to see if he was lying about the memory loss. He’ll have to write it down. Couldn’t risk forgetting. Had to be important. Felt like a lever which was out of his reach the more he repeated it in his head.

Family issues. It could mean anything… At the very least, it meant that he had a family somewhere. Did they miss him? Alva told him that he wasn’t safe and needed to leave instantly. They cared enough about him to give him a resting place.

“Wanna talk about it, Tirion…?” Lorcan asked her carefully, and she briefly froze when she turned the page in her book. It had drawings of creatures similar to the hologram.

“Did I mishear about you killing Mithrax on Titan some months ago?”

“No. We didn’t mean to kill him, he just… got in the way. In front of flaming hammers. And a rocket. Or two.” He recalled. “But we definitely killed him.”

“He’s alive.”

“Ugh…” Annoyed, he fell back on the desk with a thud. It wasn’t that comfortable, but he wasn’t going to back out of this impromptu fight. “Is this how others feel when they kill us? Why did the Fallen have to start with this? I don’t even care how it was done at this point. Fallen Guardians? Sure. Whatever.”

“He’s not mad…”

“Just disappointed, then?” Lorcan guessed.

“Chatter is that he has sided with us. With the Traveler. The Spider managed to somehow get him to realize that the murder was just… strictly business and… an accident. I’m lucky I got on his good graces.”

“It was! Also, what?”

“We got another Eliksni ally on our side and I’m not complaining about it. I have no plans to arrange a meeting with him, but we best not kill him next time we see him.”

“Fallen…” Uldren repeated. “The four-armed ones, right?”

“Oh!” Lorcan almost fell off the desk when he bolted upright. “Kind of sad that you missed the best of the Fallen. Well… eh…” He knew this was going to be complicated from the very start. Lorcan really wanted to tell him about how his sister had Fallen bondservants. It’s going to have to wait. “Anyway, now all of them are in one group. They used to be in their own houses. My first introduction to the Fallen was Saint-14 disintegrating a whole squadron of them by just kneeling one in the face.”
“They weren’t that threatening on my way here.”

“They can barely stab you now. Before, they almost killed all of us. Think we’ve got some books you could read.” He offered, hoping that the books had no mention of House of Wolves. “What else did your Ghost tell you?”

“Something about the Vex, Hive, and the Scorn.”

There was that flash in Tirion’s eyes again, alongside her trying not to slam the desk with her hand.

“We’ve got books…” Tirion’s stern voice indicated that the flash wasn’t just an Awoken quirk. “The Vex are time traveling war machines, the Hive are abominations who worship death and have worse family relations than the entirety of the Reef.” She fell silent after that.

“And the Scorn?”

Lorcan tried to come into rescue. “They’re… uh…”

“I can handle it.” She let him know, and quickly brought up an image of what looked like a disfigured Fallen, dead flesh pulsating on their mutilated pale bodies. “The Scorn stand for something that should never have been created. But, here we are…”

“What happened to them?”

It wasn’t a flash this time. The feeling overtook her eyes. The emotions blended together like water, oil, and gasoline. Anger and resentment, sorrow and remorse, pity and a sense of absolution.

“Domino effect coming together in a perfect circle. There are creatures who specialize in self-interest. They latch onto pain of others. They latch on to grief and exploit it for their own benefit.” Tirion spoke slowly, as monotone voice as she could make it to not reveal too much. “One of those creatures latched onto someone in great pain, filled him with darkness. He still had some good in him left despite all of that. Somewhere, deep inside.”

“Then what?”

“He tried to save a wounded Fallen Archon. The creature exploited the wish. And thus, the Scorn were born. Born out of darkness and death. The Scorn continued to wreak havoc and killed hundreds. I put a stop to a big deal of it.”

“Huh.” Uldren wasn’t entirely convinced. “Sounds like a fairy tale to me.”

Tirion gave him a sad smile. “I wish it was. Truly. No actor here is absolved of guilt, however. It also came to my attention that my friend was the one who wounded that Archon. I never doubted him when he said that he always burned his fingers with that Golden Gun. The only thing he was sloppy with…” She removed her hand from the Ace. Had to keep it together. “That’s what you get in this world. Wish granting dragons, death fanatics, scavengers who were left for dead and are as downtrodden as us. Destroyed towers and people on the very principle of extinction.”

Lorcan raised a finger. “And the Cabal! But they are barely here anymore. Why did I make myself think of Calus again? All you need to know about the Cabal now is that they’re very… luxurious…”

Tirion’s smile turned amused when she saw the nausea on Lorcan’s face. It will never not be funny to her.
She faced Uldren again. Differently this time.

“There is also a lot of good here, but you have to make an effort to focus on it. It’s easy to forget. It’s easy to focus on the faults and destroy yourself trying to fix them or give up the fight entirely.” With a press of a button, the hologram of the Scorn was gone, replaced by a beautiful vista of some planet he hasn’t been to. “Don’t let me scare you.”

“It’s days like these I miss Saint.” Lorcan frowned. “No matter how bad things were he always managed to come up with a speech with a reason to fight. His reason was pigeons, as it was one of the last things remaining of the old world he fought for.”

“Sounds… eccentric.” Uldren couldn’t find the word.

“Oh, he definitely was eccentric! He was the best Guardian to ever live, too.” Lorcan told proudly. “The Vex felled him, but not without respect. I don’t know of anyone else who got laid to rest in a beautiful tomb built by the people who felled him.”

“My drone rambled something about how excited he is to show me the glorious Last City, about Guardians being legendary heroes—”

“They aren’t!” Tirion and Lorcan said in perfect unison, and she waved a hand at the Hunter to let him speak. He could put it in better words.

“All Guardian worshipping and Zavala’s propaganda does is that it puts a category of people into a mythic status which I think is idiotic for everyone involved.” Lorcan had to admit that Haya and Saint were some of the best things that happened to him in that regard. He continued: “I’ve known Guardians who were the most grandiose heroes you could think of, and I’ve known Guardians who were complete assholes. We’re just people! Guardians forge their own destiny. We have powers and we can’t die most of the time and we’re slightly deranged, but other than that we’re just people.”

“Powers, huh?” Uldren gave him a quizzical look. He’s heard the mention of power a lot. “Are your powers just talking?”

Lorcan didn’t want to take kindly to that, but it dawned on him that they haven’t scratched the surface when it comes to explaining. He started to look for a target, ignoring Tirion’s silent disapproval. They weren’t close to done to stripping down everything that could explode on impact in the ship.

“I’ll show you.”

He found a target. A lone metal can of something on top of a console in the distance. He gathered his Light and the familiar purple dusk bow quickly manifested in his hands. With eyes on the target, he released the string and let the arrow fly.

The arrow, unfortunately, didn’t hit its intended target. It hit a thin light blue wall made out of Light, and the tether was smashed with a flaming Hammer before it could trap the Guardian responsible for the disruption.

“Lorc…” The flaming hammer disappeared from her hand. She was tall, with short blonde hair which looked like it was crudely cut by a Fallen. Her armour looked ancient, adorned with silver and wooden trinkets. Once she noticed the new Guardian, her face lit up with understanding and excitement. “Oh! If you’re showing off powers to the new kid, watcha going to want to do is—”

“Stop immediately!” Tirion interrupted with both of her hands raised, in the nick of time as Haya
was about to throw another Hammer she conjured. At what, the Warlock didn’t want to find out. “You’re going to want to stop immediately. Put that away!”

“You’re a killjoy, Tirionna!” Haya groaned and got rid of the Hammer again. “I wasn’t going to kill him!”

Tirion pointed at the ceiling. “There is a box right there that will turn this room into a firework show. That’s why we don’t shoot anything around here.”

Instant regret set in the pit of Tirion’s stomach as Haya instantly pulled out her gun and shot at the strange box in the ceiling. The room got filled with sparks, as the chain reaction led to the fire following the pipe the box was attached to. The explosions travelled until the end of the room, meeting an abrupt end when it collided with the wall.

“There, that probably took out some anti-aircraft guns.” Haya proclaimed once the explosions fell silent. “So, we adopted the boy?”

Tirion didn’t even know it herself, too tired to comment on the explosions. It probably messed up something important, but she decided to play the waiting game until something breaks. “Kind of. The line between adoption and kidnapping is so very thin, do we know which side we’re on?”

“What’s your name?” Haya asked the wide-eyed Guardian. He looked better up close. Maybe a little bit frightened, but she knows what her looks do to people. That, and just a second ago the whole place almost exploded.

“I… I don’t have one yet.” He said after a moment. “Haven’t picked one.”

“Well, better pick one soon! Tirion’s going to have a stroke if we’re gonna have to call another Guardian ‘The Guardian.’” She didn’t care that he didn’t understand the joke. “I’m Haya, by the way. No, please don’t ever say ‘Hey, Haya!’ Horse jokes get you punched, too.”

The one Lorcan told him about. “How did you pick that name?”

Haya was rummaging through a cabinet for something. “My grandmother’s name was Haya. She was in military her whole life, always looked up to her. Didn’t like my old name.”

“You remember your grandmother?”

“Don’t ask how, but yes.” She pulled out a book she had hidden deep inside. “She always told me ‘Abigail, don’t listen to what your mother says. Only reason she was born is because I didn’t feel like killing her father one day. You have control over the world and your life.’”

“She… she killed your grandfather?”

“What? No!” Haya corrected him, almost bursting into laughter at his shocked face. “Her definition of love was being in a room with someone for a long ass time without urge to kill. They were happily married for over 90 years. Sometimes you find that one person and you just don’t wanna kill them.”

“Suddenly…” Tirion began. “I haven’t heard that story before but it does explain a lot. What’s in that book?”

“A politician wronged me 700-whatever years ago, this book has pictures of said politician. I think that politician is now in the Tower.” She blew the dust off of it and turned to Uldren. “Anyway, sorry. But for the love of everything, don’t ask these two buffoons for name advice. One took it
from a street sign and a brain function, other was stopped by a dog tag from naming himself something like… I don’t know, *Ash Wipe.*”

The noise that came out of Lorcan’s mouth resembled the wail of an ancient sea creature more than a laugh. “Yes!”

Uldren didn’t find it that amusing. “I’m not really concerned about the name. What use is a name if I go through all those things you told me about?” He asked Tirion. “Is that actually true?”

“It is. Nothing much can be done about it if you choose to start a new life, though. Having friends helps.” Tirion tried to sound comforting. “Also, if you choose to remember, it won’t be instantaneous. It can take months. *Years,* even. I can’t *make* anyone remember as there is no magic potion, but I can help”

“Hold on.” Haya pulled out a chair. “She scared you with stories about the damn weirdness of your head freaking out after you become a Guardian, didn’t she?”

Uldren nodded. “You had that?”

“No. I’m weird. I know of Guardians who have. I think it’s about not hitting a sync with who you were when the Traveler marked you… I think?” Haya almost confused herself. “I knew of a crazy Warlock once who kept muttering that. Thanatonauts are insane. They’re the kinda ‘*smile and wave and back away slowly*’ Warlocks.”

“It’d make sense, but Lorcan’s different.” Tirion interjected before Uldren could ask what that long word meant. “It couldn’t have marked Lorcan when he was alive because he died about a hundred years before the Traveler came.”

“Would it matter?” Lorcan whispered, not willing to let the realization fully dawn. “What if you didn’t need to be alive in a traditional sense? What if newspapers or something were enough? Just a mention of you somewhere, just you existing past your death so to speak.”

“I get the feeling you’re not talking about ghosts without a capital g.” Tirion saw the struggle of hope on his face.

“Don’t mean to make this about myself, but could it be that someone actually searched for me?” He wanted it to be true so much it almost hurt. “That someone kept me alive for over a hundred years by trying to find me?”

“Could be…” She didn’t want to break his heart. “But, we don’t really know if our theory is correct. Some Warlocks argue that Ghosts sought out literally *anyone* with Light in them, no marking needed.”

Lorcan sighed shakily. He hoped it was true. That someone remembered him and kept him alive through that.

Haya looked at him worried. “You okay, Lore?”

“Yeah…” He whispered and got off the desk. “I have some maintenance to do. Call me if you want to shoot things outside!”

Uldren waited until Lorcan was gone to ask more questions. “What’s up with him?”

Tirion took it up herself to explain. “He was a mechanic in the army and died during an enemy raid. He never got a proper funeral. All he wants to know is why they never found him.”
“Can’t imagine that. My Ghost revived me in an open-air crypt of sorts. I guess I’m lucky in a sense.”

“Yeah, the Awoken do that.”


“To get back to it…” Tirion pushed the unwelcome image out of her head. “If we’re right, which is doubtful, that means that the Traveler marked you before… er…”

Haya hopped on the opportunity. “Before an asshole chose to—”

“Before you became what we are.” She shot a brief icy-cold glare at Haya. “We cannot give an unbiased and objective retelling of what made the two of us this way and it honestly doesn’t matter. Not sure if it means anything. I don’t think you were that much older than Lorcan when he died. It’s not much to go on.”

“Anything helps!”

“I wish I had more to go on. Anything relating to the Traveler is rather uncertain. We’ve been wrong before.” And she knew they’ll be wrong again. She felt herself getting dizzy from a rush of memories. “It also varies. It’s different for humans and Exos.”

“I know Saint didn’t have it.” Haya suddenly remembered. “I don’t think any Exos I’ve known have had that weird thing. He did headbutt a Kell and loved pigeons, but that was different.”

It made sense to Tirion. “I’d have to go back to Mars to get this straight, but Exos have to get reset a couple of times after the procedure to fix something called Dissociative Exomind Rejection. Perhaps not the same thing.” She had an idea, though. “I have to check my old files, to see if I ever investigated Exo brains. I know Cayde did have… he—”

It was difficult to say the name while sitting right across from him. Something still brought her back to that moment in the Tangled Shore.

The wishful scenario was that Uldren was now back to how he was before he left for the Black Garden, perhaps even before his life became all about Mara’s approval. He was dead years before she killed him.

She wanted to cling onto that. Accept that as truth.

Tirion wanted that miracle. Just one miracle.

“Never mind. That doesn’t matter.” Tirion shook her head as she didn’t have time to think about it now. “How are you feeling otherwise?”

“Less drowsy.” He shrugged a bit and relaxed in the chair, letting his hands dangle on either side. “I want to see more of what’s out there. Can I wield the flaming hammer?”

“Oh, no!” Haya jumped away from her chair. “No, no, no, no! I’m not putting you through the Forge!”

“Aw, why not?” It wasn’t quite a pout, but very close.

“Because my arm muscle is wider than your leg, that’s why. You won’t be able to lift it.”

Uldren wasn’t scrawny, be he definitely didn’t have the build of a Titan. She had her entry level
requirements and she’ll stick with them. First one, hold the Hammer without losing your balance.

“Come on, give me a chance.” Uldren persisted, standing up. Tirion decided it might be for the best to just enjoy the unfolding spectacle. “I’m sure I’ll be fine.”

“No!” The Titan started shooing him away with her hands, slowly staggering backwards. “Fuck off!”

“Come on, Haya.” Tirion was quite entertained by it. “Be nice to the kid.”

“Fuckin—” She rolled her eyes and sighed in defeat. Just because Tirion said it. “Alright, fine!”

Haya reluctantly gathered her Light, and with a flick of a hand a Hammer appeared in her grip. It was a smaller version of what she usually throws at things attacking her. Uldren’s curious yellow eyes followed it when she threw it up in the air to catch it again, and it landed in her hand with the handle facing him.

It all looked so effortless, she didn’t wince or grunt. He could feel the heat radiating from it, like standing next to a bonfire on the coldest night he could imagine. The metal was constantly boiling and melting but not losing its intricate shape, whispering things to him he couldn’t decipher. It was quite mesmerizing and enthralling.

Not enthralling enough to make him forget about rational thought. It probably wasn’t actually on fire.

Her hand would be covered in blisters and her clothes would be ablaze if it were real. It had to be some illusion, that she was just pulling a prank on him.

He had this.

“Can’t trick me. It’s obviously not real. I don’t think it’s as bad as you make it out to be.” He said with a voice filled with cockiness, confidently reaching out his hand to yank it from her hands. The next thing he could feel was intense pain, and only thing he could hear was the sound of his flesh burning. He immediately retracted his hand from it, breathing sharply in through his teeth, refusing to admit that the taste of blood was him biting his tongue.

“It is as bad as I make it out to be.” Haya answered his question.

His purple Ghost helped a lot with the pain, and he suddenly had a big grin on his face. The blisters were now completely gone thanks to the help of his new tiny friend. “See? That wasn’t that bad! Doesn’t even hurt! What else have you got for me?”

“Uh-huh.” She dissolved the Hammer, not a scar on her own palm or any black residue on her armour. Not even a sweat on her forehead. “I liked you better when you were drowsy a minute ago.”

“I suppose we can go and kill some things to see how your Light fares. Maybe one day you’ll be able to wield that.” Tirion suggested before anything escalated, as Uldren started to look more and more like a smug cat. She wasn’t going to allow more things to explode. “Let’s get to the armoury and find you a gun.”

“What other abilities are there? Besides the bow and the hammer.”

Lorcan was taking point with Uldren. Haya and Tirion chose to investigate one of the Black
Armory facilities further before joining the other two. The Fallen had unearthed a lab of sorts but not opened it completely.

“Any weapon you can think of you can summon with enough willpower.” Lorcan kept it simple. “Electric blades, flaming swords, void arrows, fire mallets, electric… sticks, shields.”

“What to start with, though?”

The answer was simple.

Every Guardian knew the answer.

“Don’t pick Solar, fire in other words.” Lorcan had to get it out of the way. “Don’t. For everyone’s sanity including your own, don’t do it.”

“Why is that?”

There were multiple answers the Hunter could give to the Guardian, but he had to pick just one if he wanted to be done talking before the sun set. It will set in a couple of hours. The entire day felt like a year and the what remains of it will probably feel like a decade.

“Everyone who wields Solar is insane, that’s why.” Lorcan said calmly. “They’re not insane in a mental way, they’re just weird and crazy.”

“Name three.”

“Tirion, Haya and Sunbreakers, freaking Toland, Shin Malphur, Cayde, Osiris, Ana Bray…” He listed at top of his head. “All great Guardians, sure, but everyone who channels Solar is crazy. That’s just a fact.”

“Mind telling more about them?”

“Oh boy!” It felt like a lottery where the reward was death. “Pick one because time is of the essence.”

“Tirion. What happened to her?”

Lorcan sighed in relief that he didn’t ask about the Hunter. Didn’t make anything easier. He would have an easier time talking about Osiris or talking about Toland’s demise without laughing.

“It was mostly the world. But not the world at the same time. She came pre-packaged.” He wasn’t making any sense and he knew it. “I didn’t notice until today. But that depersona- whatever she talked about? She went through it for years. I had it briefly myself, for a couple weeks maybe. Didn’t know there was a word for it.”

“You seem fine now.” Uldren pointed out as they jumped over a small frozen lake.

“The second it stopped, nightmares started. I’d rather have the same nightmare every night than the hell-feeling if that’s saying something.”

“I still don’t understand what it is. I feel okay.”

Lorcan wasn’t going to hold out hope for the new Guardian being immune from it. “I started feeling it a couple of days after I got revived. I guess a way to describe it as… you’re piling someone else on top, and your mind throws a tantrum because it can’t figure out what the hell is going on. It’s like you’re an intruder in your own house. Whatever the Traveler does with a
Guardian’s memories, it does it very wrong.”

“A brain tantrum sounds like something I can handle.”

“No, it’s hell. It’s actual living hell. If you see a Guardian dancing without any music, that’s why. As Tirion said, eventually Guardians deteriorate.”

“What helped you with it?” Uldren sounded far less confident now. At least he had some proof that it can be beaten.

“Fireworks.”

“Fireworks? Really?”

“Saint decided a celebration was in order after finding some old fireworks. Some of the fireworks might have been dynamite, but let’s not get technical now!” He remembered the night clearly. They eked out a small victory against the Fallen and took over their old fort. “The moment they started going off, it put me in this horrible trance of fear and I think I threw up all over Saint. No, I’m pretty sure I did, I remember the apologizing. Either way, something clicked in my head. Suddenly, I felt fine. I felt like myself. Then the nightmares started. Just this one continuous memory on loop. I guess it’s the only memory that could be restored because my remains were older than Haya.”

It was a good opportunity to change the topic to something more positive. “Could you wield an electric gun in one hand, and a fire stick in the other?”

Lorcan can’t say he thought about it much. Void swords? Maybe. But, focusing on just one element at a time was already enough for him. “That would technically be doable, but 150% pain in the ass to even try. No one has bothered as far as I know.”

“Sounds like a doable challenge!” He laughed.

“Ugh! Pick a name first, crowbag.” Lorcan teased. “Then you can be cocky about it.”

“Crow? Now that’s an idea for a name.”

“Suuuuure. You’ll remain a Crowbag until you can conjure a weapon out of thin air. How about that?”

Tirion and Haya were waiting for them at a place Lorcan called the Sludge. Tirion liked that place, because they couldn’t start a forest fire there. The dead trees were too damp to catch fire during this part of year. No poor animals dared to venture there, either something to do with the Shard or the heavy Cabal activity that used to be there.

Tirion noticed them instantly.

“There you two are. We have a trap set for some Taken. Just waiting for an aberration in reality.” Tirion realized that she forgot to explain a few things. There was too much. “I can’t explain what the Taken are in a short sentence, besides that they’re just shadows of what they used to be.”

“I was going to ask how to manifest an element...”

A part of her liked that enthusiasm. They never really explained that to her, though. So, she turned to one of the ancients who was trying to balance a Hammer on her finger. “Haya?”
“Don’t look at me!” She threw the Hammer up in the air, waiting for it to fall back down again. “Back in the day we just punched things until our fists changed colours. We weren’t civil about it.”

“We might have to do that again.” Tirion wasn’t equipped for this, but she had to do it. “Things have changed since my first revival. I had Ikora to help me, kind of. Titans had Zavala. Hunters had Cayde. They acted as mentors, called the Vanguard.”

“What changed?” Uldren wondered.

“The Vanguard became strained after the Red War. Then a year later, Cayde died.” She couldn’t keep her voice collected for that one, she had her hand on the Ace without even noticing it again. “That’s all I’m going to say about that. Ikora and Zavala don’t talk to each other any more. New Guardians are on their own for the most part.”

“Sounds bad.”

“That’s because it is.” How many other fledgling Guardians were out there completely lost, she wondered.

“It’s not that bad.” Haya protested. “The new Vanguard lasted only a couple of days in the grand scheme of things. It was like this for a long while. Guardians depended on each other to learn stuff, formed groups and all. Would have been no Six Coyotes with the Vanguard.”

“Haya’s opinion on the Vanguard is a bit biased…”

“No, it isn’t! It’s pretty objective.” She interrupted Tirion. “There were three things in total great about the Vanguard. Cayde, Saint, and Andal. I can give them credit for that. Everything else was a terrible idea. Everyone knows this. Let’s not lead the kid astray!”

“Guessing Andal is not alive either…” Uldren whispered to himself.

“Nope. If by whatever reason you get asked to be a Hunter Vanguard, just run for your life.” She warned him, throwing her Hammer at a nearby rock and watching it bounce. “First one was Tallulah, she got killed by a wish dragon after betting her life. Caliban was the next one, don’t know how he died. Kauko just fucked off from the world and so did his replacement. Andal got killed by Taniks, asshole Fallen. Cayde got shot by some whiny prince who couldn’t kill people properly. The position is cursed, probably by an Ahamkara.”

“The others must have similar track records.” Uldren crossed his arms. “Can’t be a curse.”

“Warlocks have only had two, Osiris and Ikora. So have Titans, Saint and Zavala. Hunter Vanguard position is just…” She motioned towards the cracked ground with both of her hands for emphasis: “Here is a nice chair, sit on this chair to die instantly if you think you can change the world for the better. Go ahead, do it.”

“Lorcan told me about Saint. How did Osiris die?”

“Oh, he didn’t. He got exiled from the City. He’s still alive, obsessing over the Vex. Aza-fucking-zel. We call each other now and then to just swear at each other. His Ghost loves it.”

“If Haya doesn’t mind…” Tirion attempted to steer it back. “When it comes to the elements, I studied whenever I could. I started with Void as it felt the easiest to learn, maybe it had something to do with being Awoken. Then I started studying Solar, path of the Sunsinger. An incident happened and I took a break from it to master Arc.”
“You know all three?” Uldren sounded impressed, but at the same time saw it as a goal.

“Knew. Down to just Solar after the Red War. Don’t ask.”

Lorcan was staring angrily at Haya through all that. She didn’t even know who the new Guardian was, so he could lay down some semblance of forgiveness. Maybe the new Guardian just didn’t hear what she actually blurted out without thinking. He was definitely smart enough to connect dots.

The Hunter swooped in as the situation was about to turn hopeless.

“Look, Crowbag. We want you to at least be able to throw a grenade at the end of day. I’d start with Void. Kouhei started with Void too, so it could very well be an Awoken thing because you guys are weird. We can’t throw you into the Crucible so this field will have to do. Sounds good?”

He didn’t get a chance to answer, as a Taken blight spawned around them.
I die fast in this City, outside I die slow.

Night always had a particular smell.

Tirion couldn’t describe it. Smell of metal and cold, place of resplendent desolation. The world stood perfectly still once the sun was gone. No fear, just emptiness.

Night will never change. Buildings will rise and get destroyed, but the night will always be there. One of the few constants of the universe they lived in.

She found a lone observation deck on the ship with a great view of most of the EDZ. The place where they fought Thumos. The room still had the scars of the battle which they hadn’t bothered to clean up yet. She held very little memory of what caused those scars still, but it didn’t matter.

Sitting on the floor in front of the window, she was trying to twirl the Ace like Cayde used to do. It was devoid of bullets just in case. She wanted to look up at the stars and shout at Cayde that this wasn’t her job, and ask him what she was supposed to do with all of this.

No answer would ever be granted to her, so she just looked down with a sigh without even trying to beg for an answer. She’d like to think that Cayde would laugh at this, but she has a recording of him saying that Uldren killing him would *piss him off*. Still, the Hunter would probably appreciate the irony.

With his memories, Uldren would make a fantastic Hunter Vanguard. He had the skills for leadership. Memories also entailed that he would start hating Guardians again, and his own curse would be restarted. She wasn’t a fan of that rabbit hole. Wasn’t a fan of the fact that the Awoken people were bound to the Dreaming City and equally cursed. All because of an action taken against them they had no say in.

It was ultimately his choice, and she’ll react accordingly.

Making amends with the past and letting go was possible, but not forgetting it. She wasn’t going to go back to being a doctor, that life was buried. She’ll use what she remembers to help if needed. She had to think back this once, though. She’s been getting through the vaults by herself, trying to form her own thoughts. Curiosity was her ultimate weakness.

Mara saw the conversion as saving lives, and transformed everyone into something that was as close to humans as possible. Full reversal was impossible now. Too much of both Dark and Light to go back, as there was no way to expel it without turning to dust again.

Tirion thought back, to her first life. If placed in a situation where hundreds of people were unconscious and trapped underneath rubble, what would she do? Would she ask for permission to do what needs to be done to save their lives, even if it involved maiming them? The alternative was to let them die, and live with that soul-crushing guilt for the rest of years.

Maybe that’s why she preferred a path which would have never put her in those situations. Didn’t like big decisions. Always excelled at being a great follower, not a great leader. Soldier following orders, not a mastermind behind giant intricate plans. The only scheme she has ever crafted failed. Some people might call her a coward.

Spiritually, she saw Mara’s actions as pure sacrilege. No other way to put it. A part of humanity reached the beautiful mythical prophesized and coveted end of it, becoming one with the universe. Heaven, glorious after-life. Stories humanity has fought wars about for centuries. She pulled
everyone out of it, and put them in a twisted hell of her own creation. Civil wars followed, as did emotional manipulation, and a grand chase for apotheosis. Distancing herself from everyone just in case she would have to kill them to further a cause. Corruption of power.

Tirion certainly understood the logic of Mara’s actions, but at the same considered her to be an antagonist to the very concept of enlightenment itself.

That would have to make sense for the moment. She couldn’t bear thinking about it anymore for the night. This day had to end, yet for some reason she refused to end it. It was like a drug.

Light footsteps echoed not too far away, eventually turning the corner into the observation deck. She saw the yellow eyes reflected on the glass, and a faint shape of a figure.

Nothing could have prepared her for what he was about to say.

“I killed your friend, didn’t I…”

Tirion opened her mouth to speak, but nothing came out, not even air. She had no plan.

Not like she was surprised. He was always cunning. The Traveler couldn’t take that away from him.

For an Awoken, she had too much human error in her. She accidentally told him too much. Almost made the decision for him. She shouldn’t have said anything.

She had to say something now, though.

“You did.” She blinked to get rid of the sting. Her fingers were tightly gripping the Ace, hands almost shaking from it. Uldren sat down next to her on the cold metal floor once he made sure that the gun wasn’t aimed at him. Unsure of why, unsure of what to do. Unsure. That was the word which defined every second since he woke up. Maybe it was part of the drowsiness.

“Why did you welcome me?” Uldren asked once the silence became too much. “Why didn’t you kick me out? You have all the reasons to.”

“Because I do not rule this world.” Tirion answered. “I have no desire to, either. If you want to stay with us, you are very welcome to. We’ll take care of you. If you want to run, go ahead. No chain for the first time in your life. I know what you’ve been through, and you’ve earned a chance to start over and not be cast out to the wild to have your head put on a Fallen spike.”

“I don’t understand how you can do this.”

“As said, the choice is not mine to make. Once you’re ready for the Last City and the Last City is ready for the news about you, I’m bringing you to Amanda.” She hoped that the day will come soon. “It doesn’t matter what I think, or what I do. Or what any of us six do. We’re very miniscule. Amanda is the one you need to listen to if you want to know what you should do.”

“Who’s Amanda?” He’s heard that name more than once, some of the people outside had only good things to say about her. Something about repairing ships and tattoos.

“You’ll see.”

He sighed. “I guess the others know who I am too and all of this has been some show.”
“Kouhei does. You two weren’t exactly friends before. Lorcan figured it out without a doubt. Haya doesn’t know it’s you, obviously. Huritt and Alva have probably been told.”

“Haya… the one who called me a ‘whiny prince’.” He didn’t sound offended, just curious about the reasoning.

“To be fair…” Tirion thought about it. “I wouldn’t say you were ever whiny. Just… an irredeemable prick sometimes. Before you went insane.”

“Oh…” Uldren winced. “Ouch.”

Tirion was about to tell him the story of how much he annoyed her when she sought out help of the Awoken in regards of shutting down the Black Garden. It would do more harm than good, so she changed her mind.

“I could spend all night telling you stories about how you were before, but…” She looked at his reflection. “The chain is now broken.” Tirion simply said. “No point in repairing any of it. You’re free. Somewhere deep inside, you know what this means.”

“I think so…”

She hoped he knew. Tirion holstered the Ace and focused her eyes back on the view. “How did we end up here, though?” She softly whispered. “One day we were laughing, standing under the blissful illusion of everlasting childlike wonder and curiosity. Next day we got put through hell, and ended up here… Only if I could pull back this veil of time to find the path from which we strayed this horrifically.”

“Is there a point in staring at the view and thinking only what went wrong?”

“With that, you being a Warlock got ruled out.” She joked. “The point is to learn, and not fall back to same paths which led to your demise. It’s important to remember the past in your bones. Remember the lessons, but befriend the tragedies.”

“Will I regain my memories without your help? I mean, by accident.”

“That’s… complicated. Most never come close to recovering any of their memories without trying, no.”

“Most? So, there is a chance.”

“I wouldn’t say it’s a chance, but some Guardians have oddities because the Traveler didn’t do a good job.” Tirion said. “Kouhei remembers bits of it, due to how quickly he was revived. Lorcan relives his death every night, but nothing more than that. Haya remembers, but I’m pretty sure it’s not because of reasons she has told me. I think she is actually going senile and losing her mind. Exos work differently.”

“And you?”

“I have recovered a great deal of it, still processing it. It’s exhausting, but the world is a lot clearer now.” She couldn’t find a better answer for him. “People will say that once you become a Guardian you become an entirely new person. It’s up to the Guardian to make that choice. Or Risen. Or Lightbearer. Semantics are the most difficult part here, believe it or not.”

“I’ll keep that in mind. I still don’t understand how you can forgive me something like that.”
“It’s not forgiveness. It won’t be for a long while.” She stood up to her feet, her bones aching from the cold. “Ask Kouhei how he can forgive me if you want to keep following this trail of crumbs.”

“Did you mean what you said about the Reefborn Awoken, by the way?” He had just one more question. There was only one thing she said about them.

“I don’t know… absolute pricks might have went a bit too far.” She shook her head. “The leader of them is responsible for every bit of pain we’ve ever experienced. A lot of Reefborn Awoken support her. Those who don’t either left the Reef or died as sacrifices. I would go as far as saying that every Awoken’s death is her fault.”

“Sounds like the correct use of words.”

She wasn’t sure if she agreed. “Get some sleep.”

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“Guardian.” A voice above her caught her attention.

“Commander Zavala.”

Zavala always looked like he hasn’t slept since the Tower fell, yet didn’t look exhausted. He was never one to lean against walls, so he simply stood next to her.

She decided to take a short moment to rest before going home, maybe try to find some more insight into things by looking at the City. All she found was a rough wall to lean on away from everyone and a head devoid of thoughts.

“I’ve been hearing good things about your settlement.”

“It’s very self-sustaining, we just gave the people the opportunity and protection. Our job is to make sure they don’t die. But, thank you, sir.”

“Sir?” He hasn’t heard her say that in quite some time, if ever. “I think you have surpassed the need to call anyone any title.”

Maybe it was sleep deprivation from the traveling Having the settlement on the other side of the pond was annoying. Nothing to lose her mind about, but it did lengthen her days. Something about his words shattered a dam.

“I’m so sorry for everything.” The apology poured out without a warning. She was initially planning to say something else, a joke maybe. Not this sudden sorrow and weight upon her. “I’m deeply sorry.”

“What are you apologizing for, Guardian?”

“I took too many things out on you personally. I know you didn’t hear most of them, but I did.” There was no knowing where to start with everything. “I behaved like a child.”

Zavala didn’t even take a moment to contemplate his answer, didn’t even move. He’s been waiting for this for a while, as too many things were left unsaid for months.

“One thing you have demonstrated to the world is that you have a good heart beating in your chest. There are still some lessons to learn on your part, lessons that the Crucible will never think of providing as it focuses on other agendas.” He said. “I didn’t approve of you storming off to the Tangled Shore. I still don’t. Your pursuit into a foreign dominion put every single life here at risk.
We can’t afford these rampages, no matter what your argument for them might be.”

“Trust me, I learned my lesson.” She prayed that she sounded sincere when she said that.

“I hope you didn’t lose your spark. There is a reason we forbid Guardians from going there. The Tangled Shore desecrates Guardians and smothers Light. I know you went to the Shore foremost of all to help people and prevent further bloodshed. That, I can honour.” Zavala watched her head slowly turn to him, a thousand years of exhaustion in those glowing eyes. “Your team never left Earth the whole time you were away. You were the ones fighting down in the City recently, protecting the people from the Fallen.”

She knew it wouldn’t stop at that. It never stopped at praise. “… but?”

“I wish I had someone to tell me this a lot of years ago: you should take time to audit what your heart wants before mindlessly acting on the desires.” He wasn’t sure she understood. “Your personal frenzy concluding with putting a stop to an Ahamkara was a stroke of luck. A war which is won by going against orders is a war won by coincidence, it is not a strategy we can rely on or make a habit out of. We need to practice good strategies, as the next war won’t grant us luck.”

“I am aware that sometimes good intentions do the most harm. How can I assure that it doesn’t happen again, then? I’m scared to help a child tie her shoelaces now just in case she’s Oryx in disguise.” She realized how paranoid she sounded only when the words were said out loud, she swore that Zavala cracked a smile in his eyes. His smiling was only in his eyes. She didn’t dare to look at them to make sure.

“You can’t assure that, given everything that has happened. Everything is possible.” Zavala told her. “The two of us learned something from it. We didn’t have enough eyes on the field, but Reefborn reclusiveness was to blame. We need to be more aware. It’s important to take victories where you can, as now we have powerful allies by our side.”

Tirion bit her tongue to not share her current thoughts about the allies he just praised. “Maybe I should read The Art of War again. Maybe it has something that would help me find sense in any of this.”

“I wish you luck. Sun Tzu has given me no answers recently.”

“It never made sense to me. No smart general would write down all his knowledge for anyone and everyone to read. I’ll believe his writings when someone provides me evidence that he ever existed.” She said. “One of the first things he says, all warfare is based on deception. Had to be a trick.”

“And it’s one thing we could use less of.” Zavala pointed out. It wasn’t the time to discuss books. “We need to work together with no deception. I’d appreciate reports of your findings and your progress. The greatest victories are those we achieve together. None of us can do it alone.”

“There is no deception from me.” A half-truth. Zavala wasn’t ready to hear the news about Uldren quite yet. She’ll tell it once she has a plan built for the inevitable snowball effect that will follow. She already decided that Amanda will be the first to know. “Just an unbreakable chain, evidently.”

“Remember that no matter where you stand, you still represent the Vanguard and the Guardians.” It got her to at least look at him again, show him that she was somewhat listening to what he was saying. “The people here rely on your morale. We are too few in numbers to be running around chasing own agendas, like Ana and her Warmind. We can’t win if we’re the ones who pose threats. We are not conquerors, we are protectors.”
She scoffed at that. “You once told me that the biggest threats have to be dealt with, and the manner in which I do so is up to me.”

“What I’m telling you now is that we all need to stand together in preparation for the next threat, and make an effort to not escalate wars.” Zavala wasn’t sure if she was listening. She has lived many lives, but her Guardian one has been quite short. “Do you know what the Speaker said to me when I told him about what you did for the City?”

She briefly glanced at the very spot The Immortal was stationed at during the Red War. “No.”

“A great shadow has been lifted from our realm’. I’ll never forget those words.”

It was the Speaker’s way of saying that he was proud.

“I’m not sure what to do with that.” She didn’t feel like being anything else than honest.

“I wonder what he would say about you now. Both of us could use his guidance now.”

Tirion couldn’t read his tone, frustrating herself. She hasn’t lifted many shadows as of late, caused more than she lifted definitely. “No matter what he would say if he were alive, I’d tell him that I’m tired.” She ran a hand through her hair. “I’m tired.”

“Everyone’s tired, Guardian.”

“I know.” She sighed. Preaching to Zavala about being tired was entirely pointless, like preaching about Sword Logic to Oryx. “I don’t want to be seen as mythic, not now not centuries down the line. I’m a hero of circumstance. I’d tell to the Speaker to write that down. That’s what people need to know.”

“Is that how you truly see it?”

“I don’t think I have the courage to lie to people and implant the thought in them that we’re mythic and godly in all aspects. I’ll leave it to someone else. The people shouldn’t fall into a hellmouth of sorrow just because I’m having a bad day.” Tirion avoided answering his question. “Guardians die not from battles, as we can withstand a whole legion of Fallen and we have Ghosts. We die from the wounds long after the war. We fall apart as easily as the people who revere us for being invincible. Fuck!”

She hit the wall behind her with her fist, ignoring the small ache.

The Titan nodded at the City, still blaming himself for the craters in it. That’s what happened when Guardians abandon their duty. He has seen hundreds of those Guardians.

“We’re presented with no choice with this burden, Guardian.” There was little chance of her actually hearing him now. “The people we serve to protect take priority over us and our own inner conflicts, no matter the cost on our end. It’s a sacrifice we have to make. The second we stop making those sacrifices, we welcome another crater. More Guardians have been felled by abandoning responsibilities than the years you’ve been alive.”

And that was the other reality. It’s how minds worked. People were in dire need for something to revere, no matter how false it was.

The comfort which a lie provided.

She had no more to say after that.
The principles Guardians live by. Devotion, Bravery, Sacrifice, Death. They both act as the trials of the Traveler and a ruleset. Always emphasis on the sacrifice.

She should go home.

Rumble tore her away from sleep, just as she was about to escape the day.

Shaxx was sitting on the edge of the bed, fingers intertwined and in constant battle. His gaze fixated on the floor, as if he was trying to wage wars with it. His armour laid on the ground. She’s never seen it treated so sloppily.

“Can’t sleep?” Tirion’s soft words made his muscles tense up, but she hardly noticed in the dark. She inched closer to him, trying to get a better look at his face. “What’s wrong?”

“It’s nothing…” His hands twisting didn’t help solidify the lie.

“It’s easy to spot lies when told by someone who shouts a lot.” Tirion put a gentle hand on his own unruly hands, calming them. “And never shouts less than ten words.”

He closed his eyes, hoping it’d help. He couldn’t do that to her. He loathed his inability to prioritize her over his own conscience. Tirion waited patiently for him to organize his thoughts, as she always does. Her hand never left.

What was the point of a little pocket in time of happiness if it were actually a bubble ready to burst? She was always curious. She’ll find out eventually.

He had to tell her.

“Not too long after the Reef Wars…” He hesitated to say the name. “Mara Sov called me to collect.”

She withdrew the hand, but it was more akin to a muscle spasm caused by just hearing that name. “I see.”

“We…”

“I know what happened. Don’t recite it. I don’t want images in my head.” The frigid tone of her voice was a complete opposite of her element. “I saw something about Mara’s conjugal visit in documents I unearthed. Didn’t know that was you until today.”

“There was nothing remotely conjugal.”

“I just like the term.” She looked straight at the wall in front of her, face too blank to read. She was trying to mask a fight raging on. Couldn’t allow her mind visualise some thoughts. “It’s shorter than saying bringing in someone from outside of the prison to sleep with them.”

“I’m not sure what it was. She used the Ahamkara to summon me there…” The rest sounded too bizarre to be said out loud now.

“Huh… Well, she is attractive. As all Awoken are.” It was hard to not growl out the words. “The sociopath made everyone attractive when she pulled people out of an after-life without consent, so we have that. We’re human shaped sins but at least we’re beautiful.” The vehemence in her voice was usually reserved for gods she wanted to bring death upon.

“It’s in the past now. Those wars were fought many years ago.”
“Why tell me, then?” She begged for an answer, suddenly looking straight at him.

“Hiding the truth doesn’t change what was done.”

Another unfortunate truth. She’s been secretive herself. It hurt the most to slowly run out of things untainted by Mara. Her friends and the forests of the Earth were perhaps the only thing that didn’t hold the royal stench. No one was free of sins. She fell back to the bed, gaze fixated on the ceiling.

She tried to not imagine stars.

Those were now tainted, too.

He wanted her to say something, but he wasn’t sure if she even wanted to hear his voice anymore.

“I haven’t told you how I died, have I…” She unexpectedly said after a while, but he wasn’t going to question the change in topic.

“I’ve heard about it. A certain Sunbreaker threatened to kill me if I told you about some past mistakes.” Her face didn’t move, but he knew that she wasn’t surprised. “She told me how you… how…” Shaxx couldn’t finish it.

“How I ended up in the Cosmodrome?”

“How you died.”

She reached out and grabbed his arm. “There is no risk of that happening again. I’m a lot stronger now. I’m no longer alone.”

“I don’t doubt your strength. I don’t.”

Tirion wasn’t sure what to look at to prepare herself. “Every friend I had slowly went away. Either died in nonsense political wars by Mara’s hand, or embarked on expeditions to impress her which changed them forever. Or… never came back. Kouhei was the only friend I had left, but whether by choice or manipulation he started leaning heavily towards Mara’s ideologies.”

“You remember all of that?”

“Yes. For better or worse. I couldn’t let Mara taint any more of the world. So, I sought out secrets to destroy her and the city with.” She felt him squeeze her hand. “The more I found out, the worse it got. She has ruined the lives of a lot of innocent people for her plans. They tried to stop me by trying to make me go insane, blamed it on leaves. But, they didn’t know of my plan. They had no idea.”

“Those Awoken vaults on Earth, that was you I presume? Even the Redjacks couldn’t dig them up. They were bound to earth with a strange force.”

“Yes. We have them secured now.” She still wasn’t sure if she made the right choice with them. “On the final week of it I was sick to my stomach of everyone who looked fondly at Mara. To the point where I shot and killed Kouhei on my way out the door. I…” She almost stopped breathing.

“You don’t have to tell me if you aren’t ready.”

“I am ready.” She made it clear. “I am also completely repulsed with myself. In a world without Ghosts, I left a young girl without a father. Even with Ghosts, after his revival Kouhei was the one who found my corpse. I ruined him.” Tirion felt the tears sting her eyes as the dizzying memories
flooded in, but she continued: “That’s the heart-breaking part of remembering. I don’t remember him as cold, I don’t remember him as ruthless. I don’t remember him being stoic and made out of stone. I did that to him. Am I better than Mara?”

He didn’t have an answer for her. No one had. “There is no reason why you can’t bring back the man he once was.”

“Maybe. Doesn’t help with the guilt.” She wiped a tear away before it escaped. “His daughter lives in the Last City now, she’s almost an adult. She adored me back when she was a kid. What am I supposed to tell her?”

“The truth.” Shaxx simply said. There was nothing else to say to that. “The full truth, and listen to what she has to say.”

“That’s what I’ve been thinking. I don’t expect forgiveness. Neither do I deserve it.”

“Some people can surprise you.”

“Including myself.” She whispered. “Pulling that trigger on myself is something that I shouldn’t have done. I realize that I could have survived it, and that a gun to the head wasn’t the answer to my problems. Nothing I did was an answer.” She murmured. “It was just an end. I should have fought. Had to be a better way to remove her voice from my head. There is always a better way.”

“You’ve fought enough for a hundred years’ worth of lifetimes since you got revived, and you would have without a doubt cleared the Black Garden without Light.” He boomed, putting the tiniest smile on her face. “But, you would have never stepped foot in the Crucible.”

“I would have found a way to annoy you in some shape or form. Your voice was hard to avoid, even then.” The smile grew slightly wider. “I strangely enough don’t regret becoming a Guardian, though. For one big reason. I don’t care about power or indestructibility. The reason is my Ghost.”

“He’s quite adorable.”

“He’s my little man. My little light. All grown up.” She whispered. “He would have found me anyway. I wouldn’t have survived long, as conveniently Hive showed up later on Earth. The zombie apocalypse…”

“The what?”

“Don’t worry about it.” She sat up with an exhausted grunt. She just wanted to go back to sleep. She didn’t care anymore. Couldn’t summon any more strength. “In Mara’s defence, and I’ll only say those words out loud once, if that fireteam wouldn’t have killed Riven as quickly as they did, I know of at least fifty Guardians who would have used the Wish Wall to do the same thing. Lorcan would be ten of those Guardians with different wigs. Quite the business idea if it just stops at reading long books to people.”

At least she still had her jokes.

“I suppose I should thank them.”

Tirion remembered how this conversation started in the first place. “Obviously I’m not mad. That was a long time ago. I’m just tired of hearing about her. Just…” She shifted herself until she was facing him so she could put her hand on his shoulder. It was just one more ridiculous thing that happened on a ridiculous day. “Let’s have this place for just the two of us. Ignore the sorrows. I need a place where I can ignore the sorrows. Give me a slow show and make me laugh.”
He reciprocated the touch. “We can do that.”

_It wasn’t a storm, it was more like a malevolent black sea. She wasn’t in anyone’s body, just an observer to the final calamity. A mere wisp recording the last moments of existence, soaring carelessly._

_It didn’t rain water, it rained coal. Black smoke in shape of pyramids. The dust turned humans into crystalline fragments in timeless space, and the dark liquid drowned the rest. It consumed their forms, turned them into simplicity. They made it stronger. There was no screaming, as their voice was taken first. Lost to the world in endless pain._

_She saw it all. She saw it. She watches it. She doesn’t know how to wake up. Is she the only one alive? One day she won’t be able to wake up from this. No legs to walk on, no body to use. No Light. Just a wisp witnessing the end. The silent end. An end where the dust blocked out the sun. Lives turned to dust. The Traveler was gone, pieces of it sticking out in the dark oil._

_It doesn’t stop. It keeps going. She doesn’t know how to wake up. With no eyes to close she can’t shut it out. Why now? Why show this to her now? The City was a black sea, and the black water kept rising. The Traveler was gone. She was gone. It all was gone._

_Wake up._

_She didn’t know how._

_Wake up._

_She couldn’t._

_Seed the spark._

_Yes. The spark. She had to find it. Had to grab it._

_Hold on to it._

_She did._

_Wake up._

Tirion slowly faded in back into reality, and a rush overtook her.

_She had to go. She had to go now. Hurriedly putting her armour on and grabbing her weapons like there was no time to waste. She had to leave now. Her Ghost had a storm of questions for her, majority of them were answered when he saw the coordinates._

_The Dreaming City._

_“What are you doing, Guardian?” Ghost asked curiously._

_“I want to stand infront of her and tell her that a ruler is a ruler. That I don’t trust any future crafted by her because she reeks of greed and disgrace. I want to tell her that she fosters cruelty.” Tirion loaded her gun as she ranted. “I want to tell her that if need be I am willing to find a god’s altar to swear eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.”_

_“But what are you going to do?”_
“Whilst I cannot criticize any action that leads to destruction of her rule, I am smart enough to know that destroying it will doom us all. She has power, and something is coming. I need to talk to her and it has to be now.”

He looked at the gun in her hands, and then back at her. “You sure you just want to talk? Quit a lot of artillery for just talking.”

“I need something in my hands.”

The Watchtower was in her sights. She fought valiantly to not be swallowed up by sadness like the people in her nightmare got consumed by the Dark. The storm of emotion the place held barely made her wobble.

She was a lot stronger now. Had to push past everything. She’ll be alright.

The enemy of my enemy is my friend.

Tirion always hated that saying.

The curse was growing stronger right infront of her eyes, Taken corruption consuming the city, its dark tentacles trying to strangle it gently.

Its persistence wasn’t due to lack of her own effort trying to fight it.

She couldn’t count how many Guardians and Corsairs were fighting there, possibly several hundred combined. Everyone bonded together to defend a cursed city, given instructions that don’t go further than execute that task and don’t ask questions why. Guardians were perfect for tasks which required mindless shooting. In the corner of her eye, she saw some of the Corsairs recognize her. Most considered it to be taboo to speak of the past, but most were terrible at hiding their emotions.

The attention was focused on a place called the Blind Well, the Blind Well, a tool with the power to split the seams between realities. Buried deep inside the vaults were the writings and schematics of Portia and Nascia, one of the creators. They were kept in the dark as much as possible about its true purpose. Huritt theorised that it’s the very thing which opens Mara’s makeshift throne world.

There was something more to it. There had to be. No one was told anything more asides from there is only the plan. Manipulated to follow it blindly, right hand not knowing what the left hand was building. Tirion approached the entrance cautiously, sensing the vast quantities of Light deep inside. She didn’t dare to move any closer. No Light of hers was going to be sacrificed for Mara’s twisted plans.

On the way out of the Well, one of the Guardians carelessly dropped a large purple rock when they got distracted by nearby Scorn. She snatched it off of the ground before they noticed. She’s seen the sketches. It belonged to the Oracle, the one created from a Techeun collapsing into a singularity.

Thinking about it was tiresome. Awoken couldn’t do a single thing in a way that was convenient or made sense.

She didn’t bother taking in the sights on her walk there. Everything was artificial. It once was a comet shrouded by darkness, and one day it will return to that. It was their feeble attempt to imitate the Traveler’s powers, and they used an orphaned animal to create it. People have differing things to say about the quality of the Traveler’s gifts, but everyone can agree that everything the Traveler did was completely driven by free will. No one kidnapped it. And at that point, the discussion of
whether the gifts were given out of malice or generosity would start.

The Dreaming City was an abomination of an attempt at mimicry. That’s how she’ll view it.

To her disappointment, the offering did not seem to work. It felt like it was ignored.

She still had her voice.

“Mara Sov!” Tirion shouted at the purple orb, and it only flickered back as a response. Mara could never handle criticism, figuring out what to say wasn’t difficult. “Too busy destroying your own people to open up the doors for me? Too busy caring about your own affairs to be a decent queen?”

That did it.

The orb and the rings around it suddenly started to move violently, getting into position.

“I don’t think that was a good idea…” Ghost noted.

“I don’t care. I need to talk to her.”

A bright light shone inside of the orb, and Tirion ran in without hesitation.

Once on the other side, she halted in her steps to breathe it all in, to attempt to process it as words escaped her.

What was this place? Edge of the system or a grandeur illusion? It was quite empowering, having the entire galaxy right at her fingertips. It was almost set there as bait for a queen. It was there, but completely out of reach. Would be excruciatingly taunting for someone like Mara.

Mara refused to be speechless for a minute at the insolent visitor, refused to treat it with any inkling of respect. It was an intruder in her dominion.

“I showed you benevolence for your actions multiple times, and now you know how to rule, do you? You understand the sacrifices I make? You’ve always spoken of good queens and absent rulers, so you must know these things.” Mara’s voice echoed on every surface it could, but it didn’t reach the galaxy behind her quite yet. “Tell me what I have done wrong!”

Tirion stood silent and resilient, with her hands behind her back. Yelling was quite telling. No answer was needed.

“SPEAK!” Mara’s intense shout shook the structures around her, lighting up her spiky throne. “What should I do, when my every action is in service of a future that benefits you?! You do not know me or the things I do. Do not dare to presume. You have not earned the right.”

Tirion waited to speak until she was sure that Mara had finished her tantrum. Mara’s throne pulsed with strange energy, her rage only making it glow brighter. It felt familiar, like Light. She could think about it later.

“We’re at a power struggle, Mara. Both of us can incinerate each other. You’ve seen my work.” Her words put a vein on Mara’s forehead. “We have something bigger to worry about. I do want to spend all day quoting people who had smart things to say about dictators, but I can save that for when a mutual threat is gone.”

“You are not on my level.” Mara spat, trying to dig her heel into the stone underneath her boot.
“You were given chance after chance, and you kept defiling it. You are not welcome here, cretin.”

“We’re practically neighbours, Mara.” She couldn’t let herself become irritated. She couldn’t, but it became harder with every second the blue glowing eyes glared at her. “And I’m here to bargain. You see me as a tool. I’m a loose cannon and I need to be tied down. I’m an it. You have plans of a utopia, but you are an autocratic leader with unchecked power who will never leave and you want me to let you put the destiny of humanity at the mercy of one Queen. Did I miss anything here?”

Tirion promised herself she wouldn’t go down that road. Knowing Mara, it was going to get worse.

Mara stood up from her throne and walked gracefully with her royal garment swaying over to one of the large purple circles in the room, where a hologram of a pyramid shaped object hovered on top of it.

The coal pyramids she saw in her dream. She was right that Mara knew something at the very least.

“You see me as evil, don’t you? After everything I have done?”

Something told Tirion that it was a question she knew the answer to.

“I see you as a desperate woman who is trying to cling to power and life, and in order to get there you need to be pragmatic to the point of being ruthless.” Tirion kept it as honest as she could. “All beings are fallible and mortal, including you. Perhaps you are afraid of death? Is that why you despise Guardians?”

The anger in Mara’s cold eyes almost tore the hologram apart. She had all the confirmation she needed that it was Theta next to her. The one who could never keep things concise.

But she always had answers and skills. What a great Techeun she would have made if not for the betrayals on her part. She could have been so much more than a rebellious child who didn’t know better. Lost potential.

“Tell me how my brother died.” Mara asked a very simple question, revealing nothing more.

“I put an end to one suffering you were responsible for. What kind of sister neglects her own brother just in case she might need to kill him one day?” Tirion had a simple answer. “He was also responsible for the death of my friend.”

“Yes. I’m sure you miss it.” She waved her hand dismissively. “Were you satisfied by your vengeance? I wasn’t. What is there to bargain?” Mara said uncaringly. “You are a child with no understanding of anything, including what I do.”

Tirion forced herself to not walk out. “Then help me understand!” She pointed at the hologram. “Help me, because this thing will kill us both if Savathun trying to get into the Distributary won’t! We need to work together and a little bit of transparency isn’t too much to ask for.”

Mara turned her gaze towards the splendid galaxy, or the illusion of one. For all faults Tirion found in Mara, she couldn’t criticize the sense of style. Only if it had stopped at style. The Queen was staring at the galaxy with ambitions to rule, to use it as a diadem.

“If it were up to me alone, I would have destroyed your Traveler when I had the chance.”

“Why didn’t you do it?”
“Because there are too many who fear what might thrive without it, and not enough who fear the wars it seeks out so deliberately.” She said, cryptic as ever. She saw the arguments take shape Tirion’s head. Mara’s heard them all. The Traveler being a gazelle, it being innocent, it just wanting to help, it having no part in the death it leaves behind. It was far from truth. “Too much of a good thing will make you sick. Balance can come down to a single grain of sand. My people were born of calamity. Who knows what will awaken when it collapses again. Maybe then you will understand.”

“This is infuriating.” Tirion’s words were just loud breaths through her teeth. Her people? Born out of calamity? “I came here to tell you that we can join forces and work together despite everything, but you willingly choose to be infuriating.”

“I do not choose to be anything. I only do what has to be done.”

“We all make choices.”

Tirion started to head towards the portal which would teleport her back. It was worth a try, if she was willing to count that as a try. Mara would never budge.

“Maybe you can understand. Shouldn’t you be familiar with not getting attached to the lives you want to save? You had quite a lot of things to say about emotional attachment, about how to save lives.”

The Warlock wished for Ghaul to come back from the dead so he’d take her Light away again, just so she wouldn’t set the place on fire. Looking Mara in the eyes didn’t make her wiser. “I have no words, for once. What the hell are you talking about?”

“Do you have a rebuttal? We’re alike in many ways. I heard your recordings. Oh, you don’t know who put a stop to that, do you? Ask the other traitor for the story, I do not possess the time.”

“We’re nothing alike.” It hurt to even talk because of how hard she’s been clenching her jaw. “The people you’re comparing yourself to made an oath that above all they will not play God. You want to become a god.”

“Oaths are fickle and weak, and you’ve broken your Guardian oath. You still don’t understand. You are an arrogant creature who is so extremely sure that everyone but you is wrong. That’s why I can’t help you understand. You refuse to understand.” Mara returned to her stone throne. “Get out of my sight, Theta. No bargains will be made. You are dismissed.”

“What is it that you want, Mara? You want Darkness and Light to clash again and ruin the world once again with another singularity? You want a paradise? That’s…” It clicked in her head, all of it. It was right infront of her, been there all along. Everything from Calus’s messages to what was uncovered in the vaults. “That’s what all this Light is for, isn’t it? For a weapon of Light to create another singularity once the Collapse hits! That’s how you’re planning to ‘save’ humanity?!”

Tirion growled, stomping closer to her, she couldn’t let this happen. She refused. She won’t let her stand in that very place and watch anything of hers unfold for entertainment. “That’s not how it works! You are not allowed to write your own fairy tales and bend the universe!”

“The Guardian of Guardians!” The Queen saw the visible nausea on the Guardian’s face at the title. “I see it now. Your people would be very proud of you if they could see you now. You would rather see everyone go extinct than embrace change and the only thing which could save it!” Mara retorted, finally seeing Tirion break. She wasn’t that resilient after all. “You are that Nightingale. You believe you get to choose who lives or dies and don’t seem to care who lives or dies, and you
brand me a heartless tyrant?”

“There are better ways to stop the second Collapse than a paradise ran by someone with grand visions but extremely questionable power such as yours.” Tirion clenched her fist so she wouldn’t draw her gun. She doubted that Mara could be killed there. “You can’t save humanity with inhumanity. Utopias are small minded and centred on the being which crafted them. And you, you are vile. No one has the right to rule the universe. Only way I’ll accept your paradise if it ends with a bullet in your head once you’ve finished crafting it.”

“You fail to answer my question yet again. Until you yourself can find another way to do your job, don’t dare to speak to me and do not dare call me a tyrant.” Mara almost crushed the stone arm rest with her grip. “Don’t return. I took you back in after you left for a thousand years, I showed you benevolence when you returned as a Traveler-spawn. No more.”

The light pierced Tirion’s eyes, and a strong force pushed her off of her feet until she was flying backwards straight towards the portal. Before she could recuperate, she was back in the Dreaming City and the purple orb closed shut. There was no opening it up again without another offering, and certainly not with her present there.

Tirion held it in all the way to her ship. The instance her body was in the pilot’s seat, she began to scream. Had to practice, because losing her demeanour in the Last City would be bad.

Her Ghost waited patiently until she got it all out, until she was breathing heavily and leaning her head against the wheel.

“Mara has no right…” Tirion gasped out the words. “She has no right!” She slammed the dashboard with her fist, leaving a dent.

“Talk to me, Guardian!” He was almost scared to fly infront of her. He knew that she would never harm him, but it was better to be on the cautious side.

“How do we stop her?” The question was asked to anyone who would listen, and Tirion’s eyes have never been wider. “How do we stop her? No one has the right to be the ruler of the universe. Not a single breathing thing!”

“Are you scared?”

“I’m not scared, I’m scared for the people.” Tirion tried hard to control her breathing. “I would rather have gods come here again and again and try to kill me personally than have her rule. If it means I have to take the position of eternal torture just to make sure no absolute ruler governs us, I gladly will.”

“Guardian…”

She didn’t want that, she whirled to look him straight in the eye.

“People had someone to liberate them before, Little Light. Always. We won’t have that if Mara succeeds with her plans.” Tirion’s voice made him recoil, but she had to let him know. “People under absolute rulership always had hope. They had hope that someone would come and free them. No one would come to free us. Not a single being. We would survive the onslaught and all onslaughts that will try to come after, but we’d be stuck. Stuck in a beautiful prison, in our little solar system. It will be rendered a spectacle for a monarch.”

“Are you sure about this?”
“Saint spoke of a thriving City. I won’t let Mara defile the pathway to get there. Even if I have to spend centuries in the Ascendant Realm fighting, I won’t let her defile it. The thriving City won’t be ruled by her. Even if it means I have to be the sacrificial lamb to forge a weapon which would bring her demise.” She made the choice right then and there. “I'll never have a change of heart, and the nightingale will never sing. I have no heart, the nightingale is gone and now I wear the wings.”
But shall the fear become the cure?

A great deal of resentment held inside hailed from belief that the world stole your life.

Beings are programmed to know that death is permanent. It’s an end. When someone wakes up from the dead, immediate anger swells up at the unfairness of the world, at the unforgivable injustice done to you. Someone robbed you. They stole your life. They left your corpse there to rot. No one ever found you. If anyone did find you, they didn’t find you worthy of a funeral. Maybe, you became the thing you hated. The thoughts can swim, you can’t drown them. Bury them and they’ll crawl out of their grave. They’ll always surface. It’s nothing that can be helped.

You automatically become a vengeful spirit, bound to this world for eternity. Some see it as blessing, some don't understand why it matters.

Maybe it was just all a superstition, and the result of a heart that was made to never stop striving.

Tirion and Lorcan cut through the grass with their machetes, trying to find the ruins of what was once a prosperous city. A prosperous city and his burial site before he became a revenant.

“I’ve tried to come here now and then, wanting to do something…” Lorcan swiped the grass infront of him, it won’t be long now. “I always freeze up in my ship. I don't believe that there is anything here.”

“What gave you the inspiration to fire up the engine?”

“Investigating your previous lives is a trend now, thought I might hop on.” One final swipe and they were out of the jungle. “I don’t know, if you want honesty. Thought it was time. Better late than never.”

A forgotten part of the world welcomed them without anything to say, the footsteps of the Guardians and their chirping Ghosts the only sound heard. Everything was fully explored by Ghosts for charges to revive, no wildlife to be seen as the meat got stripped from every single skeleton years ago. Twisted metal stretching upwards from the few buildings that still stood hugging a river drained of water. Harlow was the one who drained it after years of trying. She had to get the bones of her Guardian out somehow. He would have been found much earlier if not for the pieces of the bridge becoming his coffin and weighing him down until mud buried him.

Lorcan’s steps slowed as he traversed it, breathing it in. It hasn’t changed since he got revived, but it looked nothing like his dream asides from the lonely broken bridge. They reconstructed it once, only to have it destroyed again by the Collapse. The world itself refused to let it stay there.

He will never forget the spot.

“There were so many people here once…” Lorcan whispered as he slowly spun at the edge of what remained of a bridge. The exact spot where his nightmare ends. Where once was laughter there were now ghosts. “There were so many people here and then they were gone.”

They decided prior that a library was where they should start, assuming it hadn’t been ransacked. They were in luck. Street signs and maps were the last thing to die in a city. Some of the roads survived, begging to be followed. This part of the world wasn't ravaged by the Collapse, but by earth reclaiming it. Buildings collapsing due to a foundation not meant to last centuries, grass eating everything up due to lack of people trampling it down and keeping it under control. Cities don't die ever before their inhabitants do. As long as there is someone to complain and someone to
fix things, cities don't die. They didn't even find a skeleton, as if everyone just got up and left.

It washed over Tirion how much of the world there was to rebuild. EDZ, Cosmodrome, Last City, and the old city they were rummaging through combined made just a fraction of the world. She’s heard that some of the northwest is not habitable because of the radiation, she’s heard of whole countries sinking, heard of fields which never have been lived in. They weren't finished settling the earth before they moved on to other planets.

Were they truly all alone in the Last City? There had to be more isolated settlements somewhere. The Earth was too vast for only one city to hold the last of humanity. Had to be more. Had to be more people than that. It took a while for Guardians to show up, there were survivors before Guardians.

On any other occasion, Lorcan had little against silence. Something was different now, but it was too much effort for him to talk to just fill the silence. The nightmares have become harder to ignore in the recent weeks and he took it as a sign as them getting impatient. Obviously, something had to be done. Moments to breathe were few and far between, moments of courage like this were non-existent. In all honestly, it felt like an excuse. He had a lot of free time to help out Ada and find her documents. They had a lot of time to solve puzzles to unlock old laboratories and unearth lost forges. Had time to keep Haya away from Ada because some input wasn’t necessary. Sometimes cold facts weren’t what a person needed, but empathy. People always knew the cold facts, but rarely had empathy shown to them. They weren’t sure what they did to Ada by finding her missing piece but she seemed to be happier because of it.

Tirion decided to not accept the sniper rifle. It was Ada’s from the beginning and will be hers to the very end. Tirion didn’t feel like she had done enough to earn it. Ada was still alive. No glory or joy from taking a weapon which wasn’t earned.

Lorcan tried to imagine what it would take to anger someone to the point of getting a bomb dropped on him. He found no insight. Tagging along with Haya has led to doing and witnessing some things for Glimmer he might not be proud of now, but he was still standing. Not even Dredgen Yor suffered the same fate, but Shin’s powers have been compared to bombs.

The library smelled of mould and mildew, every single book was ruined by moisture. It was the place Hunters told horror stories to Warlocks about. The roof had a giant hole in it almost entirely rebuilt by moss, making it rain on the inside.

“Will be a moment…” Harlow informed him while scanning the first console she found, lacking the usual drama in her voice. She knew about the importance of this quest.

He needed to throw the anxiety out of the window until it was done. Put it on pause. Couldn’t stand still like that. They'll probably won't find answers, but something inside him refused to believe that.

“You lived all the time in the Distributary?” It was the only thing Lorcan could think of which was the exact opposite of the spot they were standing on.

“Don’t remember for how long. I snuck out of the singularity the second it let me, the others were too distracted by wars. Everything was on fire, even the nothingness. All because Mara couldn't admit to what she did. Although, I no longer remember where it is. They took that away from me later.” She told, leaning against an old wet pillar on the verge of breaking. “Came back when the Dreaming City was built.”

He tried not to judge, but couldn’t hide the disbelief on his face. “Why return to the assholery?”
“No one was like me out there in the real world…’’ The answer found her before she realized it, her mind running on autopilot. “I was one of the first to leave. I was a monster in the outside world. Returning to a place where you’re not a monster makes sense, you know?”

“The cost, though! I guess I’ll never get it.” He scratched the back of his neck.

“Dreaming City for all it was, was my beloved home. For a couple of decades, then the illusion shattered. Just had to be curious about it…” She said, having a hard time conjuring the image in her mind because nothing around her reminded her of it. “In the Dreaming City, I didn’t have to hide in a forest and have a mythos formed around me, or cover my face with scarves if I wanted to be close to people. I could just be me there. It was nice.”

“Sometimes I see the kids around the settlement offer blankets to the Awoken, because they think the Awoken are cold. It’s cute.” Lorcan smiled slightly. “None of them look scared, just curious. Parents find it adorable.”

She’s seen that herself. They always had questions. She almost never got offended, as they were just curious. Couldn't fault anyone for being curious. “Wasn’t always like that. Parents used to forbid them from talking to the glowing eyed creatures.”

“I’ve seen it, as early as when my Ghost found me.” He didn’t need to tell her what he saw. “I don’t think any real change started until they put Zavala at a helm.”

“What was the general reputation?” She was curious about how it looked from the other end.

“That you carried disease was one of them.” He made a choice to stop listing things then. “If you ask me, the confusion and the anger was definitely about not knowing where you guys came from. You are taking a piss in the forest, and see two glowing eyes staring at you in the dark. What do you do?”

“Sounds like a story I need to hear.” She leaned in slightly with interest.

“There isn’t much of the story besides the running away in terror. Guess I contributed to the problem.” He still felt bad about it. “The answer is that you write fairy tales about it to spook children.”

“I left for over a hundred years. For the Awoken living in the Distributary, it was a whole lot more than that. Thousands.” Tirion said, gritting her teeth at how Mara tried to use that against her to make her feel guilt. Petra wasn’t let back in until a long-winded letter was written by her. She had no plans for that.

“Hundred years without making a connection to anyone?”

“There were some friendships. Things came to a halt when my helmet came off. Sometimes you’re willing to put up with any kind of hurt just to have a conversation with someone where you don’t have to hide who you are.” Her heavy words almost dragged her down. “Glad things changed, though. For a solid minute. Is it selfish of me that my choice to not leak the documents was because I didn’t want people to ostracize me?”

“Not exactly.” Lorcan said immediately. “Would have done a lot of damage to the City Awoken. There are a lot of them who are great grandchildren, who have nothing to do with the originals.”

“They’ll find out eventually. The Hive got it and now they’re plundering for more in the Dreaming City, I don’t think the Cabal care, the Fallen probably don’t either.” She rubbed her eyes. “Now we got it, and it feels like we should destroy the vaults. At the same time…”
“Doesn’t change that a single rancid conjunction of words written in those vaults actually happened?”

“Yeah.”

“Destroy them.” It was simple to him. “Let people be happy.”

“Isn’t that technically lying? Demolishing history feels wrong, people deserve to know where they came from.”

“All of that happened too long ago and people will start crusades, if you ask me. If we have a choice to not put a burden or people or to do so, I’d pick the first one. Feels like preventing suffering is the least Mara we can get, you know?”

“People also get curious though.” Tirion argued. “They will want to know why they are blue and others aren’t.”

“I—” At first, he had a counterargument for her but then he realized what exactly he was doing in the library. “This isn’t what it looks like!”

“Speaking of that…” Harlow interrupted. “Gone as far back as I can here. This one ends just after the Traveler gets here. Need to find another archive.”

Lorcan knew that he should take it as a sign to quit and go home. But, he didn’t. Signs were for lesser degenerates than him. “Maybe the basement? Gotta be something. Let’s go.”

Tirion got her gun out just in case. Everything was too quiet and the chances of finding a Hive brood in the basement were quite likely. Everything should be expected.

“Why look here?” Tirion’s Ghost asked as he watched Harlow struggle with the lock on a massive door. He could do it a lot better. He’d say something about it, but he learned his lesson after the last headbutt. “Why not try to find the archive in Old Accra? Or the Ishtar Academy?”

“Eh, already searched it while we were shutting down some Vex fun time before the attack. I searched everywhere except for this place.” Lorcan said. “People dying in a Nobody Cares town a lot of hundred years ago wasn’t a hallmark achievement worthy of recognition to those people.”

“You’d think something like what happened to you would be noted.”

“You’d think!”

Harlow got the door open before he could think of a response so they carried on. Both Ghosts turned on their flashlights and started searching for a power source, something they could jigger with to wake up the old consoles. No alien broods found them, just dust and boxes of old hard drives and magnetic records, hundreds of them.

All of them instantly knew why the door was so difficult to open. Harlow was better and smarter than most. Had to be. No one else could have opened the door.

Centuries of history behind a tightly locked door. A door which was once only opened for students who procrastinated with their assignments about ancient history and realized the deadline was tomorrow. Few cared about what was behind that door otherwise.

“We shouldn’t expect even half of these drives to work…” Tirion tried to keep her awe in check. They didn’t have Awoken magic on their side this time. “But… wow.”
“No electricity down here, either. Luckily we have batteries.” Lorcan pointed out, taking out a device out of his rucksack. He hoped he had the wires for it all. “At least I know the year. Let’s get looking.”

Tirion didn’t even dare touch anything on the shelves, in fear that it will crumble to dust or the oils of her fingertips would damage it. Maybe if she took some time to re-learn some of her Awoken skills she’d find a way to put all this history in an immortal state, like she did with her possessions. It was natural as breathing once.

There was nothing in particular she wanted to find out. Perhaps she was just overwhelmed by the possibilities. Flying here constantly would attract too many claws, and she wasn’t sure if they could bring any of their findings home. She couldn’t make this about herself, this was Lorcan’s moment. He was sitting on the ground working a lot slower than he usually does, almost fighting through it. The screen lit up and shone light on every dust particle flying in the air. Their first plan of action was to look for old news articles.

It was time.

Lorcan tried to search for his name first.

Nothing.

As expected.

Tried to pinpoint it. Searching for street signs he has found, then he found a city. Its history, corrupted images of how it looked back then, faces that were long dead. He missed a lot of years abandoned underneath that bridge. Searched for terms in his dream. Flares. Planes. Bombs. Death.

The more he searched, he started to get the feeling that the device was trying to deter him. To warn him to not go deeper because there was no coming back from the answers he might find. It loaded slower and slower, to the point of almost screeching to an unusable halt. He didn’t listen to what it was trying to say.

“This…” He swallowed hard. Greatest words failed him. “It can’t be…”

“What is it?” Tirion asked, concerned.

“It can’t.” Lorcan repeated, unable to tear his eyes away from the screen. He couldn’t even shut it off. It was completely frozen now, mocking him for his choices. “It wasn’t supposed to happen.”

“What wasn’t?” She hurriedly strode over to where he was sitting.

He asked for this, didn’t he? Sought it out. Wanted answers to stop the nightmares. That's why Zavala introduced that rule in the first place, to avoid this hurt.

Because sometimes, there is no rhyme or reason. There is just pain, and it's immensely pointless to give a go at deciphering it. It's an endless road which constantly teases you that you'll find something if you drive for just ten more hours.

And he knew all of that. He preached about it, how there is no coming back. That if given the choice, you should move on. Talked about how it becomes a burden.

“Tirion, it’s okay.” He added. “I died because of a mistake.” Defeat over took his voice, warping it to a mere whisper. He read the blurry paragraphs again and again, maybe he misread, maybe there was something wrong with the scanner they used all those centuries ago. “They say it was a navigational error. I died because
of a navigational error.” He seized the second the machine unfroze itself to scroll down to see if there was anything more.

“I’m sorry, Lorcan.”

The Hunter didn’t say anything back for a while, just stared at the screen unblinking until his eyes started to burn. He had to finish reading it, no matter how much it filled him with anguish. There was no stopping, he promised himself. No half-truths.

He had to take it in stride, no crawling up into a ball for him. His Ghost laid down in the nook of his neck, trying to be comforting.

“A measly amount was compensated. Only time life had any kind of value to people was when life was taken by a mistake. I was one of those lives, you assholes.” He refused to register what was written on the screen right infront of him, couldn’t dig through the shock to find the anger needed to throw the datapad at a wall. It wouldn’t erase anything. “The obvious reason why no one searched for me is because my family was in one of those homes. Navigational error. Navigational error.”

Navigational error.

A person with too much power made a navigational error.

He tried treating the phrase like exposure therapy. Reading it over and over and over and over again until it no longer hurt.

It worked sometimes. At some point, it started to sound like gibberish.

Often, it didn’t. It was a chance always worth taking.

“How do you feel?” Tirion didn’t see it as a place or time to tell him what to think. She regretted the question, as it was pretty obvious how he felt. She knelt down next to him, trying to do something.

“I want to find that pilot responsible for it. Somehow.” Lorcan barely had the strength to clench his fist, or to even hold the datapad. “Somehow. Don’t care how. It was one pilot’s fault. I need to find him.”

“Revenge doesn’t last, Lorcan.” Letting anyone else go down a pointless path wasn’t on her agenda.

“In my dream, there was only one older person. Guessing it was the commander. The rest were about my age then. Kids. Same probably went for that pilot.” His body slowly drooped, only kept up by the shelf behind him. The voice which was usually cracking jokes was now a shiver. “I want to talk to him. Sit down with him in a strange pocket of space and time, and talk to him. Not about what we did. Just be kids for a moment before our lives get stolen from us.”

No one knew it better than the two of them.

It didn’t feel like closure, far from it. It felt like the door was about to be closed for good but someone put a wooden door block between it and the doorframe, keeping it from closing. He couldn’t kick it away, it was nailed to the doorframe. No hammer in sight to pull out the nails. He’d damage the door by trying to slam it shut over and over again.

Why wouldn’t the door just shut already? Why did the doorstop refuse to break? What was the
point of useless lingering?

This was supposed to be closure. The knowledge he has been seeking out.

A damn navigational error.

“There has to be something about you in there.” Tirion wasn’t sure if he wanted to keep going, but perhaps finding a picture of himself before it hailed down on him would help.

Maybe that would help it.

He still hasn’t found himself.

He has tried it before, but this was uncharted territory for most Hunters, including Vanguard ones. Zavala would undoubtedly see exploring this area as a waste of time so none of this was in the Vanguard records. They couldn’t access ancient military records in an ancient library, so he had to get creative and started to dig through the other hard drives. Maybe a photo album. He didn’t dare go the narcissistic route and search through history books, no chance he made it in those. He wished. There were many people with the same first name as him, some pictures in black and white making it even harder to extrapolate anything.

“There is something…” He didn’t dare raise hopes yet, but it could hardly get worse.

“Yeah?”

He waved her over to take a look. It was a grainy black and white picture of five young men in uniform, guns set aside. They’re smiling ear to ear. One of them was holding a tiny kitten in his hands, and a familiar boy sat next to him.

“This is an image archive of sorts, where people got to contribute... Got sent in a couple of days before the Traveler got here.” His Ghost was already finding ways to get the image for him as he read. “This is captioned as… Idiot #1, Lorc, me with Lucy, Idiot #2 and Idiot #3. Picture taken by Idiot #4.”

Tirion felt comfortable smiling at it because even Lorcan was about to start laughing. “There is more.”

He started reading the text which was underneath an image of messy handwriting on the back of the photo. “Lorc found this little thing yowling for food and took her in. She became one of us, she killed our vermin. She survived the bombing by my side. Today, little thing is 10 years old, sleeping on my legs as I go through these pictures. A great cat. I love this cat. Also, at the chance this ends up in a fuck-off historical museum, I have a message. Lorcan O’Connell: If you’re reading this, fuck yourself.”

Lorcan couldn’t hold the laughter in, reading it again made it worse. It was an acceptable legacy to leave behind. There was something more underneath so he continued reading once he collected himself.

“Brother, I wish you were home. If you’re alive somewhere, please tell me that you’re not alone.” The amusement in his voice faded into slight sorrow, but he had to finish reading. “If you are dead: come back from the dead already, you bastard. I was told we’ll meet again some sunny day. I know she wasn’t on our side, and that you hated that song. There will be a time where sides don’t matter. I hope by then we no longer wonder what happened to Vera, and that we meet again. Don’t know where, don’t know when.”
Lorcan’s hand lingered on the screen, trying to reach through like it was a portal. He didn’t remember that man, but he remembered a feeling. It told him enough. He tried to stop his lip from quivering by biting it on the inside.

He wished he could reach through, just for a moment.

It wasn’t a happy time by any means, but he just wanted a minute of that moment.

“You’ve been alive right here all this time…” Tirion said softly. “Every little thing we do matters in some way, doesn’t it?”

“More than we think.” He didn’t have the heart to let go of it quite yet, if ever. “We should transmat all of this home. Pretty sure us opening the door screwed everything over.”

“I have a transmat beacon in my bag.” She let him think. He’ll talk if he’s ready. “I can take care of it.”

Everything in the room was insignificant to a lot of people before the Collapse. A resource sink and a waste of a room. There were always backups and backups of those backups. Then it became one of the most valuable and irreplaceable rooms on their little rock. There will never be enough time to read through everything. She placed the beacon on the ground, and explored the room to mark everything they needed. She could hear the sighs of exasperated long dead librarians in the silence.

“Is it true that Shaxx is planning to set up weddings for Crimson Days?” She heard him say.

“Something like that. He has Arcite gathering doves from the mountains.”

“You know that he would go all Shakespeare and have people kill each other for his hand in marriage if it weren’t for you.”

She cringed. “This might sound like heresy, but I want to take all of Shakespeare’s books and set them on fire. Had enough of him. Get rid of him.”

“Guy had some problems.”

“Don’t we all.” She sighed. “It kills me to keep secrets from him. I want to tell him about Uldren, but I can’t. Especially this close to Crimson Days. Amanda’s been too busy, and I don’t know how to start.”

The whole event meant a lot to Shaxx. If he was happy, the whole Tower was happy.

“It is no longer a band-aid to rip off, is it? It’s kind of a knife someone fused on you with a welding torch and I don’t want to see anyone ripping that off.” Lorcan winced at the image. “It might be amusing to see Zavala shout higher than Shaxx, so all joy will not be lost. Probably.”

“What were we supposed to do?” She sat down on the dusty floor once everything was ready for transmat. “He came to us. The other option was to kick him out and have him die, or wander to the Last City and suffer a worse fate. I won’t have that.”

“Did you by happenstance happen to read the logs from the prison when Uldren got thrown in it?”

“Yes, I did.” Tirion muttered, hating that she was forced to think about that. “Cayde was my friend as the ancient proverb goes, but I couldn’t stomach it. Uldren was... Uldren, but putting a bag over his head and dragging him to a cell like his life had no value was despicable. It’s worse than
treat someone like an animal. Cayde then joked about it."

“Maybe that’s the reason he never told you about it?”

“I was pretty out of it the last year. Maybe he mentioned it in passing. Still… I want better for Uldren, or whatever new name he chooses.” She said. “I want this bloodbath to end. Can’t propagate it any further.”

“It’s not a bloodbath, though. It’s like a ricochet of pricks being pricks to one another.” He confused himself. “You know what I mean.”

“Sorry…” It hit her. “Didn’t mean to make this about myself. This was your thing.”

“Things of friends are my things.” He looked down at his device again. The cat reminded him quite a lot of the one that hangs out in the Tower. Never heard her cry for food, though. Everyone loved that cat. “Things of my friends also keep me from just giving up here.”

“You would never do that.”

“I would. I’ve been only alone once.” He began. “The Nightstalker stereotype is that we are loners, that we made smoke grenades just so that people wouldn’t stand next to us.”

“Shaxx was responsible for the latter stereotype. And the one that Warlocks are better with books than with guns.”

“Yeah…” He smiled for a split second. “This band of brothers, Harlow, Haya, our little group of psychopaths and Alva. It’s good to have things of your friends. Not sure how I would handle it without it. It’s also very satisfying to use the Dusk Bow, Gunslingers can suck it.”

“It’s important to take time for you.”

“Guess so. I only have one memory of being alone, when I died underneath that bridge. That was the only time I was alone.” It was easier to say it now, as the door clicked shut with those words. Finally. “Good to have a reminder that I’m not stuck there.”

“You’re not alone in going through that.”

Both of them sat there as the boxes disappeared into strange blue sparkles one by one as they got transmatted. There were still some vacant rooms that needed to be filled on the ship. Maybe they’ll give it to the City, but not before vetting everything in it.

“I still feel guilty about leaving after Crota.” He has never brought it up before then. Never found the time or opportunity. That moment was the only time so far it was topical. “Can’t speak for Haya. Here I am talking about my own personal hell and we left you in that exact spot.”

“It’s alright.” There was no lingering anger in her. “You had reasons.”

“We really didn’t. Hellmouth ruining us is not a reason.”

“You didn’t leave me behind out of spite towards me.” She tried again. “Don’t worry. Crota messed us up.”

“I’m just apologizing because I could have snagged Shaxx before you did if we had stayed.” There was that twinkle in his eye. “Simple! Only reason I agreed on that deal where we pissed off Kouhei was to get Shaxx to look at me.”
She’ll need her Ghost to transmat the dust off of her, because her hands did nothing when she stood up. “You just want to know details about the wedding.”

“Maybe.” He tried to not sound excited, but broke in seconds. “It’s been over a year! Tell me!”

“It was simple. Beach, private ceremony, our Ghosts as witnesses, doves, a priest that we put under five non-disclosure agreements.” She saw that slight disappointment in his eyes. She had more to say. “It wasn’t about the place. Just... feeling the happiest you can feel with another person. You can’t translate that into decorations, or to fancy clothing, or general pompousness. That doesn’t matter, because you don’t see anything besides your heart in front of you. Those are your details.”

“How much Crucible would I have to do to get a hug from him?” Lorcan looked totally serious.

“Just… ask?” She was honestly curious if it would work. “I’m sure he would give you a big hug if you just asked. He gives great hugs.”

“What about trying out my new theory that involves making knives out of Void and taking that to the Crucible?”

“Guess… that’d work too.”

When there is too much Darkness in the universe, Light must cast it away. And when there is too much Light, Darkness must drown it out. This truth is our burden. This is what it is to be Awoken. I dreamt of a friend I will come to have. She will tell me: a side should always be taken. Even if it’s the wrong side. I think I should like her. The next act is about to begin, and I do not know when I will return. Fear nothing. Bow to no one. We will meet again. One day.

It just wouldn’t leave her alone, that smothering chain around her neck. She knows that it will be gone some day.

She couldn’t pinpoint where the message came from, but that voice will always nauseate her. Of course, she had to get one final say in before disappearing. Tirion asked around the Reef, and the reports she got back indicated that the Queen was gone. Still alive undoubtedly, but no one could reach her via the engine. Not even Petra, the most loyal of Awoken.

Tirion herself didn’t have that loose definition of a burden. Mara had no right to decide what it was to be Awoken. Never had, never will have. Admitting to being her pawn was admitting defeat. Reef Awoken were notorious for never taking sides, claiming to be part light while residing in the last place the light touches. Forging artificial bright beautiful cities with the deepest darkness they can find. A convoluted contradictory beautiful insanity which she had no desire to associate herself with.

She knew of who Mara spoke of. The Stranger. That Exo. Exact same words were uttered to Tirion once, that a side should be taken even if it’s the wrong one.

Did that Exo actually have enough power to change the most stubborn and vile of minds? She was fighting her own war last Tirion saw her, communicating with someone fighting a violent war on the other side. Tirion just wanted things to stay in one linear timeline, was that too much to ask for?

Truly, it didn’t matter who she was to Tirion, whether it be a farm girl or an esteemed scientist. All that mattered was the future that Exo was trying to kill. What war was so horrible it required measures like the ones she has taken? Would anyone be able to tell legends about her still if her plans yielded success? She was still fighting somewhere, still hopping through timelines, still not erased from time. A war still raged on, that’s was the fact. The drums were getting louder and
closer, and preparations had to be made.

Tirion didn’t find herself frightened. It’s been a while since she’s been scared for herself. Perhaps it was a war that couldn’t be won, but it did not equal automatic annihilation. It was time to forge armours and weapons to *survive*, not to win. Few Guardians kill a threat in just one life. They come back from the dead until there is no one left to kill them, over and over.

But if it had to be *fought* and not endured, if she didn't take a cowards way and instead refused to let the world go down without a fight...

Ordinary weapons couldn’t fight the first Collapse. The abandoned tanks emptied of shells and battered in the Cosmodrome were direct proof of that. She had to learn from the wins and losses of the past. Imbue the weapons with Light, maybe. Transform every bullet into poison, like Thorn except on the other side of the spectrum.

If Thorn can exist, why can’t a Light sibling?

It would have to be created from a Guardian, or a Ghost, or a shard of the Traveler. Just like Thorn was created from a Hive artefact. Find a dark weapon, and then purify it even further. Shadows didn’t purify it enough. There was a person in the Tower who could help her, but a severe cost came with it. Every one of her moves had a consequence. He was the only one who could potentially get her a proto Thorn to experiment with. Had to tread carefully around it, she wasn’t going to die by Shin’s hands. Shin would never discriminate. If she goes too far, she is dead. It’s a fact she has to face.

But what about the people who haven’t been blessed with a gift? That’s for whom the armours and weapons would be for. The bunkers and the shelters. They had only one and a half so far, as far she could tell. Their stranded ship and the Leviathan. Not enough. There was the Distributary, but finding it again was near an impossibility. Evacuating thousands of people there even a bigger issue.

There were no sides for her to take. The fog covering the land was grey. No sides as far as she could tell. Very few things had black and white sides. The burden of being perfectly in the middle was being forced to spend all your energy looking out for gusts of wind, because it never took a particularly strong force to push someone too far to one side. She had to look out for those winds, had to plant her feet on the ground and try to move at the same time.

Maybe the Stranger wasn’t talking about that. Maybe it all came down to Light versus Dark. The new Shadows try to stay in the middle, try to practice the arts but not fall to Dark wholly like their patron saint did.

She didn’t know. Maybe it was just that, swaying. Either pick a side or be forcefully swayed to one direction never to return. You have to make a choice before the world makes the choice for you. Foreign concept to her. Anyone can return and anyone can collapse all the same, except for the Awoken. They are perpetually trapped in the prison in-between. *That* was their curse, that was their burden. The prison, not the knowledge.

All she knew was that Light and Dark were forces that didn’t mix together. Oil and water. You could never have both of those. Had to pick one. Awoken failed at that. Abominations of reality.

Tirion steeled herself with a deep breath. It was going too fast in her brain.

There was no possibility of going back to what she was before. There was no letting fear set in about what might happen to the Awoken once the second Collapse is finished. There was no letting
hate set in for how a lunatic dismembered her. *None* of that. She could spend all day on that, or she could use it to defy everything that has plans to befall her.

Most importantly, they always had each other. If worst comes to worst, they’ll have each other. If they have each other, they have the power to strike down tyrants. They’ll have the power to pull each other out of the deepest pits. Worst coming to worst was not a concern. It was what they did, they always pulled out victory from shattered hope.

She snuck into his dingy hideout right after him, before anyone could get his attention. His attention was disturbingly coveted around the Tower, ancient titles and names being whispered louder and louder.

“It’s the chosen one!” The Drifter flickered the jade coin between his fingers before flipping it in the air. He saw her sneaking about, they always had the same look. He would have died long time ago if he didn’t have a sixth sense for knowing when people were stalking him. “Slay any Hive gods lately? Hurts my feelings that you keep ignorin’ me here. Kills me to not know what you did with prince what’s-his-name.”

The first thing she noticed about him was the hoarding problem. Pots and pans, Fallen Captain helmets, Vex arms. No rhyme or reason to it. Nothing he could pack up quickly and run away with, either.

He was there to stay, or he has simply gotten too comfortable.

“I heard that you have a tainted Hive artefact.” Tirion said, watching surprise jab his face lightly. “I need it.”

“I would love to hand it to ya, but there are certain agreements I gotta respect.” He smirked, with dead wrinkly eyes set right on her, they grew darker when he lowered his head. “Violating those agreements would get the both of us attention neither of us want.”

“What agreements would that be?” She had doubts that someone branded as a rogue Lightbearer had any allegiances.

“A certain Sunbreaker.”

*Of course.* “I don’t care about that agreement. It applies to the rest of my team, but not to me. She’s really pissing me off now.”

“That’s Abigail for ya. Leavin’ her trail of rile in her wake. Would still have my bar if not for her. Don’t know what made your paths cross or what made you trust her, but it wasn’t anything holy. Watch your back around her, she’s not the type to drop habits if you get my drift.” He wasn’t going to complain about the freedom. “That’s why I am not breaking the deal. Deal is that we stay out of each other’s business. You involve her business. So, no can do on your artifact huntin’.”

Tirion rolled her eyes.

“I’ll deal with her if she complains. I know how to purge that artefact. I’ve read about the Weapons of Sorrow and I have my experience with the Hive.” Tirion wasn’t going to give up. “You can feed the hunger of those artefacts by burning a lot of Hive. The bigger ones you burn, the better.”

“And risk some mighty temptation while you’re at it, *sister*.” Drifter pointed right at her, dropping the friendly smile as it could not hide hollow in his eyes. “You have to feed it Light, too. But, you still came here knowin’ all that. That’s a level above insane. Normally, I would dig that. I have my
limits."

“There are three people in this system who are smart enough to know what to do with that thing. Me, Huritt, and Ikora.” She thought it would be much harder than this. “Only three. You’re complaining. Maybe you’re the fourth one, but you can’t leave.”

Capable volunteers weren’t the thing he was complaining about. “What’s your game here, hero?”

“No game.”

“I don’t believe you. You see, I know a rat when I see one. Rats have gotten too many of my people killed, and have gotten you-know-who closer to me. Too many friends are scorch marks.” He admired the insanity, though. “What’s stopping ya from taking it to the Vanguard? I have invested a lot into my current business and can’t risk seeing it fall now.”

“Complete self-interest. Does it look like the Vanguard are doing their jobs? They are barely sending out people on strikes now.”

“Punk…” The Drifter laughed. “You got me. Didn't see you getting along that well with Zavala the other day. But what you have to remember is that this will paint a nice target on your back for the man with the Golden Gun. It’s not a pleasant feelin’, have to give up every bit of freedom you thought you had. You really ready to go down that road?”

“I’ll worry about the roads.” The Drifter shook his head at her confidence. “I know that if I at some point make a mistake people will banish me and their cries will haunt me until the end.”

“Sounds like you’ve got too much conscience for the dark path.” He kicked over the Fallen helmet to reveal an old box underneath it. “I ain’t complaining. I’ll profit from this. The fall of a champion will make for some great entertainment.”

“Well. Make sure to devote a glass of champagne to me at least once it’s all said and done.”

"Don't worry about that," He put the artefact on top of pages ripped out of an ancient book and handed it over to her. "Champagne's not my thing, but I already got a pawnshop owner who has been pesterin' me for your cracked crown."
They say love is a virtue, don't they?

Did she truly believe that she was doing it all to create a weapon of Light, or was it actually a convenient excuse to tempt the Dark?

She hid her identity when she was in the Crucible to avoid bias and suspicion. Some eyes she couldn’t hide from. Letter after letter arrived to her from the one she couldn’t hide from.

The Renegade.

Shin wanted her to reflect. He knew her unsettlingly well. Her mission didn’t change at any point, and Shin wasn’t trying to dissuade her either. Disappointingly, she was forced to destroy every single proto-Thorn she found, or die. Her Ghost didn’t comment much on it. He trusted her and knew that she would never stray too far. The atmosphere was nothing to talk about. Hive caves and their rot.

But Shin… he didn’t tell her anything more than what she has been telling herself for years now, and he was perfectly aware of it. His job wasn’t to create an intervention for her, or to serve as a warning. He knew that she was smart enough to know the odds and consequences.

It wasn’t Zavala’s constant speeches about what a Guardian is and what a Guardian should be and how there should be no deviation. It wasn’t Saladin’s growls about how today’s Guardians aren’t good enough and him painting a picture of what she should live up to and more. Wasn’t Mara’s scoffs about how Guardians aren’t even worthy of a humanizing pronoun.

Shin’s words were like the ones of a friend. His job was to give her something concrete to hang onto, to keep her afloat.

Once you’re in the deep dark, you forget about the existence of reflections. You forget about your own thoughts. You need that voice to keep you grounded, you need it to keep you from drowning.

That’s where she was at the end. In the deepest Hive tunnel, the Last Word in her hands. There was also a lot of blood. The Hive didn’t bleed and she was all alone.

Too much blood.

Everything smelled like dried iron. She stood in the shower until she lost track of time, the smell wouldn’t go away. The Hive gunk and mud eventually cracked off, and it’s all she could ask for.

Tirion wiped away the fog on the mirror, taken aback for a second when she saw who was staring back. Will take a minute to get used to the hair. It wasn’t as short as it was a long time ago, cut just enough so she’d be able to wear a helmet and would have less Hive gunk to clean.

She’ll probably remain inside for the rest of the day. The petals always reminded her too much of blood.

“Guardian?” Her Ghost quietly crept up. She was dressed in the first clothes she found around and sitting on the couch with her head in her hands. She remembered everything that happened, which was new. But she learned that it came with questions like why it happened. “Are you alright?”

The Last Word was on the coffee table right infront of her. Wasn’t a replica this time. The real thing.
He told her that they’ll never meet, and she was its new wielder.

There was nothing deserving of it to her about it.

“My head hurts.” She tried to not sound like she was whining. “Hoping that mixing tea with liquor cabinet will help. And no, it wasn’t your fault.”

“Every time I can’t help you…” He watched as she turned to look at him with her swollen eyes. “It feels like my fault.”

A small smile graced the corner of her lips. “You are the best Ghost. No other Ghost to my knowledge is better.”

“Well…” He could name five.

“Whoever you want to name, they’re not better. You came back from the dead, just like me. You’re special.” She carefully pulled him closer and wiped some of the dirt off of him. “No Ghost is better. You just happened to find a Guardian who is a nightmare to deal with.”

“You’re not a nightmare.” He chirped.

“Compared to other Guardians, I’m at least a handful…” Tirion let him go once he was as clean as she could get him. The new shell held up fantastically well. “Don’t worry if you can’t heal me. I’m not really going through things as the Traveler intended.”

“That’s slightly comforting.” He chirped happily. “I think your tea is ready.”

The thing she made wasn’t legally allowed to be called tea. It was closer to a muscle relaxant. Didn’t dare to risk painkillers.

Maybe she’ll have a relaxing day.

Maybe she’ll ruin it for herself.

“Call Haya.” Couldn’t stand still. “I need to make my day worse.”

“On it.”

Haya cared about her friends. In retrospect, perhaps the only thing she could be trusted with. For better, or for unacceptably worse. Filters on life were for amateurs of it.

“What’s up?” The sound of clanging metal in the distance almost drowned her voice out.

“Why did you make the deal with the Drifter behind my back? To start.”

“Oh…” She was heard running to get away to a quieter place. “He is a very short man and too much of a pussy to reveal his real name. He does weird shit and he would have gotten you to do his weird shit while you were grieving Cayde, and—”

Tirion didn’t know why she didn’t want to hear more, but the earpiece was on the other side of the room and the call was forfeited before she realized that the reasons didn’t matter.

She just didn’t want to hear it. It was a holiday celebration.

“World has got to be coming to some kind of end when you can’t tolerate Haya…” Ghost carefully transmatted the earpiece to the counter so it wouldn’t get forgotten.
“I like her. She’s still my friend. She is how sunlight feels.” Tirion relaxed in the couch. “Sunlight during a hangover that is. It’s there, it hurts. But everyone including you needs the sun.”

“You’ve been spending too much time with Lorcan judging by that comedy.”

“Maybe. Reminds me that I need to talk to Huritt. I’m not giving up on my pursuit.”

“I’ll get a message sent. He’s been difficult to contact lately. Something about some scripts they’ve found.”

Tirion leaned her head back in exhaustion. “We’ll discuss that too.”

Ghost couldn’t keep his eye away from the fancy new weapon, though. It was the weapon. They had a lot of replicas before the attack, a great deal of them were sold to fans of the famous renegade. Made Shaxx’s job fun. “Hey, should we take this to the Drifter just to brag about it?”

“You mean easily see if his Ghost is still alive or not, because it might outright kill him?”

“I’ll be always ready for any resurrecting.”

She shouldn’t. She really shouldn’t. Amusement was hard to come by, and she didn’t think that Drifter could do much. Not in the middle of the Tower. He would be amused by the fall of the champion, but he would not enjoy being the direct cause of the fall. He liked to be a bystander. Especially during days like these.

When Shaxx’s voice was heard across the planet, Drifter preferred to be a bystander somewhere in Saturn’s orbit. His dreams didn’t always come true, he gave up dreaming when chasing nightmares in the waking world became a hobby. He was one more shout away from plugging his ears with Vex milk he had lying around. Some part of him felt ashamed that his sight went before his hearing did.

No matter how shot his sight was, that gun will always be sharper than any sword in his eyes.

“Hey!” The Drifter stopped himself from stumbling backwards over the junk on the floor. “What the hell are you doin’ with that gun? That’s the Last Word!”

“You are always free to ask the man who gifted it to me.” Tirion was as confused as him, but she wasn’t going to tell him that. She didn’t even want to twirl it.

He couldn’t say the name out loud, afraid that it would summon him. “Oh you…” No one could tell if his voice was an exhausted sigh or an impressed gasp. “You are such a punk. Trying to play both of us, huh? You are insane. I dig it.”

Tirion didn’t believe it was possible to sound both livid and adoring at the same time.

“I’m not playing any of you. I just need the Thorn. Haya’s agreement is still in effect to some extent.”

“You better decide on a course, kid. By the looks of it you don’t have any. I saw how you played with the dark.”

“I have a course.” Tirion let him know before turning around to get out of the garage. Not because she didn’t have anything more to say, but because it felt like a death-trap. Wouldn’t put it a past him to have a Fallen baby hidden somewhere.
“Ask yourself: What’s to stop that man from doing you in like he’s done with so many of my friends?” It got her to freeze slightly right next to the gate, and she looked back at him and the unnerving smirk.

“Nothing to stop him, he told me as much.” She said. “But, do you not see that my skin is blue? Lingering between is a genetic defect. I’ll never fall to either side.”

“The Awoken…” Drifter waved it away. “You and your slumberin’ city are easy on the eyes, that’s what makes it messed up. I can’t see you and royalty exactly getting along with all the kings and princes you’ve killed.”

“I’m a defector. I am on no side, if that’s what you’re wondering. Won’t sell you out.”

“Figures.” Something told him they’ll get along just fine. “I’ll be seein’ ya. Punk.”

Every year Shaxx has a goal to make Crimson days more extravagant than the last. Always a success. He was in the middle of narrating a match, she tried to not intervene in the shadows. To her surprise, he grabbed her arm mid yelling about a Guardian blowing up another Guardian in the name of love, and pulled her to him. None of it put a dent in his speech. He held her close, earning some whistles from bystanders.

There was the slightest bit of fear that he was going to throw her at some point, specifically when all four Guardians on the field were supercharged.

She always had her Ghost.

The match concluded without her being thrown, with a decisive victory for the team with a Hunter and a Warlock.

Feeling a little bit coy, she decided to see how fast he could turn off his microphone.

“What if we let the winner of Crimson Days join us for a night?”

Answer: before she could blink. A power she would never abuse because she knew how important the Crucible was to him but it was the most tempting one.

“Quite the proposition…” Shaxx turned her laughing form to face him. “Would have to raise the stakes.”

“That so?” She but her lip and gently grabbed his medallion.

“Crucible isn’t sufficient enough training for the competition you’re thinking of.” He growled, smirking underneath the helmet. “I’d fight for you. A fight isn’t a fight unless the challenge is sufficient. I want a challenge.”

“Raise the stakes then.” She teased. “No fun for me if it’s one sided. No preference.”

The crowd next to them was getting a little bit too close for comfort, but all it took was a prolonged glare to get them running for the nearest hills.

“That can be arranged—” He stopped, dropping their game when he saw the crimson trail on her face. “You’re bleeding.”

He was about to reach out to help her, but she quickly wiped the blood off that was coming out of her nose with her sleeve. “What happened?” He softly asked.
“I pushed myself a little bit too hard with my resurrecting abilities earlier.” Her Ghost was dancing around her, trying to heal her. It didn’t bleed much, just enough to force her to find another shirt if she didn’t want to make people think that she killed someone. “We were hunting some Hive who didn’t want to die. I’m fine, just got creative with my limits.”

“Nothing wrong with pushing limits, but…” Shaxx sighed, cupping her face. “Don’t let it kill you.”

“I won’t.” She glanced behind her, the Guardians were readying up for another match. “Thought I could cut the amount of Light needed in half for my abilities. Technically, I could. Technically. It hurt a lot.”

Wouldn’t be a wielder of solar energy if not for risks. “Be careful, Hivebane.”

“I will.” She looked down at her sleeve. She had to go and fix it, no matter how much she wanted to watch Crucible matches in his arms all day. “How many times will you be fine with it, though?”

“I trust you enough.”

It was as far as that was going to get without her being able to see his face. “Don’t forget the microphone.” She almost made him late to the match with the quick hug.

She had to find out what exactly went wrong. She knew of only two Sunsingers, neither one of them available for a quick conversation. One was dealing with the Vex, other one was a lonely orb in the Ascendant Realm.

It just emphasised the importance of the Vanguard. Sunsingers were more reclusive than before, with few left after the Red War. No books written by Thanatonauts were introductory instruction manuals for beginners. Most were about where to drown yourself if you want to experience a specific vision, and how to befriend Deathsingers with some margins of failure. Some hold the belief that it’s the primary reason why some classes go extinct. No one to lean on and ask advice from. Gunslingers were most prevalent for a reason, Cayde was a great teacher. Voidwalkers owe their popularity to people striving to be as feared and respected as Ikora. As for Titans, entirely dependent on who you asked. Warlocks will scowl and say that Strikers manifested from a great love of plummeting down from a building. Hunters will claim that they can do better. Some Titans will say that Strikers are the best because of multifunctionality, how you can both destroy and defend in one slam. Other Titans will get angry at the scowling Warlocks and showcase exactly how cool it looks to jump off the Tower and slam down.

She hoped that one day they will have a proper school for Guardians, but then again most notable classes were developed out in the wilderness.

It still would be nice to have someone more experienced than her to lean on.

“Explain to me what happened again?” Ghost wanted to know. She did her best to hide the sleeve to not raise further concern.

“I’m a dishonourable duellist?”

“That I got.”

She set herself on fire before the arrows of the proto Thorn could smother her Light, came back, and shot Enkaar before he could figure out what happened. It was clever, but not honourable. Issue at hand was that she burnt back to life more times in per minute than it should be possible. Enkaar was as dishonourable as her, as she was told that duelling first involved an apology.
“I think I pushed myself too hard.” She couldn’t think of any other reason. “I knew that just getting touched by the darts meant instant death. Put enough determination and unwillingness to die into someone, and they gain the ability to turn lifeforce into Light.”

“I want to say *let’s not do that again*, but…”

“Can’t escape the Hive caves.” She could face them now. Maybe, she’ll go back to the moon eventually. “But I won’t do that again if it can be avoided. Those darts weren’t purified.”

They avoided Guardians in a hurry by taking a route through the lower levels of the Tower. Didn’t feel like telling fancy stories about her last adventure. At the risk of being overheard, they waited until they were back in the apartment to talk.

“Are you sure it will work?” Ghost asked as she rummaged through clothing. “What makes you think that purifying a Weapon of Sorrow is better than dousing a normal weapon in Light?”

“I’m not entirely sure.” It was the best answer she could give. “Light shall come out of darkness, Light is always born out of darkness. That’s the constant. Every Guardian who has lived for more than a year grazed darkness, either via death or via actions or via things they’ve been forced to endure— doesn’t make much sense, does it?”

“Not really.”

“I’m basing a theory on poetry, but I’m out of ideas.” She wasn’t going to give up until proven that it wouldn’t work. “It would be a ridiculous coincidence that nearly every scripture is about how light is born out of darkness, and darkness is devoted to infinity itself to destroy every single spark. Light being born out of darkness is the only consistent aspect of it all. That, and the end of the world.”

The Ghost flied closer to her face to examine her. “I’m not sure if that makes sense or if it was a hit in the head.”

“Nothing makes sense around us. I’m related to a race who took sense and broke it to pieces.” An idea hit her. A pair of old Warlock robes. Could be always modified. She lifted them up right infront of her. “I remember those Iron Lord artefacts, their charms imbued with strange energy. I think it was Silimar’s charm that was one of my favourites.”

“Shame we lost it.”

“Hm…” It was possible, but where to start? “Thorn is like a poison against Light. If I could somehow make a robe which negates poison…”

“It would work only for the cleansed Thorn, wouldn’t it?”

“Yes.” She could flesh out the idea later. “I need to find that gun. As quickly as possible. No reports about Savathun, either. Has Huritt said anything?”

“No. Not yet.”

Tirion looked down at the robe. “I think he’s trying to find Eris. I think they knew eachother before.”

“I still expect her to chant something about the Hive when we turn a corner in the Tower.”

“She’s the only person who could help us now.” Tirion murmured. “And she left towards Mara’s
general direction."

“We’ll find her.”

“If Huritt doesn’t respond in a couple of hours, we’ll seek him out. We’d know if he’s in trouble. For now…” She discarded the robes and stood up. “Let’s just take a minute to breathe.”

“There was one thing I didn’t tell you.” It was Kouhei’s voice disrupting the small amount of peace she had. Tirion was overlooking the City, leaning on the railing. One day she’ll get used to the petals. One day. She’ll tell herself that every year.

“What is it?”

He got straight to the point, for better or worse as usual. “Mara knew about your plan, and ordered me to destroy the fuse so that what you were planning would never come to fruition. I buried the fuse instead of destroying it.”

The other traitor. The one Mara was shouting about.

In another life, she would have stormed out. In another life it was about how much work she put into that plan, not the unintended consequences of her plan. Just as Shin said. Every path is shared and carries a consequence.

That was a lesson which was learned only after she got revived.

“Thank you…”

He didn’t understand why she was thanking him. He remembers the stranger that inhabited her during her last month of her previous life.

Zavala once proposed a deal to the Reef after Mara died. He offered them safe refuge in the Last City, only cost was renouncing their queen. In another life he’d question what kind of cruel world it was where that didn’t happen ten years earlier. She could have saved a lot of people, the vaults had records of everything that happened. She was seeking to bring liberation to the Awoken.

Kouhei put a stop to it. It was not a dedication to Mara that made him do it, but revenge. That’s why he has been able to forgive her. He already executed the payback for what she did.

He could not feel any worse for it.

“You put your whole life into that plan.”

“I put a lot of hatred towards one person into that plan.” Tirion said, watching Alva try to befriend a dove below. “If it would have gone through, it would have hurt a lot more people than one.”

“Mara didn’t halt Oryx to help anyone outside of the Reef. A lot less of our people would have died if the Taken War would have happened during the reign of a different queen.”

“At first, I thought that no matter what, she still somehow helped us…” It hurt to say those words so close together. “Then, I found some newly recovered footage of the onslaught. Oryx was toying with them throughout the battle. He destroyed more of his own when wiping out the Awoken fleet than the Awoken destroyed of his.”

“You admire that beast?”
“No. No friends in murderers of my enemies. It just shows that he had limits. The weapon still worked when I crash-landed on it. It definitely was still operational. Sitting in the rings of Saturn was a strategical choice, not one imposed on him.”

“The King is dead.”

“Kings don’t die, they just select an heir. Killing an ideology hard, my plan wouldn’t have scratched it. Mara’s Techeuns wouldn’t have left, and that’s the only thing she needed. Riven’s job was done.” She was doing a bad job with her point. “The Awoken living far away from the Reef do not deserve to be punished for the sins of their creator.”

“Then rewrite it.” Kouhei suggested, very matter of fact.

“Rewrite it?” She almost recoiled. Tirion couldn’t do it. It would be akin to tarnishing history.

“Alis Li.” A forgotten name left his lips. A name of grief and injustice. A name that history should remember. “Make it about her. Don’t give Mara the recognition. Tell the tale of the good Awoken, the brief moment of peace under her rule, of how she was sacrificed. About the horrors she suffered. Don’t even mention Mara’s name.”

“Wouldn’t that be a bit biased?”

“No. It’s the same story told, except from a different angle. Alis’ story deserves to be told.”

She knew it better than anyone that curiosity couldn’t be stopped. The Awoken deserved to know where they came from. They also deserved a life where they were represented by someone who loved them, not someone who would throw them to the wolves.

Tirion wouldn’t have to even take credit, just sneak in a book in one of the libraries. What was censorship and what was a retelling from another angle?

“I’ll do it.” She nodded, not having better ideas. “Speaking of, where is the other bird?”

“In a state of delirious desire to get a Hammer of Sol thrown at him.” Kouhei pulled out his datapad to make sure. “Or in the EDZ. Told him to find an NLS drive.”

She saw an image of a map on the device. “You’re tracking him?”

“Just his Ghost, who naively let me.” He said. “They both know.”

“What happened to the ship Alva gave him? It was enough to get him here from the Reef.” She saw a twitch on his face. “Kouhei.”

“The Fallen dissected it. Stole the whole ship. Entire thing.”

“Kouhei.” She repeated, more disappointed this time.

“After finding out that he was alive, I crashed his ship down from orbit. The Fallen swarmed it like ants and pulled it apart.” Kouhei told. “He barely remembered Jolyon when he was in prison. Had to crash his ship and don’t give him a way to run away until I’m sure he’s not an infiltrator.”

“And?”

“I’m past point of caring if he is, and he is annoying me.” He pocketed the datapad. “He’ll survive.”
“You could get along instead.”

The Titan groaned. “Threta, I’m not going to the Dreaming City to drag Jolyon here so that the child would be productive for once in his life.”

She didn’t hear much after that name. He’ll call her what he knows her.

“All of this will give me a good reason to take him to Amanda.” At least she had a start now. “He’s smart, though. Might want to get to EDZ to see if he hasn’t fiddled with the tracker.”

Just what he was about to do. His Ghost gave her a small wave with her shell before they both disappeared to orbit.

“No response from Huritt yet.” Her Ghost said. “Do you want to wait or do you want to go?”

“Let’s go.”

Tirion was back in the city she hated, not the one of the living dead though. Huritt was showing up on the NavPoint at least, no response from his Ghost or him. They never wait to respond.

“Don’t!” A female voice somewhere behind her hissed out the warning. One of the several corsairs in the blue crystalline cave. “It’s taboo!”

“How is it taboo?” A slightly younger voice demanded to know. “It’s her!”

“It’s not her.” The first voice stopped her. “It’s not her. That’s why it’s taboo. They’re never them.”

“I don’t care!”

“Elia!” The older voice couldn’t budge the girl, one of the few times she couldn’t. “Ealasaid, do not do this!”

Not that day. She’ll volunteer to take the post in the Monastery once the curse reaches full strength, swim in the sea of Taken. This was too important to be obedient.

“Threta?” Elia called out cautiously, earning a slight glance from the Warlock. The corsair removed her helmet, revealing slick black hair and murky blue glowing eyes underneath. “Is that you? Do you… do you remember me?”

Too many distracting memories. Too many feelings. Had to push it aside. It’ll consume her like a flood later, but she couldn’t afford anything in that moment.

“I don’t have time, Elia.”

Elia refused to yield that day, clutching onto unfamiliar inspiration and the familiar rage slowly boiling inside her. “You go away for ten years and you don’t have time?” She insisted on following the Warlock and not letting her get away. Not again. “Now, you’re going to stroll back into the Dreaming City, as if nothing has happened?! We have a curse on our hands!”

“Leave me alone.” Tirion only cared about finding Huritt, not how her frigid voice almost froze the corsair who was now infront of her.

“I loved you!”
That did it. That desperate outcry did it. Tirion almost melted the innocent datapad in her hand.

“I remember you not being there for me. Keep on doing that, and leave me alone.”

“Me not being there for you…?” Elia repeated slowly, becoming queasy from the words, as she processed it before defending herself. “You alienated yourself from me and everyone! Then, you left the Reef. How am I supposed to feel?”

“I want you to repeat that sentence a couple of times and get back to me, yeah?” Tirion glanced down at the device once she was done with her demands. The tracker wasn’t moving. Huritt always moved, only one who could rival her in not being able to sit still. In his case, there were always notes to be taken and finding a space on the wall to stick them on.

“What did I ever do to you, Threta?” The rage fading almost made her collapse, replaced with something that was neither sadness nor anything else.

“Same story told, except from a different angle, huh…” She mumbled, summoning a Sparrow just so she could get away. “Fine. See it that way.”

“Threta…”! The Corsair had to jump back to avoid being burnt by the trails of the sparrow. In Tirion’s mind, the meeting didn’t even happen. She had to make sure that her friend was alright. She jumped off the Sparrow when her earpiece started beeping, telling her that she arrived.

He was there, but not there at the same time. Technology told her he was there. Facts told her he was there. Her eyes told her that he wasn’t.

Huritt should be right where she was standing.

There was that small crack in reality, one that could be torn open with enough force of the mind applied to it.

Tirion shivered slightly. It was not fear. It was something else. She couldn’t enter the Eleusinia when she intended to kill Dul Incaru, so Kouhei had to replace her. It was not fear, she knows fear. It was comparable to something or someone grabbing her shoulders and pulling her back.

“I don’t understand…” Her Ghost murmured. “I don’t detect him, I have tried running Alva’s anti stealth scan, nothing…”

“I do. Come on.”

She distinctly remembered the place. It was off limits to her, but no ruleset stopped her from stumbling upon hidden chasms and secrets. The Taken infestation undoubtedly opened their fair share of portals to the place, but she knew the real path. The monastery in Rheasilvia to the right of the Watchtower, the Harbinger’s Seclude. Bushes of Asphodelias were there for decoration, the purple hued walls pulsated with strange energy.

She was distracting herself on purpose.

Past the statue of Alis and down the stairs past Sjur’s chamber was a pit. Technically an elevator. Nodding at her Ghost to prepare himself in case it goes wrong, she gathered her light and slowly hovered down. She didn’t remember what the place was called, but the statues of the women always disturbed her. Five big statues and twenty-four smaller ones. The fourth big one was missing a head and her ball.

“Creepy…” Ghost commented. “What is all this?”
“A history book.” She said. “I could be wrong, but I think the big statues are the Techeuns the Aphelion killed. We’re in a hurry, though.”

It was also where they stashed the Tinctures.

Tirion shouldn’t be doing it, given her history. The tinctures lead only to the darkest road. It’ll only be a one-time thing. Normally it required a tribute, but other Guardians have been careless so there was plenty to grab around the ancient Ahamkara skull. The liquid inside of it sought escape manically. She ran back to where the tracker was leading her to, and took a swig. It tasted like nothing, like dust except without drying out her throat and choking her.

Reality itself ripped itself apart, and a portal appeared right in front of her. Priority was to find Huritt, not worry about her personal qualms.

A place so bereft of joy the greyness of it muted her own bright colours. No wind yet a storm.

“You!” A deep voice desperate to echo against a wall shouted. Nothing echoed in that place, amplifying the sounds of death around her. Maybe that was only in her head. “Why would you come here? There is no place less suited for the likes of you, walking in the dreamland of your enemies.”

“Hello, Toland.” The glowing white ball didn’t react. She hoped he wasn’t intimidated by all of her unbridled excitement to see him.

“You know my forgotten name yet not know that there is no place less suited for the likes of you. A strange creature you are.”

“Go away, Toland.” She jumped to the next platform she could see in the dark. She couldn’t bet on her Light working there, nor could she afford to take risks. The Ascendant Realm wasn’t going to become her or anyone’s resting place that day.

“Go away?” The orb scoffed. “I want to appear in the Tower and taunt them, lo, lo, I never sleep, I dance in light and shadow, I never sleep, I will never die…”

To her, he sounded like he was dying. He didn’t know that there was no one for him left to taunt at the Tower, or that his precious weapon was destroyed.

She’s seen him before. Or, at least something which resembled his current form. “When we were killing the King, was that you helping us to hop between?”

“Why would I help six fools who couldn’t take Oryx’s throne?” Toland shot back. “You could have been kings and queens, not plundering doomed cities for survival. Gah!”

“Taking that as a no.”

Another platform, more grey. It put her further away from the NavPoint but it was the only road she was presented. There was no portal to bring her back. Had to focus no matter what.

Toland could sense how lost she was. No matter where she ran, even if it was right towards her target, she got further away. Not just in this realm. Tirion was right at home in the Ascendant Realm, her refusing to admit it didn’t negate anything about it being a fact. She would thrive in this world. This detached world, the wonderland of the diamond city. She didn’t fear the horrors found inside, no. She was scared of the truth, that this was where she truly belonged.

“You’re here to find your friend.”
“Have you seen him?”

“Follow the screams.” The orb disappeared and an inhuman shrill followed. He appeared on a platform below her, brightest spot in the distance. Following him was the best lead she had and he wasn’t pleased with that choice. “There are no guides here. It is a place of scheming queens & traps unsprung. You are a brave light, but a stupid one, too.”

The deeper she got the closer she got, but there was still quite a lot to go. Tirion wiped the sweat off her brow. There was no concept of time in the Ascendant Realm. No clue for how long she has wandered, or will wander for. She had to dive deeper to make herself known. An ocean without the water, the pressure was the Dark. Her Light faded with every yard she descended. How will she be able to swim back up now?

“Come now, you’ll have to be cleverer than this to break through.” Toland mocked her. It felt like she was close, and she’ll believe her own feelings. “Sharpen yourself.”

Maybe she could fit him in her empty Tincture bottle, but she couldn’t act on any of that.

“I know this curse can’t be ended as it’s the universe rejecting a foreign body, so tell me about it. A Vex mind and Savathun are involved, correct? We’ve read the Books of Sorrow.”

“Quuria is the key.” He travelled further down with her, staying by her side. “The Mind simulates Oryx, and thereby masters the power to Take. But of course, Quuria is no power unto itself.”

“How about Savathun?”

“The curse itself is how the deceiver manifests; she has learned from her brother’s death. Clever girl, clever girl…”

Three people that could apply to. “She has learned to hide better. No better place to hide than The Distributary. The things she could do with unlimited time it could provide…”

“You think you have it all figured out. Knowledge is its own end.”

Close. Closer. She could feel his Light. “I don’t. I never have anything figured out.”

The first speck of light in ages entered her vision. It was a strange temple, illuminated with abandoned lamps. She sensed Light, but the deep was starting to wear her down.

“Listen! Do you hear them respond to your presence?” Toland whispered. “Commands echoing through the dark, fetid caverns…”

She felt them, immune to the power of their whispers by this point. “I do.”

“Let them beckon you. Let them teach you.”

Drawing her gun, she leapt down. Shadows and Wizards, with the objective to drain her life. She shouldn’t risk anything. The Hive she fought weren’t empowered by this world, but she was. She hated this world before, but now she could use it against them. The Thralls fell, soon did the Wizards. She not dare die. Soon, only she was left.

Tirion still sensed the Light, and rushed over to the Exo body on the ground, falling to her knees. His Ghost came out of hiding from underneath him, the entire shell shaking. Huritt was still alive, still grunting like he was mumbling in his sleep.
“An old friend…” Toland sighed, keeping his distance. “Chose to be forgotten. What a shame. He should have killed his Ghost.”

“Why did you help me?” Tirion asked Toland.

Toland’s form flickered slightly, and a portal to freedom opened behind her.

“Tell me, Guardian: Do you trust me? Do you believe I am an ally of the Light or a servant of the Darkness? What if I told you I was neither?” Toland wasn’t surprised when she gave him no answer, just a head full of thoughts. “The Witch Queen’s deception runs deep, question everything, question even me…”

Toland’s voice faded away with him, leaving her in the crushing silence. She looked over to Huritt’s Ghost, who recoiled from just being acknowledged like an animal who’s been hit.

“Come on…” Tirion whispered kindly to her. “You know me. You know me. I’m here.” As slowly as she could, she reached out her hand. She gently held the Ghost until she relaxed. “Good. Come on. Let’s get your Guardian out of here.”

She put his arm on her shoulders and carried Huritt out, relief filling her with strength. She gently laid him on the grass when they were no longer in the realm, and his Ghost got to healing him.

“Eris…” The tiny voice said from the Ghost. “Eris. He’s been getting messages from Eris.”

“Let’s get him home.”

Alva was staying with him. Everyone was told that he’ll be fine, that he just needs rest and Light.

Tirion couldn’t shake that she failed her friend. Huritt preferred to study alone, and she trusted him. He was more than capable in battle. It still felt like she failed him.

When did they start falling apart like this? Or rather, who was trying to tear them apart? That was their weakness afterall.

She grabbed the datapads marked *Eris* from his room before she let him rest and headed home to the City. Tons of messages, all from Eris. Tirion didn’t believe it for a second. It was amiss. She’s heard Eris talk, heard her attempts at humour, heard her singing twisted versions of children’s lullabies about the Hive.

That, or someone Tirion trusted was responsible for the biggest horror of her life. Too many betrayals. She won’t let it happen. Not Eris.

She noticed the slight discrepancies and errors in the text. Eris didn’t write much, but when she did it was clean. This was more machine-like.

“Something is wrong…” Ghost said. “Let me try something.”

“What’s on your mind?”

“Strange encryption.” The letters on the screen twisted and turned, until the message got changed entirely. It corrupted itself entirely, and became unreadable. “Oh…”

“That’s not on you.” She pulled out her own datapad. “It’s not Eris, either.”

Five messages in rapid succession. Whoever this was, they were angry with her.
“Oh, that’s torn it. No going back now. I suppose we’ll do this formally…” Ghost read the transmission. “What is this?”

“Trouble…” Medusa, claimant to be an AI. A craftmind. An empath. Survivor of the Golden Age. A whole lot of it read like nonsense to her. Every time it spoke of the King it spoke respectfully. It talked of failed timelines where it went wrong for it, not the Guardians. Story about Thetis, how she held her child in fire to strengthen him but the ritual was interrupted. Final purpose of the Guardians being finding the Distributary. Loneliness. A strange game. It could not be trusted. It simply couldn’t. “A lot of trouble.”

“Why take the name Medusa?”

“It tries to emulate people, I think. Emulate stories. You can’t emulate people, people are too stupid and too jittery to be emulated.” Tirion swore she had a book on it, and started going through the shelf. Grand stories about gods fighting were right up Shaxx’s alley, so it didn’t take much. “Don’t know the details about Medusa that well. Punished by the gods and cursed with eyes that can turn people to stone.”

Tirion wasn’t that interested in the life, as it was mostly consisted debating the how and whys and whats. It was the end that she wanted. It wasn’t smart to take the name of someone who died, it’s a curse in itself. It should only be looked at through a reflection. Then, there is further debate. Some say the head was used to free someone of the burden of carrying the entire world on their shoulders by turning them to stone. Others say the petrification was a punishment for refusing someone hospitality.

“How many of these stories do you think are real?”

“They’ll ask the same question about us in a thousand years.” There was no way to tell. “I don’t buy that she was a golden age AI for the colony mission. AIs aren’t a virus which can cling onto you. It would entail that they created a soul of sorts, which is impossible.”

“Um…” Ghost didn’t know how to phrase it.

“You’re different.” She didn’t want him to believe otherwise. “You were created by the Traveler, a being with power beyond anyone’s understanding. Humans are too stupid to create something as intricate as a soul. Even with the help of the Traveler, creating a spirit was an impossibility. An AI would still need a shell, a house. Everything except for outer shells of the ship were destroyed. An AI cannot disodge its soul and leave.”

“Then what’s your take on it?”

“That we’re being lied to, we’re being messed with. And it almost got Huritt killed.” Tirion slammed the book shut and stood up from the couch. “Call Haya, tell her to meet us where we fought Prime.”

“Why?”

“Because this abomination is trying to tear me and my team apart, and I can’t have that. They found our weakness.”

Botza district was her strange home. So close, yet it all felt so far away. So far removed, a twisted reflection of how it all will look if she lets everything die. Emptiness and a broken Traveler. Ascendant Realm was truly lonely, but the City was oddly at peace.

Almost like it was meant to be.
“Eh, I deserved that.” Haya landed right next to Tirion with a thud, disrupting the peace. “Couldn’t let the Drifter be.”

“Yeah. Not sure where to start with that.” Tirion put her hands on her hips and looked down on the ground, hoping that she’ll find something etched in it a long time ago. She needed to sit down, the edge of the rooftop was as good of a place as any. Haya joined her, smelling of brimstone and ash and armour polish.

Tirion tried to find a start for a very long time.

“I bleach my hair.” Haya said while waiting for Tirion to figure things out, sensing the Warlock’s irritation because the peace was disrupted. “The eyes and the skin, nothing much can be done about that. That’s fucked, and Leor’s getting weaker so I’m not putting the pressure on them. The hair is still brown.”

“Okay.”

Haya continued, unable to stop. “When I think of Abigail. I think of this weak girl. A teenager who got beaten up with no one at her side and was thrown down the stairs of life.”

“And when I think of Haya on a good day, I think of the hero Abigail needed.” Tirion finished for her, looking her sternly in the eyes. “Maybe I’m being too passive with people, but I get why you did what you did. The deals you’ve made. Could have told me and not gone behind my back, but I get it.”

“There is a but…”

There was.

“But, tell me. Which story is better: a story of a girl getting rescued, or a story of a girl surviving it and eventually becoming a person she needed the most in her darkest time? You don’t need to be another person.”

“Wasn’t expecting that…” Haya didn’t think long about it. “Abigail is better off dead. They gave me a choice, get tortured until I freeze to death or do the ritual. She died when I made a choice.”

“She’s still you. I’ve tried doing what you did. You can make amends and move on, but not kill it.”

“I know I can’t murder it. Putting myself in ‘another room’ is a better solution. I am the person I would have hated. Dark Ages are sugar coated.” She frowned with a shaking jaw. “Alternative would be taking responsibility for the things I’ve done. I’m not sure I can.”

“Take responsibility, damn it!” Tirion didn’t mean to snap. One too many things that happened. “I know that you are past caring or being lucid or handling things well. However, it doesn’t mean the people who are affected by your mistakes have the same fortitude. You’re indestructible, the rest of the world isn’t. Stop externalizing blame on others. Stop being nosy. Recognize when you’re wrong. Talk to me.”

Haya had to start with one. Not the one she’s been refusing to think about for perhaps centuries, but the one which has been haunting her since the meeting on the rooftop. She intertwined her bruised fingers to keep her hands steady. They weren’t shaking because of nerves. They’ve been shaking for a few years now.

“I fucked up…”
“You did. We can fix it.”

Could lie. She’s good at that. No. Not then. Lies will get people killed. Didn’t occur to her until that very moment that her mistake could get used against her proteges, or worse. Her proteges had Ghosts, and Hammers which could melt bullets. The problem didn’t lie with the man known as Drifter, but the people who willingly went through the door next to him. He was just the charming smile next to the door.

“I fucked over Redrix, and helped Drifter create another Guardian killing weapon.”

Tirion’s breath got stuck in her throat. But, it was what she asked of her. “How?”

“I made the deal with Drifter as you know, so he couldn’t have you or Lorcan or the rest of us. He is a *fuck*. I needed insurance that he’ll stay away.” Fear she didn’t know she was feeling infested her voice. “He chose the seventh best Guardian.”

“What about the weapon?” Tirion didn’t yell. Berating would serve no purpose.

“To make the deal, bastard asked me to get a weapon core for him. Found one of his buddies killed by Shin.” Haya watched Tirion fight for her life to hide that anger on her face. “The weapon core was used to create this weapon called Malfeasance. Don’t know who has it. I just know that it exists.”

Tirion stood there for a moment, expecting a sea of excuses, that Haya didn’t mean to do any of it, a string of profanities. Silence met her. “You’re going to make this right, Haya.”

“I—” Haya stared wide eyed into empty space. “How?! How do I unfuck this?”

She could be furious, could tell her to figure it out herself and stomp off. Could tell her to get out of her sight. She didn’t want to lose a friend.

“Be that hero. Find whoever has that weapon, and steal it or buy it. Explain this to Lorcan, he will help.” Tirion put down the orders. “Redrix will be fine. Anyone around that gun won’t. Find it. Start with the Crucible feeds when it’s live.”

“That...” Haya hopped to her feet, with no rebuttal. That’s not where she expected to be. “I’ll get on it. I think Lorcan has recordings. I don’t think the scumbags would be in the Crucible.”

“Also...” Tirion sighed before the Titan set off to leave. “Haya?”

“What?”

“No more secrecy. Please tell me these things in the future. *Please.*” The Warlock begged. “The world will fall if the world manages to tear us apart, got me?”

“I will.” Haya nodded with an understanding smile. “By the way, once we get that rat, I’ll need you. I’ll need you for something.”

“Anything.”

“I might need to go... *home.*” Couldn’t say that word out loud without her voice breaking. Could be a coincidence, could be just the age. She crossed her arms, trying to hug herself. It was suddenly very cold. “I need to go home. If I am going to take responsibility, I need to go all out. I need to go home. I can’t do it alone.”
“Are you alright?” Tirion has never seen her cold.

“Will you be there?”

Tirion nodded. “I’ll be there.”

“Good.” Haya disappeared into blue particles, to her ship in orbit.

Not how Tirion imagined spending the beginning of Crimson Days. She smelled that iron again. Maybe Toland would have helped, but she didn’t get the chance to ask.

It was… she had no idea what it was when she got back to the Tower again. Shaxx wasn’t yelling, so it had to be late. He was still at his station. She fell right into his arms without saying anything, felt his arms hold her up, one of his hands in her hair.

Simple acts were the only thing she needed. Tender moments, sense of normalcy.

“Tell me something…” Tirion murmured into his fur pauldron.

“I saw a Guardian throw a heavy ammo brick at his opponent instead of putting it in his gun.” He could hear her muffled laugh. “He knocked him out. Turns out if he would have taken the time to load his gun he and his Bond would have died.”

That was what it was all about.

“Huritt almost died, went chasing something in the Ascendant Realm…” She was too tired to try and escape it, killing her laugh in the process. Shaxx loosened his arms to look at her. “He’s fine now. He is a very capable Warlock with more powers than me, I trusted him to survive. But, he almost didn’t.”

“He survived.” Shaxx whispered. “You will always survive. You have proof of it.”

“Hmm…” Tirion leaned her head against his chest plate. She’s heard that before, but that was before getting a hint of how it was to be on the other side.

Shaxx turned off the monitors with his free hand and turned his attention solely to her. Arcite was somewhere in the hangar, resting after the adventure in the mountain. Tirion yelped when he swept her off her feet and started carrying her to their balcony. He needed a place where the helmet could come off, where both of them could see each other. It was a long walk, a silent one. She was getting lost in her mind again.

“I’ve been conditioned to believe that every single person who is excellent with a firearm will not live for long. Champions have come and gone.” He gently put her down, but not taking his hands or eyes off her. “With you, I make a conscious effort to go against all my beliefs. It’s a fight to do so, but the alternative is far more harrowing.”

Tirion’s face got overtaken by a sense of delight, and she helped him pull the helmet off. “But worth it.”

“Worth it…” He repeated softly, lightly caressing her cheek. “I would not wish any companion in the world but you.”

“Is it love if the very instant you saw me your heart didn’t fly at my service?”

Shaxx chuckled, voice vibrating his armour. “It is. I’d never doubt it. When you depart from me
The way the swung side to side hypnotized the rest of the world away from existing. She reached up to put a hand on his face, and channelled her light to hover up to be able to kiss him. She wanted to retire to that moment. It was her perfect version of a paradise. A paradise wasn’t pretty colours or heavenly plants or ethereal vistas, wasn’t crafted by magic beyond her own understanding.

It was happiness.

Happiness, beauty, and a soul. The three things that couldn’t be artificially created. People have tried, trialed it and had the experiments crash and burn. The trifecta was intimate, spawned from a person. Not a blanket which could put on everyone. It was too integral to a person for that.

Similar to a Throne World. Built from a person and their image and accomplishments.

A paradise couldn’t be crafted by something she didn’t understand. She understood the kiss, and the joy it filled her heart with. It was intertwined with her soul. The Traveler was still a stranger, and she had no grasp on how its powers actually worked. She wouldn’t compare it to armour, but to a fractured bone rejecting an internal fixator made of wrong kind of metal. It will never be able to heal if the fix is something it can’t understand and bond with.

Tirion will never let anyone make a paradise for her. It wouldn’t be hers, it would be a prison of shiny colours and filled with shiny baubles. It would be admitting defeat, giving up her freedom. Giving up happiness.

She just wanted happiness.

“Funny how we ended up here.” She whispered when she pulled away. “You came from beautifully written sonnets about love, I come from outmost pessimism about love.”

He raised an eyebrow, leaning his forehead against hers. “Is that so?”

“I remember I was once told that I need to have a heart of stone.” Tirion told. “When you pick apart something and then assemble it again, magic gets lost. All you’ll be able to see after that will be the cogs and what metal they were made of. I think for the longest time I was worried that it was all I’ll see. No matter how long it has been, I’ve never seen the cogs with you.”

“What cogs could there possibly be in love?” Love was the simplest yet the most complicated thing to him.

“Many.” She had no idea where to start. “To translate the cogs, it’s your mind picking out someone and seeing them as a drug. Pleasure when you’re with them, loneliness when away. Certain poets and playwrights have phrased it better.”

“Interesting. What else?”

“Then it morphs. It forms a bedrock.” She tried to explain. “Instead of it giving you pleasure it gives you a rush to make sure that they’re happy.”

“If anything, knowing all that strengthens it all.”

“The paper where the cogs weren’t translated was a book, 150 pages of it.” She smiled wryly. “Breaking down everything that happens to its very atoms and…” Tirion trailed off.

“What?”
“In hindsight, it was extraordinary beautiful.” Tirion pulled him in slightly closer. “There was no philosophising until the conclusion, yet it was oddly poetic. From the pinpoint accurate descriptions to how exactly blood flowed in your head, to every long name of a chemical.”

“So, what did they conclude?”

“It’s not satisfying.” She thought it be courteous to warn him. “It’s really not.”

He was prepared. “Tell me.”

“It ended with the author saying that he will not draw conclusions, as any conclusion which can be drawn about it would be indisputably wrong. He outright denied the existence of miracles, said that to draw the conclusion that love is an unimaginative miracle was a cardinal sin in the form of a knife to his heart.” She talked and Shaxx listened patiently without a sign that he was getting sick of it, the opposite actually. “Once its purpose to expand humanity has been served, there was no reason to keep feeling it. Many bad choices have been made because of love. That kept him awake all night.”

“Love heals.” Shaxx added. “During Crimson Days, the entire Tower shifts. The Crucible transforms, the bonds formed there invigorate the Light of others. People accuse me of giving them amps, but it’s just the force of love. But, I get that he was trying to understand why Cayde wanted a Drake tank despite it offering no benefit to his job.”

“Only bet I am willing to make without Cayde is that the man who wrote that paper is Asher Mir, because the world likes jokes.” There was a correlation between Cayde no longer being there and her having endless Glimmer.

“That man sounds precisely like a man who is in love. In love with his work, perhaps.”

“Does it also sound familiar?” She had to tease him about it.

“It’s a different kind of love.” Shaxx said. “Yet, he doesn’t sound like a pessimist. Sounds like someone who wanted to believe.” He just wanted to keep her talking.

“There were a lot of people calling it entirely pointless. That like any other kind of drug it brings you happiness in spades, but the fall will be rough once it inevitably ends. Ergo, pointless.” She knew that a speech was coming when his eyes rolled slightly, accompanied with a scoff.

“I would tell them – tell everyone with abilities of hearing and even the deaf – that it is worth the fall and the fight!” He boomed, clenching a fist in the air. “That they are cowards if they are afraid of it. Every gift has its price. Don’t be terrified of the price, be terrified of the wonderful storm the gift will bring.”

“I would pay an astounding amount of Glimmer for you to go back in time and call a room full of scientists and doctors cowards.” Tirion could barely make it a coherent sentence through her laughter, it resembled a wheeze more than actual speech. The amusement got reflected on his own face. “We wouldn’t have needed the Traveler to change the world, that would have been enough.”

“That’s the reason the Guardians love me and keep coming back to the Crucible.” Shaxx proudly boasted. “I’ve never called anyone a coward directly, but they know what I mean.”

“Really?” She tilted her head, loose hair falling infront of her face. It always made his fingers twitch with the urge to move it away and he could never resist. “You were quite subtle when you shouted at someone that there was no cowardice in hiding until they’re supercharged.”
“I’ll see it. I’ll see it every time!” Shaxx couldn’t rest until he was sure that both the rookies and veterans alike knew it. “I want to see those rookies set the world on fire, cowardice won’t get me that.”

“And leave me without a job?” She feigned a pout.

“You’re there to show them how to set it on fire in a beneficial way. No one will come close to you.” He said. Once he thought that she was reckless. She was, to some extent. Down the line she turned it into a resounding confidence. “I knew it was you in the Crucible some days ago.”

“Hard to be subtle when you practice a dead art, huh?” She shrugged, moving backwards so she could sit on the railing. “It was the only way I could make it fair. The others needed to be shouted at without biases.”

“You should go in there one day without hiding. Show the world how it’s done.”

Tirion was ready for that any time, but it wasn’t up to her. “Are you sure the world is ready for that commentary?”

“I promised you that once the time is right I will tell the whole world how much I love you. No better way than the Crucible.”

“They probably have grainy feeds of the matches all the way out in the Reef.”

“I hope they do. I’ll find out if they don’t and amend the issue.” He was completely serious. “For now…” He looked down at the sleeping City.

“You won’t…”

Shaxx cleared his throat. If this will be the last thing he’ll say for a year, he’ll be perfectly fine with it. “Hear my soul speak!!” The Titan roared, already seeing windows light up down below. “I love my wife more than words can wield the matter! My heart is full, and ever at her service!”
The intentions of a saint with demons at your side.

Back in the city, she somehow incredulously made herself part of the curse.

Why?

There were no moving on until things were finished and pristine. What was there to uncover in that place besides horrible pain? She had avoided it for so long, but now she found herself getting forcefully yanked back.

Tirion laid on the highest tower she could find, traces of the Taken blight humming next to her. It became a pleasant melody after a while. No peace wanted to visit her. It was perfect, engineered to be beautiful and relaxing. Engineered to keep civilians calm, almost. Who could be anxious or mad when their eyes were on a breath-taking view?

She couldn’t be angrier over her own inability to simply let go. Over not being able to take that feeling of letting go when she fell down the pit on Mars, and applying it to her feelings towards the city.

It was so simple in theory.

“How do I let this go?” She whispered.

“What about that Corsair, Elia?” Her Ghost appeared in her vision.

“There are more people than Elia who are absolutely outraged at me.” She said. “Elia is the only one who appears to not live in a world of pretend. I am dead to the other Corsairs. She’s right, though. I did all those things. I pushed everyone away. No one was obligated to put up with me and…”

The Ghost got right up in her face. “I’ve talked enough with Haya to know that I should stop you right there. You could learn something from her.”

Tirion rapidly blinked in surprise. “What?”

“You were hurting, Guardian. It’s alright to not feel guilty for once about feeling pain.”

“I still need to apologize to her.”

Was she giving too many chances to people who didn’t deserve them? There was no guilt about letting the Dreaming City burn. Every bullet fired while her feet were on its ground gave off a strange energy, it hardly mattered if she refused to kill anything in the city as there were hundreds of Guardians and Awoken contributing to it all in that Blind Well. Her old plan was to get everyone who could be convinced and everyone sane out of the city, and then let it wither away.

The ideal situation.

All the fighting was feeding something, something bad. She had influence and power and a notable hero status, but everything about her attempting to get people to stop fighting would fail and brand her a heretic of a kind. Whatever they’re feeding will arrive soon. Whenever she lets go to be careful, twenty Guardians take her place and do something irreparable.

Tirion desperately missed the Vanguard. All that time spent cursing them, hating them. They were
always covert. Correction, Cayde was the one who was usually covert. Small strike teams sent out to solve problems, or one-man Guardian team. Sure, Guardians were treated like nameless and mute frames with guns and forces of the universe, but the system quelled threats. For the first time in many years, Guardians finally have a sense of freedom and detachment from the Vanguard. And all of them are now huddled together in a place which does the most harm, because the guns sparkle the most in that part of the solar system.

Eris was another part of what made the Vanguard work in its last moments of glory. The beautiful team Cayde and Eris made. One was dead, other couldn’t be located. The jigsaw puzzle pieces weren’t simply lost, they were set on fire.

When was the last time Tirion heard about Zavala sending someone out on a strike operation? Must have been a couple months now. The world was falling apart under the illusion that everyone was contributing to fixing it. What a meaningful moment through such a meaningless process.

Hopelessness didn’t begin to cover it all.

Haya was still on the hunt for the gun, so Tirion will get to continue her project once it is found.

If she still remembered Elia, she hardly ever broke rules. With the curse, the other Corsairs couldn’t send her to the most infested Taken pit for doing a taboo thing. The Corsairs in the cave will undoubtedly know where the curse places her every week.

“Where is Ealasaid?” Tirion sounded like she never left, like the last ten years didn’t happen. Like she was still Threta. The Corsairs pretended like she never even came back. Not a single wrong button hit, not a single eye taken off Scorn off in the distance. “Really? Is this how you want to run things now?”

“We have nothing for you here, Guardian.” One of the Corsairs said. “I suggest you join others in the Blind Well, or consult Petra Venj for additional jobs that need to be done around here.”

“Alright, I can play this game.” Tirion stood straight. “This Guardian killed Skolas.”

“You also killed Crota, bringing the King here, killing our people!” The Corsair could hold the anger in as well as the Dreaming City halts its curse. Her nails almost left scratch marks on the rifle she was holding. “The consequences of the heroic things you have done hit us first.”

“You used to be my family once.” Tirion couldn’t get the Corsair to look at her. “I sacrificed every part of my soul to get you away from cursed comet, to start a liberation.”

“Liar.” The Corsair hissed. “We are still here, held down by this curse placed on us. You are free, you left us to rot. Where is the justice in that?”

“The god aspirant put a stop to my seditious plan, put the thorns in my skin. Your obedience to a tyrant left you to rot. The god aspirant is the abominable one, you know how I am and what I stand for.” Tirion moved until the Corsair wouldn’t be able to look away. There was only one way to get what she wants, make them uncomfortable with thoughts to the point of them doing anything to get her to leave them. “Miserable species ruled by a murderous tyrant, you will never see peaceful days again if you keep fighting against the truth.”

“Ealasaid is down in the Monastery, two floors down.” The Corsair couldn’t bear it any more than that, sighing a breath of relief when Tirion backed off. “You used to be kind once, Theta. Nothing malevolent in you. You saved the life of my sister. What did your Traveler do to you?”

“The Traveler gave me a second chance at life after I made a mistake.” Tirion couldn’t see any
change of expression due to the mask on the eyes of the Corsair. “Not everyone gets that.”

“It made you say all those vile things…”

“No. All The Traveler did was save me when I had no one by my side. Everything else is me and me alone reacting to the world.” Tirion bowed her head for a second. “It does pain me that I couldn’t get you out.”

“You were smart. You could have gotten us out of this curse.” The Corsair smashed the gun against the makeshift desk, almost knocking it down. “You could have. For all I care, you were the one who killed Riven.”

“By the time I recovered it all, the time was way past.” She wrapped her arms about her own slowly drooping body. “It’s past everything now. Every Awoken outside of the Reef would get hurt.”

“You care more about the Earthborn than us?!” The Corsair’s fingers itched to rip the mask off. “They abandoned us. Our Queen would have welcomed them back.”

“There is no us versus them here. We’re all Awoken, and we all will suffer because everything we are is decided by a god aspirant. I would hurt more than I would save now.” Tirion said shakily. “I’m not here to preach. Just to apologize. I could have done it better…”

“What does it matter…” The Corsair scoffed. “Tell me, will we ever get out of this curse?”

“No.”

“Can you make it more specific?” Sadness gripped the Corsair like she previously gripped her gun in anger. Everyone was exhausted, everyone needed someone to be mad at. “What if the Dreaming City was a body? What would you say is happening to it?”

“I can’t whip up any comforting analogy here.”

“Try…”

That hopeless crack in the Corsair’s voice made her try.

“Black mould.” Tirion said. “The spores are a neurotoxin. Once they attach to your neurons, they incapacitate you. Shuts down your organs. Kills you if not treated.”

“Treat it.”

“You can take medicine to treat it, but it will always come back if the primary cause is not removed.” Tirion did warn her. “The primary cause usually being your house, your surroundings. In this scenario, we have no idea where the wall of spores is. All we know is that we’re making it more powerful by fighting.”

“But we can’t give up fighting.” She jerked her head towards Tirion. “Guardians can, but everyone else here is stuck in this curse. I try to fight differently every time, different strategies, but something… something…”

“A shadowy hand turning your page.”

“I feel like a puppet, a claw on my throat and strings pulling my limbs.” The Corsair trembled. “Do you know how terrifying it is to feel like your body isn’t your own?”
“I can’t imagine that kind of breach of bodily autonomy.”

“You joke…”

“I’m not sure if I do.”

“You…” It was too much to process at once. “Go see Ealasaid. I don’t need any help here, she could use some.”

Tirion nodded. “I will.”

“Taking that you’re not planning to stay in the city for any tea…”

“I have a dysfunctional family to get back to after this.” Tirion smiled dryly. “I’ve grown sick of the Awoken tea.”

“Fair enough.” The Corsair’s pale fingers hugged the assault rifle again, and she returned to her post. “We’ll meet when we will meet again, cousin.”

The monastery was almost on the other side of the rock. If Elia survived this far, her life wasn’t in danger.

“It always worries me when you go crazy like that…” Ghost chirped. “I do get your point.”

“I don’t, a whole lot of the time.” She smiled at him. “Let’s get to the monastery.”

The stained glass in the depths of it all, a thing she strangely missed. Devrim’s church has been picked clean of that. Little time to appreciate it all was granted, as sounds of battle distracted her. The army of Taken, getting significantly smaller every second. Without warning, Tirion summoned a radiant grenade and threw it at the horde. Elia would have killed them either way.

“Thanks!” Elia shouted, hopping up to her feet. “Oh…”

The both of them stood awkwardly, opening and closing their mouths as ideas entered and fled from them whilst awkwardness gripped them.

“Yeah…”

“How have you been?” Elia asked, trying to start again.

“Um…” Tirion hoped to find linguistic wisdom in a rock right next to her foot. “I am dealing with the depression that happens when you lose your identity for a couple of years, then lose your Light, lose some of your ability to form new memories, then slowly get stabbed by your past life.”

“Sounds…”

“You don’t have to.” Tirion held on to the cold bronze railing that kept her from falling into the abyss. Every single corner of the Dreaming City was shrouded in mystery.

“You disappeared, Threta. There was no one to be there for. You were gone.” Elia joined her. “I’m talking about before you left. You stopped talking to me and everyone. What were we supposed to do?”

“Your anger and neglect is entirely contingent upon my neglect, I get that now.” Tirion took a deep breath. “I just wanted someone to be next to me. That wasn’t love. Nowhere close.”
“You were methodical. I remember someone saying that if you would have been the Traveler, you would not have left earth.” Elia stood firm, afraid that it would hurt to even move. “No force would have brought you back. Nothing I could have done would have brought you back. I tried the Techeuns—”

“The Techeuns gave me the thorns.” Tirion’s glare almost struck her. “Paranoia, madness, violence. They lodged the thorns under my skin. It wasn’t to wake me up from the stupor, it was to mute me further.”

“Fuck, Threta. What did you do to deserve that?”

“Found out every single secret about this god forsaken and god cursed city and god cursed people.” Tirion pushed herself off of the railing. “Found out that I was sick, on top of that. I had nothing to lose. I was going to die anyway. I was going to tell everything.”

“What was it that you found out?”

“I found out enough to make me do what I did. My plans were stopped.” She murmured. “At this point, it’s too late for everything. Everything. No one will benefit from knowing. You can’t break out of this curse.”

“Would it have at the very least prevented the curse?”

“It would have prevented the curse for you, but placed a whole another curse on a lot of people unrelated to it.”

Elia grunted loudly. “Who is the son of a bitch who stopped everything? Any stop for this madness would be acceptable.”

“Mara.”

“She wouldn’t” The Corsair instantly denied it. “Mara cares for her people. She’s out there somewhere fighting for us. She has sacrificed a whole lot more than the both of us.”

Tirion held back an angry bark. “It was Mara’s orders. Take it or live in denial.”

“If orders were Mara’s, I’m sure she gave that order for a good reason.” That fire at Tirion’s fingertips frightened Elia enough to not want to comfort her with any kind of touch. “Mara is doing everything to save humanity.”

There was the feeling again. The exact same one she felt during her last few days as a regular Awoken. That crushing hopelessness.

“I died scared and alone, Elia. Can you take a second to imagine how that must have felt like? Everyone who died during the Taken War also died scared and alone. Only person of Mara’s who didn’t die alone was her brother.” Tirion clenched her fist to try to stop the fire. “The difference between Mara Sov and being a kind ruler is extremely vast.”

“She is kind if she manages to save us. All sacrifices are worth it.”

Tirion had to grip the railing again, her entire body almost giving in as the nausea crept up on her. “You’re taking her side…?”

“I’m forever loyal to the Queen. My uniform represents that.”
“I see…” Tirion hoped that the metal in her hand wasn’t melting. “Perhaps the curse is sentient…”

“What do you mean?”

“That it only chooses the most loyal, and no innocents fall under it. That you deserve it.”

“Whatever image of Queen Mara Sov you have in your head, you are far more cruel than her.” Elia clenched her teeth. “What twisted beliefs do you harbour?”

“My beliefs are simple. No one should be governed by a ruler that you can’t topple. Everyone deserves bodily autonomy. No one should live in fear, or in a state of illusion that everything is alright. There should be no rulership of body and mind.” Tirion said. “No person should constantly hunger for private life. No one should live in a beautiful artificial insanity.”

“How has Mara not represented your beliefs?”

“As long as you’re the co-creator of the problem, you will never understand.”

“I didn’t create this curse!” Elia shouted after Tirion, who was on her way out. “She wants to help you. Please, just…”

“Mara has mastered the despicable art of exploiting human dependency and attachment needs in others, and started to thirst for godhood.” Tirion had already locked for Transmat. Anything to get out of the place and never return. “We have very differing definitions of kindness and helping. Riven only punished those who witnessed abuse without seeking justice. A penalty must be paid.”

Tirion’s last memory of the Dreaming City will be one of Elia dropping her gun.

_________________________________________

Light must be born out of Darkness.

But what was the Darkness?

Lorcan was kicking the box with the weapon in it to make it move, refusing to touch it. The gun was wrapped in three different fabrics used for isolation and placed in a paper box so it wouldn’t hurt to kick. The Guardian who used to own it couldn’t have been doing his job longer than a year, making him very easy to trick. Allegedly, the poor Guardian had no idea who the Drifter was and found the gun out in the field next to a dead Guardian. Lorcan concluded that the kid was too stupid to know anything more, told him to look in the other direction, snatched the gun, and ran off.

It was a beautifully crafted gun, he’ll give it that. Painstaking amount of work went into it, carved and painted with great care.

It also was one of their guns.

“I got a shipment from the Scumbag Emporium.” Lorcan used nearly all of his strength for the final kick to make it slide all the way over where Tirion was standing. “Now what?”

With a disturbing amount of confidence and eagerness, Tirion instantly picked up the box and tore through it all until she felt cold metal on her fingertips. Strange light blue fire emanated from it when she wrapped her hands around the handle. Maybe this was exactly what she’s been looking for all along.

“You’re looking kinda dauntless with that gun…” Lorcan didn’t dare step closer to it. It didn’t ease his fears when she fired a dozen shots into a wall to see how it worked. Quite similar to the fabled
weapon, but not as strong. The slugs exploded after enough of them got piled on. Maybe if she could find a way to make it more powerful, and then convert it. Malfeasance was too contained, too careful. Thorn was too corrupted. Drifter was trying to hit the perfect balance with it. Powerful weapon able to utilize the Darkness, but without the trap door made out of rotting wood underneath the wielder.

Not really good enough after all.

Could it be that much different from purifying the swords? Only purification won’t be enough, she needed to make it shoot an antidote for the poison. The swords only shot the elements. The Darkness wasn’t a sick being, but a disease without a carrier. There was nothing inside of it. Her only real exposure to it was the ball of chaotic black liquid, perhaps the same liquid she saw in her dreams. Vex couldn’t understand it, prompting their worship for it. What could possibly be too complex for the omnipotent understanding of the Vex?

“Ghost…” She said. “Can you bring up footage from the Black Garden?”

“On it!”

“So, what are we doing?” Lorcan asked, unable to read anyone’s mind while Tirion lived completely in her own. “Oh, wait! I don’t think I’ve seen it before.”

It’s been too long since she watched it.

Electricity raged and roared inside it, with strange tentacles coming out of it, like nerves. The Vex worshipping it been there long enough time to grow moss. It emitted orbs of strange light and used it to turn a statue into a Vex effortlessly.

“It’s like a tumour in reality…” Tirion was almost as enthralled by it like the Vex were, falling back to a chair. “Fast forward to its death, no one needs to see the in-between.”

Ghost did as asked, and all she could hope for was that she was looking at it when it exploded. She won’t let the world get her close and take it from her again this time.

The footage was shaky, but still very discernible, and showed her everything she needed to see.

It condensed itself into a ball, and exploded into blinding light. She was back on Mars in a second, with red petals around her, the red Vex flowers.

That’s why.

She forgot about the petals.

It was just like the way Ghaul’s soul died, the Traveler exploding into Light. Was it mimicking the Traveler, or was it a shadow of it executing its functions?

Killing the statues killed the heart. What were they then? Part of the aorta? Severing it would cut off the blood flow, killing the heart. Where was the brain of it all?

Tirion backtracked. Could it be an actual living body? They had the heart, and plenty of minds. Maybe they’re using a heart from another timeline. Why imitate humans and their physiology? Granted, humans didn’t have the monopoly on that. Unlikely that earth as a whole had it, too.

“I’ve got nothing.” She threw the gun back into the box, feeling her brain starting to break. “I’ll show the gun to Shaxx later. Maybe he can get something out of it.”
“What are you trying to get out of it?”

“How to use the Light, the same way the Traveler did when it killed the remnants of Ghaul.” It clicked. “The Light itself, not the elements. The blinding Light that eviscerated Ghaul. It was strong enough to tear apart light itself.”

“The only thing the Traveler showed is that you kinda die when you expunge Light.”

“Or become catatonic.”

“I—” Lorcan didn’t expect her to borderline embrace it. His eyes darted as he thought it through. He wasn’t Haya, resorting straight into insults. Bluntness usually causes people to run. “I think what you’re doing is not a good idea and you should cut it out.”

“Really?” Curiosity mixed with the tiniest fraction of relief filled her eyes. He somewhat defeatedly sat down in the chair next to her. He had to seize control before it was too late, but it didn’t ease things.

“I don’t want to lose another world. I finally made peace with losing my old world. I don’t want to lose this one. Scumbag accessories lead to loss.” His voice quavered. “Haya’s going through some kind of dementia, we almost lost Huritt, and you… you are trying to recreate Thorn. It’s been a long time since all six of us have just sat down.”

“We’ll have each other, no matter what. We always reunite.” Tirion said. “The final tale they’ll write about us is that we disappeared together.”

“Manhattan...”

“What?”

“Manhattan nuclear zone. What used to be New York is a giant crater. Not the only crater on Earth. Darkness wasn’t the one who took all the casualties.” Lorcan didn’t want to bring up the holographic map. He wanted to envision it as little as possible. “Something big is coming, I don’t want us to lose the world.” Lorcan murmured and closed his eyes. “It feels like we’re so close to losing the world, and we won’t be able to help people. Either it will be us or invaders, but I’m guessing it will be us. That at times the only thing this settlement and kind gestures stand for is making people comfortable before they die.”

She put a comforting hand on his shoulder. “Sweet boy…”

“Is that why you don’t talk to them? So that it would hurt less when you lose them?” He asked after a while of them sitting there, slowly opening his eyes. “I’m down there as much as I can, but I never see you there.”

“Truth be told, I’m never down there because I’m terrified.” She withdrew her hand. “I’ll never be anything they want me to be, and I feel like I’m letting them down. I have no idea who I am.”

“They talk about you a whole lot.”

“They talk about the illusion of me. The destroyer of the Black Garden, Conqueror of the Vault of Glass, the killer of Crota, Slayer of Oryx, Hero of The Red War, killer of Panoptes, eradicator of the Barons...” She almost laughed out the titles. Will never stop being silly. “When the people see my ship in the sky, they will know that they are safe. Going down there might make them doubt it. They need hope, which I don’t think I can provide with who I really am.”
“I think they just want to get to know you. I think you’re misunderstanding them as much as they misunderstand you.”

“You think so?”

“Definitely!” He nodded. “They saw you with Shaxx, they know that you have feelings now. They also know that Shaxx is capable of feelings, and that’s another can of worms and gossip… which I totally definitely didn’t participate in.”

Tirion smiled. “One of the things we worried about.”

“They know that you’re hum— uh— not a… robot? That’s wrong too.” Lorcan cringed. “They know that you’re not some infallible myth. I think telling them about surviving everything you went through is more inspiring than killing a god. They know that it’s okay to feel lost, they won’t judge you for that. Those who don’t know that? They need to hear that it’s okay to feel lost, that you need to breathe.”

“How would you even begin with that? Everything I’ve done is hardly a fun campfire story.”

“Jokes? Even though you’re not good at them?” Lorcan suggested with a strange shrug. “Whenever a shipment goes to hell I say: looks like they made a navigational error, like the one that killed me! Then they ask me about it and I start talking about the cat and, well, everyone likes cats. Should I just cut out the middleman?”

Tirion pulled out a tiny statuette out of her robe pocket. Ethereal blue and grey stone in the shape of a lean cat, its eyes glowing purple. She stole it from the Dreaming City to keep as a keepsake. Now that a semblance of peace has been made, she didn’t need it any longer. “Maybe. Want this?”

“Oh!” He quickly took it from her hand. He lifted it up and stared it right in the eyes for a moment, purple getting reflected in his green eyes. He probably shouldn’t be staring at it for too long. “See? I was right. Even the Awoken like cats!”

“I need to drop this off at Shaxx and then I have a thing with Haya.” The chair creaked when she left it. “I should be back in a couple of days…”

“All I’m saying that the longer you delay to go down there after you come back, the more stories will be told about you.” He pocketed the cat statuette. “Remember that game? Death means consequence, or whatever we called it?”

Tirion scoffed. “You were the one who crashed into a Cabal window and died from cracking your skull.”

“Me having 40 minutes’ worth of footage of interesting fighting methods aside…” He knew that she knew what he was about to bring up. “Mars…”

“No.” Tirion slowly diverted her gaze to the ceiling.

“Cabal shields…”

“How I wish it stopped there…”

“I never knew a Warlock would catch that much momentum, first of all. Cabal, and you saying…” Her annoyed expression just made him laugh. “It’s just one Cabal.”

“Uh-huh...”
“It wasn’t just one Cabal. Was it now, Tirion?”

“I don’t remember much after the first Cabal struck me and caused me to fly to the other side of Mars.” The tale wasn’t done. “I burned back to life and found myself at a place where Rasputin felt like dropping a Warsat.”

Lorcan was thriving in her fighting to form the words and recall that moment.

“I fell off a cliff and died because I was laughing too hard.” Lorcan wiped a tear, trying to not wheeze and almost falling out of his chair. “We need to do that again.”

“Yeah, yeah… Where is the boy, by the way?”

“Around.” Last time Lorcan saw him, Kouhei had him. “I’ll get him. I think he stole my favourite cloak. Or someone did. It disappeared from my room. Who the hell steals a cloak?”

“The one with the mouldy snake skin?”

“Yep.”

She could smell it at the mere mention, and wrinkled her nose on instinct. “The one we’ve been trying to get rid of because you haven’t washed it since the Red War?”

“It’s like a teddy bear, alright?” Lorcan explained with strict hand gestures. “You know, a teddy bear you’ve had since you were a kid. It’s all mangled and smelly and has holes and stuffing sticking out of it. I don’t remember having that, but there is this little girl running around with that kind of teddy bear. It belonged to her mother once. It’s how I imagine it feels like.”

“Oh.” Her expression fell. “Now I feel bad.”

“Eh… maybe it was time to let go. Pass it onto someone else, let go of a childhood I forgot about. I’m sure there is a term for it all.”

“But you’re not going to do that.”

“Hell nope!”

Tirion had all four guns neatly laid out on the table infront of her.

The Last Word. Malfeasance. Ace of Spades. Her Own.

She needed to craft something that didn’t represent vengeance, darkness, grief, or sorrow. The Thorn wasn’t even a match here.

All she yearned for was a reminder that light could still flourish no matter what, to carry it on her hip. To fight with it. Something constantly right infront of her eyes when she fights. It needed to also serve as a reminder that pain was part of it, but it was just a bad day and not a bad life. The Ace did that, but the gun wasn’t entirely hers. It was a memory, it stood for something and someone else.

Perhaps she needed to just start from the very beginning. Not convert anything of someone else’s, but build something from ground up.

“Is that…”
She was too deep in thought to notice a large looming presence until it spoke.

“Haya and Lorcan found it.” She murmured. “I found the other. The real one.”

“Explains why Shin stopped responding.” Shaxx dare not touch any of the weapons on the table, instead he took a seat infront of her. “The Malfeasance isn’t one of a kind, however.”

“What?”

“Saw one in the Crucible once. Made sure that they were never seen again in any of my arenas.” It was happening again. “The Drifter knows that we’re keeping tabs on him.”

“What’s your next move without Shin?”

He could only think of one, clenched fists already crackling with electricity. “Throw Drifter out.”

“Shaxx…”

“What?”

“If I come home in a day or two and he’s not here…”

“It won’t be me.”

“Good.” The sigh of relief from her felt artificial.

“It will be a dozen Titans breaking in through the ceiling of his pathetic hiding place.” Shaxx growled. “I have no time for lowlife goons like Dredgens. Sunbreakers are back to their former glory, and will take a job for Glimmer!”

She rubbed her eyes. “You can’t have Sunbreakers crashing through his ceiling…”

“Why not?”

“Because Haya made a deal with him. That they won’t lay a finger on eachother. They meaning Drifter and his associates, and Haya and her Sunbreakers and her friends. But!” She stopped him from speaking with a raised hand. Tirion wanted to say it as quickly as possible, as alternative was waiting a very long time. “You can… use them to terrify him into hanging over the edge of the Tower and have the Sunbreakers not help him. That way you’ll honour the deal and get him out.w”

“What does he care about deals?”

“He cares. He hasn’t even tried to recruit me. Even if he doesn’t care, I can’t risk anything that might make him tempt one of my friends.” She had to make the severity of it clear. “It also means that Haya will shank him with a broken bottle if the deal dissolves.”

“Seven Strikers, then!”

“I wish I shared your enthusiasm in times of peril…” It was amusing, but her day wasn’t going to get better with those guns in front of her. She holstered the Ace and her purple one, and put the other two in a thick metal box. She placed her hands on the lid, and focused her attention on him. “Hi…”

“Hi.” He placed his dark hands on hers. “Where will you be going?”

“Going east, I promised Haya to join her. Then doing some scavenging on way back. Everything is
too silent now and I don’t like it.”

“Trouble always finds you, Hivebane.”

“Better it find me first before it finds the City people.” She was interrupted by the chirp of her Ghost. “What’s happening?”

“Emergency Consensus meeting.” Ghost said. “Unsure of what the subject matter is, they have it locked pretty tight.”

“I think I’m barred from participating.”

“You have a seat, so does the usual gang and the Praxic Order.”

“Praxic Order doesn’t show up unless it’s about a threat to humanity, it has to be about Drifter. Don’t know why they would want me there.” She slumped in the chair. “They weren’t happy with me last time. To hell with those meetings. Since when am I even part of it?”

“You’re really going to pass on a chance to tell off Hideo?”

She held her breath before letting it out with a broken confused squeak. “This is emotional blackmail, Little Light. I don’t like what those meetings do to me. I reach such a level of exhaustion I become energized to be an unpleasant person. I really don’t like those people.”

“I already told Haya you’ll be late…”

Tirion crossed her arms like an upset child. “I hate this.”

Shaxx chuckled. “The Consensus meetings are your Crucible. You secretly love those them.”

“In the same way you love Tex Mechanica.”

“I should have some Titans pay their representatives a visit. Been too long.” Shaxx said thoughtfully. Tirion was moving towards the door with the efficiency of a cat sitting on a warm spot being told to move. “Good luck!”

Tirion forced herself to not listen to anything that was said to avoid getting riled up about it. Zavala was arguing that Drifter posed no threat and proposed giving him a better home than his current settlement, Praxic Order argued against. They glanced at her now and then waiting for her to speak, but she didn’t have the energy. Speak when spoken to was a great rule to follow.

She’s heard some of Haya’s rambles about the Drifter, how he is a very short and scared man. One thing even Haya admitted was that Drifter didn’t lack intelligence. He had an ear somewhere in the room, listening in. It was for the best not to speak. She tuned out some of the yelling, but she did hear something about throwing drifter out an airlock to prevent another Dark Age. Before Tirion could call it an adorable idea, the Praxic Order representative stormed out.

The Drifter will be gone by the time the meeting is adjourned. She was sure of it. He was somewhere close.

“… is it safe to assume that our Guardian hero here was also responsible for the Guardians going rogue? The example she has set should be a cause of concern.”

The Warlock looked up to see the Executor staring right at her on the other side of the massive table, trying to suppress a smirk or struggling with facial expressions. She couldn’t tell. She could
see the point he was trying to present, as no one wanted to associate her or her friends with Vanguard obedience.

“I really don’t like you, Hideo.” Something about that room brought bad things out of her. Perhaps it was how it was lit. Could use a tad less harsh lamps and maybe some diffusing light bulbs instead, maybe a nice colourful plant for the table.

“Mature. At the very least, it’s not another outburst like the one we witnessed last time you sat in this room.” He reminded her, almost mockingly. “What do you have to say to the allegation?”

“That I really don’t like you?”

“You have an obligation to take this seriously, girl.”

If she could sink any deeper into the seat… “You want the City to be ruled by an authoritarian figure.”

“Your flawed understanding of the New Monarchy’s values is unwelcomed here.”

“I’ll make it welcomed.” She retorted. “You want autocracy. Zavala wants obedience. The Drifter is offering the Guardians a world that is deeply and subconsciously yearned for.” Tirion heard the gasps around her.

Zavala was about to interrupt him, but Hideo wanted further answers. “I’d would like to request you to elaborate that point before conclusions are drawn about your current set of morals, Guardian.”

“A tyranny doesn’t have to scream at the top of its lungs to be one. Doesn’t have to be flashy and the leaders don’t need to have megaphones.” She shifted until she sat properly, putting her arms on the table. “It can be very, very, silent. It’s still there. The people obey. All it takes is one person to walk up to them and make them remember that lack of free will isn’t a fundamental aspect of being. Free will is a right.”

“Irrelevant!”

“Oh, it is relevant!” She knew that he was not someone to be convinced, but she wasn’t done answering his question. He asked for it. “Birds are meant to fly. Word of caged birds invite liberators. The one who caged the birds gave birth to the liberator. Blame of the birds flying away does not fall on the one who freed them, it falls on the one who exercised rulership over them.”

“Liberators of caged birds do not make them tempt the Darkness.” Ikora argued. “They do not cause murder, alleged or not.”

“No, not the liberators. The birds also die because no one has taught them to survive. The liberator often takes a tutorship role.” Tirion said, expecting to get exiled any minute. “Drifter didn’t convince anyone to harness the Taken energy and use it as a weapon. He just opened the cage you created. Sentient beings are not meant to be obedient foot soldiers. Rebellion of mind is certain when put in situations it was not made for.”

“What are you trying to say, Guardian?” Zavala asked. He understood her perfectly, he just wished that he understood it wrong somehow.

“All the suppressed anger over identities and lives lost, all personal freedoms denied, all of the censored speeches, all of the forbidden thoughts. It added up.” All eyes were on her now as she faced Zavala. “You created thousands of slingshots, one for each Guardian. Only thing the Drifter
did was to convince the forces of the world to let go of the slingshot.”

“We had no part in creation of the Drifter.”

“Think about it.” Tirion leaned forward. “You welcome him or crush his Ghost and make him suffocate in space… does not matter. Yor was a Guardian who got corrupted by the Darkness. You hid that knowledge from Guardians. You hid the lessons.”

“We hid it for the best.”

“I’d argue further but this isn’t about the Darkness, not fundamentally. It’s a natural reaction to a broken and mismanaged upbringing, it’s people lashing out. Get rid of Drifter, and more will come.”

No one wanted to say anything more, not even gasp. She had one more thing to add. “I’m not on Drifter’s side, in case there are questions about that. I’m not on the side of mindless obedience to a higher power.”

“That’s how you see everything?”

“That’s the choice the Guardians are faced with now. Every single Guardian.” Tirion said coldly. “One side is mindless obedience to a higher power they don’t understand and living life as an eternal servant and soldier without any sense of identity besides what they can conjure with their Light…”

“What Drifter is doing is not freedom.” A councilman argued. “He’s not providing freedom to anyone! He’s sending down Guardians down the path of Yor and all of his aspirants.”

“Other side is freedom. Freedom with that pain of seeing sunlight for the first time in years. Drifter is, funnily enough, making them see sunlight for the first time.” No one in the room was pleased by her words. “Freedom with the anger that comes from being denied a life, freedom with grieving the life that was taken from you. Freedom with the anxiety of figuring out who you are. A mass of pent up feelings exploding in on itself leads them down a dark path, not the Drifter. Drifter capitalizes on it by latching onto what the Guardians have been morphed to.”

“You are defending someone accused of murdering Guardians?” The councilman looked at her, then in disbelief at Zavala for letting it continue.

“I’m not defending him. I’m explaining it. He is scum, rivalling the Executor. I’m condemning everyone.”

“We’ll resume this another time.” Zavala put a stop to it. “We have one more order of business, and it’s about you and… the death of Cayde-6.”

“What is there more to say?”

“Your lack of a report.” He said. “It has been six months since Cayde died, and your reluctance to write down what happened has caused the Praxic Order to start an investigation.”

“They believe that I am responsible for it?” She looked at everyone in the room, not being able to read anyone except for Ikora. Ikora looked as angry as her.

“We haven’t heard your part of the story. The only thing we have are the last recordings of his Ghost, and Petra’s side.”
“It’s not a story I enjoy telling.”

“This is ridiculous.” Ikora shook her head. “Report or not, I have faith that she didn’t do it.”

“Let her speak, Ikora.” Zavala said. “We need it for the record.”

Tirion scrunched a piece of paper underneath her hands. It was ultimately just her word. Words had power, actions did too. But, words were clearer. Praxic Order was powerful, and no matter what she would say they could get her kicked out of the City.

“To preface… I’ve lost my mind fighting for this City and its people. At times, it might not have been at the side of the Vanguard.” She tried to stay calm. “Not one of my actions have been with the goal of subterfuge, ruination, or dismantling, or harm to humanity or the City. Fallout due to my mistakes has happened, I will admit to that. I have been presented with hundreds of chances to run, but haven’t taken any of them.”

“Have you thought about it?”

“Who in this room hasn’t been tempted with it?”

“Continue.”

“If I end up in a position where I am forced to escape a city I’ve saved repeatedly, a city I sacrificed a lot for, it will be because of my own crimes. Not because of slander and lies and rumours started by the Praxic Order, rumours that I had a role in the death of my friend.” Tirion focused her anger on the crumpled paper in her hand. “My Ghost has the footage for the rest, and Petra Venj can give you a recollection of what happened to knock the both of us out. If you knew Cayde, think of what he might have done and amplify it three times.”

“We have Petra’s side of the story.” Ikora said. “We only need yours.”

“If you have it, you know that we got separated.” Tirion remembered the smell most prominently. Unique smell of rot and rust. “When Sundance died, I was a couple of blocks away searching for Cayde. I felt her die. I’ll never forget that blue gust of wind, that life force which used to be the ability to laugh and put up with Cayde and finetune his ideas. I wasn’t anywhere near when the Baron shot her. I hope she is at peace with the Light, somewhere.”

She remembered something else. Ikora said that they had recordings of his Ghost. They recovered her remains. Tirion was too distraught to do that, must have been Petra or Ikora’s hidden. “I hope no one is desecrating her remains to find out if I’m a sinner or someone with intentions of a saint with demons at her side. That is the outmost level of disrespect a Guardian can do if they want to ensure that Cayde is resting in peace.”

Tirion closed her eyes. Was the Praxic Order seeking justice, or did they want her out of the City? Her mind spiralled into thousands of avenues the Order could go. Call her own footage a fabrication, find out about her recent adventures in deep Hive tunnels and use that against her. Only something paracausal can kill Ghosts in places Light can reach.

She could be looking at a life in exile depending on what the real agenda of the Order is. They don’t hesitate with their assassinations, but she’ll be able to take them.

To be thrown out of the City after everything she has done would hurt far more than anything the Praxic Fire can do.
Hell.

The world is the darkest its ever been but yet I can still see you shining bright.

We lost the world.

Those are not the answers you seek. You know that we lost it. Didn't come all this way for me to tell you things you already know.

Tell me, can you still see the stars? Look up for me. Can you still see them? Do you know what stars are? The Nightingales have stopped singing. Have they? I don’t know.

I’ve been watching you. I don’t know who you are, but there is always one. Always one curious mind. Don’t turn around. You won’t find me. I was never really here, none of us can be found here. Six names lost to time. How many years has it been? How many years have you spent searching for us? I don’t know how long it has been since we looked into the eyes of the causation of our departure from existence. If you're here, it means we were wrong. We thought that there would be nothing for anyone to be looking for in this world. We are gone.

You’re still trying to figure out why we lost, what brought on the madness, and where we are. You’re still fighting relentlessly. Have you not heard enough to be absolutely convinced that you’re following a path of madness? Do you want myths and legends written about you as well? You’re roping in a lot of innocent souls by adding links to this chain.

There were many before me.

There was me.

There is you.

There will be someone else after you.

And one more after that.

The chain is infinite. This place is hell. It cannot be stopped by you setting fire to the room. The link behind you will try to figure out why you did that.

Can you tell me about the tales the survivors tell about us? Can’t be good ones if you’re seeking out the actual truth about what happened. It breaks my heart to see you put your whole spirit into this particular fight. Survivors want to know why we let the world burn. You want justice for what happened to the world. I fully understand that. You’re a vengeful spirit. You must know that you are simply succumbing to the emptiness, same emptiness we saw in the face of...

There is nothing left of us. We saw the face.

I cannot stop you.

We were as lost as you.

We were lost.

Keep searching for your victories. The calamity is as unrelenting as your force of will.

They said that about me once.
There are victories, though. One thing which cannot go extinct. Victory, a word I haven't heard in years. You can win. You can. We're somewhere. You can bring us back.

We can win.

Keep going. Find the face of the one who put us in a dream in death. It is not a dream. Don't look at its face. Remember that it is not a dream.

I'll tell you were to find us.

We saw something that was real, most would have gone mad. We refused to believe we were mad. I remember now. We weren't mad. We saw something. We saw something I can't tell you about yet. This is where it began. With one choice. Wasn't the wrong choice. Wasn't the right choice. This is where the end began.

I had to keep the darkness flowing. With the choice that I had to let the darkness keep flowing.

Find us. You've already found me in a way.

“Drifter is a very short demented little man.” Haya vaulted over what was once a looming pillar. “Mara is a Queen of Babylon acting bitch. What's here to compare?”

“Both want power.” Tirion said, easily keeping up with Haya in their little race. “Is it true that you know what's inside of that ship, though?”

“Kind of.” She violently threw a Hammer at some debris to get it out of the way. “He mutters a lot to himself. Something about a portal to something else. He once was on a journey with some other waste of lives where he found a big angry monolith. Either way, you don't need to know things to scare people.”

“Huh...”

The once glorious city was in their sightlines, numerous skyscrapers standing unrelenting underneath a grey sky. Few of them as tall as the Tower back in the Last City.

“Watcha were planning to say? That my face does it for me?”

“No. Just that I should try it sometime.”

Tirion stopped in her steps, feeling a cold drop of water on her nose. It sizzled against her skin, almost painfully. Moments like these she wished she had the courage to go back to the Shard, to gain the ability to switch elements again.

Maybe she didn’t need the Shard, maybe she needed to let go.

“Tirionna?”

With every drop of rain on her skin, her smile grew wider. She stretched out her arms at either side as it started to pour down. It brought her down to a sense of strange bliss. Something she has longed for years. She closed her eyes for a sole moment, feeling her hair getting heavier and damper.

Sense of freedom. Another memory.

When she crash-landed on the first planet that looked liveable, it was raining. Hungry, scared, her burning ship only source of heat.
Yet, free.

It took her breath away, just recalling that feeling. One that she didn’t know she won’t feel ever again.

“Tirionna!” Haya shouted from where she had taken shelter underneath a ruined building. “I’m not saying that you should stop acting weird, but stop acting weird!”

Tirion promptly returned to reality, suddenly cold and numb, and ran to shelter where Haya had thrown a small Hammer of Sol at the ground. She threw a couple more down once Tirion was inside the tunnel. The walls were covered in strange graffiti, none of it legible. Memories of the old world were stubborn enough to linger on forever.

They had no choice but to sit it out. Ghosts could bring the Guardians back to life in the case of them picking the path of freezing to death, but neither of them felt like it. Dying of starvation to get brought back to life hungry, dying from the cold to be brought back close to death.

“You know, Warlords are damn liars. Every one of them. We lie. I think that’s why all the big wars were against the Fallen. Not that they destroyed everything but that Fallen are also liars and we felt kinda threatened. Couldn’t handle competition.” Haya threw some leaves into the pile as she talked. “We communicate with lies, kind of. Not intentional, but we’re too old to remember things well enough to be honest.”

“Except for you. You remember.”

“Means I can jigger it.” Haya didn’t make it easier to understand. “I think back during my lowest in the Gap I could recite the alphabet better than Drifter can recite his past. I think he is so damn deluded and insane he erased what he once was out of reality.”

“How well did you actually know him?” Reaching out her hands to warm them was a natural reflex she had no control over.

“After the Lords of The Not War Kind killed everyone up north for territory, his bar was the first thing I found. It wasn’t that far off from what used to be our camp. Felwinter just wanted that whole mountain for himself.” Haya didn’t seethe out of anger towards him, but confusion. “Fuckin’ Citan decided to wage war one day in it. Efrideet went crazy because of him, but she wasn’t chasing me. When I talked to Drifter it was like he remembered but… not at the same time. It’s like identities in identities on top of identities with him.”

“What do you mean?”

“I can’t really explain. He remembered me, that I was in the bar. He used me to recall… I don’t know. He must have been thinking of another Sunbreaker.” She scratched the back of her head. “Dude’s weird. I talked with him enough at the bar to drunkenly reveal my real name, so there’s that.”

“Like you were the anchor to a memory of his, and his head filled in the gaps?”

“Yeah…? I think he anchored to the wrong memory, though.” Haya tried to figure it out as she went along. “That there was something actually human in there. It was as fitting as a… flower in a desert. You get it. Twitched at the mention of Sunbreakers.”

Tirion poked the fire with a stick. “I’d never would have guessed that this is where we’d end up. That somehow we’d go from cheats and scoundrels hungry for Glimmer, to somewhat notorious group abstaining from crime. Before Crota, we would have lived in Gambit.”
“Who woulda thunk that we’re actually six idiots with no clue what to do. I guess we gotta be subversive somehow.”

“Happy genius heroes!” The Warlock almost sang the phrase out.

Haya raised an invisible glass. “World’s gonna miss us so much.”

They should make a crest out of that. Who knew how much time they had left. It was slowly becoming very real, and very frightening.

“That Praxic Warlock is undoubtedly going to investigate all six of us.” Tirion slowly came to the realization. “Can’t fault them for wasting time on us, as we aren’t the most transparent. She could just call us in for an interview instead.”

“Eh, she isn’t going to find anything on any of us.” Haya wasn’t that worried about it. “One of them tried to chase me down after I crushed the Ghosts of Alva’s tormentors. Had to explain to them that the assholes didn’t die by throwing one of the assholes at the Praxic Order.”

“Yeah, I remember that.”

“Shoulda killed them, though. The Praxic Order didn’t go after them!” The Titan shook her head, Hammer ready to be thrown in her hand. “They would have gotten more Exos on their hands if I wouldn’t have scared them. But no! Me doing what the Order does is somehow bad.”

“They’re more about the Darkness and all, not people being morally awry. Obviously.”

“Is the spooky Darkness even a thing?” Haya wasn’t sure if she wanted to have this conversation. “People are looking for ways to defeat the damn thing but if they’re looking for the brightest light they can find there are 15,000 of them somewhere around here.”

“A lot of people believe that everything was dismantled during the Golden Age.” Tirion’s words made Haya snort.

“Why do people think they were?” She scoffed. “No one dismantled anything! Pricks with the authority to press buttons got their lifespans tripled. Why would they dismantle anything as long as they’re in power?”

“You make it sound like you believe that the ‘Golden Age’ was a lie propagated by people with authority to press buttons.”

Haya stopped the groan in her throat before it manifested. “It felt like an illusion, making people comfortable before they die.” Haya couldn’t put it better than that. “If the truth ends up being that the Darkness which killed humanity was one prick with too much power accidentally pressing a button while fucking their mistress senseless, I wouldn’t be surprised. I just wouldn’t.”

“Nuclear annihilation would have left a different mark on the world. We have Rasputin’s logs to confirm that it was an invader, and of course the Awoken. Something was on its way to here.”

“Think yourself of like a prick with too much power.” Haya presented the idea to the Warlock. “If you got reports that something big is coming to kill you, wouldn’t you panic and press some buttons? We have craters all around the planet.”

Tirion answer to that question was outmost refusal to think about it.

“The Speaker was always rather mythological, talking about forces of Light and Dark.” She spoke
with sudden wonder, still hearing the Speaker’s speeches. “Mara has been like that as well, that it’s magical and mythical and there needs to be a cosmic balance. It’s been almost a form of indoctrination, to be swayed to view it as mythical and magical instead of hard science of what it actually is.”

“Sounds like people just don’t wanna understand it, that it’s more comforting to think it’s magic. Can’t blame them, but I’m a bit past caring what it actually is. I’m sure the dead appreciate this debate.” Haya went through what Tirion said again in her head. “Wait, you being tired of fairy tales?”

“A fairy tale in the waking world is a nightmare.” She fed the fire with her own Light. “Fairy tales are not supposed to be real. Their purpose is to make people less afraid, as the books will never become reality. That’s the reassurance you had when reading them. They taught you lessons, but not enough to wish for it to be a reality.”

“Hell, I’ve already accepted that the old world isn’t coming back. Dark Ages will probably come back, but not the world before it.”

“That so?”

“We fucked up somewhere on our way to paradise. We’ve been in an irreversible Hell for last 700 years. Warlords knew that, the Vanguard have been this band-aid of denial. I think we just refused anything else than Hell during the Collapse, because there is that addiction to pain. In a paradise where nothing hurts, we’d rot and melt like a corpse.” Haya dissolved the Hammer in her hand. “It’s not coming back. Not enough people remember the details of the whole thing.”

“The old world doesn’t mean a glittering world.”

“Nope! There will always be an old world, won’t there? Like, the old world now is the one before Collapse. The old world then was one before the Traveler. The old world then was world war after world war.” She leaned her head back against the wall. Ruination was the normal state of life, its default state. “Then before that there was probably a plague.”

“I don’t want to give up.” Tirion bit her lip. “I don’t want to let this world burn. I don’t want it to burn. That’s what I keep telling myself. I don’t want it to burn. I don’t know what to do to prevent it from burning. I want the world Saint talked about.”

“You okay?”

“I…” The fire almost blinded her, but she couldn’t look away. “Not really. Feels like I’m trying to hold on a railing covered with oil. I’ll be okay.”

The rain started roaring even louder, but the fire never died.

Tirion had to figure out how to execute her plan, and she had to do it quick. It will agitate the Praxic Order further undoubtedly, they didn’t like Guardians digging into Hive caves and getting corrupted again.

Asher Mir knew something perhaps, but she’d have to be his lab rat for a couple of hours.

They needed to find some way to purge it, and she had to keep herself from going mad trying to understand.

“I forget that people can forget sometimes.” Haya whispered. “I kinda figured that the Lord stood for Warlord or something and Shaxx wanted fewer syllables. He wants to forget it all because you
made him better. And I keep digging things up. This is turning into a big therapy session but I feel bad.” She was about to ask why Tirion woke up a part of her soul, but she also promised to not blame other people. This was on her.

“You did it all to make sure he won’t hurt me. You’re not an asshole.”

“Will this even work?” Haya shivered, changing the topic. She’ll never admit being anxious out loud. “This whole thing?”

“Not being able to forget doesn’t mean that you can’t move on. Opposite if anything. Forgetting is not moving on. Forgetting is just forgetting.”

“What happened to your family?” Haya suddenly asked.

“House of Devils if they survived the Collapse.”

Horror washed over Haya’s face. “Oh.”

“I said goodbye.” Tirion fought to keep that door locked in her head. “Fate intervened, and I got a chance to say goodbye to them before I left for a job. Guess I’ll have that. They were proud of me.”

“The last message I sent to my sister was advice on a dress for a shindig. Last message to my parents was a week before it all ended, don’t even remember what I said. Something mundane.” The barbarians took everything from her during her initiation to it, including the last conversations she had with the people she cowardly left behind.

“If you got the choice to go back and pretend the last 700 years were a bad dream, would you take it?” Tirion asked her. “In a sense where you’d remember everything, but none of it happened.”


“Depends on where you want to put me. Few happy moments before I became a Guardian.”

Rare moment of sympathy coursed through Haya’s eyes.

“Honestly for the longest time I’ve believed that the reason I’ve survived this long is because I am subconsciously fighting to stay alive to avoid some kind of Hell.” Haya scowled. “Now I think the real reason I’ve survived this long is because I refuse to die before this world does. Spite towards it all keeps me going.”

“How have you convinced that anger to not turn into perpetual exhaustion?”

“A Titan thing.”

“Maybe I should become one.”

“You think too much to be a Titan.”

“That’s why I should become one.”

Tirion checked her messages periodically as they waited for the rain to pass. The Praxic Warlock refused to back off, expecting something in return no doubt.

As much as Tirion wanted to block communications, it would just make her look more suspicious. Aunor accused her of wanting power. Little did the Praxic Warlock know that if Tirion actually desired power, Oryx’s throne would not be empty and there wouldn’t be a ball of energy in the
Ascendant Realm being furious about it. Tirion has had a historical amount of chances to seize power and might, from Oryx’s throne to letting the people of the City elevate her to godhood.

Did she really need to take time out of her day to write it down for everyone?

The war with the Drifter wasn’t hers to fight. They kept insisting that the fate of the City was on her shoulders.

What was she supposed to do?

People in a healthy city have roles. Judge, jury, and execution are three different people. Her role was of no diplomat or peace maker. Not one of paving paths. Her word was not one which could change things, as this was simply just fallout. The bomb had already fallen. She couldn’t control fallout, couldn’t control the consequences of something that was set in motion before her Ghost found her. The Vanguard were too weak to operate due to no fault of hers. Things were falling apart and it was somehow her job to address the situation. Rezyl Azzir was like her once. Couple of levels above her, if you ask her. Beloved by the City, the one who was tasked with diplomacy and he enjoyed the task. They knew nothing about the Darkness, nothing about the Traveler, and she couldn’t bring herself to tell them anything else but the truth. They knew what happened to Rezyl.

Standing on a stage and preaching to people that murder is bad and that they shouldn’t do it was no solution. People were acting stupid and it wasn’t her job to make them smarter.

Guardians will be killing eachother in tremendous bloodbaths, no matter what side they’re on. Both sides will believe that they’re right. Praxic Order cleansing Dredgens with their fire, Dredgens slaughtering other Guardians.

Children with guns and endless ammunition, not gods.

Blundering fools.

And they wanted her to tell people that they shouldn’t be idiots and that murder was bad.

She had to find a god to kill, maybe pull out an Echo of Oryx just for fun. Something to show people that there were things to take out their aggression on that weren’t Guardians. How difficult would it be to resurrect Crotta again? As much as Aunor’s vague complaints made her want to find the deepest Hive burrow and burn a Hive god back into existence, she couldn’t do it.

The civilians will be left behind seeking shelter from the thunderstorms, listening to gods wage war amongst themselves. She’ll keep cleansing EDZ of Taken blights to make sure that people won’t die from contaminated water. Her primary focus had to be on the people of the City and the settlement.

Which meant that she needed to keep the disaster away from the people.

There was no need to have any bigger understanding of the Drifter than the one she had. He was running a scheme to either gain power or give power to something else, Guardians were just replaceable Mote fetching cogs and the civil war he started was a side effect. Guardians were vulnerable, yearning for freedom inside. They were perfect subjects for manipulation. He didn’t have to do much besides smile at them.

Things out in the dark that only dark could overcome. That was the motto of his current life. She could find out more, by making him think that he got her, that she’ll play his game. It wasn’t difficult, but she had to make an effort to not think out loud.
The Man with The Golden Gun wasn’t coming for either one of them. They were free now, every single one. From Dredgens and fear of becoming a smear on the wall to law abiding Guardians and Zavala’s disappointment.

Tirion saw no issues in letting Drifter work on his plan, something useful could come out of all that research as long as he worked under close surveillance. Something she needed. Always something to learn. Whispers about the Nine circulated around the Tower just before she left, something about a reckoning and blindingly white odd structures. She recognized that place.

Guardians killing eachother no matter the side they were on had to come to an end, however. She couldn’t place the blame on the Drifter for that. It was just pure stupidity.

So, she’ll play that game.

Tirion will play their game of stupidity when in their sight. She’ll be dumb for them. She’ll pretend she hasn’t done the research on the Praxic Order, and the way they work and what morals they claim to represent in this game. Keeping in touch with Aunor meant that she got intel. Siding against the Drifter meant breaking the deal.

“Ghost?” She called for her tiny loyal companion and he appeared with a whoosh. “I want to do something stupid.”

“This always leads to good things.”

“Drifter, Nine, and Aunor need to be busy with eachother and out of people’s way. Send a message to Kouhei, he has a broken allegiance with the Nine, goose chase or not.” She ordered. “Get him to either find out about the Drifter or somehow mess with Drifter. I don’t really care. He’s smart. Preferably, get both.”

Ghost was already on it, no questions asked. “Why the Nine in particular?”

“ Heard some Guardians talking about the Nine. Even if I hadn’t, I would have asked you to do the same thing. We have a scale of stupidity, and in order to win this sudden war I have to expand it a tiny bit.”

“Tirion, wait!” Haya interrupted. “That breaks the deal!”

“Wasn’t the deal that no fingers would be laid on eachother?”

“It was! He also cuts people’s fingers off when deals get broken.”

“What is there to stop him from getting someone else to push a building on top of us? I’ll take it up with him when we get back.”

The Hammer bounced off the wall back into Haya’s hand.

Of course he had other people. He was slowly building an entire army for an unknown purpose. When need to make someone disappear arises Drifter will find ways and workarounds. No one was gone yet, her Sunbreakers knew what joining up with him entailed and traitors would be found out immediately. Sunbreakers who meddled with the night always had a smell to them.

They had a job to do for now, a short getaway before the reign of chaos. Haya almost begged for the rain to never end so she wouldn’t have to face the horror she’s been putting off for centuries.

It all ended, like all things.
Tirion respected the sudden silence as they explored the city. Haya could navigate it with her eyes closed, she could also freeze in spot way before her mind caught up to why she froze. Always inadvertently counting the footsteps.

The house stood valiantly in front of her. She no longer was a flaming Hammer throwing indestructible force, but someone coming home late. The house was understated, two floors with white paint chipping off the walls. The windows had cracks in them, but not enough for it to shatter.

“It’s alright.” Tirion’s voice behind her said, making her realize how long she’s been standing there. “Take your time.”

Haya could do this. She faced worse before. No. She hasn’t. She really hasn’t. Nothing was worse than this, no god or dictator. No fire she could conjure could make the ice-cold door handle in her hand warmer. She tried to keep the worlds from blending, telling herself that the intruding world died centuries ago. She didn’t use care when opening the door out of fear that it’d break, but out of fear that it will wake someone up and she’ll get in trouble.

“Mom…” Haya softly called out, and quickly realized what she said. Clearing her throat, she tried again. There was no one in the house. “Leor… do something.”

The Ghost scanned every inch of the empty house. Most of the furniture was broken, withered from old age. All pictures from the walls were gone, only dark squares left as evidence that they once hung on the green walls. She’ll get them back even if she has to use Vex technology to do so. Tirion’s presence alone was comforting enough to not make her lose her mind. What used to be her room was upstairs, but the risk of breaking the already brittle stairs was too great. She has broken more than enough and had to preserve some sanctity.

“Nothing.” Leor finished the scan. “There is nothing.”

“What do you mean?”

“No traces of human remains.” They said bluntly. “No skeletons, nothing. Traces of nothing. No one died here.”

“What…” Haya stammered. No hopes. Couldn’t have hopes. Lost almost everyone so far. Hopes weren’t allowed. Prohibited. “… what?”

“We should keep searching around.” Tirion suggested. “Any other places you can think of?”

“I can think of one, but it will probably set me on holy fire.” Why was fear so strange? Feeling it was a rare occasion. “Leor, keep an eye out for skeletons. Anything.”

She couldn’t close the door behind her without feeling like she was sneaking out late at night. Leor was great at handling memories for her, healing the pain. She’ll be always grateful for them. When all of their Ghosts collapsed during the invasion, there was very little room for functioning. Infinite triggering of memories strongly resembling the feeling of falling down a flight of stairs made out of fragments of hell. Seven centuries worth of it all.

The town was devoid of death. No skeletons, no animals. Like the ancient tale of the Mary Celeste, where everyone just got up and left. It wasn’t like the Botza district, where everything was destroyed and you could sense every person the Cabal took from the world wandering around trying to move on.

No spirits were wandering around this town, no fog of grief.
“Ugh…” Tirion’s Ghost groaned. “Something here is messing up my sensors. Makes me feel sick. It’s tingly.”

“Tingly?” Haya asked.

“Yeah, like needles. Prickly. What I imagine nettles feel like.”

“I have an idea.” Haya said, eyeing a large rundown apartment block in the shape of a wall. “There was a park behind this…”

“Don’t summon your Hammers…” Tirion warned.

“I won’t.” Haya counted in her head, something to the beat of an ancient story once told to her. She closed her eyes, and let the beat lead her until she arrived at a door with graffiti on it. If just glanced at, it looked like a scribble. A familiar sigil if any attention was paid by the right people. She whispered something to Leor, and they unveiled a small hidden latch with a keypad inside. More symbols. Haya took a chance, and typed something in. An old name, a forgotten verse. Only ones who came here are those who knew the path. No stragglers or Warlords would end up there. The instant the door opened, both of them ran into the dark.

“Something to tell me, Haya?” Tirion asked, trying to find the way in the path illuminated by their Ghosts.

“Kind of.” Haya picked up the pace. “Fuck if I know honestly, but I have an idea.”

“That idea is?” All Tirion saw was dark.

“I know that there was almost a whole town underneath here. At least they were working on it.” Haya hugged the wall after almost colliding with it. “If the inhabitants were trains and stuff. Either way, tons of electricity.”

“Hm…”

“And maybe an illegal club or two.”

“There it is.”

“Point is, that there was a giant hole. And railroads.” The wall she was tracing came to an end, and so did the concrete underneath her footsteps. Leor peered down, revealing numerous train tracks with their flashlight. “Railroads gotta lead somewhere. The path to here was paved after the Collapse, there were a lotta walls before. You couldn’t get to here from the apartments, you had to take an annoying route. My mother joked that she’ll knock down the walls one day.”

“Where to?”

Haya positioned herself until she stood north, trying to remember. She couldn’t recite a book she was reading word for word, but she could recite every single thing that happened around her when she was reading the book.

Had to try to remember people. Remember the constantly running trains.

“I don’t know.” Haya finally said. “Leor?”

They tried to shake their shell, to signify shaking a head. “Jammed. Can’t scan for arc signatures. Someone doesn’t want people to be here. Alternatively, they didn’t want anyone to know that
people were here.”

She wasn’t going to give up. She almost broke her ankle when she jumped down to the train tracks. The metal buzzed with energy, but no trains were heard. Had to keep on walking. She had endless time to explore every part of it. She knew that if she kept on walking west, she’d end up in the old military base in a couple of hours. Between those two there was a club, enough food and water and substances to last for a very long time.

That’s where she would run. That’s what she was running towards the day before the world changed, but it didn’t save anyone.

Maybe she was trying to convince herself that throwing her life away in her youth was for some divine purpose and it was all worth it.

It wasn’t.

A silent crackle in the wind caught their attention. One that wasn’t made by any of their Ghosts or them.

“Stop.”

A male voice on an intercom. Both Guardians decided to do as told. They could handle death and being shot, hostility from them would just hurt everyone.

“First paragraph on the fifth page of your journal.”

“We don’t have a journal. My name is Tirion.” The Warlock said. “We’re peaceful.”

“And the other one?”

“Haya.” The Titan responded lazily.

“Very funny. First paragraph on the fifth page of your journal.”

“What the—” Haya tried to figure out where the voice was coming from. “That is my name! Abigail, if you want another one of mine!”

“Are you here to joke around?” The voice turned menacing, adding to Haya’s annoyance.

She had to accept that words were better than a Hammer hurled at every surface: “I can’t go back to Dark Ages and unfuck my skin so you’d see the family resemblance! Who are you?”

“We’ll be watching you. First door on your left.”

The click of the door was loud enough to let them know where it was. They followed the sound to see bright blue colour wash the walls until it unveiled a door. Knowing that they probably didn’t have time, the ran to open it only to find a dark tunnel with soft light at the end of it. Haya almost shoulder charged the door open as the patience was drained from her.

A breath of life hit them as well a blinding light. Haya noticed the smell first, the sweet aroma of foods she hasn’t seen in hundreds of years. Sound was second, songs lost to time flying freely through the air. Sight came to her at last; people.

A lot of people. The lights on the high ceiling simulated the sky and sun. Fortified settlement hidden away from the world, with their shops and houses and apartments and colourful decorations. It wasn’t a paradise, if anything an accurate reflection of the outside world. The
houses were made with hard work and materials from outside. They weren’t hiding in a beautiful paradise away from the world, they were surviving the world.

People. They survived. She couldn’t count them.

No one even noticed them standing there for a long time. They weren’t beings with godly powers then, just awestruck kids. Amazed by the simple fact that a small part of the world survived, that there are things not even the most powerful forces in the universe can kill.

“You’re blue!” A tiny girl exclaimed with curiosity at Tirion. The girl had zero fear in her eyes, unlike the children of the City. They didn’t always look frightened, but the cracks were there.

“I am!” The Warlock couldn’t help but smile.

“Did you eat something weird?”

Tirion knelt down to be at eye level with the girl so she could get a better look. No doubt the girl will find the swirling patterns of light fascinating.

“Not really. Bad people and bad things sometimes happen to people.” She slightly stretched out her hand, showing that there was no reason to fear. “Doesn’t make it a bad life.”

“ Weird.” The girl expected the Warlock’s hand to be cold, but only found the opposite. Gentle warmth. The Warlock still looked very cold to the little girl.

“I see you met Leah.” The voice they heard earlier spoke, and the tiny girl ran over to hug the armoured man. “My name is Zed.”

“You trust us?” Tirion asked the accented man. He looked trustworthy enough. Few things remarkable about his appearance besides the sweat on his brow and curly black hair.

“If Leah trusts you, so do I. The girl has a detector.” The girl ran off to play with the other children at lightning speed. He turned to Haya. “Forgive my hostility earlier. Claiming to be Abigail is not only a bold claim, but an insult. We were also under the belief that Guardians were almost extinct. Welcome home, Abigail.”

“You managed to fit in so many questions into so few words…” Haya put her hands on her hips before sharply turning her head to him. “What!”

Confusion consumed his face. “You don’t know this place?”

“I haven’t been here in 700 years because I went on a tantrum.” She motioned towards her scarred face. “So, no?”

Zed had more question than he thought possible, but she was the only one who deserved answers then. “This is Ariela’s Haven.”

“That’s…” She switched over to Void power because she’d do less accidental damage with it. “That’s my mother’s name. How do you know her name?”

“I suppose that raises just more questions.” Zed sighed, almost mournfully. “Come on.”

Haya glanced briefly at Tirion.

“You’ll be fine.” The Warlock said, with a patient smile. “I’ll wait here.”
The man kept a respectful distance from her during the trek, he didn’t lead her but simply showed her the way. Every person they passed was welcoming, if they had questions none were asked. The children were amazed by her heavy armour, chasing her with questions with eyes brighter than of an Awoken. Zed had to tell them to wait for a little while, earning a lot of pouting. Haya was too busy in her head to pay attention to it. Fear, anticipation, anxiety. She couldn’t tell what it was. All of them at the same time. A box filled to the brim with guilt with its lid weighted down by a bag of bricks, and a hand was reaching out to remove the bag. She returned to the world to find herself in a library of a kind. She wasn’t going to let Zed make her read.

“I have a whole lot of questions.” Haya tried to not shout, but most of the shout was muted by her teeth. “I’m not putting any lab equipment in my mouth to show you my identity.”

“You won’t have to.”

“How do you know me?”

Zed, instead of using his words, pulled out an old book and placed it on a table. The covers of it were hard leather, the corners glistening metal. She recognized it. Zed recognized that struggle on Haya’s face. The outmost refusal to show any weak points if she could endure it, and she could endure anything. If she were like her mother, she had no patience for tales that used too many words.

“I’m not going to tell you what to do.” Zed said softly, with hands behind his back.

Taking the deepest breath her lungs allowed her to, she had to use her Light to stabilize her hands when she opened the old photo album. First picture the first brick removed, threatening to consume her with the confidence of a god. The inhale was sharper than a knife.

They looked so happy.

A rare moment when all of them were in the same room in the living room. Her parents on either side, her brothers and sisters in-between, her right in the middle. The big smile made her look like an entirely different person.

She couldn’t remember a moment in the last seven centuries where she came even close to being as happy as she was the day the picture was taken.

“What happened?” Haya’s question came out smooth, but her fighting the grief in her heart it made her sound ready to turn every structure to dust with her Hammers. “From the beginning.”

Zed already had another journal in his hands. “Raid sirens screeched, I refused to let the world end.”

“That’s all you’ve got?” She asked weakly.

“Sorry. It sets a tone.” He flipped the page. “During the calamity, only thing that shouted louder than the raid sirens were your mother.”

Haya manged to get a pained laugh out despite the heavy weight. “That sounds like her. Get her disappointed enough and… and…” Couldn’t keep the joy up for more than a second. “Go on.”

“Her force was overwhelming. She rallied as many people as she could to hide underground, some refused because of prophecies.” He read. “No one has a solid recollection of what happened during the onslaught, everyone who saw it died or were too traumatised to remember. All of the survivors had one common thing to say, they would have died if not for Ariela.”
“Did they… Did they…” Haya whispered, but her throat wouldn’t let her finish the question. “You know what I’m going to ask. I can tear down buildings but I can’t ask this.”

“Your father was the first to pass, twenty years after. It dented her, but didn’t break her. When she was alive, she spent almost every hour of her day helping everyone build this haven. She passed away peacefully from old age, many years after the calamity.” Zed’s words knocked the wind out of her. “Hardly any written end for your siblings, but they lived here for a while. Went their own ways.”

“Everyone survived…” Haya whispered with what felt like her last remaining breath, her lungs shrinking in size. She had to keep repeating it in her head. It all was explained to fast, she had to go back. They survived. 700 years’ worth of questions and guilt gone in less than a fraction.

“Our people survive, Abigail. No matter what.” Zed watched her pull the album closer to her, she appeared to be less weighted this time around as acceptance slowly sunk into her. “Before today, the belief was that you were the only one who died to the destruction. Your mother’s belief that you weren’t dead were one of the things that fueled her. I’m sure you finding your way here brings her a great amount of peace.”

She didn’t want to hear more about her until a chance to breathe was given to her.

“What’s your role in all this?” Haya knew when people were lying, Zed wasn’t. Something was off, though. He opened the right side of his poofy jacket to show her something hiding between the thick jacket and bulletproof vest. There it was, a bright blue eye hopping about. It acted more like a puppy than a Ghost. It had a very minimalist shell with a hatch in the front, made to resemble an inconspicuous tchotchke when the hatch was closed. “Huh. How many years?”

“400th birthday next month. Died when hunting for food one day.” He tapped the Ghost on the head before it happily returned to the inner pocket of the jacket. “I’ve taken my place as a historian in my free time, Guard as an official job.”

“Guard…” There were few times she was overjoyed that Lorcan wasn’t by her side. This was one of them. “I lost track of the actual number. I was one of the first.”

“How come you remember your past?” The visceral reaction Haya had to the picture didn’t look like it was a result of extensive research into her past, it was real. She remembered.

All she could do was shrug. “I don’t know. I think the… uh… um…” Haya hesitantly pointed at the dusty ceiling with a battered hand. “One of those… rightfully punished me for being a coward. My family survived, but I still left them behind. I’ve been living with this guilt that I let them die.” Her hand fell back to the desk, at the corner of the page of the album. She almost had the courage to turn the page. Soon. If she does, she wants to do it with the whole team of friends. Tell stories about every picture. She didn’t want to do it alone and far away from home.

“Do you still pray, Abigail?”

“Is there redemption for someone with a reserved place in hell?” Even she wasn’t sure if it was rhetorical. Her mother’s gaze in the picture stopped her from slamming her fist on the table. “I don’t know. Everything I was taught came true, didn’t it? Up until the end. We were supposed to have a blissful utopia, a new heaven and earth! Rest depends on who you want to start a fight with. The story is finished. We’re in hell. What faith is there to have? I’m lost.”

“Faith for the new heaven and earth. The world to come. It is not the end. The last 700 years have been a time of judgement for us all. Not all dead have been resurrected yet.”
It was difficult to tell what year she was in. “What if it’s a technological singularity?”

“A what?”

“I don’t know. I heard that word thrown around by people smarter than me. What if the paradise ends up being the creation of someone who wants to be a god? Who has no right to be one? Who wants to rule? Who has put their damn throne above all stars and stolen from us? Will they actually be brought down to the nether world for their sins?”

“I have few answers for you, you have to seek them out yourself.” The solemn answer didn’t help to ease her distress.

“Great.” She looked down at the picture again. “Great. Fantastic.”

He knew that she knew the answer, but didn’t want to say it out loud yet.

“May I ask what happened to you, Abigail?” Zed asked carefully. “I have never seen scars like that.”

He wanted a story, so she’ll give him one.

“First thing I remember after the collapse is the horror over killing the only other person left alive.” Haya told. “I was alone for months, no idea what Light was. I thought I was the last person alive. A repeat of dying from hunger because I found no animals to eat. Leor did their best. I wasn’t scared, there was no room for fear. My brain had to deal with the trauma of dying every hour.”

“But you survived.”

“Eventually I reached this snowy mountain. Reached the point of insanity where I wanted to try out different ways to die. I really wanted to try immolation but had to take what the world gave to me. Hadn’t freezed to death before that. I just wanted something different. Die in a different way.” Haya tried to combat the cold that overtook her with her Light. “Barbarians ambushed me, one of them took Leor. The other two kept kicking me until the snow around me was red. They were white as snow. They gave me a choice as they laughed. Either bleach away everything I am and be reborn into this new world, or have them crush my Ghost and torture me until I either freeze to death or die from bleeding inside.”

“What made you not give up?”

“That one day they will die and I will outlive them. And I did. Now, I keep outliving everyone.” She looked at Zed, the broken eyes startling him. “Don’t get me wrong. Eventually we became friends, family. They became my family because I so desperately wanted a family after such a long time of wandering alone. Soon enough I was the one kicking people and painting snow red. Watching Iron Lords kill them was bittersweet. It was sad because they were my best friends, but they were assholes and they deserved it all.”

He didn’t know what more to say to that. Nevertheless, he was intruding. Surveillance was there in the case of anything going wrong, and he had his own Light powers to defend the haven with.

“I’ll let you have a moment. The album and the journal are yours.”

Zed closed the door behind him, having seen enough to trust her. He saw the blue woman who came with Haya not too far away, answering questions of curious children. He has heard of her kind, mostly legends about eyes glowing in forests. Seeing one in person was a little bit disturbing. Something about their eyes. She kindly bid farewell to her small group of small fans when she
noticed that Zed was there.

“Haya sent me a notice that she needs a moment…” Tirion said, trying to soften her gaze to not startle him further. “May I ask some questions?”

“Go ahead.” If not for Leah’s warm reception to her, he wouldn’t trust the woman.

Tirion looked at the settlement again, barely finding breath. “How does this thing work?”

“We have a system. First, everything outside is fortified. No one can break in. We don’t send out more than ten people a month to gather supplies. Every hunter sent out has a journal in their backpack with instructions how to get home in case they die and come back to life.” Zed explained. “We disrupt all attempts to track people. If you ask scanners, none of this exists.”

“But it does…” She breathed out. “It does. I understand why you hide it, I’ve seen what happens when you don’t hide. We almost lost the Last City by being out in the open. You don’t know how much hope all of this instils in me.”

He couldn’t imagine. “Is the fabled Last City still standing?”

“It’s… quite shattered. Shattered to the point where you shouldn’t trust any Guardians you encounter in the wild because of strange allegiances sworn. I hate what it has turned to.” She muttered sadly. “The City is holding on but it won’t take long until it falls again. What you have here… its secure.”

“There are whispers out there that say when the final living Ghost finds its Guardian, the final reckoning will begin. After that, the chosen ones will be rewarded a paradise.” Zed couldn’t tell what the sting of anger on her face was, and she didn’t say anything in response. Instead, she leaned against the nearest wall and waited for Haya.

Tirion wasn’t going to insult and put down anyone’s faith out loud. She was a guest. No matter how angry the words made her, she had to stand down. Tirion has had her fair share of exposure to a paradise and gods and rulership powers no one should possess. A god aspirant maimed her, and then built a prison pretending to be a paradise. Now the god aspirant is seeking ways to rule over the whole galaxy, to become the crowned ever-Queen with the universe being her dominion.

Tirion couldn’t stomach a paradise. The beautiful garden. The afterlife. The place of a thousand names throughout history. Whoever desires the paradise is free to go there, but she’ll fight until there is no air in her lungs to avoid it. They won’t find her alive in the prophesized paradise.

Haya didn’t say a word on their way back. Zed told them that they are welcome back once every few months to avoid raising suspicion. Too much traffic in and out would kill them. Whatever it was that happened in the room, Haya needed time to process it. After Tirion made sure that Haya was home safe and not completely alone in the settlement and that Leor would contact her immediately at the first sign of awry, she set her sights on a specific part of the Tower.

Praxic eyes and ears were about to be everywhere, so she had to be smart about it. She had to play dumb again and respond to Aunor. The Praxic Order devised a plan, to wiretap the Drifter’s new place of residence and to use Tirion to do it.

All it meant is that she had a window of opportunity.

Currently, the Drifter was losing. Aunor has been winning for a moment too long.
“Look, Champion, I know we’ve got a great friendship going here…” Drifter’s eyes remained dead while his voice and casually raised hands exuded that charm he was known for. “I don’t need any more blue psychos on my hands right now. The stunt you and your buddy pulled with the Nine? Having her show that card game to your friend? Cute. It pissed me off, but you’re some years too late for that stunt to work.”

“We share the same problem regarding blue psychos. You’re not the only one with that problem.” The charm didn’t work on those who have gained freedom. “Parameters of the deal have to be adjusted. I have Haya’s permission. I’ve been doing a lot of research about your Gambit. A lot of people have taken a lot of notes about it.”

He reached into a cooking pot filled with jade coins. “When a deal is done there is no changin’ it. Gotta look out for my hide. But, at least ya’ had the decency to waltz in here and ask for permission. Really pisses me off when people break their word.”

“When a deal has a broken foundation, it needs to be fixed. It’s a simple adjustment.” Tirion stood tall. “Or do you want to die?”

Old Drifter leaned against the orange railing, the black swirls in the bank behind him dancing. It hummed with strange energy, slowed down whispers.

“I’m listening.”

“No dominoes are allowed. No one in the middle. None and no exception. No backstabbing by proxy.” Her own unsettling green eyes looked straight into his dead ones. “Either one of us breaks it, we’re allowed to kill each other. Get Shaxx involved in your hare-brained schemes in any way, you’re dead. One of Haya’s Sunbreakers messes up your plans by her orders, feel free to kill me. We’re making a deal to not stab each other, our associates included. A peace treaty between our groups in this war.”

“As much as I admire a woman willing to risk the trust of everyone who’s ever been kind to her…” It was too intriguing to be true. She was more likely to bait and bleed him than her words of a truce being truthful. “What are you getting out of all this, kid?”

“I need the Gambit running no matter the cost. I need to monitor it for research. You’ll get your motes, I’ll get science. It’s imperative that it keeps going, we can’t let it fail. What comes out of Gambit can be used to prevent what’s about to come.”

Drifter jerked up his head and laughed. “What’s about to come? Ha! There is no prevetin’ the apocalypse! I wouldn’t be pokin’ around in the Nine Realms if I knew that we had a bright future to look forward to. Hell, I’ve seen the bright future of everyone begging to die. All of this is just preparation.”

“I’m trying to prevent a harsher future than anything you can imagine. People can survive calamities.”

Drifter’s coin froze between his fingers. “What the hell do you know about harsh? I guess Abigail has told you some stories.”

“I remember my past life. I lived a mild case of the beautiful insanity that is about to consume the world. I can’t let it consume the world.”

The images of enemies of humanity on the coin changed rapidly as it trailed his fingers. “Trust me, there is a better solution to that problem than whatever the hell you’ve got in your brain.”
“Which would be?”

“You really think that the Warlord loves you and that Abigail is your best friend? Warlords don’t know feelings! No one comes back from the Dark Ages. We don’t see evil as a color, a spectrum to heed and all that dogma.” Drifter knew that a feisty and arduous retort wasn’t coming. Instead, her eyes just fell to the floor in thought. “Abigail tryin’ to make friends? Her I can get. She is crazier than me. She goes on all about how she fears Hell. She won’t end up in Hell because she is Hell. But Shaxx? Well. Who needs the Devil when you’ve got the Lord? The loud idiot got the horns and everything. Everyone is running their own Gambit, some of us are just not hidin’ it.”

“What is it that you are trying to persuade me to do?” Tirion asked him. “Find a field of daisies and play the loves me not game?”

“Tell you what, kid. The best advice I can give you right now is return to heaven while you can, explore as much of the universe as you can, alone. Get that mechanic to hook you up with one of them big long-range haulers. You can build a cosy abode in one of them. Smoke. Leaves. Friends. Lives. Dust. Don’t even try to hold on.”

“Enjoy the view and all that as the world collapses in on itself?”

He caught the coin with a satisfying ding. “You got it! Or, stay here and quickly make yourself a dead woman walking. I’ll take that deal of yours, I’ve got your back if you stand with me.”

It would make everything come full circle, but she couldn’t do it. People had to take priority. Survival of others had to be ensured at the very least.

“Aunor asked me to bug your quarters.” She dropped one of the coins she accidentally grabbed. “I’ll be back in fifteen minutes. I’ll drop off the microphones behind the Omolon box in the corner. Would be bad for her if someone would, I don’t know, find them and run away with them. Absolutely terrible.”

“What exactly are you plannin’ to do once our Warlock friend finds out about this game you’re playin’? I dig it as long as it brings profit to Drifter, but check the logs to see what went down at District 125 the other day. Lotta dead Ghosts.”

She could withstand fire. She could burn herself back to life. No one will touch her Ghost.

The machine every problem was trapped in was about to start bleeding to death.

But for now, she had to play a part. A group of Guardians were on their way there, eager for a reward from the Drifter.

“Me? Oh! What about me, stranger? What did I do?” Tirion pointed at herself innocently as she slowly backed away, head filled with nothing but air. Face now free of stress, replaced with mischievousness of a child. “Oh, I had nothing to do with this. The microphones? One of your contacts came and swooped away the microphones because they were shiny, microphones that were placed there because of Aunor’s orders. I did my job!”

“Stupid doesn’t suit you, sister!”

“I’ll force it to suit me.”
When this world has failed me, be the path that brings me home.

A lock.

All of his work so far, trumped by a lock. It couldn’t be. Had to be a bug, maybe a power surge. He pulled off the visor to confirm. The datapad in front of him reflected what he saw earlier, a harsh image of a lock. Request for higher authorization. He was too polite to yell at the piece of technology to make it clear that he was the one with authorization.

Every light bulb in the room turned on and blinded the Guardian who was sitting in the dark rummaging through the memories.

“You’ve seen enough.” The commanding Titan held the jammer in his hand, just to mock the Guardian. “You’ve investigated enough. Anya tells me that it is affecting your other duties. Stop it.”

“We need them!” The Guardian fought the urge to yell as he tore his eyes off the datapad.

“We got enough info to know that—”

The Guardian slammed his palms on the flimsy desk, making the locked datapad almost fall off. “We got enough info to know that they can burn everything in their path like no one else can! Alleged misaligned interest, they are smart! We need to find them!”

“We don’t. We know where all of them are, except for her. That’s exactly how she wants it. We made the decision leave all of them be.” The Titan was barely moved by the tantrum. “You believe in the fairy-tale version of them. They let the world burn, and now they think they are in hiding. Cowards. They’re far more concerned with disassociating themselves than tackling the problems of the world.”

The Guardian got ready to fight.

“Tirion was the one who discovered that Hive have returned to earth, discovered that Hive planned to raise an army to invade Earth. Stopped the Hive from draining the Light of the Traveler...”

“What of it was long lasting?” The Titan set his menacing glare on the man infront of him. “The Traveler didn’t survive.”

The Guardian persisted through gritted teeth. He’ll stand there listing things the whole week if he had to. “She shut down the Black Garden—”

“Out of no favour to the City. You know that.”

“She killed majority of high-ranking Hive in the Solar System—” The young Guardian was slowly starting to lose his argument, hating how weak he felt infront of the burly Titan. He was no longer a Titan, titles like that were a thing of the old world. He’ll always be a Titan to the Guardian.

The Titan’s energy was as shattered as the world outside. He had his own list of her accomplishments. Too many things were broken in the world to allow this subordinate to waste his breath.

“624.”
“… what?” He didn’t associate anything with that number

“That number is burned into my brain with the force of a thousand Sunbreakers,” The Titan grunted. “624 accomplishments. I counted. The day they disappeared, I got so furious that I sat down and went through the records and counted it all. I re-counted it every day. We were facing the certainty of our destruction and I was counting. The world was collapsing all around us yet I was sitting there counting. Six. Two. Four. I know the name of every single thing she and her team killed by heart.”

“Then you know what power they have. They can save us. Just find them, give them guns.” The Guardian begged. “Please. At least… tell me why not.”

“Because Tirion is a strange pretty little bird who lives in her own world.” The Titan almost broke the old wooden chair when he sat down on it. “She didn’t want to be caged. That’s where all of her motivations were.”

“She didn’t want the world to be caged.” The Guardian corrected him softly. He refused to budge. “Best I can tell right now is that the participants in the Gambit managed to use Taken energy to amplify their Light, and eviscerate Taken Primevals with that. Tirion was on the hunt for something like that. Turning Dark to Light, chipping the dark parts of the Thorn away.”

“You should stop using that machine. You’re becoming her. You’ll end up just like her.”

The Guardian has heard that before, and undoubtedly will hear again. “I’m not.”

“We have cameras on you when you’re in this room.” The Titan raised a finger to stop the Guardian from complaining about it. “We didn’t detect any heat signatures in this room. Yet, you heard someone. Didn’t you? Someone was here.”

“I didn’t.” He lied.

“You heard Tirion.”

“I…”

“What did she tell you?”

“She told me to turn around, then told me to find her. As if it was a test to question her.” The young boy sighed, looking down. “Please. Just a couple more.”

“How did you find these again?”

“With whatever remains of FWC’s help. In one timeline, they disappeared. In the second one, they died. In third one, they survived.” He wasn’t so sure if that was the truth anymore.

“Do I want to know how FWC did any of it?”

“You don’t.”

The men sat in silence for a very long time. One contemplating and trying to find some light in deep seeded hatred, other anxiously waiting for a response trying to fight all urges to give up. He heard her, in his head. He’s hallucinated before, and his weakness made him an expert at a task for once. He knew the difference between what brains conjure and what was reality.

He just needed more time.
“Do you think he loved her?” The Guardian asked a question he’s been mulling over, staring at the lock. After a moment, it fizzled away.

“That loud poor bastard still does.” The Titan pocketed the jammer and glanced at the Guardian’s surprised face. “I’ll allow it. Traitors need to be brought to justice. First step to recovery of this hell is introducing normalcy into it. Getting her back would help everyone in the long run. We’ll be monitoring you. Report everything she says.”

“Yes, sir.”

The Guardian waited until dark fell on the room before putting on the visor again.

_Breathe. Deep breaths. You’ll be alright._

You watch me. I watch you.

When we get to the end of the story, you will know more than you do now. Question everything, question even me.

I am not an Ahamkara tempting you. I am not a Hive god or god aspirant whispering into your ear. By this point, you should have learned a lot of lessons from us. You should know what is me. I don’t know who you are just yet. I know you’re curious, filled with fear yet covered by an unbreakable shield. You know of the terrible punishments that are at the end of the road of curiosity, yet you keep on going. I don’t think you were scared when you looked into the eyes of that Titan.

Have you ever been sailing? Have you ever been in the middle of the ocean, mist all around you? That’s how it looks like. This solemn peace all around me.

I was the only one pulled in here, because I chose to. It was the only way, there was nothing I could do. I am not just an apparition up in the heavenly mist. I was last at the valley of death. They’re one and the same place.

The valley of death. That’s the next step.

I had to seek it out. I wanted to chip the bad parts away, to give birth to Light. Dark and Light aren’t their true names. We have to stick to simple names for now.

Dark can’t be avoided. Living your life trying to hide from it does not make you a warrior of Light. Warriors of Light have walked through the Darkness as if it were mere grass, because they know the Dark can’t hurt them.

_You have to want the Dark to wield it._

No. You have to stop fearing the Dark to wield it. _Want_ is irrelevant. Don’t focus on your desire to stop being afraid. Focus on losing the fear. Fear is a wall made out of smokes and mirrors. Fear is a thing we develop over time, it’s nothing we are born with.

I cling onto childhood a lot. Cling onto that moment where all of us had that childlike innocence. Only lesson I feel comfortable teaching others is to hang on to it, because it will disappear.

None of us hung onto it.

That’s our tragedy. That’s where the roots to our greatest failures started to grow, and now they’re lovingly cradling the world.
I’m sorry.
I’m so sorry.

We thought the moment would last forever. That’s what’s funny about the ultimately meaningless phrase, a long moment. It stems us from us wanting it last forever. It’s meaningless.

I love fairy tales because the authors always found a way to fall back to it, to revert to faiths they had as children. In that way, they could love in the moment forever.

Guardians don’t remember their childhoods. They don’t remember that joy. Only thing they got to fall back on is the void. Not having anything means nothing to lose.

Guardians have no tears, and therefore they suffer more.

I had a dream once while taking a moment to rest in this hellscape. Only I and the Traveler in suffocating darkness, first beacon of light I’ve seen in months. I approached it with aching limbs, and asked it: “Who are you?”

Everything around me started shaking as it answered me with a voice only I was allowed to hear. A world shattering calm voice.

“I only do His will, I am his gardener.

I take all His flowers and trees, and transplant them into the gardens of Paradise in an unknown land.

How they flourish there, and what that garden resembles, I may not tell you.”

Although, I suppose that was just a memory.

Dreams are funny in that way.

No matter how many times she tried to swallow the nausea through her ragged breathing, it mocked her and found her request for its nails to be removed from her chest to be atrocious. The marrow of her bones shaking stung her, all she could do was try to control her breathing. The world was blurry, she could make out debris of the Shrieker she just felled around her, she could smell the Void. She refused to look at what was right in front of her. Tirion was losing grip on the world, slowly drifting away as she couldn’t breathe fast enough.

There was a procedure.

Tirion remembered the procedure.

She had to concentrate on something. Anything. Tearing her eyes open, she found a Hive receptacle. It would have to do. Had to focus on it, examine it. Try to figure out how it works.

It’s just temporary.

She had to stay in reality. Had to cling onto it. No matter how dirty and infested with rot the reality around her might be. Solar System. Saturn. Titan. Archology. Focus on the reality, focus on how it will be over in a couple of minutes. Focus on her breathing becoming quieter and replaced by Hive worms crawling around.

Focus on the receptacle. Focus.
“… Guardian?” The robotic voice was a jab in her chest. He wasn’t too far away. “Guardian?”

Tirion tucked her legs underneath her to sit on them, facing the weapon. She placed her trembling hands on her lap, focusing on stillness and the reality of her actions.

They’ll hate her for it.

“Guardian…” He was right next to her now. “Guardian, what did you do?”

“There was no other way…” Tirion quavered out. “Had to craft the real thing. I promise to you, I will find a way to chip away the dark. I promise. I promise…”

Blue comforting swirls appeared all around her, warmth. Safety. A moment of a home she wished she had. It ceased once the job was finished and she was brought back to full health.

“I promise…” Tirion repeated. She didn’t know how to hold it without getting stung.

“I believe you, Guardian. Just…” The little bot placed himself a couple of inches away from her eyes. “Just be careful.”

“With this, I have become the enemy of hope.” The jagged handle of the Thorn cut into her skin. “I have to work quick, I’m not sure where to start. This could take months. Enough time for Shin to kill me, and people to turn against me. I need a place to hide it until I have a plan.”

“Got any ideas?”

“Keep it in my ship for now.” She holstered it as she stood up. It rejected her body, vibrating to escape the confinement. Perhaps that was a good sign. “Need further telemetries from Gambit. Need to figure out how deaths of Taken Wizards create a well of Light. Huritt should have something for me.”

“You aren’t planning to participate in the Gambit, right?”

“No. Just keep watching from afar. Just…” She had to take a moment, clutching onto a nearby stone wall so she wouldn’t fall over. “Remember when I was sick a while ago?”

“Yes. I couldn’t heal you.” He recalled.

“Ghosts can’t cure terror and its side effects.” Tirion took a deep breath before continuing. “When our current objective is done, I’m going to talk with the people. If they have questions, we’re going to let them know that I’m just sick, alright?”

“Alright…” Ghost agreed hesitantly.

“They can’t know that I’m scared. They can’t know that I got a Thorn stashed away somewhere.” Her eyes pierced his little blue one. “Not until it’s cleansed. I don’t want to get their hopes up. Once it’s done, we tell the story. They’ll believe that I did it without fear.”

“You really believe that this will work? Cleansing that thing?”


“Good!” Ghost spun around excitedly, with new faith. His Guardian always pulls through. “What’s next before we head back?”

“We’re going to see Nasan Ar, after the visit to the settlement.” It took some effort to fetch the
name from the burrows of her mind. “Orin is her new name now.”

Ghost noticed the slight lack of joy in the voice. “How well did you know her?”

“No that well. She lived under a tree, had a village.” Tirion told as she walked, each step kicking off small Hive worms off of her boots. “I wanted to get to know her, but I never had time. She was like me. Uncertain of what role to play, curious. Wanting to see the outside world, explore it in hopes of finding a true purpose. A lottery ticket of all things placed her on the Yang Liwei.” Tirion paused for a moment to smile for a second. “I think we would have made good friends.”

“What happened to her?”

“People wanted to leave the Reef, to see what’s out there. Mara saw it as water seeping out the cracks on the glass of a snow globe.” They paused to look at one of the flickering screens of the Arcology, text about Titan being their new home hardly legible. “She let people leave, but leaving meant banishment. Nasan was one of the people who left. I left earlier. Then... I don’t know.”

“Makes me wonder what you had to do to get Mara to welcome you back.”

“Doesn’t matter. All I can say is that I was desperate. I started hearing a lot of rumours about Awoken being slaughtered by ‘curious’ stray Warlords. I loved the outside world, but it didn’t want me.” She sighed mournfully, placing a hand on the purple screen. “There was that moment... that one moment.”

“What moment?” He carefully asked, flying closer to her.

“It wasn’t just a moment. Years. It feels like a moment.” Our Home. “One moment where all of us were intact. I didn’t know how vile Mara was, Jolyon wasn’t plagued by nightmares, Uldren wasn’t shattered, Kouhei smiled, Nasan Ar wasn’t a corrupted mannequin of the Nine.”

“I think you know the answer.”

“I know that I need to focus on what’s going on now. Enjoy the moment.” Tirion let her hand fell, waiting until it stopped swaying by her side. “Doesn’t make it easier. It feels like all the angels watching us collectively left. Or more appropriately, were stolen by Mara so she’d survive her atrocities.”

She was doing it again. It always came back to that. Obsessed with the past and future and can’t see the present for what it is. He still hasn’t come up with a way to distract her from it. He couldn’t give her a hug, or figure out what to change the conversation to.

The little Ghost tried his best every time no matter what.

“Let’s get out of here, Guardian.” The small Ghost nuded her shoulder with his entire being. “Let’s go find something more colorful to look at.”

Glorious day, in hindsight.

Splendid.

Guardians were on their own adventures deep inside the infinite forest, high on tonics they asked precisely zero questions about. Outside of the simulations and factories of adrenaline, the very last of snow has melted and the world was alive once again. Full of colour, trees that have awakened. Crops no longer frozen.
She hid her nervousness effortlessly as she strode into the settlement. Her flowy robes were dancing with the winds of Spring. Burgundy robes with white fabric on top, strange words written in gold on the white fabric. The white wasn’t blinding, the robes have gone through their fair share of wear and tear and battles with the Hive. Hair in intricate knots, as tidy as she could make it but loose strands were unavoidable.

Her presence was majestic, her blue skin making her appear like she was out of this world. She wasn’t like a queen, wasn’t like a strange disgusting alien. She didn’t suck the air out of the room and made the people collapse in awe. There was no flogging to demand respect. She held a strength, one which radiated around her.

She was something else entirely.

Sense of pride bloomed in her chest as she traversed it. How much the people have been able to accomplish. Her disappointment in herself joined the internal fight, as she missed the development of it all. She missed the starting gun. Regret over missing this, regret over not noticing how Haya’s project has grown and how proud she was over her students.

Tirion missed too much, stuck in her own broken memories and spite towards the past.

She had to take a breather when she could. To recognize the present. Only then she could recognize the future and plan accordingly. Only then she could cleanse weapons of Darkness.

She had to learn how to cling onto moments. Moments will not last.

Tirion knelt down next to a girl struggling with something. Couldn’t have been older than ten.

“Hi!”

Upon hearing Tirion’s voice, the child instantly his what she was working on. “Hello!”

Tirion tried to look behind the girl, kind smile on her face. “What are you hiding?”

“Stuff.”

“What kind of stuff?”

The girl frowned slightly. “I’ll figure it out.” Her face turned cheerful and determined. “Heroes don’t ask for help!”

“Now that’s just false…” Tirion shifted until she was sitting on the ground. “Every hero has asked for help.”

“Even you?”

“Yeah.” Tirion nodded. “Less times than I should have.”

“Hm…” The girl slowly revealed what she was hiding. A broken toy of sorts. Tirion slowly took it from her tiny hands to examine it. This was as far away from her forte as it could get.

“My friend Lorcan could help with it.” She signalled to her Ghost to call him. He never left Earth nowadays. “He should be here soon.”

“My dad said that you killed a big bad by yourself.”

“Which one?” Tirion almost laughed. The girl sat down in front of her with newfound interest.
“I’ve always had people behind me.”

“Tell me a story!” The girl leaned forwards, head in her tiny hands.

“How about…” She thought for it for a second. “A story of a girl who killed a king?”

“What kinda king? Was he a good king?”

“No such thing as a good thing. Don’t let anyone make you bow.” Tirion had the girl’s attention, hopefully until Lorcan got there. “There was this girl, named Eris. Bravest person I know of. She had three glowing eyes. Most found her to be scary, but deep inside she was kind. Other people who have gone through same things as her turn selfish and let cynicism course through their veins, they start to hate the world. Not Eris. She wanted justice for her friends, she wanted to help.”

“What did she do?”

“Once, someone was in trouble high up on the moon. Nowhere to turn as shadowy monsters started to overtake. She cast a spell to get them out. Didn’t use an inch of bitterness to watch someone else suffer the way she suffered.” Tirion paused for a moment. “She kept helping along the way, directing with her knowledge. Showing paths to portals and ways to see them. She kept on giving until the King was dead.”

“Can I meet her?”

“I don’t know…” Tirion murmured. “One day, she was no longer there. I didn’t even notice when she left. I’m sure she’s okay. She has enough power and kindness in her to survive any trial. Don’t tell her I said that if you find her, she doesn’t like nice things said about her.”

She could manage a tiny smile, while knowing that Guardians taint every single thing they merely glance at. They bring death everywhere they go, seeking lives to exchange. In order for them to come back from the dead, a sacrifice has to be made.

She’ll try to die as little as possible to make sure that the girl will not come into Death’s way until it’s truly her time.

That one was hers to guard.

“Ya called me?” Lorcan interrupted, but was welcomed all the same.

“We did.” Tirion motioned towards the broken toy. He sat down next to it, and curiously stared at it to assess the damage.

“I’m not gonna fix it for you…” Lorcan decided to finish the sentence very quickly once the girl started to look like she was about to burst into tears. “I’m going to help you. Come on.” Lorcan put the broken toy between them. Then, he took out strange black fabric roll from his backpack. Unrolling it revealed many tools. Just as he opened his mouth, Tirion stopped him.

“Don’t do it Lorcan!”

“Whaaaaat?” Lorcan whined innocently. “Was just gonna ask if this series of tools reminds you of your old home!”

She would laugh if the joke wasn’t said by Lorcan. “Lackluster and insulting to tools.”

“Let’s get to work.” Lorcan clapped his hands, he had work to do. Jokes could always wait for
later. “So. Where do we start?”

“We can start by figuring out what hurt it, what caused the damage.” Tirion tried to make the child less confused. “We won’t judge.”

“Uh…” She glanced down at the toy. “It fell. After I threw it at a boy.”

“Don’t you hate it when that happens?” Lorcan chuckled. “What did the boy do?”

“He said something mean about the blue people.” The girl didn’t dare to look at Tirion. “Then it… fell on his head. He then broke it. Don’t want Dad to know that I did it.”

“Gonna have Haya to teach you some things once this is done.” He physically felt Tirion’s piercing glare. “Looks like we’re going to need to pick it apart and straighten parts out. Look at the toy, which tool do you think we’ll need to use?”

Her big eyes instantly noticed the screws. “Small stars…” The tiny fingers trailed the tool belt until they landed on what she was looking for. “This one?”

Lorcan was patient, never judging if the girl fumbled. He wanted to make sure that she’d be able to repair it without him there, as he had little against throwing heavy toys at people’s heads if they deserved it.

They won’t always be there to help them.

Many wanted to go back to being kids, a world with more innocence. He hoped that he could grow old someday, with a slick grey streak in his hair.

Many wishes, many lives. Best they could do was to help retain some of the joy in the world. It was always fleeting.

It didn’t have to be.

"Nah. Dark Age version was better."

"You and I remember the Dark Age differently."

"I'll take a hard projectile over energy any day. No better way to make sure the target is dead."

"Energy is for silencing barriers. Fists are all I need to administer blunt-force trauma."

"I forget you used to be a Warlord."

"What do you mean 'used to'?"

"I thought you'd thrown in with Saladin and Felwinter."

"I did. But I never stopped being me."

"Then why—"

"Warlord' is too many syllables."

"Gambit needs more candidates like you. Should stop by sometime. Whatever you want to call yourself."
“Thank you.” Shaxx said as politely as he could to the unkept man leaning against the rusty railing. He couldn’t figure out of the smell came from him or the rust. “You’re a liar and a cheat. Stay out of my Crucible.”

“Ha! I don’t need to step a foot in there myself to get what I need.” Drifter practiced his new coin trick. If he flung it just at the right angle right at a tiny incline on the floor, it found its way back to him. He figured he should clarify some things before the Arc energy dancing around Shaxx’s fingers consumes the Titan and in turn overloads the Mote Bank in the room. Drifter didn’t want explosions in the Tower, not his style. Most importantly, those Banks were expensive to make. “Don’t worry. I ain’t takin’ her. Way more Glimmer from selling what remains of her crown when she falls over than what getting her into Gambit is worth.”

“Gods have valiantly tried but ultimately failed to make her fall over.” Shaxx said proudly. “If her crown breaks she’ll bring it back to life before you get your hands on it.”

“See, that’s where we go different ways. When a strong crown breaks, it ain’t that simple. I know your type, you still relive the Disaster every day. You know what happens when you try to break the sword of a Hive Knight.” Drifter painted the image, not intimidated by Shaxx taking up almost the whole room. “All that power!” He whistled. “All we gotta hope for is that she falls alone.”

“Crowns don’t break from mere falls.”

“A fall like hers won’t be simple. Get a feelin’ that she tried coy tricks on you when she first walked up to ya’. Can’t say I know her type because that one is something new entirely, but I ol’ Drifter can put some pieces together.”

“How is this relevant, dreg?”

“Simple.” The Drifter narrowed his eyes. “Don’t ever trust a blue psycho, never mind falling in love with one. They only bring you nightmares. They are drugs with a mighty high but terrible withdrawal.”

Shaxx crossed his arms. “I’d like you to call her that to her face and see what happens to you.”

“Oh, I did. I wouldn’t have done it if she hadn’t known what she is. I kinda value my life, as you can tell.” A small Hammer of Sol whizzed past him and the bank behind him, leaving a burn mark on the wall on the other side of the room. “Speaking of psychos…”

“We’re all mad here, dick!” Haya shot back, but her attention was stolen by a hundred jade coins in a cooking pot. She was too confused to sigh. “You know what? I’m not going to ask. I’m a reformed person. Just going to assume that jade stone radiation has something to do with your assholery.”

“My Ghost learned how to handle radiation long ago. Doesn’t help with anything. I’m already nuts.” Drifter glanced at the seemingly empty hallway behind Haya in suspicion. “If we’re havin’ some kinda Warlord getogether, Lady Efrideet better be turnin’ that corner. I miss her.”

“As much as I would love to see chaos reign here and it all ending with you being thrown off this Tower like a javelin…” Shaxx began to excuse himself. “I have Crucible matches to oversee, and breathe fresh air.”

The room became a lot bigger once the Titan left. Drifter never showed any fear or respect when facing the Titan, opposite of the rest of the Tower.

Haya was still confused about the coins. She remembered a trick from back in the day, keeping a
plastic button in your mouth to trick the body into thinking that you’re eating. Didn’t cure hunger, but it kept it away for a while. She shook herself out of it.

“Was wondering if you want to eat some cigarettes on top of the old Tower.”

“Take it your little Nightstalker doesn’t smoke.”

“I’m so pissed we made the deal to not hurt eachother. Tower. Now.”

She left before him, knowing he’d follow. As far as she knew, the Praxic Order reached some sort of conclusion about him. Enough to get them to back off. She took some time to look around as she waited. There has been scaffolding on top of the old Tower for the longest time now, yet no construction workers ever seen. This strange lack of life.

“Y’know, I remember that group of yours.” Drifter snuck up behind her, cigarette already in mouth. “Crew I used to run with talked about ya, the group of cowards refusing to live in the new world. Couldn’t blame ya, somewhere deep inside. While we were out there begging to die, you lot did the smart thing. Person who sold you out must either have been someone who hated cowards or hated that you got the easy way out.”

“No easy way out.” The ash fell from the cigarette as she spoke. “Nothing was easy.”

“Had to admit you had it better than most of us.”

Both of them sat down on the ledge of the Tower, both of them forgotten about the fear of falling down to a final death.

“We were upfront with everything we did. We were idiots, too stupid to get our hands on paint. We thought we were cowards but then definitions changed when rumors started flying.” Haya recalled, and memories flooded through her mind. The one story she’ll remember the clearest. “Heard this story once. This Awoken girl just wanted to find shelter, fresh off wherever the hell black hole Awoken came from. Some Warlords eyed her the whole day, leered at her, stalked her from a distance. They waited, watched her struggle and barely hang on to life as it was. They killed her in her sleep because they were afraid of her. That’s cowardice. That girl deserved better than to be killed in her sleep by cowards. There is no good life after death.”

“You’re actin’ like you’ve never been a coward.”

“I’ve never felt it. Neither have you.” She blew out the smoke and turned to him. “We’ve all got our tales about holding a dying person in our arms, them crying how they can’t feel a thing, and you realizing that you can’t either. Me, you, Shaxx, Zavala, Saladin. Everyone from that time got one.”

“What was yours?”

She pointed at him. “You first.”

After a pause The Drifter began, with an unsettlingly soft voice:

“My neighbour’s kid after the whole village got caught in a crossfire between Warlords and Iron Lords. She liked the tricks I could do with the Light. It still bounces ‘round my head.” His dead eyes drifted to the sky and he was in another world. “Right before the light went out in her tiny eyes, she whispered, ‘I can't feel anything.’” The enthusiastic Gambit overseer was gone, replaced by the broken husk of the past.
Haya honoured her part of the agreement, not wanting to hear him talk in that spine-chilling tone ever again.

“Collateral of a Sunbreaker job. Before I joined them. My first introduction to them, matter of fact. A boy was trapped in a collapsed house. I thought I could save him. He said that he couldn’t feel his legs, how he couldn’t feel pain but he couldn’t move. How he couldn’t feel a thing…” Her leg was bouncing up and down, and only another drag of the cigarette could calm it. It took more than one. It’s easier to believe that it can be mended easily than face the full brunt of the damage.

“Funny how they always say the same thing.” Drifter pointed out, back in reality.

“They don’t, do they.” The thick grey smoke from her chapped lips briefly blocked out the sun for her. What would she be without it?

“Nah. Most don’t even die infront of ya, if they die.” Drifter lit another cigarette with a satisfying drag of the match. “Everyone from that time got one. Only one. That’s the one boon we get granted, the practice run. World tellin’ you that things are about to get a whole lotta worse and only amateurs get complacent. These young Guardians are precious, runnin’ round without that. Guess that’s what makes em flock to my Gambit, they wanna go through it. Sick bastards. Ain’t complaining.”

Haya didn’t even scoff. “You don’t give a shit about why they do it!”

“As long as they keep the motes comin’, they can have any reason for it. Motes mean that I can get away.”

“They have to go through it, though.” Haya looked down at it all. They were always playing with that purple ball. A great way to find new Guardians. She couldn’t make out what the figures were doing, but she would bet her life that the purple ball was moving. Too many new Guardians showing up these days, not giving her enough time to think if she should trust an old prophecy a fraction of living beings remember. “Who’s your Alice, Eli?”

Drifter didn’t move a muscle at the name, but the question. “The hell are you talking about?”

“While on the subject of things all of us got. All of us from back in the day got an Alice. The one friend who set out for the Wonderland and went mad trying to understand it. I hate that book, but we all have one.”

Drifter has gone a lot of years not thinking about that snake, recent events changed that. She appears to be everywhere now, taunting him and haunting him. He might as well get used to all the questions about her.

“Her name was Orin, she was a Sunbreaker, Awoken, loyal to her Queen. She’s something different now. You know, the psycho your friends have been tryin’ to befriend.” He said in slight annoyance, but all Haya could do was raise her hands in innocent defence, knowing that she has no control over what her Awoken friends do. “That’s all you gonna get. I don’t need a shoulder to cry on.”

“Eli, huh…”

That name again. It has been many years since a Sunbreaker has uttered it.

“Save it.” He waved her away.
“Keep your children in check. All I’m saying.”

“No one putting a curse on me, and there is a reason why I avoid chairs.”

The cigarette almost fell out of her mouth but she managed to stop it. “Says the reanimated dead. We have passed curses by several thousand light years.”

They watched the world below for a while, the Guardians scuttling about like ants. Humans could never empathize with lives of ants.

“How the hell are the two of us only proper relics of that world?” Drifter asked himself. “We got the three stubborn Titans, but they’re different. Ikora and her big-ass shotgun came a little bit later. Ain’t anyone else besides us who remembers there being nothin’ but wanting to kill the world because it refused to let you die.”

“Coulda smashed your Ghost if you hated it so much.”

“Tried to.” Drifter rapidly glanced around, trying to find it. “It got slippery. Found out that it’s more use to me alive, now I made it immortal with scavenged parts. Doesn’t mean that I trust it. It knows where we stand.”

She had a pretty good idea of what an immortal Ghost meant in relation to Drifter. Didn’t need to ask questions about that. “How many do you think are left?”

“Not that many. Maybe a hundred.” Drifter guessed. “They say something big gonna happen once all living Ghosts have found their charges. Considering the rate they’ve been killed off as of late at the Shore, it could either be tomorrow or next year. Gotta take every chance I get to improve the Gambit.”

"Judgement Day's not coming, is it?"

"Judgement Day ain't coming soon enough."

“We gonna live our lives to the fullest and make bucket lists?” Haya tried to sound sarcastic, while hoping and begging that the next cigarette drag will kill her.

Drifter had to laugh at that. “Don’t think for a second that you have a seat next to me once the end comes.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Haya deflected through the smoke, and stood up gingerly, her armour clanking loudly. Even if she had a seat, she wouldn’t take it. Merely watching the world come to an end was worse than any apocalypse she could think of. If she goes out, she’ll go out like a true Sunbreaker. Not powerless on Mercury, but surrounded by flames she has drawn from the depths of Hell itself.

They will never find her cold and whimpering.

She enjoyed irritating the Drifter. But, slowly developing a soul meant that kicking someone while they’re down didn’t make her happy. Drifter would never show emotion, with the cigarette between his fingers. She’s been in a place like that before, she could read his mind.

“Orin was a good kid.”

The man audibly cringed. “Just get outta here.”

Titans couldn’t be budged.
“She didn’t stay for long, maybe less than a week. But, I remember her. I liked her hair, but Liu Feng complained that it blocked out the sun. She was kinda timid but the Forge embraced her, which according to Ouros meant that she held a lot of strength inside.” Haya dropped the cigarette and watched it fall until it was out of sight. Despite being on its way down, it still left fragments of ashes scattered in the air. “I know you’re going to tell me to fuck off for this, but I’m sorry for what happened. Losing friends is rough.”

He squashed his own cigarette. “She ain’t dead.”

“I know that you don’t have it in you to pull the trigger to kill her. She ain’t immortal.” She tried to imitate his accent. “Before you ask, I can’t do anything about Tirion going after her.”

“Startin’ to think that she’s addicted to havin’ a bad life.” He shook his head. “Everyone who looks at whatever remains of Orin doesn’t come back from it. The psycho won’t leave ya alone. Could be just me.”

“Tirion can handle it. She’s damn unstoppable.”

“Yeah…” Drifter sighed in soft annoyance, and clicked his tongue. “That’s what Orin thought, look at what she is now. It’s not who anymore, it’s what. That’s what they said about Saint-14, even though I don’t buy that he’s dead.” He watched as she froze at the name in the corner of his eye. “Meanwhile, you’re here! Warlords don’t change, and you’re a Warlord through and through. Abigail, White Death, Haya. You can go through as many names as you want to. That life will never leave ya’. Trust me, I know.”

“You refused to accept a name. I lived in my names.” Haya prepared to jump. She wasn’t going to listen to the dogma of the Drifter, and her friend needed her. “I’m not seeking redemption. There is no redemption for the dead.”

“It’s too bad she won’t live.” Drifter grunted as he stood up, the large craters of The Last City in full view. “She’ll see you as you trying to save her as a challenge. They always do.”

“She can try!”

Back.

Back in the world of ruination. Back in the present. Something disconnected the line.

Footsteps. Three, if he could count them. One sounded wooden. Warily, he lifted his heavy head. The datapad left a sizable imprint on his face. The Guardian rubbed his eyes to see better, through the fog of sleep he could make out a figure approaching him. Red hair, dark robes. Dreams within dreams.

“You have to chisel things down to their simplest form. Remove the fragrance and bedazzlement. Strip it down. Make it vulnerable. Cold.” She rested her hands on the cane. “Its simplest form. Accessorizing feelings and actions is pointless. Rid of the embellishments.”

The man blinked a couple of times, waiting until the world became clear again. Tirion took a seat across from him. Slowly as the world came into focus, she unholstered her gun to put it on the old table. A decorated hand cannon which he has never seen or heard of, but he could put the pieces together.

“Is that the...” He almost gulped.
“Yes.”

“You did it…” He breathed out in disbelief, too afraid to touch it, too afraid to bask in its glory. “You actually did it! You converted it!”

Her face had no excitement on it. Once she put her hand on the gun, strange Light swirled around it. That gun was a part of her, no different than her heart in her chest.

“You have questions.”

He had nothing prepared, despite months of reading and going through memories.

“Y-yes…” He stammered out. Tirion quickly holstered her gun, just before her hand turned into a fist. She gripped that cane of hers with force strong enough to shatter stone. Her face remained like a doll’s, unfeeling.

“I spent years blaming myself for the casualties of the Cabal invasion, but it was The Nine fucking with us. They disabled our security and defence systems prior to the Cabal attack because they wanted to see what would happen.” She didn’t allow any of the repressed resentment and grief echo in the room. With all her attempts to hide it, like putting bricks on a crumpled piece of paper to try and smooth it out. The paper will never be smooth. She couldn’t hide her shaking hands, she couldn’t hide the hate. “That’s the hero story, the one you’ve been trying to find with this little project of yours. The story of the universe continuously fucking with you, and you bleeding dry to rise above it.”

“Why not fight?”

“Because at a certain point, it becomes not about the will to fight but about questions if you can continue. Death never returns what he has taken, but you can always make him leave. You can always sing him away.”

“That makes no sense.” He rubbed his chin. “Isn’t that one and the same?”

“You can have all the will and strength to fight, the limitless endurance. However, when your mind goes down twisted paths there is very little strength can accomplish.” She looked down at the cane. “You win to get rewarded with knowledge that it will hurt again, and again, and again. You have the strength to fight it but strength to endure it will wane until you have nothing but spite for the universe. The spite becomes fuel to outlive it. That’s where I am, without any lies.”

He saw her shut her eyes, trying to push away something creeping up on her.

“I wish I could reverse the turning point for you…” He whispered. He felt so sorry for her.

“We all have our wishes.” Tirion laughed lowly. “We all have the cynicism. I want to return to the real world just to set it on fire. I will set the whole bloody world on fire.”

“Is that really what you want to do?” He asked her, sincerely. She sounded like she was trying to convince herself that hope was no longer real. The determination of her voice was feigned.

“Heroes are a very flawed concept.” She avoided the question. “If only I could go home…”

“What do you mean?”

She looked real. The gun on the table looked real before. Her shaking hands looked real. She was not really there.
“That you are a dreamer, and that is your misfortune.” Tirion gripped the cane and pushed herself up. The old withering wood in the room she was in was familiar. “This is the Farm…”

“The commanders decided to settle in here. We were meant to move out after a month after the disaster, but it’s been a lot longer than that.”

Her gaze kept darting, legs walking in a circle. She couldn’t go outside. It hurts if she strays too far. “Which way is the Shard?”

He took a moment to collect himself and think. “Should be to your left.”

“Hm.” She scratched the back of her head. “That means I’m close. If only I could find my way to the door in the woods.” She felt the pull back, back into the other realm. That world looked completely different. Which world was her home, really? One was a world which did everything in its power to get her back, other was a world she was too scared to face again.

The world she wanted gone.

Maybe she could have prevented it, but they stupidly didn’t take Oryx’s throne. She’d have foreseen it, with all that power. Power is everything she stood against, and it led to her own fall.

“Don’t set the world on fire, Tirion.” He didn’t want any regrets, in case he never gets to speak to her again. “I don’t know you that well. All I know is that you were the one who inspired people to not set the world on fire.”

“Good for me…” She rolled her eyes.

“No matter your motivations, you were always righting wrongs. You never said die. You helped that girl…”

“They lied to us!” She hissed through gritted teeth, cane almost drilling a hole in the wooden floor. “They lied to us when we set out to find them, giving us orders of the past. Those orders weren’t for us. They bent reality. They deceived us before that, by allowing Ghaul to take thousands of lives. They’ve done more than that. It was them. It was them all along. What is a universe if you cannot trust it?” Tirion broke one plank of wood underneath her feet after stabbing it with her cane.

She continued, louder this time, letting her infuriation bleed into her voice. “You can’t trust people you love, you can't hang on to anything. You can’t trust this world!”

“I choose to believe you can…” He tried. Instead, she pulled her hand cannon out and shot the device infront of him until it no longer could be repaired. Enough of him digging through everyone's memories, it had served its purpose.

“I know that the commanders are waiting right outside that door, and that they are going to ambush me if I get out. Half of them are on their way to the forest!” She could hear them, the rumbling. Their anger, even. Their desire to see justice brought. The boy in front of her was frozen in shock. “The world betrayed everyone before I even thought about it. I wasn’t the first.”

He quickly stood up, hoping that he could stop the door from opening. Slowly, he raised his hands.

“I’m sure… I’m sure if you stay here, take the time to talk to them—”

“Oh, no. That’s not how any of it will go.” Tirion wagged her finger, embers dancing around her hand. Embers of a flame long asleep, about to be reawakened more powerful than ever. “Those who are all-powerful should fear everything. I am that everything, and I am about to escape hell.”
Just as the door was forced open by a small army, she let herself be pulled back. Away from reality, back to the only world she could trust.

“Damn it all!” One of the commanders chose to take his anger out on the desk with bullet holes. “Why couldn’t you go to hell on your own, Tirion? Why did you have to drag everyone down with you!?”

“If only…” The Guardian whispered among the chaos.

“What was that?”

“She said if only…”

“You almost had her, and you’re worried about semantics?!” The man almost had the Guardian against the wall. “You can stay here all you want, everyone else is leaving for the forest with a gun.”

The Guardian remained calm.

“If only. She already knows that she will never come home, yet she fights for it anyway.” He told the commander. “You want to send an army against someone who is giving her everything even when what she’s doing is hopeless?”

"I am. She killed all gods and idols who could possibly save her."
Oh my love, be brave for me.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Was she running again?

“How long have we been here for?” The weary Ghost wondered. “My clock stopped ticking.”

“I don’t think about good things when I think about home.” Tirion carried on in the murky mist. “If I stay here, I will eventually find a better home here. At least it feels like it.”

Barely having strength to fly, the Ghost landed on her shoulder. “We need to leave this place, Guardian.”

“Now that I know that I can leave…” It was freeing to say. “I feel less trapped in here. It’s very strange.”

“How often do you think about how we ended up in here?”

“Not at all.” She tried to cough away the raspiness of her voice. “I don’t think I have anyone out there. I got what I wanted with this realm, but it was either stay here or let people die.”

“They didn’t sound like they believed you were dead.”

“Guess I had a reputation.” The world forced her to get used to the colours of death around her. It had become strangely beautiful. “I have no regrets with anything I did. I’ve been given options here, either succumb to this or rise above it. I am rising above. Nothing can break me.”

They approached fragments of a statue, a reflection of the real world. She gracefully knelt down, fabrics of her robes swirling around her. She grabbed one of the rocks, with her name faintly etched on it.

They cared enough to build a memorial.

“Wasn’t my reputation…” She whispered, cleaning the rock with a gloved hand. “At the first hint of me being possibly alive, they started to believe that I abandoned them. They hate me.”

“You don’t know what happened.”

“I know enough.” Tirion threw the rock away. “Let’s go. Let’s hope we’re going in the right direction.”

She’s gone through the story in her head about a thousand times now. Not the whole thing, but stopping at a roadblock and restarting. She won’t have this ample time to think soon. She had to process it.

Had to go back. As per usual.

Maybe she forgot something.

Maybe she didn’t know enough.

She needed to remember. Before she goes through the portal with home on other side, she needed
to remember. Not taking time to remember was a risk.

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Present Day.

Tirion was lying down on her back on the red carpet, mesmerized by the red flags fighting with the wind. A large figure sat down right next to her, refusing to admit that the day had exhausted him. The fledgling Dredgens were backing off, but it never entailed good things. They were preparing for something.

“I’ve done nothing today.” Her voice was almost just a breath. “Well. Besides succumbing to some peer-pressure.”

“For what?” The voice asked above her.

“I and the team decided to create these capsules of a kind, to be opened in case we go missing for a worrying amount of time.” Tirion explained. “Not that I’m worried about that. I’ll keep coming back. If the world wants me dead it’ll have to die first. Nothing will stop me from coming back.”

“Just what I expected to hear. Although, I’m sure you’ll outlive the world.” Shaxx chuckled. “What did you write?”

“It’s not done yet, but…” She fumbled with the datapad. “Walk through the world with a kind heart no matter what happens to you. Make the war about coming out of it with a kind heart and not about winning. There are battles you won’t be able to win. Then I stop there, because it becomes miserable.”

“Sounds inspiring.”

“It feels like a cautionary tale. I feel like… these are the things I should be telling everyone now. This should be a speech, for the people. If worst comes, I want something good for them to remember me by.” She sat up, watching sunlight seep through the cracks of the broken Traveler. “A storm is coming. A storm is coming and I don’t work well in water, rain is coming and the strongest weapons we have are warriors of the sun. I can only hope that it is the Dark that is coming, because our strongest warriors are ones of the sun.”

“Even if it’s a storm, I know that it takes all the oceans of the world to dent the ones that burn the brightest.”

A small smile visited her lips. “Lights that burn the brightest burn the shortest.”

“The war will be over before you burn out.”

She faced him, coyly. “That confidence!”

“It’s the truth.” Shaxx clasped her hand. “No one will catch us off guard this time around.”

“No one should have caught us off guard last time.” Her face stiffened. “I still don’t understand how it happened. Doesn’t matter now, I guess.”

“You raised a question for yourself and you’ll spend the next week trying to find the answer…” When she sighed in joyous annoyance he remembered that he knew her too well. “What makes you think it wasn’t just the storm?”
“We’ve been through storms.” She remembered, leaning into him. “They didn’t knock any of our defences out. Being the Awoken that I am I cursed myself with solving this mystery!”

“I haven’t been without my own questions about it. Unfortunately, the Redjacks haven’t been able to find a thing.” He was almost disappointed in himself. “Bright side is we’ve got better evacuation protocols now, better guns, and humanity is more spread out thanks to your efforts. Once the storm strikes it won’t be as disastrous. The Guardians turning to Dark, however…”

“I’m on good terms with Saladin, I’m sure I can get him to call Efrideet if you want Drifter thrown off the Tower.” She joked, “Haya told me about your small meeting.”

“Death by Lady Efrideet would be too much of an honour for him.” He returned to his previous thought. “It still remains a concern. One that’s being worked on, if it’s any consolation.”

“I trust you with that. Otherwise, I’ll start working on it and that’s…” She grimaced in disgust. “Have to pace myself or die before the storm comes.”

Shaxx often wonders where she is, where her head is. Moments in the night when he wakes up in the middle of the night, noticing that her lost look doesn’t disappear when she’s asleep. He’s seen thousands of Guardians, both before battle and scarred by it. None had the look she had, plans whirring in her head, being lost in a strange world. With her claims that she’s feeling alright, he has started to believe that she doesn’t notice it herself.

He still loved her, always will. But sometimes when she flies away in her ship he is uncertain if she will come back whole. Her Ghost could only do so little.

He wished he could rub his tired face, but the helmet stopped that objective. The helmet and the constant demands of the Crucible.

One day…

“There are some things I still have to finish up.” That flash of her eyes when she returns to the real world has become uncomfortably familiar. “Meet you back home, Hivebane.”

Days where she got nothing done exhausted her the most, guilt from not accomplishing anything was overwhelming. Everyone was running out of time, and people needed hope. The very moment Tirion was supposed to make the turn that led home, she deviated. She had to visit someone. Still twirling his coins, still talking to himself in his little burrow. Still hoping for some kind of undeserved salvation. He heard her approaching from far away. Would be dead and buried without that skill.

“Would it go against the deal we’ve got goin’ for you to stop visitin’ the Emissary? If it weren’t for the treaty, I would have killed you!” Drifter spewed out the question the second he saw her. “Shut up! Don’t answer! I don’t need the sass right now.” His demeanour was controlled chaos, erratic but stabilized by a weakening force. He fought with his neck to the point of almost snapping it as he tried to not look over his shoulder constantly.

“I knew of her as Nasan Ar.” Tirion answered anyway. All he had were harmless words. “You are not the only one heartbroken by what happened to her, the porcelain doll she ended up becoming. She doesn’t speak with her voice alone any longer.”

Drifter surprised her for once, almost defeately leaning back into the railing and covering his eyes with a gloved hand. She waited for him to look up again. “I’m in over my head, kid.”

“One thing we’ll ever have in common.”
He sighed. “Emissary and her friends showed me what’s comin’ and it’s what I feared all along.”

“I lost my dogma long ago. Mind sharing?”

“Then you know that it can’t be fought with Light alone. Gambit is our salvation.”

“You can’t force salvation, Drifter.” Tirion tilted her head, speaking calmly. “Salvation and redemption involve having ethics for a prolonged period of time, and you and I know that you don’t have enough time.”

“Once I figure out your game, sister…” She was starting to make him angry. “Tell me. What the hell do you want this world to become?”

“Free, and not on fire.”

“I don’t believe ya’.”

“My game is to make sure a tyrant doesn’t get to power, no matter the cost.” She had her hands confidently behind her back. “I kill kings, queens, and all who aspire to rule over the minds of people.”

“Then tell me this…” He began, about to impolitely ask a question that he knew the answer of. “Why do you send your team to kill what’s-her-name in that shiny city?”

“Not killing her means starting a war. We’re not ready.”

“Oh, that’s not what I was getting at!” He hugged the jade coin with his fingers. “All that power you hold, must feel good. The power to start a war, right at your fingertips. Don’t that make you everythin’ you hate? Don’t that make you to your Queen? You keep making the war stronger with every time you delay it. I read up on it, thanks to your friend. Don’t think anythin’ can slip by me.”

It was great exercise in how to counter fear. “I don’t yearn for power.”

“Never said you did. But, it ain’t a secret ‘round these parts that you hate the Dreamin’ City and everything that Queen of yours has done.” Drifter saw it, how she could hide it all with her prim and proper posture besides that flash of her eyes. “Having that power at your fingertips, power to make it all crumble. You keep delayin’ it. You’re ain’t that much different from the Queen, you’re a true Awoken.”

Tirion briefly closed her eyes and swallowed what she wanted to say, and chose to pretend he never said that last part.

“Perhaps I’m just showing decency to the lives on that rock.” Nothing about her tone sounded believable. A dreg could sound more truthful than her.

“You know that I know that you’re lying. I’ve known liars and been killed by liars, but they’re all taking a dirt nap now. I know that there is just one thing making you delay it all. It ain’t power though, you’re not lying about that.”

There still were Praxic microphones around, but she found herself not caring. “Feeling left out of the fun?”

Tirion loosened herself, the prim and proper of it all dissipating.

“She keeps killing us…” Tirion didn’t let any grief show, clenching her jaw. The waves of light on her pale blue skin almost roared. “Every day there are less and less Awoken. We’ve been plummeting towards extinction since the Taken War. We’re people, too. We’re people. We’re not sacrifices. None of us consented to it. When the Darkness gets here, the Awoken will be no more.” Her voice cracked, and she eyed the dust flying around the dwelling place to pretend it didn’t happen. It looked so free, yet contained. Could fly through the wind freely but could never escape. “A people of a curse, doomed to die because the world willed it to be.”

In a different world, they would be best buddies.

With her mouth shut, she still looked like a kid. Some lost Awoken refugee from the Dreaming City. How she wished that she could be just that. Never found out about the stories, lived out life on the Reef, escaped to the Last City during a crisis.

How simple would things have been, but without her there would be very little Last City to speak of.

He saw it as almost pathetic.

What would he do if she were a run-of-the-mill lost Awoken refugee? Probably swindle her with a charming smile, send her on a task that would further his own gain.

It wasn’t a scared Awoken refugee in front of him, though. It was a god slayer, descendant of a doomed race of people, cursed even further on by a power no one truly understood. She could bring the entire Tower down with the snap of a finger. The Tower was a puny dot compared to the likes of Oryx.

And she was angry.

She was furious.

She could stand tall all she wanted, but he saw through her.

Drifter wasn’t a man of fear, but a man of constantly watching his back. She wouldn’t kill him, she wouldn’t target him specifically.

But when the day arrives, once the shackles blessed by gods and their combined strength keeping her stable finally shatter, he’ll die. He was certain of it. One more push, and she’ll turn this world inside and out.

Drifter wasn’t a man of admitting out loud that he was scared of dying.

He needed to be a human being for once. As close as he could get to it, of course.

“I can tell you from personal experience that revenge doesn’t last. That anger you’re feeling right now, kid? Will never leave ya. You’ll find these small replacements for it, you won’t wanna live life without that anger.” Drifter reflected on too many years of life, listening to the hum of the Mote bank behind him. “But, as we both know we’ve both been advised to stay outta each other’s business. Nothin’ about asking questions and I will always love pandemonium. So, sister. How are you gonna get revenge using an entire Throne World? Every single person you save will become a memory to you. Think ‘bout the story you’re gonna leave behind, kid. You’re not saving anyone but yourself. All those people gasping when they see ya will hate your guts.”
“I am of the belief that everyone’s choices should be their own. May no living being be roped into the same atrocities as the Awoken were by their Queen. Whenever a King or Queen comes around, it’s my duty to tear a hole in existence to fell them at no expense of other people.”

“Ha! You’re just makin’ things up to scare me.” Drifter laughed it off. “But, just in case, stay away from my dwelling place when you’re in a bad mood, alright? I guess that’s part of our little deal, not killin’ each other.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

“Oh, kid? A final piece of advice?” He stopped her as she was leaving.

“What?” She looked back at him.

“If you’re doing this all for you and your own survival, I’m not blaming ya’. I’m all for doin’ what it takes to survive. Do whatever crazy things you want, but here’s something I never had the chance to tell anyone else on account of they’re dead or tryin’ a kill me: don’t give in to hope. That gets you killed. Take every day as it is, especially if what you’re saying is true.”

She paused before responding. “I know. That’s what I wish I would have told my Awoken peers a decade before the Taken War. We’re all the same here.”

Sometimes the spark takes a different shape.

It was a Taken Vandal. Maybe. She couldn’t tell. All that mattered was that she was back in the dark place again, ripped from the blinding white world of the Nine. It always embraced her like a true home, a feeling she fought against until she burnt out.

“I’ve always wondered. Who will pull you out of this when you have no one?” A voice blew into her head. It was a voice she couldn’t hear but could feel in her bones. “It’s formidable that you can create a spark by yourself.”

It compelled her to answer.

“I’m strong enough.”

“You already have no one. Go meet her.”

Not knowing quite what it meant, she approached a hidden door and tightly gripped the worn-out copper handle. The daylight in the familiar kitchen made her almost squint in pain. Memories of it all almost made her woozy, she found herself losing her balance as she took it all in.

It was home.

“Sweetheart, what happened to you?”

A woman that held a strong resemblance to the Guardian looked up from the paper she was reading, a slightly chipped coffee cup with steam coming out of it by her side.

“Nothing, just a lot of running.” Tirion answered against her choice. In a body not her own but one she owned. She sensed that disbelieving gaze of her mother. “I’m fine, mom!”

“You’ve been running before you could walk.” The woman laughed and flipped to the next page of the crinkly newspaper. “Always thought that you would end up a gold medallist in sports.”
She sat down with a raised eyebrow, but forgot what she was confused about. “How’s Matt doing?”

“In very high spirits. They think it’s just a flu. Your dad is with him.”

“That’s…” Something was wrong in this realm of time, but this new world consumed her too quickly to continue that thought. Like a dream that she was starting to lose control over. “That’s good.”

Trapped in her own mind, being awake in a memory of dreams. Tirion looked out the window, everything seemed like it should be. The cars whose owners she would always complain about, untrimmed hedges, toys scattered about on the lawn. She wasn’t Tirion in that moment.

“Sweetheart…” The woman hoped she could break through the girl, with the kindest voice Tirion has heard in centuries. “If you want to cleanse all evils of the world, you have to stop running. You have to turn, and you have to face it all. Embrace the evil. You keep throwing happiness away because you’re too scared of the possibility that you’ll never be happy.”

“I’m not running.” Tirion shook her head. Somehow, it was all falling into pieces. She just couldn’t bear to hear that voice again. She yearned to cut herself out of this world, but wanted to stay there as long as she could. It wasn’t real. “I have a duty.”

“Remember that day?” The woman’s voice got Tirion to almost inhale the whole room, filling her lungs. “That day when you came into the kitchen, dishevelled, believing that your baby brother will be okay?” The woman put a comforting hand on hers. “Do you remember what happened next day?”

“I don’t want to remember.” She sniffled quietly, trying to wiggle herself out of this nightmare world. Trying to find the spark which would bring her back to life. “I-I got what I asked for with my memories, I won’t complain about that. But I don’t want to remember more than I do.”

The woman never showed any signs of anger, she kept her comforting and kind composure.

“You need to remember, darling. Next day, we were told that it wasn’t a flu. That day, you stopped running in the living world and started running in your own head. You stopped believing in hope. You swore to never give into hope.” The mother spoke softly, her smile turning sorrowful when Tirion turned her face to her. “You were convinced it was just a flu, based on nothing but hope. The news you got the day after made you afraid of believing in anything. I lost you first. It hasn’t stopped, has it? Every time you slip up and actually believe in something, it hurts you again. You set yourself up.”

“I…” Tirion’s throat was too thick to say anything. Her face fell again, towards the floor.

“Sweetheart, look at me.” Carefully, the woman turned Tirion’s blue face and wiped the tears away. She tried valiantly to hide her own. The woman’s grip on Tirion’s hand tightened slowly. “You’ve always been brave. From breaking tall furniture by jumping off of it, to saving the world. You’ve been so brave, and I’m so proud of you. Loss after loss, unfairness after unfairness, you come back.”

“It’s not fair…” Tirion quavered out.

“It isn’t.” Her mother whispered. “None of what happened to you is fair. Don’t you ever believe that you deserve it, or that you keep deserving it. But, don’t see it as a bad thing. Unfairness in life is simply something you have to face. It is not your whole life.”
Tirion asked the question she thought she would never get to ask ever again. “What do I do, mom? What do I do to win?”

“Stop running. You’re brave enough to stop running. You’re strong enough to stop running. You’re strong enough to move past the pain and injustices served to you. You’re strong enough.” The woman radiated gentleness. “Even if you have to say *if only.*”

“I don’t understand…” Tirion had to catch her breath after trying to say the simplest of words. “I am not—”

The sound in the room disappeared after she blinked.

She sat there alone.

Just her, no home, and no mother.

A tiny spark was dancing infront of her in the silent darkness, begging to be held.

With a heavy heart and tired limbs, she grabbed it and burned back to life. The powers above teleported her back to the beginning of this strange trial, next to a lone mote bank and a giant white shard in the sky with the symbols of the Nine on it.

Tirion clenched her teeth and gripped her gun. She was going to get through this, if for nothing but herself. To prove to herself how strong she really was. One of the things she has lost hope in as of late, her own combat ability and skills. She needed to be better than she already was, both for herself and the entire world.

Taking off in sprint, she jumped into the swirling mass of dark energy and found herself on the other side. The first was a warmup, practice in how many Taken she can massacre quickly.

The Bridge was the second trial, and the words were branded inside of her skull.

Stop running.

Before the final blow served by a Vandal, she was struggling with the bridge. She thought she could make a jump to the other side, take a shortcut to whatever horrors waited for her.

She had to stop running. Stand still. When her feet stopped moving, energy roared around her and started to rebuild the bridge, piece by piece. That’s how they got to the Son all those years ago, building a bridge with Light. Had to be patient. The combatants wishing dearly for her death were of no issue. There was no enemy fire couldn’t kill.

Once she reached the final platform, she knew she was about to engage in a fight she prepared herself for a long time ago.

Tirion was no longer afraid to face him. He and his echoes were welcome to come back as many times as they pleased. It would only be good for her and what she has been building.

It laughed at her when it saw her, but in moments it was groaning as her bullets pierced him. He had no sword to slice her with this time, she took it from him and despite the destruction the pieces of the Willbreaker will always be with her.

She almost enjoyed the cowardice of the Echo of Oryx, how it was flying away from her. When she fought Oryx by herself the first time, the fight was unhonourable on her end. She constantly ran, hid, fuelled by fear. Now the roles were switched, she was the sword.
Only thing that robbed enjoyment of the fight was that the true Oryx was dead. This was just a strange apparition, a remnant of him. Summoned to terrify a hanged man. It had to do.

With one final bullet, mass of black in the shape of Oryx screamed out and faded away.

But even all of that, even after deathless conquering the trial she set for herself… she wasn’t satisfied.

It still hungered. It still demanded tribute. It was far from enough to grow.

Soon, she told herself.

“Guardian?” The source of the friendly voice was right infront of her, shifting the top of his shell so he’d look concerned.

“Huh?” Tirion snapped back to this strange reality, feeling oddly irritated.

“I was just saying… good job!”

“Thanks…” She slowly mumbled, not noticing her Ghost’s forced happy tone, her eyes still on the spot where the Echo died. Something was missing, and it was going to bother her all year. “Let’s explore the rest of this.”

“I was just thinking…” Ghost began as they scoured the place. “I feel like our adventures are sometimes a list of stuff I never wanted to know about and now wish I didn't.”

“If I ever write a book about my adventures, I’ll use that as a title.”

“I’ll remind you.”

There wasn’t much to see in the place, same old architecture of the Nine. She couldn’t place what materials they used for any of it, or if it was just all a dream. As they’ve been going through the strange place, they’ve been finding strange canisters. The last one was resting behind a strange pedestal.

“That’s the last of the… eggs.” Ghost couldn’t find the correct word for the strange golden devices. “We should get moving so we can decrypt them.”

“What do you think are in these?”

“Judging by our recent luck, probably long stories about intergalactic shithousery.” She stopped herself with a sharp inhale. “Don’t ever repeat that last word!”

The decryption was going slowly, if at all. By this point she knew that trying to unlock hidden knowledge only hurts her in the end, but she can create strength from it. Tirion was taking notes as she was waiting, making calculations. Calculations about paracausality, calculations about cleansing sorrow.

Her Ghost was a silent onlooker. He had grown concerned. Nearly everyone in her life had at that point. Concerned, bitter. The little Ghost couldn’t find the word for what he was feeling.

He had spent most of his life searching for his Guardian, he searched for hundreds of years until he found her. He found her remains in that car, undisturbed.

He remembers that exhilarating joy when she took her first breath of air. He couldn’t put into
words how long he had searched for his charge, he managed to not be a stuttering mess somehow. He got her to the safety of the Tower, but at what cost?

A destiny is composed of many small choices.

But now... what did he know? He was just a Ghost. A Ghost to revive her, and a Ghost to try to talk to her just to find out she wasn't listening.

He was just a Ghost.

“Hellooo!” A dark red head of hair belonging to Lorcan peeked out from behind a wall. “We got a thing. Didn’t want to send you a message because some words…” His eyes were wide when he briefly glanced at the ground. “Some words should just not be typed out. I think I’d contaminate every single electronic thing if I’d try and then we’d have no tech and then—”

“What is it, Lorcan?”

“A box arrived at our door, parchment, red wax seal…” The Hunter rubbed his eyes, fighting so hard not to think about it. “It motivated me to fix all broken showers we had. You know who I’m talking about.”

“Calus?”

“Yes…” He winced out before finally collapsing on a chair that he nearly missed. “Why can’t we have normal emperors and normal kings and normal queens?”

“No such thing.”

“I—I—” He had to readjust himself in order to not slide off the chair. “There is a degree of normal!” Lorcan raised a wobbly finger to emphasize his words. “Calus breaks the measuring tool!”

Tirion rested her head on her hand, lightly tapping on the table with her other hand. “I’m here just struggling to figure out how to bait Mara and Calus into a meeting, then kill them both. We need to kill them both.”

“That’s what I’ve been saying!”

“Not for the reasons you think. He is more powerful than us. We need to kill him.”

He saw that vile look in her eyes, almost the same one he remembers glaring at him from the shadows all those years ago.

“Alright…” He straightened himself and furrowed his brow. “I know you never explicitly told me to tell you this and all, but I’m going to be a friend and tell you this now.”

“What?”

“You’re acting murder hungry.” He said. “I don’t wanna write a complaint form to Shaxx about how his wife is a power alcoholic and how her friends failed her.”

“I don’t want power.” She gripped a nearby gun. “I killed an Echo of Oryx earlier today and felt nothing.”

“You what-the-fuck?” Lorcan nervously laughed, with eyes as big as the Echo.
“Hunted one down in the Nine Realms, with a little bit of help from the Drifter.” Her explanation made his eyes wider. “Doesn’t matter. There was no gratification.”

Lorcan managed to calm himself down, for his friend. He’d joke about picking up a hobby, gardening perhaps. Some strange wordplay about her going back to her Awoken roots.

He knew better.

“I don’t think I believe in Sword Logic, and those worms.” Had to start somewhere. “Isn’t it just a fancy poetry word for addiction?”

“When you put it that way, more or less.” Tirion went through it in her head. “About riding a high. You naturally become stronger.”

“Calus makes me want to throw up, but we shouldn’t kill him if he isn’t a threat to us. I’m into leather cloaks as of late, and his skin would make a great one.” Lorcan stopped when he realized he was rambling, and took a moment to get back on track. Losing friends will never be part of the plan, never will happen again. “If we decide to kill something, it can’t be for our own gain. Can’t be because we find it fun.”

“Nothing for personal gain, especially gain which would hurt people.” Tirion added another rule.

“We should write this down!” Lorcan clumsily hopped off the chair to fetch a notepad and an old friend. “What should we call it? *Conduct of The Idiots*?” He twirled the pen, before scribbling something down on the notepad.

“Um…” She slowly looked at him playing with the pen, slowly finding herself in a better mood. “The *Ad Meliora*?”

“Something less Calus.” He frowned slightly at what he wrote before looking at her. “I just wrote *Fuck Shakespeare.*”

Tirion laughed. “Think that might be too controversial.”

“To hell with the name…”

A simple set of rules to live by. Rules to *never* break.

*Kill only if they’re a deathly threat.*

*Never kill for own gain, or for own anger, or for own disgust.*

*Never sacrifice innocents.*

*Never wear a crown.*

*Never abandon one another.*

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Tirion was fighting against her heavy eyelids. They haven’t made any progress on the decryption, but her exhaustion convinced her that it would decrypt faster if she were awake for it.

Maybe she should go home. It will be done in the morning.

“Incoming message…” Her Ghost said. Lazily, she dragged the datapad to her.
The Fortress. I’ve got something for you.

She knew where that was and who it was from. The once-beautiful battered castle wasn’t too far away, so she picked travel by Sparrow. No matter how fast she went, it wasn’t fast enough. The world didn’t blur enough around her, the wind wasn’t strong enough. Sparrow standards were too secure, and too strict. If you wanted have an adrenaline filled joy ride, you had to do modifications. Amanda wouldn’t go for it.

Even with the modifications, there was no rush as there was no risk.

Tirion took in the night after disembarking her Sparrow. It didn’t take long to find Shaxx waiting for her, inspecting the old castle.

“There you are…” The Titan began. “I had an inspiring discussion with the Drifter.”

“This…” She noticed the large box next to him. “Can’t be good.”

“Alongside half of your crew.”

She figured out what was going on. “I’m fine.”

“No one believes that you are.”

Tirion couldn’t keep her guard up around him. “What’s in the box?” She asked him.

“A warhammer.” He simply responded. “Your Ghost gave me some ideas.”

“It won’t help.” She murmured. “Killing an Echo of Oryx didn’t help.”

“That’s because you merely killed it.” He handed her the hammer. “You didn’t shout obscenities at it.”

She slowly gripped the handle, almost robot like.

She needed to stand still.

She needed to face it.

Tirion started with the first thing that came to mind.

“The last of humanity is down to under a million…” Tirion's hands tightened around the handle. “All those people believe in us, believe in the Guardians to save them. They believe in life, they have so much hope. Hope that they will survive.”

“You can provide them with that hope.”

“I can’t!” With the first swing, she swung the hammer at the wall. Parts of the ancient brick chipped away, dust landing on her boots. “I can’t! She roared again, hitting it again. “Not with everything going on!”

“Good.” The castle hadn’t collapsed yet, meant that she wasn’t done. “Let it out.”

“A narcissistic Emperor who wants the whole system to die, holding a gun against people’s heads. Believing he has control!” Another hit, still no sizable hole. “A Queen who wants to be a god, a Queen who has left her own people in ash. Those two forces are fighting for leadership of humanity, two forces who don’t know the definition of humanity! All while the Hive are
corrupting more and more of the system!” The warhammer wasn’t going to cut it. Not by a longshot. “I’m angry! I’m angry that people keep dying before they are ready to die! I’m tired of people’s fates being decided for them!”

Fire of a thousand suns consumed her as she leapt high up in the air, a brilliant large sword made of fire manifesting in her hands. She was utterly resplendent, definition of beauty in destruction as she unleashed her powers and turned the dark night into day.

She refused to stop until everything had crumbled, until the arena was no more. She could tear all armies asunder, but she’ll only be able to soar the skies if she carries no burdens. Burdens will keep her where the people are. They both needed someone defending them, and someone to help them believe in miracles.

Tirion collapsed into the dirt once her Light was expunged, strong arms wrapping around her within moments. He pulled her close to him, not wanting to let go. A rift of comforting healing energy embraced them both, the night illuminated by hundreds of orbs of Light.

“You heal them.” Shaxx spoke into her hair, hugging her close. “That’s how you save them. You heal them.”

She knew what she had to do to cleanse it.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for lack of updates!
The Thorn she crafted whispered screams.

Tirion exhausted all options she could think of. It injected infusions, rejected cleanliness. It clung on to the Dark like she has been clinging onto her sanity since the Red War. There was a particular feeling of fraud around it. It were not a fully breathing person, just a hollow doll trying to be one.

With all her recovered knowledge, she couldn’t breathe life into a doll. There was room for experiments, but she’s gone as far as she could go with the toy. Its purpose was to disintegrate her fear of it. As it lay there whispering on the table, it didn’t frighten her. The bravery didn’t come from accepting the Dark, becoming one with it, seeing it as a new saviour. It came from the realization that she has a sufficiently thick enough wall around her to not let the Dark pierce her.

Tirion needed the real thing now, the cadaver.

As luck would have it – luck she has come to hate – a kind stranger was tracking her, and was willing to lend her a gift. She couldn’t complain. She’s been making a note to count her blessings since the war, to humble herself.

The Warlock stared inside the chest, hands gripping each side of it, fingers almost tapping holes. Language she couldn’t translate etched into the inside of the lid.

“Ghost?” Her voice was commanding, almost.

“Yes?”

“Could you send a picture of this text to Kouhei?” She laid a finger on it, careful to not rub off the chalk. “Perhaps he knows something.”

If Ghost had an affirmation to the request, she blocked it out. Harsh green glowing eyes staring down the rotten gun.

The cadaver didn’t scream. To her, the gun was like a rotted body which still held energy. A soul. She couldn’t pick the word right then and there, as it was dwarfed with her purpose.

She had to cleanse it.

She had to.

There was no defending, no fighting, no saving of lives, no future until she cleansed it. Create her weapon, the first of its kind. Prove that it can be done. In part for selfish reasons, in part of not willing to see the remains of life around her get smothered out of existence.

She had to.

She had to.

“Guardian?” Tirion blinked a couple of times until the concerned blue eye came into focus.

“You’ve been looking at that for too long.”
If the Ghost would have a mouth, he would bite the insides of it to stop himself from expressing
the horror at what she is planning to do. But, he trusted his Guardian. Always. He knew that she
could cleanse it, he knew that she would do no harm to innocents.

He knew that no matter what, she would come back.

It felt like things were going to be okay.

But ever so often, it feels like it’s all going to fall apart. Like she will fall apart. He couldn’t read
her mind, he was clueless if she was constantly picking herself up or if she was breaking all her
bones or purpose repeatedly just so they would become stronger after they’ve healed. The closest
thing to her was in a way possibly the biggest stranger.

The Little Light talks with other Ghosts a lot, but he never brought up the question. Never asked
them if it’s normal to be like this. He’s allegedly supposed to know everything about her, to keep
her alive. He knows of her strange habits, her strange burrowing places.

He never knows what she’s thinking. Sometimes, he believes that she herself is an outsider in her
own world.

There was a time where that wasn’t the case. A time where he knew what she was thinking, could
read her like an open book with bright colours inside. A time of them being a perfect Guardian and
Ghost combo.

Every setback, every elimination of joy from her face, was caused by the one thing. He glanced up
briefly: the rock was staring down at them the same way she was glaring at the rotten gun in the
chest.

“Have you thought about the Moon recently, Guardian?”

The night went from pleasant, to an unbearably hot summer one. The air was barely breathable.

Ghost flinched at the sight.

The sigh that escaped her mouth sounded almost like a cough, and she almost broke the sides of
the chest she clutched on. After almost drawing blood from the insides of her mouth from
clenching her jaw, she answered: “What do you even expect me to say here, Little Light?” She
abruptly stopped an intruding thought to replace it with another one. Her hands loosened, and she
closed her eyes in an attempt to ignore that it was right above her. Tirion spoke softer this time;
“One day I will have to go back. That day I hope I will no longer fear it. Going back there terrified
makes victory impossible. Going back there terrified just opens myself up for further fears.”

“Are you afraid, Guardian? Of the Moon?”

Tirion has heard that question before. She has answered the question before. She has fallen and
gotten up before. Loop. Looped. Still looping. She had to break it. Break the loop. Break the loop
but not for her, not about her.

Never about her. It can’t be about her. She knows that with enough will, she’ll get over her fears.
She is not allowed to make it about her.

The world was so much bigger than her.

Had to break this loop. Had to stop making it about her.
Tirion felt the vomit coming up her throat at the thought that Mara may be right. That Tirion was just a disposable powerful pawn, to be sacrificed just so the remaining life wouldn’t get smothered.

She was afraid, but not of the Hive. Not of their rituals, not the nightmares they’ve been responsible for. Not of the pain they’ve caused and could cause again with fifty times the intensity. It can no longer be about her.

“I’m afraid of what people will do.” When she tried to find it in the sky, the Moon got obscured by clouds as if it were hiding from her. “I am fine.” Her chapped lips almost cracked when she flashed a strange looking smile. “I can deal with whatever is to come. However, as with every single time a threat has emerged, a division occurs. Half of them turn to vultures with their sights on a role of leadership, the other half are terrified as the vultures fight. Everyone is afraid. We are stuck in a loop of fear.”

“You…” The Ghost knew that she wasn’t going to like what he was about to say. “You should try to talk with Zavala again. It might be our only chance to fix that.”

“We won’t see eye to eye.” Tirion slowly looked back down, too aware still of the Moon’s haunting presence. “We… I…”

She couldn’t stop thinking about it.

As long as she has known him, Zavala has been very parental.

How real was that woman in the shape of her mother? How real is that realm she ends up in when she supposedly dies? It was driving her crazy. It was her realm, one that could not have been infiltrated by the Nine. A manifestation of her own thoughts and desires and memories in one. A mockery.

But, at least now she knew exactly where her anger towards Zavala came from. Guardians constantly giggle about it, how Zavala is a strange fatherly figure to them. How when Zavala compliments you it truly feels warm inside. Once news got out that he knits in his free time, the jokes of endearment became even more frequent.

The cause of their disagreements had nothing to do with her feeling controlled and used.

She was such a child.

Tirion got closure with her old self. She didn’t get closure with people she left behind. With many, closure was out of the question. She left them to die. There was the thought of finding their final resting places and practicing Thanatonautism, but she wanted a way that was reliable. Something tangible, a thing free from doubt. Something she would never question if it happened or not.

The gun she will craft will be for them. A gun that won’t allow anyone to die.

“I won’t lose any more people.” Tirion finished her thought, finally putting her pale hand on the old gun. “I don’t want to keep telling them that things will be okay just so that they won’t panic as they’re dying. I want my words to have meaning and reassurance, not to cause them to lose less blood so they would have time to latch on the tiny strand of survival.”

The gun almost sought escape from her hands, deep inside of it twisting with life.

“You… you saw something in that realm, didn’t you?” Ghost asked, concern in his robotic voice.
Somewhere inside, he wondered why he even bothered with the myriad of questions about her wellbeing. But, he was her Ghost. He was made to keep her alive. He gave up waiting for an answer the moment she stared at the gun for an uncomfortable amount of time. The Ghost glanced up at her with a tiny creak when she put it in a smaller box, and held it close to her.

“I saw my mother. My *actual* mother.” Tirion slowly said. “Or an illusion of her, some kind of mind torture my brain concocted. She told me that I should stop running away from happiness. That happiness doesn’t cause pain. Happiness is not the cause of bad things happening to me.”

“Definitely sounds like something you wouldn’t say.” He tried to joke.

“All it did was just make me more afraid. Not afraid… just lost. I feel like I’m missing a piece.” They didn’t say much more until they were approaching Devrim’s church. How many people were there when the Collapse hit? “I know that it is not a currency, not an exchange. That you need to feel a certain quota of pain to buy happiness, or that happiness is a line of dominoes and sadness is inevitable because happiness is the causation of it.” She cast a look at her Ghost, for some reason surprised that he was intently listening to her. “The truth is, part of me believes that bringing happiness to other people will get them killed, that I am a true personification of my people by carrying a curse. That’s why I need to cleanse this.” A look at the box with the Thorn, a deep breath. “I need to prove to myself that I can be Light, that I can burn away the darkness. Last time I did this, I had help. This time it will be only me, forging a new path.”

For the first time in a long time, the Little Light felt warmth and pride blooming inside of him.

Determination coursed through her as they jumped from planet to planet, deciphering puzzles and massacring Hive. Not determination, *hope*. Time for fighting was done. She was no attendee of Menageries of exiled emperors nor a pawn of an inhumane Queen. Not a toy with a gun to be ordered around by commanders of armies. Not a false image to be worshipped and hearts broken by truths.

Tirion was a *healer*.

It took her a long time to remember that, to recover the aspect of her. The Gardener muted that part of her brain, and she fought with all she had to get a piece of herself back. She rebuilt herself, but couldn’t stop there. She had to grow.

A mountain of pain came with remembering her past lives. Grief for lives lost, grief for injustices against the world. An injustice that is left as such is an open wound in the world. If by so happens that a life is lost under her watch, she will write it down, and bring it justice. No one shall be allowed to die all alone, with no mark left on the world.

In a way she believes that people leave a mark just by existing, everyone plays a role in this strange theatre. But, people deserve better. They deserve better than the world has to offer.

Deserved better.

Deserved better.

Deserved better.

She had to go back for a second, just before their journey was done. Had to backtrack to Earth. She was mere hours away from cleansing it. She chipped away the dirt which left a Rose, but it wasn’t its final journey.

She had to backtrack, because she forgot about something.
Jumping from rusty roof to rusty roof until her feet landed on the ground, right in front of the lost limb of the Traveler.

Tirion finally knew where the fascination came from. Why her eyes barely left the Traveler. She almost tripped when she ran down to the Salt Mines, where the Shard rested.

They were similar in many ways. People are naturally drawn to things that resemble them, people crave to find pieces of themselves in other things so that they won’t feel alone.

Beings with unequivocal desire to rebuild the world, to cure the sick. Both had pieces of them brutally ripped away. Limbs severed and hearts crushed. Her steps slowed down the closer she got to it.

The one in the City wasn’t real. This was the part of it that was still alive. She almost heard sounds of a hospital far off in her mind.

One was mechanical, one was not.

One broke down, one survived.

She was able to repair herself, the Traveler will be forever broken. All machines break in the end, but who is to say how much of the Traveler was truly machine. Mysterious fog of purple Light was leaking out of it, as if it were bleeding out.

What truly constitutes as life?

It was her job to heal them now, to sing death away until her voice is gone.

Who knows who will come after, but the burden was hers to bear.

She wore the wings.

Her robes got dirty as she sat down on the dirt.

She didn’t put thought into what she was going to say. She wanted to say so much, to pour it all out, to the point of almost overwhelming herself.

She let her thoughts flow, like water.

It just had to flow.

Her heart beat strangely before she let it go.

“My little brother died.” An involuntary laugh escaped her, one that felt like it had been held in for hundreds of years. Tirion shifted her eyes to the purple, blue, and red thunder roaring inside the Shard. “In another life, of course. I think that’s where my resentment for rulers started. I think that’s when I started fighting, started this enormous inner struggle. It all started with my hate towards you, and the powers you hold, how easily you could take things away and how you brought joy to everyone with no discernible pattern. We lived in a Golden Age and he died. Destiny had to twist a new disease to kill him. That’s where my destiny began. I’m linked to you more than any other Guardian. The link being a powerful resentment, not me being a Chosen One.”

Tirion paused for an answer, but surprisingly nothing came. She carried on, almost awaiting what will escape from her mouth next. “You gave me your life to save me. I took a wrong turn, and you
rescued me. If only… if only I could be so kind."

The wind rustled the twigs of dead trees around her when she closed her slightly wet eyes. It didn’t burn a vision into her mind, didn’t speak with a distorted voice. The wind danced around her for a moment before settling down, and the thunder inside of the Shard calmed down ever so slightly, just enough for her to notice.

“We need to die so this world can live.” She whispered. “We can’t die without leaving something behind. I---” Tirion paused for a minute, dismissing the ridiculousness of talking to what appeared to be an inanimate object. “I spent a long time hating you. I spent even a longer time despising you. But, continuing hating you would be like hating a dying man. And it wasn’t your choice to die. Your suffering wasn’t your choice. None of it was.”

Tirion kept on talking, as if she were actually expecting a response. “It’s the job of your children to deal with everything you’ve left behind. I just wish it was easier. I just wish that the circumstances were a little bit different.”

Her lips circled into the tiniest of a smile, albeit a sad one. “Much like Cayde. He died and left a huge pile of debts behind him. It would make no sense for me to be angry at him because he left all of his debts for me to clean up.” She sighed. “I could blame the debris. I could blame Cayde’s recklessness. I could blame Uldren. I could blame Mara. I could blame Variks. I could get stuck in that. But ultimately, some things just happen. Then, you have to carry on. You have to carry on with life. You can’t let the world end up in a grief standstill. You have to carry on.”

Cayde.

She hasn’t thought him about him in some time. It’s been almost a year since he passed.

Tirion brought her knees closer to her, hugging them.

“You know, when Cayde died, it felt so familiar.” The wind suddenly became comforting. “It felt so familiar I almost beat myself up for not seeing it coming. Destiny repeating itself. I’m not claiming that the world contorted itself to send me a message. I—” She flattened her lips. “Did I give Uldren a merciful death because of goodness of my heart? This thought creeps up now and then; that I killed him out of revenge for crimes made against me in another life. To make someone I hate feel just a tiny bit of the worst pain imaginable, have their world become a little bit smaller and a lot darker?” There was no telling if her hands were shaking from the cold or the hidden thoughts she finally released to the world. She had to stop at some point. Had to. Had to pick herself up.

The Warlock was clueless regarding who she was begging. Whether it was the world, the Traveler, or even herself.

She had to tell it one last thing.

“Thank you.” She whispered, with a grateful smile. “For all you’ve done. I hope that one day I can only be so kind.”

Last purple crystal. Last Light freed. No words spoken until that last crystal shattered.

The world felt so tremendously massive and blinding now.

Tirion had never thought about the technicalities of hugging a Ghost before that day, but she figured it out as she went along. She pulled him close and hugged him as if he were a stuffed toy,
earning a confused yet appreciative grumble from him. She didn’t keep him too long, getting distracted with celebrating.

It was cleansed, the Thorn was cleansed. It was right in her hands.

Weapons of Justice.

*Weapons of Hope.*

Lumina was the first of its kind.

They could craft more, one for each of them to start with. They could craft them for every Sunbreaker. They will craft more. They will find ways to imbue flaming hammers with this. They have the means, they have knowledge that Light is truly limitless.

They could save the world.

Bit by bit, inch by inch, they could heal it. They didn’t need to heal the entire world; a fraction was more than enough. But most importantly, they will try.

They could rescue everyone. Make sure that no one gets hurt.

They could introduce hope to the world, yet again. That hope will be there to stay, it will refuse to be fleeting. It will take its own consciousness.

Her Ghost laughed at her overjoyed and confused state. Frozen in happiness, mouth moving and struggling to find words how to express it all. She looked at the gun, looked at the Ghost, looked at her own hands, looked at the sky. Trying to calculate possibilities. She had no issues figuring out what she was feeling. She knew exactly what it was, it was something she has hunted for many years now.

This joy, this hope. After so many losses.

“Great job, Guardian!”

Her glowing green eyes glanced up straight at him. Only part of the journey of the gun to her hands that mattered were all the casualties that she has sworn not to repeat, but to honour instead. Describing the forging process would be like describing breathing. Something that was truly natural to her. She remembers the travels, the small stacks of hope in her heart with each step they reached.

“My heart didn’t let me evolve my Light before. It thought that I could never heal or protect anyone ever again. I could sit and talk all day about saving everyone and being their protector, but it blocked me. Now, I’m free.” She gasped at her own words, then silently laughed. “I’m free…” She laughed a bit louder the second time, the smile on her face getting wider by the second. “I’m free!”

After some time, she calmed down. Eyes transfixed on the Mars sky. As if she just escaped a plastic bag she was once trapped in. They could go anywhere. Not just her and her Little Light, but everyone.

Her Ghost could read her thoughts now that the smog in her head was gone. There was a small cloud left, trying to hide. Trying to avoid extinction.

“Guardian… about what you said before.”
“Huh?” Her messy head snapped to him.

“I know you, Guardian.” He began. Now he knew how she felt when she was sitting in front of the Traveler, thoughts pouring out. “Sometimes you give me trouble, but I know you. You’re my Guardian.”

The little Ghost checked off almost every item on his list, unfaltering: “There have been many times where I wanted you to talk about how you feel. Often, I’ve found myself wishing that we would go home. I don’t like the look in your eyes when you go on a rampage, and I’ve wanted to tell you that I don’t think you know the reason why the Traveler chose you. I know that I’m not alone constantly wondering if... you’re still here.” He noticed how her face softened up at his words. He knew his Guardian. He didn’t expect her to get angry. “I hope you’ll never leave me. You know I’ll never leave you, right?”

There it was, a true smile from her. He had only seen her this happy only once before. It was a different type of happiness, but still shining. “I won’t. Ever.”

“I don’t want to lose you, Guardian. To anything.” The little Ghost remembered his original point. It was so easy to get swept away. “I know you. I really know you. You didn’t kill Uldren out of any revenge. I know that if you could have helped him, you would have.”

“He... was corrupted to his very soul, with the ability to recognize what happened withered away. Doomed for a fate in a dark rotten cell for rest of his life.” She recalled that day. “He wouldn’t have made it to the cell in any case. Cayde... Cayde wouldn’t have wanted that fate for him. For anyone. If anything, Cayde was the only one who could even begin to relate to what Uldren went through.”

Ghost had a hard time remembering the last time both of them talked about Cayde.

“I miss Cayde.” Ghost sighed. “The memories of those we care for only hurt because we care.”

“It doesn’t hurt anymore.” She started walking as she spoke. “There is this proposition. That a person isn’t dead as long as there is someone to remember them. Cayde won’t be dead for a very long time.” Tirion traversed over debris left behind from a forgotten fight. “Hundreds of his stashes, people constantly retelling stories, his debts that I’m still paying off.” She silently cursed the Exo. “He’s still here among us.”

Tirion paused for a moment, and took a look at the happy Ghost. “So is...” But, the thought trailed off. The Ghost knew. “They’re still here among us, and it no longer hurts.” She clasped her hands, with a content sigh. “Let’s go home!”

Tirion had many homes. Her only selfish wish that they would be closer to each other. Feet dangling as she was sitting on the very roof of the Ag Borradh, watching a rare sunset.

“Hello!” A young Hunter’s voice called out, and he promptly sat down next to her, before giving up entirely and lying down. “Stupid question.” Lorcan asked.

“Yeah?”

He hesitated for a moment, hands behind his head. “Without a Ghost, you get really sick, right?”

She wanted to hear him out. “That’s what I assume. If my recordings are reliable, it was catching up to me.”
Lorcan hesitated again, this time with a light click of tongue. “Do you hate Mara for that?” He turned his head to look at her. “That she didn’t turn you into an ailment free god?” In that moment, Lorcan realized the stupidity of his question “Concept of Guardians notwithstanding, I guess.”

“It’s the only thing I like about her.” She didn’t have to think much. “It’s the consent part.”

“You know, we talked about how much being a Guardian sucks, but…” He sat up with a loud grunt. “I kinda want to have that future. Slick grey streak in my hair, married…”

“So, you’re saying you want to be Devrim.”

“Who doesn’t!” Lorcan almost threw his hands up in the air. “No, but…” He rummaged his head for a bit. “I already lived out the life where that was in the realm of possibility. I think I’ve come to peace with it now. Being a Guardian has brought me more than a grey streak in my hair ever could.”

“We’ve had some great times.” The entire forest of the EDZ was washed in an orange haze. “It’s funny how none of us would choose each other as friends.”

“Yeah!” Lorcan fell back again with a laugh. “It was a series of ‘This is really irresponsible. How do I join this party?’ and now we’re here.”

A door opening distracted them both, with a Titan on the other side. Kouhei was holding a piece of paper. Without a word, not even a grunt, he handed over the paper to Tirion. Lorcan was giving him half a glare as a response to getting ignored.

“Even so, our bonds are for eternity.” Tirion read, not being able to figure out what it referred to. “What is this?”


“I get that the word translation is an old word but you don’t have to be—” Lorcan rolled away just in time to avoid a Titan boot crushing his face. “It’s a nice saying!”

“It was etched inside a chest by Shin Malphur.” Tirion still didn’t know what to think of it. “It’s still a good saying.”

Kouhei joined them both, keeping distance from Lorcan. His entire posture shouting that he was about to deliver bad news.

“Shin Malphur was Dredgen Vale.” The Titan sounded impressed, a rare feat. “Infiltrated the Shadows to kill them from the inside.”

Lorcan immediately spoke up: “I’m not saying anything. Asides that it’s a great business tactic.” The Hunter picked up on some slight awkward shuffling by the Titan. “Life starts to hurt when I think about your sense of humour, Kouhei. My Ghost literally gets exhausted.” Lorcan’s face was akin to a ventriloquist, blank and unmoving.

“It is funny, though.” Tirion chimed in.

“How?!” Lorcan tried not to shout.

“The story of terrifying shadow men turned into a tavern song about stupidity.”

“Did you two get your sense of humour from the Starlight or the Dark?”
Final stop. Final home. Muscular arms wrapping around her from behind as she was reading something that already escaped her mind, holding her softly.

“How does it feel, your mission being done at last?” Shaxx murmured into her hair. “You wanted to heal people. Now, you hold a weapon of hope in your hands. You bent your Light until it gave you the ability to heal, to summon the long lost Well of Radiance.”

It was only in her presence he wouldn’t shout it from the heavens.

“For the very first time, I feel like all sacrifices along the way have been worth it.” She relaxed in his hold. “All the fighting, constantly on the verge of losing myself to the dark, the pain. The…”

“What is it?”

“I’ll be able to heal. I’ll be able to prevent hurt. But what about trying to cure current afflictions of the suffering?”

After a pause, he turned her around until she was facing him. “You’re talking about the Awoken.”

She nodded. “Out of all the titles I have, I don’t want Last Of The Awoken to be one of them. I want to help them. I want to ensure the survival of my people, but those who reside in the Dreaming City are too deep in for me to pull them out.”

“There is certain honour in it.” Shaxx began. “Standing your ground and relentlessly defending your home, never faltering. I’ve read the logs from the Dreaming City, not once have they considered surrender, even after majority of City Guardians retreated. Dreaming City serves as a banner of inspiration. What happened is unfortunate. Some might say it was deserved. Regardless, a liberation will be the thing which harms them the most.”

“Unrelenting persistence is the only thing I’m glad to have inherited from the Awoken.” She shook her head. “Even if it’s unrelenting persistence for the wrong thing.”

He smirked, lifting her chin up. “Your heart is always in the right place.”

“So is yours.”

The Titan’s smile widened right before he kissed her. “Mine is always with yours.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm not dead I'm just waiting for Bungie to advance and/or find a main plot.

End Notes

I totally messed up the series thing but it is what it is. :|
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!