Summary

What happens when a touch averse succubus meets a time-traveling lesbian?

Emily has no idea either, but after a chance encounter in the pub it seems she'll be finding out.
Chapter 1

*Water, water, everywhere, Emily thought, and not a drop to...eat?*

She sighed at her own ridiculousness and pulled her raincoat a little tighter around herself as she carefully walked to the tube.

She didn’t *want* to be on the tube. She didn’t want to be going to the Iron & Wheel. Emily *wanted* to go home, watch something on Netflix, and try not to think about touching people. Kissing people. Of touching and bodies and skin and feeling their energy leave them and enter her, making her entire body warm as her infernal blood sang to the tune of their passion…

Emily sighed and pinched her nose. *For fuck’s sake.* It was getting to where she really needed to do *something*. She wasn’t *dying*, but she was taking tiny sips and nibbles when her nature as a succubus was screaming for her to be sitting down at a buffet.

But it was all too easy to rip a human’s soul from their body if she wasn’t careful - and the worst part was that *thanks* to the way her magic would flood them with pleasure before those final moments, they would be *thanking* her for it.

So she did her best to be content with what energy she received from casual contact and pretending to be a human who did things with her human co-workers...like take them up on invitations to go to the pub.

After all she *liked* people, which was why Emily didn’t want to hurt them.

Taking her hands out of her pockets on the tube ride meant that she was able to pick up a few nibbles from casual contact. A few commuters might feel a bit sleepy after their ride home, but everyone knew the tube could do that to you now and again.

It took the edge off, and Emily left the tube with a bit more of a spring in her step, trying to relax, smile, and just enjoy herself tonight.

After a couple of pints and taking a decent chunk of Stefan’s pocket money at darts, Emily thought she was doing a pretty good job. She’d been chatting off and on with some of the others from the bookstore, and before long she’d stopped glancing over at the clock to figure out when she could slip out without offending anyone.

If she closed her eyes, she could feel the energy from everyone around her. Most were happy, of course, but there were always a few of the sad and melancholy types, some angry, some nervous. The sort of mix you expected wandering out and around a pub like this.

But to her surprise, there was something...odd that she could sense nearby. Someone who seemed pleasant enough, but...echo-y. Like the sound of footsteps in an empty hall. Emily’s eyes opened and she scanned the pub as casually as she could, trying to understand what she’d just touched. She’d never felt anything like that before. It couldn’t have been an omnic and it wasn’t another demon. They were human, she was quite certain of that, just...odd.

She tried to take another pull of her beer to gather her thoughts, but was dismayed to find her glass was empty. Shaking her head at herself, she stood. “Looks like it’s my turn to get the next round. Anyone else ready for another?”

Emily made her way to the bar and was waiting for their drinks when a shorter girl in a hoodie
slipped in next to her. “Oops, ‘scuse me, sorry - Oi! Could I get a pint of London Pride?”

Emily looked over and couldn’t help but smile a bit. Dark brown hair that seemed to want to go in every direction, freckles, big, soulful eyes. Exactly her type, really. “Interesting choice of drink, that.”

“Oh?” The girl looked over, and from the bit of pink that rose in her cheeks, Emily had a feeling she might just be her type, too. “Sorry?”

“London Pride,” Emily repeated, putting just a little extra emphasis on the second word. “Interesting choice. Especially since it’s coming up next month.”

The girl had a laugh like little silver bells, and part of Emily’s brain had begun sending danger alarms. Don’t. Don’t! Don’t you DARE start hitting on her, you know this won’t end well! “I suppose it is,” she replied with a wink. “Don’t suppose you’re going...?”

The three pints Emily had already had quite happily intercepted the warning messages from the rest of her brain, and sent back a note that she’d take a look at those in the morning. “I might be. Hadn’t really decided yet.”

The girl really had a pretty smile. “Maybe I could give you a reason.”

“Maybe,” Emily agreed as the bartender returned with several pint glasses for her. “But unfortunately I need to run these back to my friends. Perhaps another time?”

“Sure,” the girl winked, and picked up her own drink. “Catch you later, then.”

When she got back with the drinks, Artii had a raised eyebrow. “Chatting up someone at last?”

Emily could feel herself blushing as she put the drinks down. “What? No! Not really...just being friendly, that’s all.”

Stefan snorted as he picked up his lager. “Emily, it's 2076, it’s not like we’re going to be shocked you like girls.”

Emily glared. “Excuse me, that’s -”

“None of our business,” Artii sing-songed before she took a sip of her cosmo. “But hey, if you’re not going to do anything about it, I might. She looks pretty cute as long as you don’t mind them being short and a little scruffy.”

“She wasn’t scruffy,” Emily said defensively, “her hair’s just sort of...I don’t know... windblown. It’s cute.”

“Uh- huh.” Artii gave her a smug look over her glasses, but any retort Emily might have managed was scuttled by one of the pub’s waitstaff popping by with a fresh pint of tawny colored beer.

“London pride,” the omnic announced as they set the pint glass in front of Emily. “Courtesy of the young lady at the bar.”

Emily looked over, and the girl in the hoodie raised her matching pint in a little salute and winked.

“Clearly not interested in you at all,” Stefan observed dryly. “Quite a shame.”

“Oh fuck off,” Emily declared as she wadded up a napkin and tossed it at him, her cheeks burning like hellfire.
In the end Emily kept enough control of herself to get a cab home and slip away before she could be sucked into the hoodie-wearing girl’s orbit any further. As she paid for her sins the next morning over breakfast she felt a wash of relief that she hadn’t gone anywhere past thanking her for the drink.

Really, though, she wanted to figure out what that strange energy had been. It nagged at her in the back of her mind as she got dressed, took the bus over to the shop, and let herself in.

As a matter of fact, it kept her so distracted as she helped restock the shelves and went about her day that she didn’t realize that that odd feeling was back until she realized it was standing right next to her ...and it was the girl from the pub.

“Oh!” Emily turned, surprised, as the girl cleared her throat. “Hello! I’m sorry, my head’s been in the clouds all day.”

The girl smiled. “Oh, that’s OK! Funny running into you again.” She gestured over to where Stefan was standing at the checkout counter, very clearly attempting to pretend that the rest of the shop did not exist. “Your mate over there suggested I talk to you about your recommendations for queer lit?”

Emily coughed. The worst part was Emily knew he was trying to set her up and mess with her, but the LGBT stacks were her unquestioned domain at the shop, and Stefan really hadn’t been wrong to suggest the girl come talk to her. “Well, I think I can help. Were you looking for something in particular?”

The girl gave her a rakish little smile. “Just some light reading. Wouldn’t mind something a bit on the erotic side, though.”

Emily knew when she was in a fight she was going to lose, but she did her best not to show it. “I see. Would it be fair to assume you’d prefer something on the sapphic side?”

“Female identifying or non-binary,” the girl replied with a smile. “Not really hard for you to figure out, I suppose. So - what would you recommend?”

“Well,” Emily smiled back to her. “Let me show you a few of my favorites.”

And maybe, just maybe, see what the deal is with you.

To her surprise, though, just as they were getting to the stacks the girl’s phone began to beep urgently at her, making the girl sigh with obvious frustration. “Bugger me.”

It took an effort of will, but Emily managed not to respond to that with an offer.

“Looks like I have to get back to work,” the girl apologized. “Sorry, luv. Raincheck?”

Emily nodded, her brain still not 100% engaged. “Of course. Maybe when you get yourself off. Of work! I mean, ah, maybe when I can get - oh damn.”

To her confused relief, though, the girl didn’t respond. In what seemed like an eyeblink she had disappeared, and that same bizarre energy had gone with her.

“...how very strange.”
The girl in the hoodie didn’t return before Emily’s shift ended. She didn’t want to admit that she felt a bit disappointed, but...well. The girl was a mystery, and Emily dearly loved mysteries.

And she was cute.

Very, very cute.

Exchanging books, payments, and receipts with customers at several points in the day had been enough to sate Emily’s needs for energy, but she still stopped at a chippie on the way home to grab some dinner. After all, it would look very strange for someone to visit and realize she didn’t eat food, or have anything in her pantry or fridge.

Besides, even if it wasn’t technically providing her any sustenance, the freshly battered and fried cod tasted amazing.

There was a TV on in the shop tuned to the World Service, and Emily’s attention drifted to it as she waited for her food, then became riveted to the screen as her eyes went wide.

They were showing footage of what looked like a battle, with a man in a dark cloak firing what looked like shotguns at something moving too fast for the camera to really catch - not so much a person as a blur of blue glowing light. Then, the blur resolved into a human form as she appeared on the other side of the screen in a flash of blue, and the screen froze, focusing on her as a caption ran across the bottom of the screen:

OVERWATCH: HAVE THEY RETURNED?

Emily didn’t really notice that, though.

Emily was too busy staring at the woman who now dominated the center of the screen, the camera having zoomed in on her face. The hair that didn’t really want to stay in the same direction. The dark brown eyes through amber goggles, with the faintest hint of freckles beneath the tinted lens. The soft pink lips that were pressed into a grimace of concentration.

The girl who, a few hours ago, Emily had been talking to.

Oh, she thought to herself her jaw dropped. I guess I know why she didn’t come back, now.

Emily started with a soft yelp as someone jogged her (thankfully covered) elbow.

“Sorry to startle you - they’re calling 21! That’s you, isn’t it?”

Emily shook herself a little and then looked to the man standing next to her. “Oh…” She looked down at the receipt that had crumpled in her hand. “Yes. Yes it is. Thanks, sorry. I just got a bit…” She looked up at the screen again, which had flashed to showing some retrospectives of Overwatch and the fall of the organization. “Distracted.”

“Can’t blame you,” the man said with a little smirk. “That Tracer, eh? What a bird!”

“Yes,” Emily said slowly. “I suppose she is.” Then, before he could try drawing her into a longer conversation she went to the counter to collect her takeaway order, and hurried outside to see if she could hail a cab.

Tracer. Overwatch.
She had some research to do.

After several hours of diving through news articles, wiki pages, more than a few conspiracy sites, and a couple of physics journals that she’d found hopelessly dense, Emily knew quite a bit more about ‘Tracer’, but frustratingly little about the girl who had managed to pop up in her life.

Still, at least she might have an explanation for why her energy had that strange resonance.

“Chronal disassociation,” Emily murmured to herself as she munched on one of her last handful of chips. “So she basically was pulled into...different times? Maybe even different lives? That can’t have been terribly fun…”

Was it possible the reason that ‘echo’ in her presence was because she wasn’t entirely there? Or perhaps a bit everywhere at once? Curiouser and curiouser...and had she really had her life saved by a gorilla?

“The things you miss,” Emily said ruefully, “when you’re trying to be perfectly normal and just keep to yourself.”

So. Tracer apparently lived somewhere nearby, or at least drank at the Iron and Wheel, and walked into her bookshop, which still rather suggested she lived close by...and she liked girls.

Emily sat back in her chair and looked up at the ceiling. “Has anyone told you lately that you have a horrible sense of humor?”

Not that the Almighty was likely to be listening, and particularly not to someone like her, but it still needed to be said.
Chapter 3

Normally, Emily spent her days off inside and keeping to herself, but after no sign of Tracer or her alter-ego since that afternoon in the shop, she had decided to take a calculated risk.

Fortunately, her human guise having a pale complexion made it easy to explain wearing a long sleeved t-shirt and a silk scarf around her neck when she stepped out onto the streets despite the forecast calling for sunny skies and a high of 25.

The white shirt and jeans were fairly standard, but she’d picked a scarf with bands of pink, yellow, and blue that ought to catch people’s eyes, and if she was lucky, Tracer’s energy would be just as easy to pick out in a crowd as it had been before.

A rather...massive...crowd, Emily realized as she left the tube station and stared at the throng of people filling Vauxhall Gardens. A massive, happy, generally very flirty, touch-y, and party-minded crowd.

OK, Emily admitted to herself as she tried not to panic, maybe this wasn’t the most brilliant plan after all.

Still, she was here, and it was nice to see everyone out and having fun at Pride in the Park. Even if, strictly speaking, she was a creature of lust more than of the softer emotion, she really did like seeing people out to celebrate the simple act of love, no matter the form it took.

And, an annoying little whisper reminded Emily in the back of her mind, more than a few are quite happy to celebrate lust, too!

Emily tried not to look too closely at any bushes or blankets that seemed to be moving a bit too vigorously and kept walking through the park, hoping she might get lucky as she tried to open up all of her senses without getting overwhelmed. She’d nearly given up on the entire idea as stupid and terrible when she felt that odd echoing sensation, and a heartbeat later she caught a brush of brown hair out of the corner of her eye.

Tracer was wearing a bright yellow hoodie (that, to Emily’s amusement, matched the color of her superhero tights) this time, and had a pride flag pinned to her shoulders like a cape. She wasn’t teleporting around (could she do that without her superhero...bits? Was she wearing them under the hoodie?) but she was running through the park trading high fives with several groups, and looking absolutely adorable.

“Oh, hey!” Tracer had a broad smile as she ran over, her eyes shining in a way that made Emily feel more alive just looking at her. “I was hoping I might run into you somehow!”

“Me, too,” Emily admitted. “I knew the odds weren’t so great, but...well.” She winked, taking note of the way Lena’s eyes widened slightly and her nostrils flared when she dragged her teeth over her lower lip as she smiled. “After all, I never did get to share my...recommendations.”

“God, you have no idea how frustrated I was when my mate called and told me there was an emergency.” Tracer shook her head, her smile turning to a look of chagrin. “I love him, don’t get me wrong, but his timing is shit.”

Emily chuckled. “Well, some things never change.” She looked around, almost wanting to mention seeing her on the news, but it was just a bit too public. A bit too exposed, especially with the idea of ‘outing’ her, even accidentally. “You did mention a rain check...I’m not really in the mood to go
back to work, but there’s a coffee place not too far away.”

Tracer’s eyes lit up. “Seriously? I mean - yes, absolutely, I would love to.” Then she blinked a couple times. “Uh. This is going to sound horrible but I never got your name.”

“Emily,” she offered with a smile of her own. “I’m Emily.”

“Lena,” Tracer introduced herself. “So, Emily, shall we get out of here?”

“God, yes.”

If Lena noticed the way she relaxed once they were away from the crowds in the park she was polite enough not to say anything, keeping their conversation light until they were tucked into a corner table. Emily with a monstrously sweet caramel frappe covered in whipped cream, Lena with a mug of black tea with lemon.

“I was wondering about your scarf,” Lena admitted with surprising shyness. “Those are the pan flag colors, right?”

Emily nodded. “Yes. It’s...basically accurate. But I have to admit I tend to go more for girls, generally.”

Lena grinned. “After the last couple of times we bumped into each other, I have to admit I was hoping that was the case but I didn’t want to embarrass you by assuming too much.” She took a sip from her mug. “I do need to make a confession, though.”

“Oh?” Emily raised an eyebrow. “Do tell.”

“Well.” Lena coughed. “I didn’t end up at the bookshop by accident. I didn’t get a chance to talk to you much at the pub before you left, but I ended up playing some darts with one of the folks you were out with - and he’s terrible at it, by the way - and I might have asked where you all worked in exchange for giving him back some of the money he lost.”

“I’m not sure if I should thank him or murder him for that,” Emily mused darkly.

Lena giggled. “I suppose it depends how this date goes.”

Emily raised an eyebrow. “Is this a date?”

Lena raised hers right back. “Do you want it to be?”

Yes.

No!

...maybe.

Emily hid her momentary turmoil behind a long sip from her frappe, then sat back with a smile. “Well, as much as I do like the idea of Pride, I did say I didn’t have anyone to go with…”

Lena grinned. “Seems like we might have both been looking for someone.”

“Just perhaps…which does seem to make this a date.” Emily managed to keep a straight face for perhaps five seconds before they both started laughing, and despite her general nervousness over the whole idea (not to mention the very specific oddities Lena apparently represented), she had to admit
Taking a deep breath, Emily looked around to make sure they were basically alone, then leaned in, letting her voice drop to something close to a whisper. “That day at the bookshop...I saw the news that night. I...figured out why you needed to go.”

Lena went pale. “Oh. You...you did?” She swallowed hard. “You’d be surprised how often people don’t make the connection. So, is that OK? What you figured out, I mean.”

Emily carefully made sure she was touching Lena’s clothed forearm and not her bare hand or wrist. “Of course it is. I wouldn’t have been hoping to find you if it wasn’t. Lena, you’re putting your life on the line to help people. Protect people. I can only imagine how hard it must be for you.”

Lena blushed. “Well, someone’s got to try, don’t they? I appreciate it, though.” She took a quick look around of her own, then unzipped the hoodie enough to reveal the top of something metallic that was being highlighted by a faint glow of blue light. “A lot of people don’t really look at me when they see this. Either all they focus on is the accelerator, or they just see Tracer and that’s it.”

Emily frowned. “You have to keep it on all the time?”

Lena hesitated. “Well. Not all the time, but if I want to go out of my flat...”

Emily gave Lena a sympathetic look, then looked down at her drink. “I’m so sorry, that was incredibly rude.”

Lena shrugged. “Heard it all before, believe me.”

Emily shook her head. “That doesn’t make it right.” She looked up and gave Lena a shy little smile. “But for the record...what I saw was your eyes.”

The way Lena blushed and stammered at that made Emily’s entire year.

“So,” Lena asked as they left the coffee shop, “do you think I could get your number?”

“I don’t know,” Emily teased. “It might depend on if I could get yours.”
Chapter 4

At a certain level, Emily knew she was being selfish. It made no sense at all to let herself get close to Lena - and since she was still fairly certain she couldn’t allow herself to touch Lena properly, it wasn’t fair to her, either.

But the more time they spent talking on the phone and texting, the more Emily found herself smiling and laughing and feeling happy for reasons that had nothing to do with trying to solve the strange mystery of Lena’s essence, and everything to do with the fact that Lena Oxton was a charming, funny, sweet, and lovely person. Even though she knew “Tracer” had a responsibility to go out and save the day, Emily wanted Lena all for herself - and Lena seemed perfectly happy with that idea.

And all demons are selfish creatures, she admitted to herself. That’s sort of the point…

They’d only had one other date since meeting up in the park, a pleasant lunch followed by walk through a modern glass sculpture exhibit at an art gallery near the restaurant, but they talked or traded messages nearly every day, often with Lena providing very vague mentions of what she was up to (the life of an ‘adventurer’ seemed to be a rather busy one) while Emily told her about the news from home, things going on at the bookshop, and the occasional bits of gossip.

I must be terribly boring compared to everything you do, Emily admitted after sending Lena a bit of a venting text after a particularly long day of customers who had been even more annoying than usual.

Not at all, Lena messaged back. It’s nice, honestly. It reminds me there’s a reason I do all this. It’s good to remember things can still be normal.

Emily couldn’t help but laugh a bit guiltily. Normal…right.

She was still trying to consider what to say back when Lena sent her another message.

Finally going to be back home tomorrow. Would you like to meet up for a pint and say hello to a few of my friends from work?

Emily blinked as she realized what Lena meant.

Like the one from the moon?

Lena sent back a string of laughing and crying emojis. I wish! He’s a bit conspicuous tho. Just thought I’d show a few of the others around the old neighborhood before they go their own ways…and thought maybe my girlfriend might like to meet them.

Emily’s mouth went dry. Lena hadn’t called her that before.

“Oh, hell, such a bad idea. She’ll never…I couldn’t…but…” She rubbed a hand over her face. “She probably thinks I’m some touch averse loony who spends all night in bed with books instead of people, and she’s not wrong. Why on Earth did I get myself into this?”

She thought of Lena’s eyes. Her smile. Those lips. Her laugh.

Emily sighed. She knew damned well why she got herself into this. And even if she was bound to fuck up eventually, she could still enjoy this for as long as it lasted.

Your girlfriend would love to. <3
Emily had debated what to wear to meet...well, if she wanted to get technical Emily would be meeting a group of undercover vigilantes who were all currently wanted by the United Nations.

For some reason that concept made her feel a little calmer than thinking about ‘meeting Lena’s friends’.

She’d finally settled on a dressy pair of black jeans and a nice red sweater that hung off her shoulders a bit to emphasize the scoop neckline, with broad oversized sleeves that would swallow her hands.

A pair of nice walking shoes finished the outfit, and Emily left her flat with plenty of time to spare, trying not to think about the swarms of butterflies in her stomach that seemed to grow stronger every step of the way.

Do they know I’m her girlfriend? Do they know I’m meeting them? Is this a surprise for them? Am I just maybe overthinking this…?

Emily took a deep breath and stepped through the doors of the Iron and Wheel. She looked around, let her eyes adjust to the darker environment inside, and nearly staggered back outside when a hoodie clad missile slammed into her.

Her breath burst out of her with a sharp ‘Oof!’, and Emily had to take a half stumbling step back to keep from falling, feeling a brief moment of panic before her hands dug into the thick material of Lena’s sweatshirt.

“Sorry,” Lena exclaimed. “Sorry! I didn’t mean to knock you about, I just...I missed you something awful.”

Emily laughed softly and barely resisted the urge to lean in just a little so she could kiss Lena’s forehead, settling for running a hand over her back lightly as Lena squeezed her a little tighter. Emily could feel the edges and curves of the harness Lena was concealing against her, and felt a curious mix of relief and regret.

Not having any more temptation to do something really stupid was good, but the more she realized how much Lena depended on the device, it was sobering.

Someone with so much heart deserves better than to be a constant prisoner.

“Here,” Lena said as they disengaged, “I’ll introduce you. One’s still on the way, but we got a table.”

“Sounds wonderful...and Lena?” Emily carefully made sure her hand was wrapped in her sleeve before taking Lena’s hand and squeezing lightly.

Lena stopped, turning her head enough to make good eye contact. “Yeah?”

Emily blushed, and leaned in so that she could lower her voice just a bit. “I missed you, too.”

Lena was still blushing a bit by the time they reached the round table near the back of the pub, where a tall woman with gold beads in her hair and a tattoo around one eye was chatting with a shorter, dark skinned man, and a younger looking girl sitting between them seemed completely oblivious to anything that wasn’t her handheld game.

Emily had a nagging sense of familiarity when she looked at the man - she could swear she’d seen him before - but it wasn’t clicking, so she settled on just letting it go. Lena would do the introductions, she was sure.
“So,” Lena said as she brought them to a stop in front of the table. “Here we are!” The man and taller woman turned to look at them with welcoming smiles, and Emily grinned as she caught the taller woman lightly kicking her friend in the shin.

“Hey, what - Oh!” The younger girl closed her handheld and tucked it into a pocket. “You could have just said, c’mon.”

The taller woman chuckled warmly. “Where’s the fun in that?”

Lena giggled as the younger girl rolled her eyes. “So, Emily, I’d love you to meet my friends - Fareeha, Hana, and -”

Before Lena could complete the introduction, Emily suddenly realized where she recognized the man from, and her eyes went wide with shock. “Oh my god. You’re Lúcio!”

Lúcio laughed, putting a hand behind his head. “I get that a lot.” He had his hair in tight cornrows instead of the larger locs he often wore when performing or speaking, but his face was the same. He’d simply been so unexpected in this context that Emily hadn’t been able to make the connections.

“I love your music,” Emily explained as they sat down. “Sorry. I am going to try not to fangirl too hard - but you do that and all your humanitarian work, it’s amazing, and...now this?” She looked over at Lena. “You never told me!”

Lena shrugged with a little smile. “Well, for one, officially none of us are working together, we just happen to maybe occasionally show up with some plausible deniability.” Hana snorted at that, and Lena’s smile broadened. “OK, yeah, except for the girl in the bright pink one of a kind robot who is livestreaming the whole thing.”

Fareeha gave Lena a little look. “Says the only time-traveling teleporter in the entire world.”

Lena gave her a look of mock innocence. “Since Winston told me that in the event of a malfunction I should not attempt to interact with any possible duplicates I encounter, I’m pretty sure that means I can always claim it was another me from a parallel universe.”

“There’s an image,” Lúcio agreed. “I dunno if the world could really handle more than one of you at a time, speedy.”

Emily had a minor coughing fit as her imagination told her exactly how she could handle more than one Lena at a time. “I’m sure I don’t know.”

That got a laugh out of the table, and it wasn’t long before everyone had a drink of some kind in front of them, though Emily noticed that Fareeha and Hana had both stuck to soft drinks.

“I thought someone else was driving,” Emily observed. “You’re both obviously of age.”

Hana shrugged. “I need my reflexes for streaming later.”

“I...generally prefer not to,” Fareeha said. “Besides, I’m enjoying myself. Though now that you mention it I am wondering where Angela is.”

“Parking’s always a nightmare,” Lena suggested. “Might have needed to go a few blocks before she found a spot.”

Emily nodded, about to agree when a presence entered the pub, and the beer she’d been drinking turned to frozen lead in her stomach.
No. That’s…that’s not happening. That can’t be possible!

Unfortunately Emily’s worst fears were confirmed when, to her deep dismay, ‘Angela’ arrived, making a beeline for where they were sitting. The crowd seemed to subtly part before her, and as she came closer Angela gave Emily a smile so full of hostility that she wondered if disappearing in a puff of fire and brimstone, torching her flat, and moving to New Zealand might be a reasonable option.

“How interesting seeing you here.”
Lena tilted her head in confusion at the new arrival at their table. “You know Emily?”

Angela’s blue eyes flashed with a piercing intensity. “Oh, yes. We share a few relatives. Distant cousins, you might say.”

“Very,” Emily croaked.

“Huh.” Lena looked back and forth between them. “Can’t say as I see a resemblance, but it’s a funny old world, isn’t it?”

“Just what I was thinking,” Angela agreed happily. “Emily - it’s been ages. I was thinking I might duck into the bathroom to freshen up. Would you mind coming with me? We have so much to talk about.”

Emily wasn’t certain what refusing would lead to, but she was pretty sure she didn’t want to learn. “Yeah,” she said reluctantly as she stood. “Of course, sure.”

As she left, Emily tried to focus on the path through the crowd towards the ladies room, but it was hard to miss Hana’s hissed “Lena, what the hell?!”

Oh, Emily sighed to herself as she pushed open the door to the restroom, I’m pretty sure you wouldn’t believe me if I told you.

There was an oddly hollow quality to the sound as the door shut behind her, and Emily didn’t need to use her supernatural senses to know that things weren’t normal any longer. Particularly when she walked past the small row of sinks to see the shining figure that waited for her, hovering several feet off the floor on wings of gold.

Angela had cast off her mortal guise as easily as a human took off a coat, the dark grey tights, white sweater, and light jacket she’d been wearing replaced with robes of white and blue, a flaming staff in her hand, and a halo of light making her white blonde hair shine like a golden dawn as she spoke with a voice filled with righteous fury. “You have five seconds to explain yourself, fiend, before I banish you to the pit that spawned you!”

Emily knew that another demon probably would have cast off their own mortal form and likely found themselves getting crushed by the angel’s righteous rage.

She didn’t have any desire to experience that today, or any day, so instead Emily just raised her hands and let the baggy sleeves of her sweater slide down towards her elbows. “If I said ‘exactly what it looks like’, would you give me a chance to explain?”

If that had taken Angela back, the angel didn’t let her see it. Tilting her head very slightly, the angel gave a flap of her powerful wings. “Very well. Then what, exactly, is your interest in a mortal who is under my protection?”

Emily winced. Oh, fuck. Not that Angela was terribly disposed to liking her, but if she considered Lena to be her responsibility, that just made things so much worse. “I...we...” She sighed and lowered her hands, taking a deep breath before she tried to talk again. “I had no idea who she was. I
swear I didn’t - or who you were, for that matter. It all started when some of my coworkers talked me into going out for a drink. I noticed...something odd in the room but tried to ignore it. She was at the bar when I went to get a round for my friends. She caught my eye, and we flirted a bit.”

Emily gave her a defensive glare. "Seriously! I just talked to her a for a few minutes. She bought me a drink later, and I thought that was the end of it. Harmless, nice. I didn’t...it didn't go anywhere else. I left before things went any further.” She swallowed hard. “I realize it’s hard for you to believe me, but I’m tired of hurting them. I’m trying to...go without. To just be normal, or close enough, and leave it be.”

Angela’s eyes narrowed skeptically for a moment, then widened in astonishment. “I...can see the truth of it. I can see...how difficult it has been for you.” She lowered her gaze for a moment, then made eye contact again. “So - you intended to leave things there.”

“I did,” Emily confirmed. “But then she showed up at the bookshop and Lena wasn’t...terribly subtle about wanting to try to pick things back up where we left off.”

“No,” Angela sighed wearily, “she wouldn’t be.”

For the first time since Angela had arrived, Emily felt like smiling. She gave the angel a sympathetic look for what sounded like long experience before getting back to her explanation. “Before we had much of a chance to talk, though, she got a call from...ah…”

“You can speak plainly,” Angela reminded her. “It’s not as if a mortal is going to be able to come in - very little time has passed in their perceptions.”

“That’s a rather useful trick,” Emily admitted with just a bit of envy in her voice. “Anyway - I didn’t know it at the time, but Overwatch was calling her in. I saw ‘Tracer’ on the news that night and recognized her...and before you ask, yes, I let her know that I know about her...day job. That’s part of why she invited me along tonight.”

Angela nodded. “I’m aware, yes. She asked Winston for permission to introduce you - she was very excited. But she does not know your true nature?”

Emily felt a swell of affection at the idea that Lena cared enough about her to want the others to know about her girlfriend, and it made her a bit bolder when she met the angel’s eyes. “Does she know yours?”

“Touché.”

“I haven’t taken anything from her, Angela. Not so much as a drop. I’ve no idea how it would affect her...condition...and I haven’t dared risk trying to learn. Any time I touch her it’s been through clothes or layers.” Emily looked ruefully down at her hands. “Any time I touch anyone it’s normally like that.”

“Which is why you are starving,” Angela mused. “But... why?”

“I already told you that,” Emily replied testily. “Because I’m trying to be careful. Because I may want sex - God, fuck, you have no idea how much I want sex - but I can live like this, even if it isn’t fun.”

“I understand that, I just don’t understand why you’ve gone to such lengths -"
“Because I care about her!” Emily’s face felt hot from a rush of something more than anger, and she had to pull herself back, hard. “I can’t give you a simple explanation, angel. Just...she’s never pressed me about the fact that I don’t really touch her. She’s so hopeful and positive after everything she’s been through, and she just keeps going. She’s funny and she’s sweet, and she wants to help people...and she makes things better.” Emily sighed, running a hand through her hair. “You’ve known her longer than I have. Surely you’ve seen that.”

“I have,” Angela agreed softly, and though she wasn’t actually touching the floor (Angels in their true forms so rarely did), Emily noticed that Angela had lowered herself down enough to make proper eye contact instead of looking down on her. “But I never expected to hear a demon pointing out such traits with...sincerity.”

“I’m...not going to try to pretend I’m a good person, Angela. I’ve done a lot of harm in my life, before I had a change of heart, but I’m trying.” Emily sighed. “And Lena... is a good person. I would be lying if I said I didn’t find her attractive physically - I do - but there’s so much to her than that, and I...she...” Emily shook her head. “She likes me. I still can’t entirely believe that, if I’m honest.”

“She is a good person,” Angela finally agreed, her voice becoming soft. “Kind. Tender. She wants to see the best in everyone...even you, it seems. And you have never used your gifts to influence her. That, I have to admit, was a surprise.”

“I don’t want to hurt her,” Emily repeated softly, “I don’t.” A sudden thought struck her, and she met the angel’s eyes once again, her voice going utterly serious. “I’ll swear it to you on my Name.”

That proposal clearly took Angela back. “You would do such a thing? Truly?”

Emily knelt in front of her, bowing her head. “I swear to you upon my True Name that I do not wish any harm to come to Lena Oxton by my hand or by my nature. I swear that I have done everything I can to prevent myself from unduly influencing her and that I will continue to do so as long as we are...involved.”

There was a pregnant pause as Emily took a breath, and she spoke her Name in a hushed whisper. The language of the Pit was not the lyrical, almost symphonic sounds of the Celestial tongue, but there was still something musical to it - like the dark, percussive sounds of tympani or an anvil chorus, accented by the sibilant hiss of sparks on steel and rivers of lava cooling against stone.

Even with Angela’s influence casting the room in divine brilliance it seemed for a moment as if their shadows lengthened as Emily spoke, and the air became just a bit thicker, with a sulfurous tang that teased Emily’s nose.

The effect faded as her voice died away, and there was a strange stillness to it all until Angela’s wings extended to their full span, and when she spoke there was a resonant undertone to her words like a great bell being struck with every syllable.

“**I hear you, demon of Lust, and shall hold you to your vow. So I pledge as the Angel of Mercy, Cherub friend of Judgement.**”

Emily swallowed nervously. She was sincere about everything she had said, but still, the fact that she had just handed Angela the ability to bind, banish, or potentially even destroy her under the right conditions was pretty sobering.

There was a sensation like a current of fresh air washing through the room, and when it passed Angela was back in her mortal guise, the room snapping back to the normal flow of mortal time and space.
“Well!” Angela clapped her hands lightly, her cheerful tone much more genuine. “Now that we’ve settled *that*, I suppose we ought to go back to the table.”

“Yeah,” Emily shivered just a little bit despite the warmth of her sweater. “I suppose so.”

Angela paused on her way to the door, then turned. “You know, she talks about you all the time. About how kind you are. How much she loves talking to you. How she feels when she gets to see you. It was one of the reasons I was concerned once I realized what you were. But with what you have told me, and what I have learned? I think she cares for you just as deeply as you care for her.”

Emily blushed and looked down at the floor, excitement and worry and delight all passing through her at once. “I...thank you, Angela.”

“I still have my eye on you,” Angela replied honestly, “but perhaps I have a few things to learn, too.”

Chapter End Notes

For the very few who have asked, no, I am not straight up ripping off *In Nomine* but I am borrowing a few things here and there for the cosmology. :)
Chapter 6

When Angela and Emily returned, the others were all trying not to look confused and nervous, particularly Lena, but Emily carefully put her hand on Lena's knee as she sat back down and gave a little squeeze. It's OK. I'm OK.

Lena gave her a look, and Emily shook her head a little. She wasn’t sure exactly how to explain it yet, but she’d find a way to give Lena some kind of explanation later.

Emily caught Fareeha giving Angela a similarly concerned look, and part of her really would love to know what was going on there. Angels were supposed to love humanity, of course, but rather more...abstractly than their interactions suggested. Still, if it was one of the things that had softened Angela’s outlook a bit instead of simply smiting her out of hand, Emily wouldn’t complain.

There was an awkward silence for a couple of seconds, and then Lúcio got things going again. “Emily, Lena said you guys met at the Pride festival? How’d that go?”

Emily tilted her head just a bit, and her lips turned up in a little smile. “Well, if you want to be technical, that was where I learned her name, but she started by stalking me at work.”

“Oh!” Lena mimed being wounded, clapping her hands over her chest. “Stalking is an ugly word!”

Hana looked up from her handheld, mischief in her eyes. “Yeah, just like eavesdropping, sneaking, stealing …”

Lena groaned. “Are you still on about the shrimp chips?”

Hana’s response was to look over at Emily with a wicked smile. “Tell Me. Everything.”

“Well,” Emily began, “it all started right here, actually, because my friends from work insisted I come out to the pub…”

Emily tried to moderate her intake a bit, but it turned out that keeping up with a combat pilot, an international celebrity known for partying as hard as he worked, and an angel who had apparently decided that her sober friends could handle driving them back to the hotel was...demanding.

To her surprise, though, she was having fun. As the night went on, Emily had found herself laughing at several of Fareeha’s terrible puns, to Lena’s horror, and Lúcio and Hana each got involved in conversations with her on several current events and various other subjects, the DJ offering broader suggestions or concepts compared to the gamer’s focused, pinpoint remarks. She and Angela even traded a few jokes, quite a few of which held double meanings that their friends would be unaware of.

When they suddenly found it was chucking out time Emily was feeling warm and relaxed because of the company as much as the alcohol, and shared Lena’s sense of regret as they walked them to where Angela had left her rented car, wishing she could have a bit more time to enjoy their company.

They said their goodbyes before Fareeha poured Angela and Lúcio into the back seat, and stood waving at the corner until the car’s taillights disappeared into the late evening traffic.

Neither of them were terribly steady on their feet, and Lena looked up at Emily as if just considering that their night was going to come to an end.
“I know this is *really* cliche,” Lena said in a surprisingly sober voice, “but my apartment isn’t too far...want to come over?”

“I…” Emily paused, trying to sort out what *she* wanted, what the *alcohol* wanted, what her *hunger* wanted, and what was actually a good idea. “Well. It’s probably closer than the tube station.”

“Block and a half,” Lena confirmed, “and no tube or cabbies. Just me.” She grinned rakishly. “Which might make it even more dangerous.”

*God*, Emily thought to herself, *you really have no idea…*

Still, it *was* probably better for her to go to Lena’s than risk anything else, and she didn’t feel much like waiting for a cab.

“OK,” she agreed, and let Lena lead her down the block, a laugh bubbling up inside of her at the way Lena did a little drunken pirouette in her excitement. “You sure you’ll be able to *find* your flat?”

“I’m not *that* pissed,” Lena grinned back over her shoulder, then pointed down the street. “Not far at all, honestly, and I’ve done this walk plenty of times.”

True to Lena’s word, they made it up into her flat without incident, and Emily got a (very short) tour of the place, noticing that aside from the RAF posters and some old Airfix models in her bedroom it felt very...unlived in.

“Lost a lot of my stuff back when the *Slipstream* went up,” Lena explained when Emily mentioned that impression. “I had a few things at the base that Winston kept, god love him, but when I was initially declared dead my landlord cleaned out my old flat in record time.” Lena shrugged. “Been back a few years, obviously, but I’ve tended to stay on the go. Didn’t make sense to replace much of it.”

“I...suppose I can see that,” Emily admitted. *I also think it might be one of the saddest things I’ve heard.* “Still, even if you are running around - especially with Overwatch again - you ought to feel at home, not just like this is a place to keep your things.”

Lena was just drunk enough to sigh at that instead of laughing it off. “Not easy to do when you’ve been...where I was. I went through a lot of different ‘what if’s. Saw...places. Things. People. Makes it hard to feel connected sometimes when you’re on your own. S’ a big reason why I stay so busy. Overwatch or not...It helps being out, seeing people...talking to you.”

If Emily hadn’t already caught feelings for Lena, the naked honesty of that moment would have done her in. “Oh, sweetie…” She found herself stepping forward and very carefully wrapping Lena in a hug. “You’re here, OK? You’re here with me and if it helps to see me more or come over when you have time or for me to come here, just say the word. I want you to be happy. I want you to feel like you have somewhere to come *home* to.”

Lena looked up at her. “That is the sweetest thing you’ve ever said to me, you know.” Then she looked down at the way Emily was holding her. “Em...is...is this OK? I mean, you haven’t ever said but I’ve noticed you have a bit of a thing about touching…”

Emily sighed. She loved Lena for being observant and concerned about her boundaries but she *also* had been dreading this conversation. “I...it’s complicated. I have reasons for why I’m careful. But this is very OK right now.”

“OK…” Lena hesitated, and ran her tongue over her bottom lip nervously. “Can...can I kiss you?”
Emily wanted to say yes so badly that it ached inside of her, and it felt as if something was tearing at her from the inside as she took a deep breath. “I...I’m sorry. It’s not you, OK? It’s not you...I want to...but I can’t.”

Lena frowned, but closed her eyes and nodded, settling for tightening her hug. “OK. OK, luv. “ She took a deep breath, and Emily shivered at how her body moved against her. “Can we talk about it later? I know we’re both half pissed right now, but I want to really listen.”

Emily nodded, and rubbed a little circle against the top of Lena’s back, just above the harness that she could feel beneath the sweatshirt. “I promise, yes, we can talk about it later.”

Lena stepped back and then looked down at her sweatshirt before pulling down the zipper and giving Emily a good look at the device it had concealed for the first time. The slowly rotating disc of light that was being projected from the harness grabbed her attention, and Emily watched it turn for a long moment before her eyes swept over the armored clamshell plates that ran along her sides.

“I told you I could take it off,” Lena explained softly. “I...don’t, when I’m out. There’s some equipment in here that does the same sort of thing, and the accelerator can project the stabilizing effect for about ten meters around it, but if I were to leave it or go outside that...it wouldn’t be fun.”

“Well, at least you don’t have to wear it into the shower.” It was a lame joke and they both knew it - an attempt not to focus on the heartbreakingly serious side of things - but Lena still laughed.

“Too right. Would...” Lena hesitated, and Emily tilted her head slightly but didn’t press, giving Lena room to find her words. “I need to plug it in, at night. To recharge it, basically. Would you like to see how that works?”

Would you like to see how my heart beats? Would you like to see this thing that keeps me alive?

Emily couldn’t breathe for a moment at the incredibly intimate request Lena was making. In her own way, she was making herself just as vulnerable as Emily had made herself to Angela just a few hours ago, and it was a very humbling experience to be on the other side of the trade. “I would love to.”

Lena lead her back to the bedroom and demonstrated how the catches on the sides could be opened, then pulled the device off with a long groan, stretching to work out the kinks in her neck and shoulders from wearing it all day before she opened a little maintenance port on the back and showed Emily where the charging cable that had been plugged into the wall could be attached.

“And that’s it?” Emily didn't want to say it, but the whole process wasn't much more dramatic than plugging in a toaster.

“That’s it,” Lena confirmed with a grin, then yawned, stretching again, and Emily couldn’t help herself as she watched the way Lena’s chest rose and the t-shirt she’d had on beneath the accelerator drew taut over her bust. “I know you have the...thing...but...I could get another blanket if you wanted to sleep in here tonight instead of the couch? Sleep on top of the covers?”

“I’d like that,” Emily said before she could let herself think of all the ways that idea could go wrong. “It’s late, anyway, and we ought to get some sleep.”

Lena pulled the blanket from her closet and went to the bathroom to brush her teeth, so Emily took advantage of the opportunity to pull off her sweater and strip down to the briefs she’d worn, and wrap herself in the blanket.

A succubus wrapping herself up in a bundling bag. There has to be a joke there, somewhere...
When Lena came out and undressed for bed herself, Emily might have peeked a little. After all, just because she couldn’t touch didn’t mean she couldn’t look.

Lena gave a happy little sigh as she slid beneath the sheets on the other side of the bed, and turned off the lights with tap on her phone. “G’night, Em.”

“Goodnight, beautiful.”

Emily couldn’t bring herself to feel nervous when Lena wrapped an arm around her, or at the way she cuddled close in her sleep despite the blankets between them. Sighing happily, Emily let herself relax into the embrace, closed her eyes, and enjoyed the feeling of Lena’s body pressing against hers as she fell asleep.
Emily groaned as she turned over, struggling to get out of the blankets she’d wrapped around herself. She didn’t feel too hung over, but something didn’t feel right. The bed was colder than she remembered, and she could smell...beans? Sausages, too. But who was cooking? She didn’t live… oh!

It took a moment to completely untangle herself from the blanket, and Emily was still half asleep as she pulled her sweater back on, leaving her pants and bra where she’d dropped them on the floor, and dragged herself back through the unfamiliar apartment to the kitchen.

She’d been about to call ‘Good morning’ to Lena when she got a good look at her and the words died on her lips. Her usual spiky hairstyle had gotten even more chaotic thanks to a massive case of bedhead, and the only thing she appeared to have on was a long t-shirt covered in Pachimari characters that just barely reached her upper thighs. Emily was seized with an almost overwhelming urge to slide her hands up under the hem and pull Lena against her as she peppered her neck with kisses, or maybe pin Lena against the kitchen counter and see just what was under that shirt for herself.

That is not fair! That is not fair at all!

Emily warred silently against herself as Lena moved back and forth around the kitchen, completely oblivious to her presence until Emily finally let out a noise that was somewhere between a squeak and a groan of frustration as she forced herself to step towards the barstool seats at the kitchen island instead of closer to the cook.

“Oh!” Lena turned at the sound, giving her a little grin. “Morning, sleepyhead. Tea?”

Emily nodded, still not quite trusting herself to talk until she had a bit of caffeine in her system to finish washing out the cobwebs.

“Here,” Lena produced a mug from the cupboard, filled it with what smelled like wonderfully strong black tea, then put it on the island for her. “Wasn’t sure if you liked lemon or if you took it with cream and sugar, but there’s plenty of either.”

Emily took a few sips, blissfully unconcerned about the heat of the beverage before she set down the mug. “This is lovely, but I wouldn’t mind some lemon for it.”

“Coming right up! Brekkie’s almost done.”

They ate the fry up in silence, but it was a comfortable, friendly one. The beans, sausages, and eggs were all prepared reasonably well, and the tea had helped perk her up enough to get her brain fully involved, but Emily dearly wished the food could help with the gnawing hunger that seemed to be growing stronger every time she looked at Lena.

“So,” Lena asked after she’d finished cleaning her plate, “did you sleep OK?”

“Oh, yes.” That wasn’t even a lie. Emily didn’t think she’d slept so well in ages. “I’ve missed having someone cuddled up with me, and it was really sweet of you to offer the blanket to keep things safe.”

That last part had been a bit too close to the truth, really, but Lena just laughed. “Oh, am I dangerous now?”
“No!” Emily looked up sharply and then backed herself up, embarrassed. “I mean...who says I was worried about you?”

Lena stopped laughing and took a more serious look at her. “Is this about Angela taking you back to the ladies room to give you some kind of telling off? Because she’s my friend but she’s not my mum. She doesn’t get a vote on what I do at home.”

Emily looked down at her plate, pushing the last of her beans around with her fork. “Not...exactly. It really was family business, of a sort.”

Lena frowned at her. “I thought Angie’s family was basically gone.”

She winced at the cooling, skeptical tone. This was not how she wanted this morning to go. “I want to say we’re something like...fourth or fifth cousins, technically? Maybe even a little more than that. I’d barely seen her before yesterday.”

“Then why are you acting all scared of her? You seemed to be getting on pretty well by the end.”

Lena sat back, giving her a searching look. “I mean...if not her, seriously, is it me?”

“No, no it isn’t! Of course it isn’t, Lena, you’re wonderful!” Emily looked up to meet her eyes, a growing tightness in her throat. “I didn’t want...I didn’t really want to do this yet. Talk about this. We’ve been...I’ve been really happy, you know?”

Lena’s skepticism was turning to confusion. “I don’t see why that has to change. If it’s not Angie putting an arm on you or me...is it something to do with the touching thing?”

“It...I…” Emily sighed. “Sort of? But it’s not something that I can explain easily.”

Lena was visibly struggling with her frustration, but she was clearly making an effort to push it down before she spoke. “I mean...if this is a body dysphoria thing, I do understand some of that. I’ve had friends who decided to transition, and I...had some experiences during my accident. I don’t want you to feel like you can’t be yourself, ok?”

“It’s not my body,” Emily objected, “it’s...it’s me, ok? It’s what I am, who I am!”

Lena looked at her as if she’d started speaking Attic Greek. “So who are you, Emily?”

Emily threw back the rest of her tea with a bitter laugh. “You wouldn’t believe me if I told you.”

“I’m a time traveling lesbian who’s best mate is a genetically engineered super-gorilla from the Moon,” Lena shot back. “Try me.”

That tore away the very little bit of restraint Emily had been using to keep her frustration in check. “All right,” she said softly as she put the mug back down on the island, “but you asked for this.” She rose from the stool, her back stiff and shoulders rigid. “I call myself Emily because I liked this name, and my real name is unpronounceable by human tongues. I’m a succubus, a demon spawned by the pits of Dis, created to prey upon Man’s sin of Lust. I feed on the life energy of other beings like a sponge, taking a bit of their essence for myself at the slightest touch, but I feast on sex in all its forms, and I could give you the greatest pleasure you have ever experienced as long as you didn’t mind the risk of me killing you in the process.”

Emily rounded the island, starting to approach Lena with a little dip and swish of her hips as she walked, then stopped and forced herself to turn away and walk back towards the back of the kitchen instead. “I want to kiss you, Lena. Last night it was all I could do to stop myself from kissing you when you asked. I’ve been dreaming about touching you, cuddling with you, fucking you, holding
you close all night and feeling your skin on mine, but I am terrified of hurting you and I swore to your friend - who, just in case you didn’t know, is an actual Angel with a capital letter A - that I would do everything I could not to let that happen!”

She took a deep breath, shoulders heaving, and turned back to face Lena with her arms crossed tightly against her chest. “So. That’s the reason. Are you satisfied now?!”

Lena looked utterly gobsmacked. “You...you’re serious, aren’t you? At first I thought you were having me on, but... You actually believe all that? Demons and angels and all that stuff you said?”

Emily gave Lena a resigned sigh. “I really, really hope your friend doesn’t smite me for this.” Then, before Lena could ask what she was talking about, Emily took hold of her sweater and pulled it off, shedding her mortal guise along with it.

Her skin changed from a fairly pale human tone covered in freckles to a tone closer to expensive white marble, with swirling veins of pinks and pale reds that ran up and down her body. Her nails lengthened and reddened until they were the color of fresh blood, and when she tossed her hair, the “flaming” red locks now burned from within with a fire that filled every strand, running white hot at the roots and gradually cooling along the length of each strand to yellows, oranges, and reds nearest to the ends.

The sclera of her eyes had become an inky black that glistened in the light, while the irises had turned a pale grey that was nearly a silver, pupils shining with their own inner radiance. Lena’s gaze, though, had fixed on the set of dark, slightly twisted horns that had risen up to peek through her bangs, and Emily couldn’t keep herself from giving Lena just a little smirk at her sharp intake of breath.

“I did warn you, gorgeous.”
For probably a full minute, Lena just stared, slack jawed. Emily wasn’t even entirely certain that she was breathing.

Lena finally stood and took a few steps towards her, but the look in her eyes wasn’t terrified or angry. It took her a few moments to really identify it, but Emily finally thought that **reverent** might be a good description for it.

“OK,” Lena said softly, then stopped and started again, her voice a bit stronger. “So...this...this is you.”

“Yes,” Emily said calmly. “This is me.” She considered that and then wiggled her hand back and forth. “Not that the way I look as a human isn’t. That’s me too, just...a different aspect, you might say.”

Lena tilted her head slightly as she considered that. “I...yeah. It’s still your face. It’s still your eyes.” She chuckled softly. “Well. Aside from the obvious.”

Emily felt herself flush, the heat of her blood bringing more shades of coral and pink to her skin. “Yes. Quite.”

Lena’s hand came up, a slight tremble in her fingers before she stopped herself. “I...I know you’re worried about me touching you, but it’s OK if there’s clothes or gloves or something, right? Just not skin to skin?”

“Things are a bit stronger when I am like this,” Emily admitted. “But yes - if you were to touch me with your bare hand...it would be dangerous.”

Lena gave her a look. “I can decide how much danger I’m comfortable with, y’know.” Before Emily could object, she raised one hand. “If I get some gloves - thick ones - would it be OK? I could touch you?”

Part of her really hadn’t expected Lena to even want to touch her again, “I think that would be...” She thought of Lena’s reaction, and stopped herself from saying safe. “It would be OK.”

“Right,” Lena’s eyes became a bit more determined as she nodded as much to herself as to Emily. “Be right back, luv. Just stay right where you are!” She half walked, half ran to the bedroom, and came out with her hands in the reinforced gloves she normally wore when she was being Tracer. “Think these will do?”

“I...yes,” Emily looked at the gloves, her eyes tracing the stitching between the armored plates and the brown and black dyed leather. “That leather is heavy enough. I don’t think there will be a problem.” Hesitantly, she looked into Lena’s eyes. “Are you sure...?”

Lena’s answer was to reach out and tenderly stroke her cheek, gasping softly in surprise at what she found beneath her gloved fingertips.

Emily closed her eyes and turned her head into the touch, running her chin and cheek against Lena’s palm like a cat, unable to stop herself from giving a little groan at the contact, and the way Lena’s
fingers curled in against the side of her neck.

“‘You’re so warm,’” Lena murmured softly. “I expected...I don’t know. Your skin looks almost like stone. I was expecting it might be cool, like touching a counter top or a marble slab, but…”

“I’m alive,” Emily murmured. “Everyone is a bit different - there are some of us who are more ice than fire - but passion should always burn.”

“Yeah,” Lena murmured as her hand slid up to card through the burning locks of her hair. “How am I touching this…? It looks like you’re on fire, but it just...feels like hair.”

Emily chuckled softly. “There’s plenty of complicated answers, but the simple one is ‘magic’.”

Lena gave a soft ‘huh’ as she ran her other gloved hand over her shoulder. “I...I should be scared, but that’s not at all what I feel right now.”

Emily opened her eyes and realized Lena’s mouth was so close to hers...it would be so easy to kiss her. So natural. Part of her just wanted to lean in just a bit, make that distance disappear… “Please, be careful.”

The look in Lena’s eyes was anything but careful. “You said you didn’t want to hurt me.”

Emily shivered as Lena’s hand slid from her shoulder down to her back. “Lena…”

“Then don’t,” Lena whispered, and a moment later her lips found Emily’s, gentle but urgent, and to Emily it felt as if she’d been handed a drink of cold water after days of parching thirst. Her eyes slipped shut as her breath left her in a ragged gasp before Lena’s tongue was lightly swiping against her lips.

Lena tasted of the sun rising, of spring rain, of sweetness, of hope, and Emily felt like she was growing warmer by the heartbeat, radiance spreading through her. It felt amazing, as delicious as she’d known it would be, and her eyes snapped open as she realized it was wrong.

“What are you DOING?!” Emily pushed Lena back from her and stepped out of her arms, and without even thinking she hauled back and slapped her, feeling another spark of energy pass at the contact as she connected with a sharp crack. “Lena, are you insane?”

Lena reached up to rub at her cheek, wincing. “I don’t know, maybe…” She shook her head and took a step back herself. “I just...I’ve been wanting to kiss you forever, and part of me still really didn’t think this was real. Like I was dreaming and you’re still wrapped up in my old blanket.”

Emily put her head into her hands with a groan of frustration. “You bloody idiot. Do you have any idea what could have happened?”

“I feel fine,” Lena insisted. “Well, OK, you gave me a hell of a wallop there but I probably deserved it.” She sighed. “Sorry...I just had to. I know that’s a terrible reason and you told me no before and I shouldn’t have done it, but I couldn’t stop myself.”

“Neither could I,” Emily sighed. “That’s what I’m afraid of. I’m not saying it wasn’t good, it was. But if I go too far…”

Lena groaned, running a hand over her face. “Yeah, I know, you keep saying.”

Emily threw up her hands. “Because you aren’t listening!”
“Well stop being a naked sexy demon in my kitchen, then!” Lena’s voice was full of frustration as she turned away, and Emily had to admit that she had a point.

Closing her eyes, Emily’s nostrils flared as she blew a deep breath out through her nose, then pulled herself back into her mortal form. “There. Better?”

Lena turned back, face still flushed as her eyes traced the patterns of freckles that ran up and down Emily’s still naked body. “Not...exactly, no.”

Emily looked down at herself, coughed, and shook her head. “Ah. I suppose that...yes.” Grabbing her sweater from the floor, she looked over her shoulder at Lena. “I’ll just...I’m going to go get dressed, and I’ll be back in a minute.”

“Yeah,” Lena croaked. “Yeah...sounds good. I’ll be...yeah.”

Emily closed the door to the bedroom behind her and sat down heavily on the bed. “Oh my god, what was I thinking? I wasn’t thinking. Why didn’t I just lie and say I had a skin condition or a heart problem, an embarrassing tattoo, I’m mithridatic, something…”

She rubbed her temples before reaching for her bra, pulling it back on before she shrugged on the sweater, then pulled on her jeans. “Honestly it would be easier if I was crazy.” If there was anything good about the whole situation it was that Lena had given her more to eat than she’d had in months - maybe even the last few years. But the more she thought about that…

“How was she still standing and arguing with me?” Emily bolted up from the bed as her heart jolted with alarm. “That much could have - should have - knocked her flat!”

She skipped putting her shoes and socks back on and headed back to the kitchen in her bare feet, almost tripping over herself in the rush.

“Lena? Lena!”

“Yeah?” Lena turned from where she’d apparently been working off some of her frustrations by washing dishes and cleaning up from breakfast. “What is it?”

Emily sighed with relief as she caught herself on the edge of the kitchen island. “You’re OK. Oh, thank god.”

Lena raised a hand in a bit of a noncommittal wave. “I...don’t know if I’d exactly say OK? The fact that I just kissed a demon is sort of sinking in? And the other stuff, and...yeah.”

Emily nodded and sat down on the stool, slumping a bit in her seat. “That’s fair,” she admitted, “but...physically? Not tired? Not lightheaded or exhausted?”

“No,” Lena shook her head, “not at all. Physically I feel...well. A little in need of a cold shower, but…not anything like that.” She frowned, then touched a hand to her lips. “Should I?”

Emily stared. “I...yes? I mean, please don’t misunderstand me, I’m glad you’re all right, but with what I took from you, at the very least you should feel quite tired.” She ran a hand over her belly. “I feel...well, if you’ll pardon the word, satisfied in a way I haven’t in a very long time.”

Lena gave a soft ‘huh’ and shrugged. “Sorry, luv, I’ve no idea.” She looked down at her nightshirt and then back up. “I...look, I know we need to talk more, but mind if I get dressed, too?”

Emily gave a quick nod. “Much as I like the view…”
Lena’s head jerked sharply and she fixed her with a glare. “Don’t tease unless you mean it, Emily.”

Emily bit her lip and looked away. “Sorry, yes, that’s...I earned that. Go ahead. I’ll...go sit on your couch, if that’s OK?”

Lena pulled her gloves back on and reached out to put a hand on her shoulder with a sympathetic look before she made her way back to the bedroom, and Emily found herself slumping down on the couch and hugging a throw pillow.

She had sunk so low into her funk that Emily didn’t realize Lena had come back in until she realized her (ex?) girlfriend was sitting on the floor in front of her and calling her name.

“Emily? Em, hey. Hey, please, talk to me.”

Emily started and shook herself, squeezing the pillow against her before she looked into Lena’s eyes. “Sorry...I...you probably want me to leave. I should...I can call myself a cab, and I can go, I’m so...sorry.”

Lena’s eyes widened and she reached out to put a hand on her knee. “No, Em...why would I? I want to talk but I don’t want you to leave.”

“Are you sure?” Emily looked down and realized Lena had put her gloves back on to go with the orange and white t-shirt she was wearing, and a pair of grey leggings. Grateful for the gesture, she put her hand over Lena’s and gave a tentative squeeze, growing firmer when Lena turned her hand over to squeeze back.

“I - we - have a lot to talk about,” Lena said softly, “but last I checked you’re my girlfriend, and I would be a right git to toss you out. Especially since I was the one who went too far.”

Emily felt a fluttering in her chest that had nothing to do with the taste of Lena’s spirit she’d taken. “I was sort of afraid that you wouldn’t be very interested in having me around after all that.”

Lena took her hand again and gave a reassuring squeeze. “I may be dumb sometimes - especially about all of this - but I’m not stupid.”

Emily let out a little laugh that was mixed with a few tears, and as Lena joined her, she could almost believe that somehow things were going to be alright.

Chapter End Notes

Want to see the kiss in comic form?

You're in luck!

Want to see the slap?

Got that covered too!

And some lovely art from Mrozna-Janina!
“So,” Lena asked after she’d moved to the other end of the couch, “I wanted to ask you about something.”

Emily straightened up a bit and nodded. “I’m sure you have a lot of questions.”

“Yeah,” Lena admitted. “But the biggest...you really are a demon, then?”

“That’s right.” Emily fiddled with the ends of her sweater’s sleeves. “There’s many different kinds, but that’s a simple enough shorthand for it.”

Lena sat back a bit. “So...please don’t take this the wrong way, but why do you care if you hurt me? When I think about devils, demons, whatever, it seems like that ought to be a plus for you.”

Emily grimaced and ran her hands through her hair. “You’re not wrong, and for a lot of others it would be, I admit. But... “ She trailed off, and considered how to put it, her voice slow and measured as she tried to explain why she stood apart from so many others. “When we met back up at Pride, I was serious about basically being pansexual. I’m rather wired that way. And the whole thing I said about ‘preying on the sins of man’ is true, too. But the longer I was in the mortal world, the more I spent time with people, I started to change.”

Lena leaned forward slightly as she spoke, clearly hanging on every word of Emily’s explanation.

“A big part of it was the women I met - some looking for a quick fuck or no strings, sure, but so many were interested in me because they felt like I cared about them. Because I was attentive. Because I was loving and seductive but didn’t pressure or force anything. Because I was giving to them, even if they didn’t realize I was also taking. Over the years, the more I saw that, I stopped seeing everyone around me as toys to play with and started seeing people. Even the men.” Eventually, she admitted silently.

“Wow.” Lena sat back, the astonishment in her eyes gradually replaced by amusement. “Succubus with a heart of gold. That could be a movie, you know.”

Emily snorted with a roll of her eyes. “Oh, I’m sure it’s been the plot of a bodice ripper or two. Though I suspect that in the movie they’d probably recast you as a dashing man who could show me the errors of my wicked ways.”

“Well, that’s Hollywood for you,” Lena breezed. Emily felt some of the tense misery she’d been hanging on to slowly begin to fade as they talked. It was nice to not be hiding, but more importantly it felt as if they were getting back to the casual, comfortable feelings they’d had before this morning.

“So true.” Emily found herself not certain what to say next (though she she was quite sure Lena was tired of being asked if she felt OK), and decided to just sit and let Lena continue asking the questions. She didn’t have to wait long, all things considered.

“With what you said earlier, and how you two were talking back at the pub, you weren’t kidding about Angela actually being an angel, were you?” Lena leaned forward. “When she said distant relatives...”
Emily’s cheeks warmed and she ducked her head in a shy nod. “I feel a bit bad about outing her, honestly. I wasn’t so much thinking as just venting my anger.”

Lena shrugged. “Would have put it together eventually. So was she here to hunt you or something?”

“Now who sounds like the movies?” Emily winked, getting a smile from Lena that made her want to lean across the couch and kiss her again, despite all the reasons not to. “As to why she’s here, I’ve no idea. Nothing to do with me, honestly - she was as surprised to see me there as I was terrified when I realized who had walked in. But she’s a Cherub...they tend to be guardians and protectors, and often attach themselves to groups or individuals.”

“Huh.” Lena turned her head slightly. “So what does she look like? Like, does Angie just turn into a big thing of light? Or one of those wheels of fire in some of the paintings?”

“Oh, no, the wheels within wheels are Ofanim,” Emily corrected, her hand describing a few circles. “Totally different thing. Rare, actually. I can’t say I’ve ever seen one in person.”

Lena tilted her head. “Ok, so...?”

“Well…” Emily coughed, a blush rising as she recalled being on her knees in the bathroom before Angela’s celestial radiance. “She looks rather like you’d expect, honestly. Flowing white and blue robes, wings of gold flame, halo, the whole bit.”

Lena gave a long whistle. “Wow. That’s...wow.” Her head came up as a thought struck her. “She just dropped that in the bathroom?”

“Well,” Emily said impishly, “she never let her feet touch the floor, obviously.”

Lena gave a snort. “Too right.” She tilted her head slightly. “You said something about swearing on your name? I mean - I read plenty of Harry Potter and the rest as a kid. So that means she could, what, banish you? Is that why you were so scared of her?”

“Among other things, yes.” Emily considered how much to say. “Suffice to say that if she needed to use it, I would be in quite a lot of trouble...and honestly that is scary, but her sheer power…” Emily shook her head. “It would be like using a blowtorch on an ice cube, honestly. If I’d tried to take her in a straight up fight I’d have lost before it even started.”

Lena tilted her head. “Angie? I mean...I trust you, Em, I believe it, but she’s one of the sweetest people I’ve ever met.”

“Seriously, yes.” Emily leaned back. “You don’t see it because if I had to guess, she’s doing everything she can to work within mortal means and technology, but if it were serious enough...especially if something truly infernal or worse...you might be in for quite a shock.”

Lena’s voice became thoughtful. “But if she’s that powerful, and you swore not to hurt me, after what happened why isn’t she here?” Emily stiffened in shock, and Lena raised her hands. “I mean, it was my own fault, but you make it sound like she’d know.”

“I don’t know,” Emily admitted slowly. “I think she could be powerful enough, but I genuinely don’t know.”

“Huh.” Lena looked at her with a crooked smile. “Please don’t take this the wrong way, luv, but are you sure you did it right?”

Emily did the only reasonable thing, and threw the pillow at her.
“Oi!” Emily was fairly sure Lena let herself get hit in the face for dramatic effect, nearly falling back over the arm of the couch before she pulled herself back upright. “Seriously, though...you’re sure you...um...” Lena coughed, her cheeks reddening. “I can’t think of a way to say it that doesn’t sound like a come-on.”

Emily gave her a dry look. “You’re a menace, Lena Oxton.” Still... “If I change back - with my clothes on - do you think you can control yourself?”

Lena held up her hand in a three fingered salute. “On my honor as a Girl Guide.”

Emily gave her a raised eyebrow but let herself slip back into her proper form, the change made slightly awkward by the restrictions of not affecting her clothing. “OK,” she explained as she shoved her sleeves back to expose her arms, careful not to damage the sweater with her claws. “Do you see the pink in my skin?”

Lena leaned forward a bit. “Mm...yeah. Like a seashell, or marble. Sort of...running through you.”

Emily nodded. “That’s a sign that I’ve fed.” She traced her finger along a whorl running down her arm that was nearly the color of tea roses, the pink deepening into shades of violet. “And the darker they get - the more I’ve taken.”

Lena frowned as she leaned in a bit further, tracing the line with her eyes, but kept her promise. “Before, the ones I saw... they were all really pale except when you were blushing.” She looked up sharply. “You were starving yourself?!?”

Emily pulled herself back into her human guise, crossing her arms defensively over her chest. “I wasn’t starving exactly. I wasn’t getting a lot, but it was...enough.”

“You - argh!” Lena grabbed the pillow and tossed it back at her, though not hard enough to actually hurt. “Don’t you dare keep hurting yourself!”

“With what I took,” Emily admitted, “it’s going to keep me going for a while. I shouldn’t have anything to worry about.”

“Not sure I like the sound of that, but...” Lena sighed. “OK. So I believe you, then. But it didn’t seem to affect me the way it should have, and it didn’t seem to affect your...ah...promise to Angela.”

“So far as we can tell,” Emily agreed, “yes.”

“I suppose we could call and ask if she noticed,” Lena mused. “But I dunno if she’d be happy about you spilling her secret.”

Emily gave a humorless laugh. “I should think not.”

Lena tapped on the side of her leg thoughtfully. “Well, let’s assume it didn’t, all things considered. So demonic stuff aside, we’re talking about a transfer of energy. I may not have Winston’s maths and physics education, but I know how a battery works.” She grinned at her analogy and tapped at her chest. “So either I’ve got a bigger reservoir for you to draw on than a person like me normally would, or I’m getting recharged faster than you can drain me.”

“Which is impossible,” Emily argued. “You only have so much life energy and even what you recover with rest and recuperation takes time -” She stopped mid-denial, her eyes going wide in sudden realization. “Wait...”

Lena eyes were dancing with excitement as she came to the same conclusion - perhaps a few steps
before Emily had, in fact. “About fucking time the Slipstream did me a good turn.”

“You do feel a bit...odd.” Emily considered how to explain it. “Most people are a note in a song, or like candles in a room.”

“Not me, though?”

“No,” Emily confirmed. “You...the first time we met it was like seeing one of those funhouse mirrors that reflects itself a bunch of times when you step in front of it. Or like that note was being played in an empty hall, so it kept echoing even after you’d passed by.”

“Well,” Lena murmured. “Sounds like we have a hypothesis. My disassociation and the effects of the Slipstream accident appear to let you touch me however you like without ill effect, while still providing you what you need. So we can be slow and cautious and test things that way, or...”

“Or...?”

Lena gave Emily that same damned cocky smile that had gotten her in trouble the night they first met at the Iron & Wheel. “All things considered, I’d really, really like you to kiss me.”

Chapter End Notes

In case you missed it: I have a Patreon now, for doing Patreon-y things! Just search for BZArcher there and you'll find it. :)

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

This chapter involves sexual content and lovemaking. If you are made uncomfortable by this, you may want to skip to the next chapter when it is available.

Emily wasn’t sure she’d ever felt so torn.

On the one hand, Lena might very well be safe for her to touch, to kiss, to do everything her dark heart desired. Things which Lena was very interested in too.

*She’s asking you to kiss her, you fool. Go and do it!*

But she couldn’t just leap into danger blindly. Not when the consequences could be so great.

Even with such tantalizing hope…

“I want to,” Emily whispered. “But it’s like sitting down at a buffet when you haven’t eaten in days. So many possibilities, so much to try...it’s overwhelming.”

Lena’s eyes were surprisingly kind, given the implicit rejection. “You’ve gone from nothing at all to too much at once, and it’s paralyzing.”

“Yes,” Emily agreed gratefully. “That’s just it.”

“And you’re still scared.” Lena’s voice didn’t have any judgement in it. Just an honest statement of fact.

“I am,” Emily admitted quietly, feeling oddly lost and small. “I don’t have any idea what to do.”

Carefully, Lena took off her gloves and put them on the coffee table, then scooted so her back was against the corner of the couch. “Come here, luv. Just let me hold you.”

Emily decided that seemed like a tame enough start. She slid down towards the other end of the couch, and then lay down until her head was resting against Lena’s chest.

“There, that’s it…” Lena’s arms wrapped around her, her voice hushed. “There you are.”

Emily couldn’t help the shiver that ran through her when Lena’s bare hand started to slowly rub her back. “I...Lena…” The emotional whiplashes of the day finally took their toll, and when she felt Lena’s fingers against the bare skin of her back, tears began to pool in her eyes.

“Shhhh.” Lena held her a little closer, and Emily groaned softly at the contact. “It’s OK, pet. It’s OK.”

Emily closed her eyes and just let her tears fall, the warmth of each brief touch helping to ease and relax her. She could hear Lena’s heartbeat and feel the rise and fall of each breath she took, the sounds blending with her comforting words. “Sorry...I’m sorry, I don’t even know why…”

“When I got back,” Lena said with a soft, gentle voice, “the first day Winston gave me the
accelerator, I still couldn’t leave the lab. I went from having no control of where or when I went, to stuck in one room for weeks, to suddenly being asked if I wanted to go outside...and it was just too much.”

Emily sniffed, reaching up to wipe the last of her tears away with her sleeve as she sat up enough to look at Lena properly. “What did you do?”

Lena smiled. “Winston came in, and he gave me a hug, a lot like this...and then he picked me up and carried me out.”

“Oh.” Emily took that on board, and then settled back down, letting her head rest against Lena’s shoulder. “I think I’d really like to meet him, one of these days.”

They stayed like that for some time, the warmth of Lena’s energy inside of her leaving Emily dancing on the edge of a food coma.

“This is nice,” Lena murmured. “How’re you doing, pet?”

Emily groaned as Lena’s fingers scratched along the back of her scalp. “I needed this so much.” She blushed, her eyes closing in bliss even at this simple contact. “It’s a little scary, honestly. If I’d let myself slip...given in around anyone else...”

“Sh.” Lena gently caressed her back. “You didn’t, though. You didn’t hurt anyone, so no need to feel guilty about what didn’t happen, right?”

Something about the tender care Lena had taken in easing her fears - at the way she accepted all of this - pushed Emily past a tipping point she hadn’t consciously been approaching. Carefully, she lifted herself up so she could bring a hand to Lena’s cheek, gently caressing back to the side of her head. “No,” Emily whispered. “I suppose there’s no need, after all.”

Lena’s eyes widened slightly, but before she could say anything else Emily was leaning over her, closing her eyes as their lips met in a slow and tender kiss.

Emily’s hunger wasn’t as intense but she could still feel the warmth that was so uniquely Lena passing between them as the kiss deepened. She felt a moment of fear, then let Lena’s soft groan wash it away. The brightness of her spirit was undiminished, the blazing star that was her heart unharmed. Whatever oddity of physics, magic, or time that had occurred was protecting her now just as it had earlier, and for the first time in longer than Emily cared to remember she just let herself go.

Lena’s hands were running along her sides, and Emily scooted her legs until she was properly straddling her hips, delighting in the little shiver that ran through Lena when she rocked against her.

When their lips slid apart, Emily trailed kisses along the side of Lena’s chin, making her way down to the side of her neck, getting rewarded with little gasps and squeaks as she kissed and nibbled at particularly good spots.

Lena’s voice rose as Emily worried at her neck, then began to waver as she gasped for breath. “I can’t... mm!... can’t help but think you’re - God! - you’re cheating somehow!”

Emily’s response was to give her a wicked little grin before licking one of the more sensitive spots she’d found, following it with a sharp little nip. She wasn’t really. Not exactly. But she was very observant.

“Ahhh...” Lena’s hand tightened in her hair, and now it was Emily’s turn to shiver. There was a kink she hadn’t indulged in for quite a while. “More comfortable on the bed, right?”
Emily nodded against Lena’s hand as she semi-reluctantly disengaged, sliding off of her before offering Lena a hand up. “That’s true.”

On a certain level, Emily had expected to stay in control of the encounter once they made their way into the bedroom. After all, she was the infernal seductress in their relationship.

Lena had other plans.

She lead them to the bedroom and waited for Emily to come inside, but instead of closing the bedroom door Lena pressed her against the near wall, her hungry lips finding Emily’s again as Lena’s fingers fumbled with the buttons on her jeans.

“Hello,” Emily breathed when they came up for air.

Lena flashed a fierce grin at her as the jeans finally hit the floor. “Hi.” Her hands slid beneath the hem of the sweater, and Emily let her head sag back against the wall as she bit her bottom lip again. Lena’s hands were warm and so strong. She had seen the softer, goofier, bubbly side of her lover so often that she could forget that Lena began her career as a soldier. The sure hands that were caressing her now were those of a warrior with their lovely little callouses and devastating confidence.

A succubus could easily fake the throes of passion, particularly to ease the way towards feasting on their lover, but Emily had no need to fake anything as she arched into Lena’s touch. Her sweater joined the jeans on the floor, and her bra and underwear not long after that. To Emily’s chagrin, they were halfway to the bed before she even managed to get Lena’s shirt off. “Not fair;” she pouted between gasps as Lena’s thumb brushed over a nipple. “Stop - ah! - distracting me so I can - hah! - get your clothes off!”

Lena grinned cheekily before leaning in to kiss her way up the side of Emily’s neck. “Nope,” she declared, her breath making the hairs on the back of Emily’s neck stand up. “You said ‘sex in all its forms’, right?”

Emily managed a nod before she felt the back of her calves hitting the side of the bed, and found herself being gently but insistently pushed down onto the mattress. “That’s - oh, god - that’s right.”

“I’m still going to guess you were doing;” Lena’s smile was tender and wicked at the same time, and Emily melted a bit more into the bed at the lovely mix of adoration and lust in her eyes. “Not so much being done.”

Emily couldn’t really disagree, particularly once Lena’s hand trailed down her belly and those talented fingers began to explore her. She tried to make a confirming noise, but all that really came out was a needy moan. It had been so long since she had felt someone else’s touch like this.

Lena knelt next to the bed, swallowing her cries as they kissed. Emily’s hand found the back of her scalp, digging into short brown hair as Lena’s other arm cradled around her, supporting her as Emily kissed her back hungrily. They broke apart for air only to find each other again, Emily’s body arching up to press against Lena’s chest each time the fingers inside of her discovered a particularly good spot.

Emily was greedily pulling Lena’s energy to herself even as her body reveled in the flood of touch and pleasure after so long, so intense that it rode the line between bliss and pain but never quite tipped over. Moaning in delight as she let herself drink deeply, her fears of going too far faded as Emily realized that tasting Lena was like trying to drain the ocean with a bucket.

Lena’s thumb drew little circles over her clit as her fingers crooked and slid inside of her, and Emily
surprised herself with how quickly she came apart, her head falling back with a ragged gasp as her body went taut as a bowstring for a moment and then collapsed back onto the sheets.

Acting on instinct as much as desire, she pulled Lena in for another kiss as an aftershock rolled through her, letting the fire that was raging inside of herself spread between them as she shared her pleasure.

Lena stiffened for a heartbeat as if she’d touched a live electrical main, then shuddered with ecstasy as she pressed herself closer. “Oh... oh god...oh, Emily ... oh. ”

“Yes,” Emily whispered hungrily in Lena’s ear, and then it was her turn.
Chapter 11

Emily was reasonably sure she had things to do the following day. For that matter Lena had mentioned needing to pick up groceries, since she'd all but emptied her fridge and pantry before leaving for her last ‘deployment’ with Overwatch.

Pity.

“Oh. My. God.” Lena flopped bonelessly on the bed, struggling to find the strength to turn her head so she could look at Emily properly. “I can’t feel my legs. It’s all sort of...buzz-y.”

Emily giggled, feeling more than a bit punch drunk after what had become almost an entire day spent in bed. “I think we might have gone a bit overboard.”

Lena put on a look of mock innocence. “I’ve no idea what you mean, luv. It’s not like we spent the last twenty hours shagging or anything.”

Emily put on an equally bland look, keeping her voice serious. “That is true. I mean, we did fall asleep.”

“I’d mention taking a break to have some water and hit the bathroom,” Lena agreed, “except then you snuck into the shower…”

“I did not sneak.” Emily propped herself up on one elbow as she pouted. “I seem to recall being invited in.”

Lena stuck out her tongue. “I asked you to wash my back!”

“And we both know what that meant.” Emily managed to keep the stern act up for about five seconds, then dropped the act and began to laugh as Lena tossed a ‘V’ sign at her.

Lena groaned as she forced herself to sit up, then carefully swung her legs over the side of the bed. “Still - ought to at least get some lunch. Some of us can’t eat orgasms, you know.”

“True enough,” Emily agreed. “I might want some fresh clothes, for that matter.”

Lena had a distinct wobble to her walk, but seemed to be recovering as she opened her dresser to pull out underwear and a fresh shirt. “I could give you a ride home, if you like. Let you pick up a few things, change clothes, maybe go out for a bite to eat after?”

Emily smiled. “I’d like that. I…” She blinked. “Oh, Hell, is it Sunday now?”

Lena pulled her shirt on before turning around. “Yes?”

“Shit, I was supposed to be working!” Emily lunged out of bed, trying to find her purse. “Phone, phone, phone dammit where did you - there you are!”
Hey, Emily, you OK? You usually beat me to opening up.

11:30

Still not here - is everything alright?

12:00

Missed Call

12:30

2 Missed Calls

12:45

3 Missed Calls

13:30

Your friend showed up to tell me you weren’t feeling well and hadn’t been able to get out of bed to call in. I didn’t know you knew any blonde goddesses! Where have you been hiding her?!

I’ve got Chrisann in to cover things. Just try to feel better, and if she’s single, I’d love a phone number...

“Blonde goddess…?” Emily stared at her phone in confusion until she put two and two together, then dropped her phone with a groan as she put her face in her hands. “Oh, no…”

Lena stopped pulling on her cargo pants to give her a look of mingled concern and confusion. “What’s happened?”

Emily looked up at her, biting her lip for a moment as she tried to think of what to say. “Well. It seems someone went into the shop and told them I wasn’t feeling well, and wouldn’t make it into work today.” She paused for effect. “Someone who Artii is calling a ‘Blonde Goddess’ and asking if she’s single.”

Lena blinked at her for a few seconds. “Oh. So…Angie knows, then?”

“I should think, yes.” Emily sighed and started to collect her clothes so she could get dressed. “If this
is my last afternoon on the mortal plane, I just want to make sure you know that you are amazing, I love you, and that was some of the best sex I’ve had in years.”

When Emily finished pulling on her clothes and stood up, she realized Lena was staring at her with eyes wide as dinner plates, her body so still it took a moment to confirm that she was actually breathing. “Lena?”

Lena’s voice was hushed. “You said you love me.”

Emily felt a blush creeping up her face as she looked away. “I did. Yes.”

Lena shuffled her feet, her eyes sliding down to the floor. “Is it just because you can touch me?”

Emily blinked, feeling a surge of shock and anger rise through her before she wrestled the emotions down. “No, Lena. Not at all.” She crossed the floor, and put a hand on Lena’s clothed shoulder, careful not to touch any skin. “I won’t lie - I like touching you. I enjoyed what we did. But I started falling for you when you showed up at the bookstore.”

Lena looked up to meet her eyes with a weak smile. “Oh, not at the pub?”

“I thought you were very cute at the pub,” Emily admitted wryly, “but the more I started to talk to you…” Emily’s voice softened, and now she did reach up to gently cup Lena’s cheek in her hand. “As I saw what a brave, caring, and wonderful person you are, Lena, I fell very, very much in love with you, without a single touch required.”

Tears were at the corners of Lena’s eyes as she reached up to draw Emily into another kiss. “I love you too, Emily.”

Emily hugged Lena after their lips parted, hiding her surprise and joy at Lena’s reaction behind a joking tone. “Good thing I’m your girlfriend, then.”

Lena laughed, squeezing her back before she stepped away. “Yeah. Yeah, it really is.” She took her accelerator down and unplugged the charging cable, checking the power indicators before closing the casing and shrugging the harness on over her shirt. “Could I get a hand with buckling up?” Emily nodded, and they were most of the way through helping to adjust the fittings and straps before Lena brought up one of the other things she’d mentioned. “Best sex in years, then?”

“I just finished helping you get into this thing,” Emily shot back. “Don’t you dare make me take you right back out.”

Emily let them into her flat and flipped on the lights. “Sorry, it’s not exactly a disaster but it’s still a bit of a mess.” She hardly ever dusted, the sink still had dirty dishes from the other day waiting to be washed… At least she’d done laundry as part of preparing to go out to meet Lena and the others at the pub.

She lead Lena into the living room, feeling a bit nervous that the only sound were footsteps on the hardwood floor before she turned around and realized that Lena was smiling with delight.

“This isn’t bad at all, honestly. Seen much worse, between barracks and the rest...honestly this is really nice, luv.” Lena walked to the wall Emily had covered in polaroid photos and bookshelves, with the view of King’s Row out the window. “I love this. It’s all...cozy. Comfortable.”

Emily walked up to stand behind her, wrapping her arms around Lena’s waist. “I do try. I like it here in London. I like having a place that feels like home.” She leaned over to kiss Lena’s cheek, then
made her way back towards the bedroom. “Help yourself to anything you like in the kitchen - I’ll just get changed and we can go have lunch.”

“Right, thanks!”

Emily considered herself in the bedroom mirror after she pulled off her sweater and tossed it into the hamper. The scratches on her back complained here and there as the fabric had slid over them, blending into her overall feeling of satisfied soreness. Hair somewhere between chaotically askew and gloriously well-fucked, skin practically glowing, her eyes a touch bloodshot.

_Fantastic._

Even if she wasn’t a typical succubus, Emily was enough of one to enjoy broadcasting to anyone who looked at her that she’d just had some _incredible_ sex. The thought of people seeing her out with Lena and getting scandalized (or even better, getting _envious_ ) filled her with delight as she finished getting undressed and put a bit of concealer on a few marks that might show around the edges of her clothing.

She ran a brush through her hair enough to put it firmly in the ‘well-fucked’ category, then changed into fresh underwear, clean black tights and grey long sleeved turtleneck that called attention to the blue-green silk scarf knotted around her throat that added a nice pop of color to the outfit.

Lena was standing in the kitchen when she came back, staring at her phone. Emily gave her a moment, but when Lena failed to react to her arrival she finally cleared her throat, making Lena start a bit. “Wha- oh! Hey, sorry…”

Emily walked over and put a hand on her shoulder with a frown. “What’s happened?”

Lena sighed and leaned her head over so it would rest on her hand. “I was _supposed_ to have a week or two off.”

Emily’s stomach flipped. She knew what that must mean. “Plans changed, didn’t they.”

Lena nodded weakly, then raised her phone so Emily could see the screen: _Received intelligence on Talon activity, strike expected in Oasis. Be ready for pickup by 1830 hours._

“Well,” Emily said softly, ”you _did_ say Winston’s timing was shit.” She looked at the clock on her wall on reflex as she spoke. A quarter to three. “So… three hours, then?”

“Give or take - I need to get the rest of my kit, and we’ve got a pickup point not far from Gatwick where we can slip in and out without radar picking up the transport.” Despite the sobering news, Lena managed a little smile. “That’s a secret, by the way.”

Even though it was a meant as a joke, Emily gave her a serious nod. “Then it’s safe with me.” She brought Lena into a hug, holding her tightly. _Greedy, greedy, greedy…I want more time!_  

She didn’t say that out loud, though. She knew it wouldn’t help. Instead, after Lena returned the hug she pressed a kiss to her forehead, just as she’d wanted to before, and did her best to smile. “Still want to get some lunch?”

Lena gave a soft laugh against her chest. “Wasn’t what I expected you to ask, honestly.”

Emily smiled and shook her head. “You need food regardless, and…well. We _do_ have three hours. Time enough for that later, if you want.”
That got a brighter laugh, and a smile. “OK, fair enough. Fancy a curry?”

“Whatever you like.”
Chapter 12

As it turned out, they did not go back to bed in Emily’s apartment or Lena’s.

Lena realized as they took a walk through the Row after lunch that Emily was doing it on purpose - making a point of hammering home *I love you for more reasons than sex*, and it made her smile fondly as she looked at her girlfriend, making a point of squeezing her hand when she had the chance to let Emily know she’d gotten the unspoken message, and receiving her brilliant smile in return.

She checked her watch as they neared Emily’s apartment building again and gave a little sigh. Quarter to six already.

*Too bloody soon!*

Emily’s hand tightened as she caught the sound. “Time to go, then?”

“Yeah.” Lena met her eyes with as brave a smile as she could manage, but it was hard not to feel frustrated by the whole mess. Damn Talon anyway. “Afraid so, luv. I don’t want to -”

“I know,” Emily assured her, then pulled her into a tight hug, pressing a little kiss to the top of her forehead. “I won’t tell you to ‘be safe’ because I’m very aware that’s not how it works...but *come back*, Lena. That’s all I want.”

The kiss she gave Emily was everything she couldn’t quite say in that moment, and as good of a promise to come back as she could offer.

Lena thought she could notice a bit of what Emily was doing when they kissed, now. A little ‘zing’ running through her that she’d put down to excitement and the surreal moment of their first kiss, but one she’d gotten a bit more familiar with.

“I will come back,” Lena promised softly, reaching up to stroke Emily’s cheek. “Soon as I can.”

“You’d better,” Emily said firmly. “Now go on, before I’m tempted to keep you here regardless.”

Lena nodded as she stepped back, desperately wishing she could take her up on that, but knowing that it wasn’t going to happen. Winston and the rest needed her - she’d rather cut off her legs than say no to that. “I love you!”

She blew a kiss to Emily before she teleported her way up to the rooftops for a faster run home, and tried to squeeze everything she was feeling down into a box that could be dealt with later.

Right now, Tracer had work to do.

Once she’d showered, dressed, and tooled up, Lena made it to the pickup point with ten minutes to spare, and wasn’t surprised to find Angela and Fareeha already there.

“Hana and Lúcio on the way?”

“They were checking out the museums,” Fareeha confirmed. “Said there was a lot of traffic downtown.” Her Raptora suit would be on their transport, unlike Lena’s lighter ‘working’ gear or the softer, more compact materials of Angela’s Valkyrie gear, so she was simply wearing the black
undersuit that would interface with her armor and a pair of sturdy combat boots, the rest of her clothes in a black nylon duffle.

“Yeah, that’s always a nightmare. Too bad Hana can’t just grab her mech and fly them out.” Lena grinned. “Might be a little conspicuous, though.”

That got a chuckle from both of the other women, and Lena gave Angela a speculative look while the doctor seemed to be busying herself with checking over her staff. She had a lot of questions she wanted to ask, but she wasn’t sure if Fareeha was in on the joke, and she was dead certain the others weren’t.

*After the job’s done, Lena promised herself. I hope.*

Winston turned out to be driving the bus when the Orca dropped into the abandoned lot they were using for the rendezvous point, waving to them all apologetically from the cockpit as they came on board. “I’m sorry about the short notice - and the interrupted plans. We got a tip off from a contact I’ve been working on developing at Oasis, and it was too good to pass up.”

Angela frowned. “Contact? Is it someone you’d consider reliable?”

Winston nodded, but Lena caught him giving a cautious look to where Lúcio was checking over his skates and audio-medic projection gear while chatting with Hana, who was performing her own pre-fight checks on her mech’s systems. “I do. She’s been providing some very useful information on what Vishkar has been up to - but I am concerned about how Lúcio may handle that.”

Lena sucked in a breath through her teeth as she turned that over. Lúcio had good reasons not to trust anyone tied to Vishkar, and even if this “contact” was passing them solid information (a mole inside the company?) it would make anything suspect in his eyes.

Angela’s mouth had drawn down into a little frown, apparently having the same concerns. “If she has been giving you information on Vishkar, why is she informing us about a Talon operation?”

Winston grunted. “Apparently certain elements within the company have a ‘strategic alliance’ with Talon. It’s one of the things that shook her faith in the organization, from what I can tell.”

“Makes sense,” Lena admitted. “No offense, luv, but if I found out you’d sat down at the table with those bastards, I’d be looking for a way out, too.”

“None taken,” Winston assured her. “But back to the matter at hand. Oasis is generally held as a neutral territory - we’ll need to be careful about how we move around and set things up.”

Lena nodded as she slipped around him to take the co-pilot’s seat. “I can spell you for a bit if you like.”

Winston smiled, knowing she was angling for the stick time as much as the chance to let him have a break. “I think I’ll take you up on that.”

Angela waited for Winston get out of the pilot’s seat, then settled into it herself. “I’ll keep Lena company, I think.”

Winston blinked, but nodded. “Ah, if you like. Athena is handling most of the work right now anyway.”

Angela gave a little wave, and Lena wasn’t surprised when the cabin door slid into place and locked after Winston went down into the cargo bay. “So,” Angela said with a little smile. “I think we should
Lena looked over to where Angela had settled into the seat, keeping her back straight so the wings of her suit would not strike the back of the chair. “You sure you want to do this right before a mission?”

Angela pursed her lips, then gave Lena a nod. “I apologize, I think you’re right about that. It would probably be better for us to discuss this afterwards - but I think it is important for you to know I am not going to treat you any differently than before.”

Lena smiled, a little knot of tension that she’d been carrying unwinding itself. “Thanks, luv. I appreciate you keeping Emily from getting in trouble at work, too.”

“Well,” Angela chuckled softly, “it seemed the least I could do - and I had a feeling that once you did learn about her...background...you would be unlikely to leave things alone.”

Lena could feel a blush rising on her cheeks. “Yeaaah. Well, you know...”

Angela laughed at that as she rose from her chair, hitting the control to open the door again. “Never change, Lena.”

A goofy little smile spread across her face as Lena turned her focus back to the skies. She had to admit, that had gone better than she’d really expected it would.
Chapter 13

Lena groaned as she staggered off the Orca and into the hangar at Watchpoint: Gibraltar.

To say the operation in Oasis had gotten messy was an understatement. Their tip had been correct - Talon was attempting to ‘acquire’ data from a lab there.

What their informant hadn’t included - hadn’t actually known, as it turned out - was that the lab that the Talon strike force had attacked was the domain of another faction inside of Talon.

They had set up to cover the block around the lab and engage Talon’s shock troops when they arrived, but almost as soon as they’d gotten into position Lena had stumbled into Widowmaker and Reaper doing the exact same thing, and a redhead woman who Angela seemed to recognize had burst out of the lab, firing some kind of caustic energy blasts at the Talon foot soldiers who were unlucky enough to have been caught in the internal conflict as she hurled curses at them in Gaelic.

Winston had quickly ordered them to pull back, not wanting to get caught in the crossfire between the two groups.

Lena had the hardest time making it back to their exfiltration point after her usual cat and mouse dance with Widow had taken her high into the rooftops and walkways of the ultramodern city.

She’d be lying if she said she didn’t enjoy the view during their fights, but they did tend to run her ragged.

It hadn’t been a complete failure by any means, though. The proof of Talon’s involvement in Oasis was valuable intel, especially knowing they had another significant player on the field there, and Overwatch had come away with a new resource of their own in the form of Winston’s intel source, now officially a defector from the Vishkar corporation: Satya “Symmetra” Vaswani.

Angela was leading the rather shell-shocked woman off the transport, speaking in a low, gentle voice as she steered her in the direction of the medical bay, while Lúcio and Hana watched their backs, Lú radiating distrust while Hana seemed torn between sympathy for the woman who’d just walked away from everything she had and her friend’s legitimate anger.

_I suppose I’d be pretty pissed too, in his shoes. What would I do if one of the Omnics who had planned the Uprising came to us asking to join up?_

Lena shook her head. She’d promised Angie they’d have a talk, but it looked like she’d be occupied for a bit. She considered the merits of a bit of food, then realized exactly what she needed, turning to walk down to the barracks wing instead, popping the door to her quarters and pulling off the accelerator to charge it before she flopped onto her bed.

A nap would do wonders for her, but there was one thing she needed to do first.

Emily had thrown herself into work, doing her best to avoid Artii’s pleas for Angela’s phone number, and trying hard not to worry about Lena.

She’d worked straight through the opening shift and was considering taking her ‘lunch’ so she could leave, but the lack of much to do at home wasn’t terribly appealing.

_I could pick up dinner, I suppose. Go back to that chip shop and hope for a bit of luck to see her on_
A buzzing sensation from her pocket grabbed her attention, and Emily made sure there were no customers around in the bookshop and that Chrisann was at the register before she ducked into the back and grabbed her phone.

LENA

05:15

Hey, love.

Wanted to let you know I’m back at base, all in one piece.

Hey yourself.

That’s wonderful to hear.

Any guess when you’ll be home?

Not sure.

I’ve got a few things to take care of

We’re going to debrief in a few hours

Been flying all day after we pulled out of the area and I need a nap

Wish I was with you to tuck you in.

But on the other hand you might not get very much sleep. ;)

Hmmmm.

 Doesn’t sound so bad. <3

You get home and I’ll take care of you properly. <3

See you soon, then.

Love you

Love you too.

Emily put her phone back into her pocket and smiled to herself, relief flooding through her and putting a spring in her step as she hit the bookshop floor again. She felt as if she could finish the rest of her shift, and perhaps she’d pick up dinner and a new book after all.

Lena had fallen asleep in her gear, her phone sitting atop the little desk next to her bunk.

A knock at the door made her reluctantly open her eyes, and to her shock it was nearly quarter to ten in the evening - and she’d intended to get up again at eight for the debrief.
“Must’ve been more wiped out than I thought…” Rubbing at her face, Lena pulled herself out of bed to the accompaniment of another knock.

She reached the door and opened up, surprised to find Angela there instead of Hana or Winston, dressed casually in a blouse and jeans.

“Oh. Hullo, Angie.”

“Good evening,” Angela smiled, then gestured inside. “You missed the debriefing - and dinner. May I come in?”

Lena nodded, her nostrils flaring as she caught the scent of food and noticed the waxed paper bag in Angela’s hand. “Sorry, yeah, come on in.” Stepping back, she walked back to sit down on her bed, while Angela shut the door behind her and took the chair at her desk. “Thanks for bringing some food. I really meant to just catch a quick nap.”

“We assumed as much. Given the way you and Widowmaker were chasing across the city and flying us home, I suggested to Winston it was better to let you recover.”

Lena nodded as she unwrapped a sandwich. “Yeah, it took a bit out of me.” She took a few bites before something occurred to her. “How’s Vaswani?”

Angela’s expression was tinged with sympathy and a touch of regret. “Overwhelmed, I’m afraid. I gave her a sedative to help her relax, and I expect she’ll be sleeping in the medical bay for the rest of the night. The presence of more Talon operations in a city she’d thought might be a safe haven away from Vishkar was rather upsetting to her, and Lúcio’s hostility was...an added difficulty.”

Lena sighed. “Yeah. That’s...I mean, I get it. I do. But she’s trying to make a difference. Trying to change. Shouldn’t that matter?”

“A very good question,” Angela agreed, “particularly given the other topic we need to discuss.”

Lena put paid to the last bit of the sandwich and gave Angela her full attention. “Right. So...where would you like to start, exactly?”

“I’m sure you have quite a few questions,” Angela said calmly. “This is a rather unique situation, so I thought I might let you take the lead.”

“Right…” Lena tried to sort through the questions warring for her attention, and finally picked the most important. “Why did you let Emily think you were going to kill her if you’re OK with us being together?”

“A fair question to ask,” Angela tapped her fingers against the desk before she began her answer. “How much did Emily explain to you about what she is? Or about what I am?”

Lena bit the side of her lip as she tried to recall as much as she could from that rather unexpected morning. “Well. She said you’re an angel - and apologizes for outing you, by the way. A Cherub, I think she said? You’re some kind of a protector?”

“Thas basically it, yes.” Angela’s voice took on a bit of the tone she used when trying to teach basic first aid techniques - or when she was lecturing them about why they’d just done something terribly stupid. “Cherubim is technically the proper name for the Choir I belong to, and Emily is correct that we are called to protection and healing. In my particular case, I made the decision to protect you, and the rest of Overwatch, and have certain...gifts to aid me in that task. But those same gifts also come with responsibilities and obligations.”
Lena nodded to show she was following along, and Angela tapped her finger against her cheek, considering her next words.

“I was quite happy to learn you had found love - someone who you could relax and simply be Lena with, and not just Tracer. I was very much looking forward to meeting your girlfriend. Which is why I was rather...displeased to realize her true nature the moment I stepped into the pub.”

“We noticed,” Lena said dryly. “Hana thought you were her ex or something.”

“I truly expected I would be chasing her off in the bathroom,” Angela explained, “or perhaps even having to kill her. But her actions were...rather unexpected.”

Lena had to laugh softly. “Yeah, that’s my Em.”

“When she swore not to harm you, I realized that I needed to reevaluate how I had been looking at her - particularly when she gave me her Name.” Angela shook her head, her voice touched with surprise. “I’d never thought it was possible for an infernal creature to genuinely love a mortal - but in that moment I realized she saw you as far more than a resource to be harvested.”

Lena felt a little bit of awe at how Angela spoke about Emily’s feelings for her as she leaned forward. “Speaking of that...did you know that Emily would be able to touch me safely?”

“I had a suspicion,” Angela admitted slowly. “But I wasn’t entirely certain. You are...unique, Lena.”

Lena looked over to where the accelerator was sitting. “Because of the disassociation. Because of the Slipstream.”

“Yes, and no.” Angela opened her hands, and Lena noticed a golden radiance surrounding them. Not so different from the energy her staff projected to heal. “You were born a human woman, Lena, but your experience seems to have connected you to other times and other alternative possibilities - linked your souls together in ways that even I cannot fully perceive. But for all that...even before you climbed into that plane, you had a brilliant spirit and one of the bravest, kindest hearts I have ever had the pleasure to know.”

Lena blushed. “Wow. Considering the context...thanks, Angie.”

“It’s just the truth,” Angela took a breath. “But to answer the rest of your question, because of your unique nature I suspected that she might touch you - take from you, if I may be blunt - without lasting harm. But it was better to let her come to her own conclusions. Endorsing a demon tasting of your spirit would be...frowned upon.” She sighed, looking up at the ceiling as if she could see into the skies. “As it is I would not be surprised if I am asked to account for my actions.”

“That doesn’t sound terribly good…” Lena gave Angela a searching look. “I mean - surely there’s been cases like Emily before? Demons who want to...I dunno...repent?”

“Exceedingly rarely, and in any case it is a matter you might call above my pay grade.” Angela smiled. “Regardless, it will take quite some time. Suffice it to say that since Emily has proved that her contact with you is not actually harmful, I do not feel she has violated her oath.”

“Oh, fair enough. Guess I’ll pass that along.” Lena gave Angela a careful look, then asked the next question on her mind. “So...who else is in on the joke, then?”

“Well,” Angela hedged, “that is...complex.”
Chapter 14

Emily hadn’t really expected to get a call from Lena after texting with her earlier in the day. Hadn’t really expected to hear from her until she was on her way home, in fact. She’d assumed that Lena would take the nap she’d mentioned and do...whatever quasi-military vigilante superheroes did.

Still, she was delighted to be proved wrong as she reached for her phone and put down her book, even if it was nearly midnight.

“Hello, sweetie.”

She could almost hear the smile in Lena’s voice. “Hey, you. Up to do a video call?”

“Sure,” Emily sat up as she punched the video button, using the stand in her phone case to prop it up at a comfortable angle. “I wasn’t sure I’d hear from you until you got home.”

Lena was at a bit of an odd angle until Emily realized she must be on some kind of bunk, and her phone was hanging above her. She could catch the faint glow from the accelerator at the side of the shot, while her tights and jacket were in a pile at the side of the bed, leaving Lena in a white undershirt and grey cotton briefs. “I was meaning to call you after the debriefing...but I sort of slept through it.”

Emily gave a sympathetic hum. “Poor love. Is everything alright?”

Lena shrugged, tilting her head. “As much as it can be - everyone came home and nobody had any serious injuries. We even got someone out of a bad situation, so was a nice bonus.”

Emily frowned thoughtfully. “That all sounds good to me - so why do you not seem happy?”

Lena laughed softly. “Well, there’s the fact that half of us don’t trust the woman we rescued because she used to work for Vishkar, the fact that we didn’t really stop Talon so much as let one lot of them weaken the other, I feel bad about sleeping through things, and I had the oddest conversation with Angie when she brought me some dinner.”

Emily blinked a few times as she processed all of that. “Oh.” She tried to set the bits about Angela and Talon aside and focus on the (relatively) simplest one first. “Tell me about this woman you rescued?”

“Her name’s Satya,” Lena answered “She was one of their architects, I guess.”

Emily gasped as she recognized the name. “You kidnapped Satya Vaswani?”

Lena’s brows knit. “Didn’t kidnap so much as rescued, but...you know her?”

“Not as such,” Emily admitted, “but she was the cover feature on the last issue of Modern Architecture. Absolutely brilliant woman from everything I read. She could be the next Zaha Hadid if she wanted. It’s honestly a bit of a crime that Vishkar kept her to themselves.” Her lips turned up in a little smile. “Also rather devastatingly gorgeous as I recall.”

That got a chuckle out of Lena. “Not sure anyone’s devastatingly gorgeous after getting extracted out of a firefight or treatment for shock, but...yeah.”

Emily hummed thoughtfully. “I’m guessing that Lúcio wasn’t happy about bringing her along?”
“Got it in one.” Lena let her head fall back against the pillows. “I think he’ll come around. I absolutely understand why he doesn’t have any love for Vishkar, but… Satya seemed genuinely shocked and upset about everything Vishkar had done.” Lena sighed. “I was just telling Angie that ought to count for something.”

“If she means well and she wants to help, I’m sure she’ll find a way to show everyone that.” Emily considered what else to say. “Honesty, from what little you’ve told me the whole business sounds like an ugly, dangerous mess and I’m just happy you were able to bring everyone home safe - especially yourself.”

That finally got Lena to give her a genuine smile, and it made Emily ache to hold her. “That’s pretty gay, luv.”

“So I’m told,” Emily winked at her. “Now, what about that conversation with Angela?”

“We had two, really.” Lena explained with just a touch of exasperation. “She tried to come and hash things out in the middle of the flight into the bloody OZ. She agreed it really wasn’t the time when I stopped her from going too far, but she did make it clear I wasn’t going to be treated any differently in the field.”

“That’s good,” Emily admitted with a sigh of relief. “Not that I expected less from her, really, but still.”

“Yeah, I have to admit it was a bit of a relief. Anyway…” Lena scooted herself up a bit, centering herself in the camera shot. “She brought me a sandwich since I’d slept right through supper, and we had a bit of a conversation. Not sure I want to talk about most of it over the phone, but she basically told me you’re good as far as what you two talked about.”

“Oh, thank god.” Emily breathed a long sigh of relief, and caught the little smirk tugging at Lena’s lips. “Yes, I’m aware of the irony, dear.”

“Just realized it’s a bit funny is all.” Lena winked. “But...yeah. That all happened.”

Emily smiled back to her, running a hand through her hair. “So it seems. Feeling a bit better after talking about it all?”

Lena gave a nod as she bit her lower lip. “Yeah, thanks. I just wish I was telling you this in person. Could do with a nice cuddle after all that.”

“Believe me,” Emily said wistfully, “I wish I could give you one.”

Lena’s eyes took on a little gleam that Emily was becoming rather familiar with. “Worst thing is that after having a nap and all, I’ve no idea how I’m going to get back to sleep like this.”

She raised an eyebrow at Lena’s invitation, suddenly glad she’d decided to put on one of her nicer silk nighties when she’d gotten ready for bed. “Oh, I see,” Emily said slowly, letting her voice go a bit husky. “Did you intend for this to become a booty call, darling?”

“Didn’t think about it at first,” Lena admitted, “just wanted to see you - and let you see me so you’d know I wasn’t hurt. But now that you mention it...hang on just a mo’.”

Emily certainly didn’t mind the sight of Lena turning over in bed as she reached for the accelerator, disappearing from the camera’s field of view before Emily heard a couple of muffled beeps and the sound of a door being latched.
“There,” Lena smiled wolfishly as she returned and got comfortable. “Door’s locked and no one ought to be interrupting us.”

Emily shifted her shoulder so the strap of her nightdress would slip down just a bit as she nestled back against the headboard so Lena could get a good look at her. “So what exactly would you be doing with me if you were here, Lieutenant Oxton?”

Lena licked her lips hungrily as her hands ran over the cotton of her undershirt. “That’s not fair, Em…”

Emily smiled knowingly as she gave Lena a wink. “All’s fair in love and war, you know.”

“True,” Lena’s eyes flashed. “But I seem to recall you were going to be taking care of me.”

“I suppose I did,” Emily admitted with a lazy smile. “Is that what you want, pet? For me to take care of you?”

Lena flushed beautifully, giving a soft little groan. “God, yes. Especially after a job.”

Emily ran a hand over her breast, cupping herself through the silk as she watched Lena’s reaction. “Gets you going, does it?”

“Mmm-hm…” Lena bit her bottom lip, and Emily watched as her hand slid down towards the waistband of her briefs.

“Stop,” Emily commanded, and was thrilled at how Lena froze in response. “No touching until I say. I’m taking care of you…so just pretend it’s me, while I tell you exactly what to do.”

“Ooo,” Lena breathed. “Yeah, that works…”

“Good,” Emily purred. “Now, I want you to listen carefully…”
Chapter 15

Angela hadn’t been lying to Lena when she said she would be held to account for her actions, but she would admit that she might have implied it would be a more...traumatic event than she really expected.

It certainly helped she was going to be reporting on her actions, rather than trying to hide them.

Two days after Lena had left the Watchpoint to return home to England, Angela was sitting at her desk in the lab, keeping an eye on her clock.

“Athena? I’m expecting a personal phone call shortly. Could you please stop monitoring for the next hour?”

There was an acknowledging chime from the AI a moment before her terminal announced an incoming video call.

Angela tugged the lapels of her lab coat to straighten it, took a deep breath, and then accepted the call, the display revealing the face of an athletic looking man with dark skin, piercing eyes, and white hair shaved at the sides, the rest pulled into a ponytail not terribly different from her own.

“Good afternoon, Angela. How are you today?”

Angela smiled at her Superior. “I’m well, thank you, Dominic - but I have a few things I think might be best discussed in person.”

Dominic raised one snowy eyebrow. “I see. Just a moment, then.”

The space in front of her desk seemed to ripple, and Angela could hear soft music in the back of her mind as Dominic transferred his mortal presence to her, the notes of his song rolling across the symphony like a brass fanfare.

For the barest of instants he seemed to be clad in a variation of her own Valkyrie suit, built with a slightly more warlike cut and trimmed in red and black like a crusader’s tabard, but his form settled into a much less aggressive cast, wearing a nicely cut business suit in sober grey, the only splash of color a rich red tie.

“So,” Dominic said as he accepted a mug of coffee with a nod of thanks, “I take it something significant has occurred since your last report?”

“That’s one way to put it.” Angela considered how to phrase things. “I’ve had several unexpected encounters.”

“I see.” Dominic sat back with the coffee, willing to let her explain in her own time.

Angela considered the last few weeks, and decided to begin with the most straightforward. “Winston brought a strike team together a bit unexpectedly to face a Talon operation in the city of Oasis, in Iraq.”

“I’m familiar with it,” Dominic’s mouth turned down in a frown. “I have had some concerns about it for some time. Technological development is not Our area, but a great deal of harm can come from unchecked progress.”
Angela laughed softly, but there was little humor in it. “Then you may be interested to know that Moira O’Deorain is operating a lab there on Talon’s behalf - and serving as a significant figure in the city’s government.”

Dominic straightened, his eyes widening in faint surprise. “I had thought you had dealt with her once already, before Overwatch was originally disbanded.”

“So had I,” Angela sighed regretfully. “But it seems she was able to find a powerbase once again - and backers. I have my suspicions of where that support might have come from, though I cannot prove anything for certain.”

Dominic’s mouth tugged down in a thoughtful frown. “Likely the same forces who influenced the Soldier Enhancement Program - and perhaps to the same ends.”

“Her search for ‘perfection’ and her desire to use genetic manipulation to ‘unlock’ potential certainly is concerning,” Angela agreed. “We already suspected Infernal influence in Talon. I realize my role in Overwatch is a solo assignment, but perhaps others might be able to take a look into Oasis.”

“I will make arrangements,” Dominic promised. “But it may take some time.” He paused, considering his next words carefully. “On the subject of the SEP, have you encountered Commanders Morrison or Reyes again?”

“Reaper,” Angela stressed, “was present during the battle at Oasis, but I did not encounter him directly. Once we learned that the situation was an internal Talon conflict we did our best to withdraw.”

“Ah.” Dominic set down his mug. “And Morrison?”

Angela shook her head. “He surfaced in Egypt not long ago, but he has not made any official contact with anyone in Overwatch. Though unofficially…”

Dominic raised an eyebrow as Angela trailed off, waiting for her to explain.

“Fareeha received a letter from her mother,” Angela explained slowly. “She is apparently keeping an eye on Jack while they look for more information on Gabriel, Talon, and what exactly happened during the destruction of Overwatch’s original headquarters.”

Dominic went very, very still. “I see. And how did Fareeha take the news of her mother’s return to the living?”

“Not well.”

“Hm.” Dominic tilted his head slightly, and Angela felt a shiver through her as the Seraph gave her the full force of his scrutiny. “And has she spoken to her father of late?”

“She told me that he asked to meet her for dinner on Christmas Eve,” Angela kept her voice as still and even as she could, torn between her duty and her friend’s confidence. “She isn’t sure he knows that Ana is alive.”

“Captain Amari could be a very useful ally - particularly if her self appointed mission will bring her into conflict with Talon regardless.”

Angela nodded. “Likely - but even if she decides to rejoin Overwatch, I rather doubt she’ll agree to work with Us unless there were guarantees of safety for both Samuel and Fareeha.”
Dominic conceded the point with a graceful nod. “Should the situation arise...I will ensure that any agreements you must make in the course of your mission are binding.” His eyes flicked back to hers. “Has Fareeha shown any indication that she realizes her true nature? Or of developing that potential?”

“No,” Angela answered with a firm shake of her head. “That would have been the first item in my report, otherwise. But the more she encounters others - particularly if she ends up fighting Morrison or Reaper…”

“I am aware it may simply be a matter of time,” Dominic admitted, “but until that point I would ask you only observe, and continue your duties as you see fit. If she should awaken...I am aware of your feelings, but if you will forgive the pun... I trust your judgement, Angela.”

“I do appreciate that,” Angela smiled to Dominic, then took a deep breath to center herself. “There was one other matter. We’ve spoken before about Lena Oxton.”

“Your time traveling friend, yes.” Dominic leaned forward. “You had mentioned her...unique nature before. I had thought she was ignorant of the larger War, and that you did not wish to involve her further out of respect for her earlier ordeals.”

“I’m afraid that’s no longer an option,” Angela sighed. “I met her girlfriend, and was very surprised to learn that Lena has been in a committed relationship with a succubus.”

It was very rare to gobsmack her Superior, but Angela had to admit she felt just a tiny bit of amusement at the way Dominic’s face went wooden, blinking several times before he spoke. “I’ll need you to clarify that, please.”

“I visited London with Lena and a few others just before the mission to Oasis. We were supposed to have a bit of downtime and leave before Winston called us back in. Lena had wanted us to meet her girlfriend, Emily.”

“Emily,” Dominic said thoughtfully. “That name has come up in a few other reports over the years. Rumors of a succubus who refused to claim souls for some time who used that name.”

“She’s quite real,” Angela confirmed. “I was...rather surprised, to say the least. I pulled her into the pub’s bathroom expecting to be striking her down.”

“I take it that was not the case…” Dominic’s eyes narrowed as he examined her. “Yet you do not seem to have been corrupted in any way.”

“She is not harming Lena,” Angela said firmly. “She went so far as to swear by her Name.”

“Her Name and not her Word?” Dominic surprise was clear. “That is...quite a guarantee.”

“She never earned a Word, as far as I can determine. She’s simply existed as a rogue, taking just enough to survive from casual contact and avoiding extended entanglements, mortal or otherwise.”

“Until Miss Oxton,” Dominic mused.

“Until Lena, yes.” Angela shook her head. “Hearing a demon talk about how she cared about a mortal - about how she saw the ways Lena’s hope and heroism mattered, and how important it was for her to be out there helping others...I was quite surprised.”

“I can imagine…” Dominic lapsed into silence again, his face drawn with thought as he tapped lightly against the top of the desk with his fingertips. The silence lasted for several minutes, until he
finally spoke again. “This ‘Emily’ has not enthralled her in any way?”

Angela shook her head.

“Taken from her?”

Angela coughed. “That is complicated.”

“Do your best to simplify,” Dominic commanded her dryly.

“She hadn’t fed from Lena at the time - but it seems she did not long after our...encounter. Because of Lena’s unusual nature, though, she suffered no ill effects. My protection over her was not affected, nor could I sense any harm coming to her.”

“That is both fascinating and highly concerning,” Dominic replied. “Even if her nature seems benign, she is a demon, and one who has been handed a seemingly infinite source of nourishment.”

“She is also in a relationship with a woman I would consider one of the best mortals I have ever met, and has no need to look elsewhere as a result.” Angela smiled as she turned Dominic’s words around on him. “You said you trust my judgement...while I will keep a close watch on the situation, I do not feel Emily is a threat we need to be concerned about.”

Dominic looked nonplussed, but a hint of a smile touched his lips. “Very well. If there is nothing else - it seems there is a great deal for me to consider.”

Angela folded her hands into her lap, straightening her posture just slightly. “Thank you, yes, that was everything I had for you.”

“I shall speak to you again soon, then.” Dominic stood as he prepared to leave, his mortal guise shifting once again. “Be well, Angela - and be careful.”

Angela bowed her head, and by the time she looked back up, the Angel of Judgement was gone.
“So why do we never get to see your hoodie girl?”

Emily looked up from where she’d been shelving new books to look up at Artii, who had poked her head up over the stacks. “Possibly because she respects the fact that I am supposed to be working while I’m at work?”

Artii stuck out her tongue. “You say that like Janey doesn’t bring Stefan his lunch half the time, or Chrisann’s partner doesn’t come in to have a coffee and pick her up. You are still dating, aren’t you?”

“Coming up on six months,” Emily confirmed. “Did Christmas at...well, he’s a friend of hers but he’s basically her family, too. That was nice.”

“So why do we never see her?” Artii gave her a painfully transparent attempt at puppy dog eyes. “Don’t you like us, Emily?”

“That’s a rather loaded question when you’re actively being a busybody,” Emily replied dryly, “but I like you fine. The truth is she’s just busy most of the time. Her job involves a lot of travel, so when she’s home I try to make the most of it.”

“Hmmm.” Artii took that on board and nodded, accepting the explanation. “So what does she do that keeps her so on the go?” Her lips quirked in a flirty little grin. “If I had you waiting at home for me, I’d have an awfully hard time staying away.”

Emily took a moment to consider how to put it. “Security consulting, you might say.”

Artii’s brows knit. “What, like a hacker or something?”

“More physical,” Emily said with a little grin. “You might say she has a bit of a knack for ending up where she isn’t supposed to.”

That got an excited gasp out of Artii, who came around the shelf to look at her properly. “Emily! Are you dating a Gentleman Thief? Is that why we’ve never heard her name?”

“No!” Emily laughed, picking up her next book. “Technically she’d be a Gentlewoman Thief, and she’s not actually a thief at all.” She winked. “I’d ask where you get these ideas but I know damn well what kind of horrible trash you love to read.”

“Bodice-rippers are a time honored literary tradition,” Artii countered with a grin. “It’s not my fault you lack the ability to appreciate them.”

Emily rolled her eyes as she filled more gaps in the shelf. “Yes, that’s clearly it - I work in a bookshop and help curate a significant part of the selection because I obviously cannot appreciate good literature.”

Artii stuck out her tongue. “So what does your mystery girl do if she isn’t a thief?”

“Mm. Looking at ways people can get in, helping to plug the gaps, sometimes working to help
protect a VIP or courier work - that’s what keeps her the busiest, honestly.” Emily reached into her pocket for her phone. “She was in China most of this past week, but she’s on her way home now.”

Artii’s teasing mood was replaced by a sympathetic look. “I guess I shouldn’t tease you too badly, then. China? Really?”

Emily sighed. “Mm. She goes where the work is, I’m afraid.”

“Well, I hope she saves her frequent flyer miles - she ought to take you someplace nice for putting up with all that!”

Emily chuckled as she stood. “I imagine we’ll figure something out.”

She’d nearly finished with her section when Artii stopped by again. “So, if your girlfriend isn’t back yet, you’re free tonight?”

Emily gave a thoughtful hum. “There are many layers to that question, you know.”

Artii rolled her eyes before lightly smacking her on the arm. “Free to come and get a drink tonight after we close up.”

“Oh,” Emily smiled as if she hadn’t even considered that possibility. “I suppose I am, then. Headed back to the Iron and Wheel?”

“Stefan’s giving me a ride over if you need one,” Artii wheedled.

Emily checked her phone. Lena wouldn’t be getting back until close to midnight...

“I think I may just take you both up on that.”

One upside to it being a rather chilly London winter was that no one wondered why Emily had bundled up before leaving the bookshop.

She’d had the cozy grey anorak and red wool cap for quite some time, but since Christmas she’d added the scarf Lena had given her, and a set of her girlfriend’s shooting gloves that had become a bit too worn to use as part of her Tracer gear, but still did a fine job of protecting Emily’s hands.

Or perhaps protecting everyone else from her hands, Emily supposed. It was all a matter of perspective.

Still, she felt comfortable as she sat at their table in the pub, her coat hung over the back of the chair and her scarf draped around her neck. She was letting Stefan and Artii carry most of the conversation, content to just enjoy her beer and the company.

Emily was trying to keep an eye on the clock, but after her third pint it wasn’t long before she was completely absorbed in the discussion.

“I’m just saying it’s a bit...disrespectful,” Stefan argued. “I mean, these are classics!”

Artii rolled her eyes. “They’re classics because they connected with the readers of their time, and now they’re being reimagined for a modern audience.”

“I think some of them are fascinating,” Emily agreed. “The original authors would be delighted to see their works still being relevant nearly a hundred years later.”
“But *Pride and Prejudice and Omnic*?” Stefan shook his head. “They should have left it alone with the zombies. The whole message of the story changes when you’re talking about a robot uprising instead of a mindless horde of the undead.”

Emily had been about to deliver a rebuttal when she felt a hand come down on her shoulder.

“There you are! Been looking all over for you.”

Emily stood, spinning around to face Lena, who was wearing her Shearing jacket with the accelerator buckled over it and a pair of black tights. A part of her brain recognized she didn’t have her pistols or goggles, but the rest was mostly concerned with wrapping her in a tight hug and being mortified.

“Oh god Lena I’m sorry I lost track of the time~”

“Nah,” Lena smiled brightly as she gave her a quick kiss. “I’m early. Got in faster than I expected and decided to see if I could figure out where you were since you weren’t at home.”

“You could have called,” Emily pointed out with a little smile.

Lena just giggled. “Where’s the fun in that?”

It was only when she heard a choking sound from behind them that Emily remembered they were not alone in the pub. “Ah…” Turning slowly, she gestured to Stefan, who was staring at them like a man who had just seen a yeti in his loo, and Artii, who was sputtering and making a weak little hand gesture at them. “Lena - this is Stefan and Artii, my friends from the shop. You might remember them from the night we met?”

Lena waved a bit sheepishly as she pulled out a chair. “Oh. Hi! I’m -”

Artii cut her off as she almost lunged forward out of her chair, her voice a strangled squeak. “Your hoodie girl is TRACER!?”

Emily nodded weakly. “I...yes?”


Lena scrubbed at the back of her head nervously. “Ah...is that a problem?”

Artii’s head came up, her eyes wide. “What? No! I mean...you’re amazing, sorry! I just...Emily said you worked in ‘security consulting’, oh my God.” She leaned across the table, grabbing Emily by the shoulders of her sweater and pulling her closer as her voice dropped into a stage-whisper hiss. “You’re dating Tracer!”

Emily looked blandly over at Lena and gave the glowing disc of the accelerator a little look. “Is it OK for you to have that out?”

Lena shrugged. “‘S cold out and I didn’t want to wear it under my jacket - especially with running across half the Row. Besides, George and most of the lads at the bar know me. I’ve been drinking here since I was sixteen.” She looked over at Stefan and Artii. “Just...try to remember Tracer’s not the only thing I am, ok?”

Artii let go and sat back, coughing softly as she flushed. “Sorry. I promise I will...Lena, wasn’t it?”
Lena nodded. “Yeah, thanks.” She looked over to Stefan, who still looked completely poleaxed. “Um...Stefan, right? Are you OK?”

Stefan blinked a few times, then looked at Emily with an expression of something very much like awe. “You hugged her,” he said softly, just barely audible over the noise in the pub.

Emily nodded slowly, not quite sure where this was going. “Yes, I did.”

He looked over to Lena, and then back. “You were kissing.”

Artii gave Stefan a look and smacked him on the arm. “Girlfriends do that, you twit. How many beers did you have?!”

“Hey!” Stefan rubbed at his bicep and shook his head. “I only had ginger beer - non-alcoholic, thanks. I’m driving. But Em has...you know...the thing about touching.” He looked back to Lena and gave her a shy smile. “She must really love you.”

Emily could feel her face burning even as her lips turned up in a goofy little smile as she turned to look at Lena. “I really must.”

Lena’s hand found hers, squeezing tightly with a matching smile, her eyes just a bit wet with tears. “Yeah,” she murmured. “Me, too.”

Chapter End Notes

Happy Lemon Tea day. :) 

(In case the little hint wasn't clear, the events of Reflections basically played out the same way in this AU as in canon.)
Lena was glad Satya was coming with them on missions now. Really, she was. The Architech had a fantastic eye for details during planning, her turrets were excellent for locking down the extraction point or a payload, and she was learning to work as part of a team instead of being a solo operative.

She just wished Winston would stop asking Satya to partner up with Lúcio.

“I don’t even get the point of that stupid barrier,” Lúcio complained over the comm channel. “All you’re doing is putting up a big glowing target and saying ‘Hey! Shoot here!’”

Satya’s eyeroll was practically audible. “I am sure that announcing your presence with a blaring cacophony is much more subtle.”

“Cacophony?” Lúcio’s shout was actually audible from the rooftop Lena was on, and she had to stifle a laugh. “Excuse me, that is blaring multi-platinum music, and at least my sound barrier actually stays with each person-”

“For a far shorter time thanks to your inefficient and needlessly dramatic technique -”

“Inefficient?”

“Considering you have never even bothered to properly optimize the technology you stole -”

“I think you mean liberated -”

“Oh. My. God,” Hana interrupted, her voice dripping with frustration. “Lú? She is on the list now, would you two please just FUCK and get it over with?”

The comms went dead silent for a moment before everyone seemed to start talking at once and Lena actually had to pull out her earbud to keep from being deafened.

“What?!”

“I beg your pardon?!”

“Hana, you can’t just say -”

“No, SERIOUSLY -”

“We’re in the middle of a mission -“

Fareeha finally weighed in with a parade ground bellow so loud that Lena had a feeling they heard her all the way in Castillo. “EVERYONE! SHUT! UP! “

Silence reigned as Lena put in her earbud, and when she looked down to the street she saw Fareeha gesturing sharply towards their objective with her free hand.

They managed to get the truck of weapons and contraband which had been recovered from the Los Muertos safe house they’d busted out of the city and well on the way to where they would be handing it off to their contact in the Federales before someone dared mention something unrelated to the mission - and to Lena’s surprise, it was Satya.

Satya’s voice was soft and curious. “What list?”
“Huh?” Hana was a bit softer as well, less of her D.Va persona, and Lena had to wonder if they realized their mics were broadcasting to the rest of the team. Not that she was going to interrupt, though - she was curious too.

“You said I was ‘on the list now’,” Satya explained. “What list is that?”

Hana coughed sharply, and Lena could almost imagine the blush rising on her face behind the glass of her mech’s cockpit. “Uh. Yeaaaaaaah. Well…” She coughed again, and for a moment the only sound was the stomping of her mech’s feet. “Lú and I are dating, basically, but… There’s things he needs, sometimes, that I am really not into. So we kinda made a list of people I was OK with him…taking care of that…with.”

Satya went quiet for a moment before she responded. “You are on the asexual spectrum.”

“Yuuuuuuuup,” Hana confirmed before popping her gum.

Satya’s voice had a slowly dawning sort of horrified understanding. “Then the list is potentially acceptable sexual partners?”

Lena was pretty sure she heard Mei try to stifle a giggle as Lúcio groaned.

“I’m just saying,” Hana said with a bit of embarrassment, “you guys argue a lot. The tension? Is palpable. Maybe if you got it out of your systems…”

“We argue,” Satya insisted, “because he is wrong. The very idea that I would reward his foolishness -”

Hana’s grin was audible. “Oh, so it would be a reward?”

“OK,” Lúcio interrupted, “I don’t even know where to start right now.”

Satya’s voice was glacial. “Perhaps it would be best if you did not.”

“See what I mean?” Hana laughed. “Hey, Lú, she’s blushing!”

“Oh my god, Hana, stop!” Lúcio sounded like he was about to have a heart attack.

“No way! We’re close to a breakthrough here!” Hana swiveled the torso of her mech so she was looking directly down at Satya. “C’mon. He’s got the dimples. Admit it - he’s cute.”

“His aesthetic appeal has never been a problem,” Satya admitted reluctantly.

“HA! See?!” Hana’s voice was ringing with triumph as she boosted ahead to cover the last few meters to the drop. “I’m the best wingman ever.”

“You are so not,” Lúcio grumbled.

Lena doubled back, landing next to Fareeha on the ground as she pulled her helmet off, shaking her head.

“It’s a bit like old times, innit?”

Fareeha sighed, rubbing gently at her temple with her free hand. “I used to think my mother’s stories from the old Strike Team were exaggerations. Now I think she was actually holding back for my benefit.”
“Oh,” Lena grinned. “If they’re anything like what I heard from Reinhardt a few times, she probably was!”

“Oh my god,” Emily gasped with delighted laughter as Lena retold the story. “She didn’t!”

“She did!” Lena grinned and picked up her fork, gesturing with it in the air. “She got such a look from Winston when she got back, too.”

Emily shook her head in disbelief. “I can only imagine.” Leaning forward across the table, she let her voice drop mischievously. “So, did it work?”

Lena snorted. “What, Lú and Satya? Honestly I’m not sure...but they seem to be at least trying to snipe at each other a little less.”

“Well, it’s a bit stereotypical,” Emily said with a wicked grin, “but I am aware that sometimes what a couple of people really need is a good hard—”

“Emily!” Lena couldn’t stop laughing and Emily reaching out from under the table to run her foot up and down her leg didn’t do much to help.

“Mmm? Yes, darling?” Emily winked as she leaned back in her chair. “Was there something you needed?”

“Oh,” Lena purred, “I think there’s something we both need with the way you’re acting.”

“You can’t blame me when you’re gone half the month and then come home with naughty stories.” Emily licked her lips, putting aside the welcome home dinner she’d made. “I’m good at doing without, but you’ve spoiled me terribly.”

“Well then.” Lena put one of the last pieces of lamb on her fork, holding it up with a smile. “Let me finish this before I spoil you a bit more - I suspect I’ll need the energy.”

Emily chuckled as she picked up her plate and carried it back into the kitchen. “Good thinking.”

Convincing Lena to move in with her hadn’t really taken much effort, to her great delight, and Lena had enthusiastically made the flat into a home for them both, adding a few pieces from her old place and going out with Emily to pick out a few new things for them both when she had the opportunity.

Things like their new bed frame, for example, and the slatted headboard that gave Lena some useful handholds as Emily kissed her way up and down her naked body, thrilling to the way Lena gasped and arched beneath her touch.

“Missed you,” Emily breathed between kisses as she reached Lena’s neck, biting down just enough to leave a little mark before she nibbled upwards. “Missed you so much.”

“Missed -ah!- you too,” Lena sighed happily as she let her head fall back against the pillows, gasping as Emily’s thigh pressed between her legs. “God, Em... mm ...please...need you...”

“Do you?” Emily’s voice was a soft purr of satisfaction and delight, rocking just a little harder against her as she drank deep from Lena’s need. “Tell me. Tell me how you need me, beautiful...”

“Want to feel you in me,” Lena moaned as she bucked her hips. “Want your mouth on me...” She shuddered as Emily’s tongue danced along the hollow of her throat. “Want you.”

Emily leaned back, brushing her thumbs over Lena’s nipples, and watched an idea form in Lena's
eyes with a raised eyebrow. “Something on your mind, beautiful?”

Lena’s eyes found hers, chest heaving as she panted. “Can I...can I have you? Like... you you. Demon you.”

Emily stopped, her eyes widening in surprise. “Are you sure, Lena?”

Lena nodded quickly and earnestly. “Please.”

It was the ‘please’ that got her, washing her nerves away. She hadn’t let herself out of her mortal semblance since the day she’d revealed herself to Lena, and she felt oddly shy about it, remembering the intensity of that first kiss with her. The whorls and veins of pink and purple running through her skin were much deeper and vivid now, the flame of her hair even stronger.

Emily slid one clawed fingertip carefully along the line of Lena’s jaw. “Do you like what you see?”

Lena shuddered beneath her, her eyes filled with breathtaking want. “You are so beautiful...please, Emily... please ...”

Emily slowly made her way down Lena’s body, leaving a trail of kisses down her belly until she was between her legs, keeping eye contact as her tongue brushed against her clit.

Lena let out a wail as her eyes went half lidded, and Emily felt a little thrill of her own as her hands left the headboard to bury themselves in her hair, Lena’s thumbs running over the base of her horns.

“Yes...Em... Emily...ahhhhhhh!”

Emily let out a moan of her own, feeling Lena’s pleasure with every taste of her body and spirit. “Lena...so good...you taste so good...”

“Yeah?” Lena’s voice was breathless as she pulled against her hair, urging her closer. “Tell me? - haahh! - Tell me what it’s like?”

Emily was a little surprised at how arousing that question was, her own breath quickening as she dragged her tongue along Lena’s slit before speaking again. “You’re like...summer sun...sweet wine...warm and bright...so good ...”

It wasn’t long before Emily felt Lena tense and spasm under her as she came, a sunburst of warmth spreading inside of her body as Emily greedily took from Lena’s spirit until she felt herself come apart, a wordless cry of rapture on her lips as Lena’s essence flowed through her.

She collapsed against Lena’s body, shivering from the aftershocks of ecstasy that ran through her until she was finally able to raise her head and smile back up at her. “So,” Emily asked with a shaky chuckle, “was that as good as you were hoping for?”

“No,” Lena murmured as she urged her to come up for a kiss. “It was much, much better.”

“Mmm...” Emily smiled as after a slow kiss, running a hand through Lena’s disheveled hair. “I think I like the sound of that.”

Lena grinned. “Give me a minute to catch my breath, and I’ll give you a few other things to think about, then.”

Emily really had no objections to that plan at all.
“Why am I the one who has to break into her house?” Lena shook her head as she walked through the Dublin rain. “I’m crap at this spy stuff, you know that!”

Winston’s chuckle was a low rumble in her earpiece. “You can get out easier than anyone else, and you’ll be less conspicuous than Genji or, say, McCree.”

“Yeah, I suppose…” Lena shook her head as she checked the street numbers around her. “Still. Not exactly thrilled about this. If I get caught…”

Jesse McCree sounded far too smug as he joined the conversation. “Sounds like a good reason not to get caught to me.”

“Ha. You’ve got the easy bit. You and ‘Reeha just get to sit in the pub!”

“That’s because we’re establishing an alibi,” Fareeha observed. “And covering the street for you. Which means you can join us when you’re done.”

Lena gave a grunt as she walked towards the townhouse that was their target. It was identical to nearly every other on the block, the only minor difference besides the house numbers a front door that had been painted black and trimmed with gold. “That better mean you’re buying.”

“First round’s on me,” Jesse promised.

“Bloody right it is,” Lena grumbled as she switched off her mic, then made her way up to the front door of what was still listed in public records as Moira O’Deorain’s house.

Learning that the former Blackwatch doctor and researcher was now a part of Talon had put her on their radar, and Angela had been quite firm that they needed to try to find out just what she was up to these days.

O’Deorain had apparently taken up full time residence in Oasis, but she’d still kept this place on the books, and the hope was that they’d find some clues - possibly even her personal files or research notes if they were really lucky.

On the other hand, Lena grumbled to herself as she examined the fairly simple looking door handle and deadbolt, we might find she’s just keeping it as a vacation home with nothing in here except a bunch of old clothes.

Taking one last look around, Lena reached out to test the door handle, and to her surprise it turned easily, the door swinging open.

“Well. That was easy…?” Stepping inside, she closed the door behind her, and opened her connection again. “The door was unlocked, believe it or not.”

“No sign of any alarm systems or police response.” Winston’s voice was thoughtfully concerned. “Still, that’s...odd.”

“Nice neighborhood,” Jesse observed. “Nice neighbors, too. Might have asked someone to look after the place. Ain’t unheard of.”

Winston gave a grunt of agreement. “Still - let’s not take any chances. Lena, if anything feels
“Leg it,” Lena agreed as she flipped on the little LED torch she’d put in her pocket and began to sweep around her. “Nothing too special in the front room...couches, chairs, nice taste in furniture, I have to say.”

“I’m sure she’d appreciate the compliment,” Fareeha said dryly. “Any bookshelves or things hanging on the wall that could conceal anything?”

“Not yet…”

Lena had made her way through most of the house before she finally found something. A framed piece of art in one of the bedrooms that didn’t match the decor or the house’s general vibe at all. Most of the decor was either sleek and understated, or old and comfortable looking antiques. This looked old, Lena would admit, but it was far from comfortable. A riot of shapes and colors, busy and...well. There was no other word for it: it was just ugly, and that didn’t fit the place at all.

She held the torch up in one hand and her phone in the other, then snapped a picture.

“Athena? Sending you a picture of some art. Can you identify it for me?”

Athena probably knew what it was the moment she received the image, but the AI gave a thoughtful hum anyway. “It’s a reproduction of a piece from the sixteenth century: The Fall of the Rebel Angels, painted by Pieter Bruegel, also known as Bruegel the Elder. The central figures are the Archangels Michael and Lucifer, and the piece depicts Michael and his armies driving Lucifer and his followers from Heaven, casting them into Hell.”

“...right.” Lena put her phone into her pocket and began to feel around the edges of the frame. “No sign of alarms or wires…” She carefully put the torch between her teeth so she could lift the picture off the wall, and was disappointed to find nothing but featureless plaster. She’d really expected a safe or something.

But when she turned the painting around to get a good look at how to re-hang it…

Oh, hello.

The little rectangle taped to the inside of the frame came free with just a little work, and Lena slipped it into the pocket of her jacket before carefully putting the picture back into place.

“Right,” she updated the team, “I’ve got a data drive of some kind she had stashed. How’s the front door look?”

“Still clear,” Jesse reported. “Everyone’s just happy as a clam here in the bar, and no sign of any movement around the neighbors.”

“We haven’t seen any signs of police activity or other alarms. It looks like you’re in the clear, Lena.”

A little burst of speed from the Accelerator to help her get down to the front door had her out of the house as smoothly as she’d come in, closing the door behind her and going for a long loop around the next two blocks before she finally returned to the pub where Fareeha and Jesse had been waiting for her.

She settled into the booth they’d been occupying with a sigh, and pulled her goggles off, sticking them into the same pocket she’d put the drive. “Glad that’s over...but I can’t help but notice there is
no beer in front of me.” She looked over at Jesse with a crooked little smirk. “You promised, mate.”

Jesse chuckled as he stood, his hand brushing against her jacket. “I sure did. You sit tight - I’ll bring you back something nice.”

Lena was impressed as she checked her pocket - she hadn’t even felt him pickpocketing the drive, and her goggles were undisturbed.

Fareeha gave her a reassuring smile and a wink, a glass of water sitting in front of her. “You did an excellent job, Lena. Maybe you should have considered becoming a cat burglar.”

“No one really likes a thief,” Lena observed piously, then giggled. “Still, I suppose I’m technically already a criminal, right?”

“Something like that,” Fareeha agreed with a chuckle, then scooted over to allow Jesse back into the booth.

“Did you know they’ll put a shamrock in your beer for you if you ask real nice?”

Lena groaned as she accepted the pint of Guinness, and sure enough a shamrock design had been “drawn” into the head. “God, what a bloody tourist I am.”

“I’m sure I didn’t just hear you complain about your free beer,” Jesse drawled.

“I suppose it does drink the same…”

By the time the rain had stopped and Lena left the pub, she’d managed to bring herself to drink several more pints, ridiculous tourist tripe or not, had a brief but spirited exchange with Jesse about proper forms of beer after he ordered a couple of Budweisers, and was generally feeling quite pleased with herself as she took a little walk to clear her head.

She’d sober up a bit, get a cab to the hotel, and be back home with Em in time for supper tomorrow while Jesse and Fareeha took the files she’d retrieved back to Gibraltar so Athena could crack any encryption and see if there was anything interesting.

It all seemed so very simple.

That’s probably why it went straight to hell.

Lena had been passing an alleyway, still half pissed, when the butt of a rifle came out of the darkness and slammed into the side of her head, sending her sprawling before blue skinned fingers grabbed her jacket and dragged her away, too stunned to pull herself back in time or teleport herself to safety.
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

This chapter features an attempted sexual assault. If this would be uncomfortable or triggering for you to read, you should avoid this chapter.

When she woke up, Lena’s first thought was that she had a hell of a hangover considering she only had four or five pints. Or maybe six or seven. It all felt a bit…fuzzy.

*Come to think of it,* she thought as she rolled her head back slightly and felt the furry lining of her jacket against her neck, *did I even get undressed? I don’t remember getting to the hotel. Don’t even remember a cab. I was just walking and.*

She opened her eyes as a burst of adrenaline cleared away some of the cobwebs, jerking against the ropes that had been wrapped around her chest.

Panic rose in her as she looked around. This was *not* her hotel room. It looked like a vacant office of some kind, with just the bare minimum of furnishings and generic landscape pictures on the walls.

She realized that her accelerator had been removed, but the sight of it softly glowing from the corner of the room helped to keep her from completely losing it.

*OK, so this looks pretty bad, but it’s not REALLY bad. You’re tied up, but you’re not going to disappear. Just breathe, Lena. Just...breathe.*

After several deep breaths she was finally starting to feel in control of herself, Lena looked around a bit more, trying to get a handle on her surroundings. She looked out the wide office window, and blinked as she recognized the scene.

*That’s the row of houses where O’Deorain lives. No wonder there was no security...she had someone watching to see if we took the bait!*  

*That data might be a trap too. I’ve got to get out of here and contact Winston!*

She’d just started to try moving herself around to test her bonds when she heard a door behind her open, and a soft purring voice that sent shivers up her spine. “Ah, you’re awake? Good.” Widowmaker walked around to face her, sitting on the top of the empty desk and crossing her legs at the knee. “I was starting to worry I hit you a bit too hard.”

Lena met those strange golden eyes with her own, putting on a little smirk. “Leaving aside the fact I have a girlfriend, there’s a lot easier ways to ask me out for a date, luv.”

Widowmaker tossed her head with a snort. “When I was ordered to monitor the doctor’s house, I did not expect anyone to actually think she had left anything of importance there. Surely no one would be so foolish as to *walk in the front door.*” She leaned forward and reached out to stroke a cool finger down the side of her face, making Lena jump beneath her touch. “But then - *ah!* - there you were, my little annoyance.”
“Not my fault she left it unlocked,” Lena replied conversationally. *Keep her talking. If she’s talking she isn’t trying to kill you.* “Besides, who says she didn’t leave anything? I got some lovely art education from some of the paintings.”

Widowmaker rolled her eyes. “I’m sure.” She stood, and walked closer, taking off her armored gauntlet and leaving it on the desk. “They told me I could have whomever Overwatch sent. To dispose of them however I wished. I didn’t dare to hope for you. To finally have my chance to end our game at last.” Her eyes glittered with something Lena couldn’t quite read, and then Widowmaker was leaning in and kissing her, those cold hands framing her face.

Lena would be lying if she hadn’t occasionally wondered what kissing the spider would be like, and under different circumstances maybe it would have been fun to kiss her back just to see if she could finally get a reaction out of her that didn’t involve gunfire, but not like this. Those soft, cool lips almost seemed to *burn*, with an odd tingling sensation that put her in mind of what she felt when kissing *Emily*, but that...

That wasn’t *possible*, was it?

Her eyes widened as she realized that Widowmaker’s eyes weren’t just that odd yellow gold - they actually seemed to be *glowing*.

“Can you feel it, *ma chérie*?” Widowmaker backed up slightly, and her eyes were burning, throwing odd golden highlights over the rest of her face. “Talon does not let me feed often like this. A kill is always so... *satisfying* ...but *this* ...” She shivered with anticipation, and seemed so close to something like ecstasy. “It is almost worth everything that they have taken from me.” Her hand slid down Lena’s neck and she could feel that same tugging, pulling sensation, similar to Emily’s but harsher, somehow. Less like a gentle flow and more like a sense of something *clawing* at her. Cold and jagged instead of the pleasurable warmth she’d become used to. “I am going to take your *soul*, you foolish little girl...”

Their lips crashed together again, and this time Widowmaker moaned erotically as Lena felt the tugging turn to a forceful *yank* as Widowmaker fed from her, the taller woman straddling her thigh as she ground down against her.

“So *warm*,” Widowmaker husked, shuddering in delight.

Lena tried to push her back, to force her off, but Widowmaker hung on tighter, her sounds of desire turning to confused anger at the way she was still putting up a fight.

“No one has *ever* given me so much,” Widowmaker murmured as she finally backed away. “I feel as if I am about to *burst*, yet...you are *still alive*.”

“Well,” Lena gasped as she tried to catch her breath, “y’know me, luv. Just full of surprises.”

“NO!” Widowmaker’s eyes were wide with outraged shock, pacing in front of her as she closed her hands into fists. “I should have ripped you *apart*, yet you are *still here*. How is that *possible*?”

Lena laughed weakly. “You wanted to take my soul, luv? Hate to break it to you, but someone already beat you to it.” Lena looked up with a defiant smirk as the aching sensations faded, the Slipstream or whatever that restored her after Emily (and apparently now Widowmaker) took from her replacing what had been stolen. “Have to say - she’s a bit better kisser, too.”

“You will *take me to her*,” Widowmaker snarled.

Lena rolled her eyes. “Not even going to say please? Bugger off.”
Widowmaker disappeared for a moment, then returned with her rifle in hand, pointing it at the accelerator. “I need to know how this was done. How she protected you. How you are alive, you...you stupid, annoying, foolish, frustrating, little fool! Do as I say or I will destroy it!”

Lena straightened up, drawing confidence from the fact that somehow she was back in control. “You realize that if you shoot that up, you’ll never know?” Her lips twisted into a cocky little grin. “Also, you called me a fool twice. Am I gettin’ under your skin, then?” She tilted her head just a bit, looking Widowmaker up and down. “Well. More than I already have, I suppose.”

Widowmaker’s normal icy mask was gone, her face full of warring emotions. “I can almost feel human again. I need …” To Lena’s shock, a tear rolled down her face. “I can feel. How?” Widow’s voice was jagged as she choked back a sob, filled with a desperate need. “How have you done this?”

Lena’s eyebrows rose. “What do you mean, human again? Weren’t you...what’s the word...spawned? That’s what Emily said when she told me about herself.”

“No,” Widowmaker whispered as the rifle dropped to point at the floor. “No, I was not.”

She’s all out of sorts, Lena thought to herself as she looked at the uncertain, wrecked expression on Widowmaker’s face. She said Talon didn’t let her feed often. I know I’m not the usual, but it makes me wonder if this is why…

“So,” Lena asked aloud after a long moment of silence. “Talon...did this to you, then?”

“Of course they did,” Widowmaker spat with disgust. “You fo-” She stopped herself and shook her head. “You could not possibly understand.”

“Well. You’re right, I might not - or at least not all of it...but I’m pretty sure I know someone who will.” She nodded her head over to the accelerator, then down at the ropes. “You want to talk to her? You untie me and give me back my kit. Sound like a deal?”

Widowmaker disappeared behind her again, and Lena felt the ropes go slack and fall away as she undid the knots. “I must know. It is a deal. Now... please ...take me to her.”

“Right.” Lena stood and walked over to retrieve the accelerator, getting it squared away before she turned to face Widowmaker again. “Since I left my pistols back in London you’re still at a bit of an advantage - but you try anything and I promise you won’t like what happens.”

Widowmaker nodded slowly, pulling her gauntlet back on. “D’accord.”

“Right, so...you got one of those spooky black planes you lot like to use?”
Chapter 20

Emily had started to get a bad feeling when Lena didn’t call her from the hotel.

Lena hadn’t given her details of her mission except to say she was joining a small team in Dublin for ‘a bit of recon, basically’, and that she had expected to do some work, spend the night in a hotel, and take the train back once Overwatch had what they needed.

She had tried not to worry too much - things went wrong sometimes, or became more complicated than expected. Besides, Lena was good at what she did, and had plenty of advantages to help her return safe.

*For all I know they decided to go to a pub and got into a bit too much whiskey. It will probably be fine.*

Emily had almost started to believe it by the time she went to bed.

The lack of contact by morning didn’t really help, and the *Good morning, darling* text message she’d sent to Lena’s phone still didn’t show as having been read by the time she’d left for work.

She’d tried to put a brave face on at the register, sinking into the bland pleasantries and automatic responses as she’d taken care of purchases or made a few suggestions to customers, but it all felt hollow.

“Emily?” Artii frowned as she came around from the back. “What’s wrong? You look like someone ran over your dog.”

“I’m fine,” Emily lied, and she knew it hadn’t gone over the moment the flat, dull words slipped past her lips.

“Oh no you aren’t!” She turned and snapped her fingers to get Chrisann’s attention, then motioned for her to come over. “Chrissy? Can you look after things while I take Emily to get a coffee?”

“Course I can,” Chrisann assured her as she walked over to the register. “Go on - honestly, Emmy, are you sick? You should go home and rest, you’re even more pale than usual!”

Emily looked down at the floor, feeling a blush rise on her face. “I’m...not sick, but I am a bit out of sorts. Didn’t sleep well.”

Artii sighed as she walked over to push her towards the back room. “All the more reason to get a cup of something hot inside you. Now go on and get your coat!”

“OK, OK, I’m going…”

She let Artii practically frog-march her to the coffee shop a few doors down, but didn’t say much other than her tea order until they were both sitting down at a table with steaming cups in front of them.

“Right,” Artii said firmly. “What’s *really* wrong?”

Emily looked down into her teacup. “Lena’s on...a job. She was supposed to call last night, and she didn’t.”
Artii reached out to take her hand. “Oh, you poor thing. Is that normal?”

“Sort of,” Emily admitted as she gently withdrew from the touch. “Sometimes she lets me know she won’t be able to check in. Sometimes things go a little off plan. But usually I hear something. I can’t even tell if she’s gotten the message I s - Aaahhh!”

A spike of pain doubled her over, and Emily’s shocked cry was loud enough to make heads turn around the shop. There was a feeling like icy claws tearing at her stomach, while a string that she hadn’t realized was running through her entire being was suddenly yanked taut. It felt as if someone was trying to unravel a part of her, and the pain was almost unbearable until it suddenly stopped. The pain disappeared as abruptly as it had started, and Emily was left panting as she attempted to get her breath back.

“Oh my god!” Artii was at her side in an instant, close but not quite sure if she should touch her. “Emily?! Emily what’s happened?”

“I don’t know,” Emily gasped, then slumped as relief washed through her like cool water over a burn. “I...have no idea...” *But I am afraid something has gone very, very wrong.*

Artii helped her sit up, and Emily made up a story about a problem with her sciatic nerves to ease the minds of the baristas who came over to check on her.

She still took the free slice of cake that one of them left for her, though. She was distraught, not *dead.*

Artii waited for her to finish the cake and her tea before finally speaking up again. “I realize you don’t go in for my ‘horrible trash’ romances but do you think something...well...happened? I mean you hear about old married couples on the news all the time who know when one of them gets hurt, or sick, or…”

The damnable thing was that Emily was almost certain Artii was right, but she was confused about just *how* it had happened, or what in particular had been involved. But telling her that…

“I really don’t know,” Emily finally murmured into her empty teacup. “But...I think I’d really like to go home now.”

Artii nodded. “I’ll take care of it. I’ll tell them you were sick and I sent you home to rest and get well - which I expect you to do, by the way - and if you hear anything…” She bit her lip, then looked down at her own mug. “Just let me know, ok?”

Emily nodded as she pulled out her phone to summon a cab to get her home. “I will. I promise.” She looked up to meet Artii’s eyes. “Hopefully...it’s all just nothing.”


The ride home had been a dull blur. Emily couldn’t even remember if it had been a man, woman, or omnic driving the car.

Emily wasn’t sure how long she lay on the couch, but eventually she found herself wishing she had a way to contact Winston or Angela. It wasn’t like she could just google ‘Watchpoint Gibraltar’ and get a working phone number, after all.

*Right. Soon as Lena gets home, I steal her phone and get those contacts. If I ever have a bad feeling...or whatever that was, I call them and…*

A sudden feeling twinged at her. A *presence,* close by. Demonic, yet...oddly *not.* Or at least not a
type she’d ever encountered, which shouldn’t be possible, and along with that...

LENA!

Emily shot to her feet as she heard the sound of the key in the front door’s lock, and her mortal form fell away as a furious rage boiled up through her like searing magma.

Lena had to admit they’d gotten back to London in amazing time. Those Talon gunships weren’t exactly pretty, but they had power to spare.

They’d stashed the transport in the Railway Fields, then gotten on top of an Overground train and ridden it into town, Lena using her accelerator and Widowmaker following close behind with her grapple as they ran along the rooftops until finally reaching her building in the Row.

“Emily’s probably going to be working until supper time,” Lena explained as they walked down the stairway from the roof. “Probably should text her to let her know we’ve got...ah...company.”

Widowmaker gave her a look of disbelief. “Your lover is a demon ...and she has a day job?”

“Succubus, technically.” Lena shrugged. “She likes being...y’know. Normal. Having a job. Friends. Talking to people. She needs the connection, I suppose.”

Widowmaker sniffed at the very idea. “How...mundane.”

Lena huffed a soft laugh as they reached the door to her flat. “She’s actually a pretty mundane sort of person in a lot of ways. Loves to read, likes watching movies. She’s probably more ‘normal’ than I ever could be.”

She pulled her keys from her pocket and had just turned the deadbolt when the door was yanked inward so hard that it almost jerked off the hinges, and Emily put the lie to everything she’d just said.

She was in something like her demonic form, but it was twisted in a way Lena had never seen. Emily’s soft, graceful curves and wavy falls of flaming hair had been transformed into something harder and sharper, her features a mask of rage. Her nails were twisted into thick black claws and sparks flew from her eyes almost like tears as she spoke in a furiously hissing voice that made Lena think of roaring flames and the sound of shells hitting armor.

And to her great surprise, she understood exactly what Emily was saying.

<<You will release any hold you have on my thrall THIS INSTANT or I will SHATTER you and make your Heart SCREAM IN AGONY FOR A THOUSAND YEARS!>>

Widowmaker stared at her, apparently stunned and seemingly uncomprehending, and Lena darted forward, wrapping her arms around Emily in a tight hug. “Whoa, Emily! I’m OK, it’s OK, she’s not here to hurt anyone else I promise calm down it’s OK, I’m fine I swear!”

Emily was stiff as a marble statue at first, then gradually softened under her touch, the flames receding a bit as her body slowly returned to her true shape. “Lena...you’re not hurt?” Emily’s arms came up to wrap around her, rubbing up and down her back.

“Got a bit of a knock on my head,” Lena admitted sheepishly, “but I’m OK now. We..um…” She turned enough in Emily’s arms to look at Widowmaker. She was still staring, gobsmacked, her skin turned an even more corpse-like shade as she paled in shock. “Look - this is probably a conversation not to have in the hall.” She stepped back, giving Emily a little grin. “Especially not with you
looking like *that*, pet.”

Emily looked down at her naked body, the whorls and veins in her skin shifting and blooming as she blushed. “*No, I suppose not.*” She tilted her chin up, fixing Widowmaker with a bloodcurdling glare. “*If you try anything, I swear to the Pit you’ll regret it for the rest of eternity. Understand?*”

Widowmaker blinked at her again, then nodded slowly as she seemed to take in Emily’s nudity, the blood rushing back to her face in a rather violet blush. “I did not come here to...do anything foolish.”

Emily stepped closer, her eyes narrowing. “*No...but you already did, didn’t you? I should make you pay for that...*” She turned and walked back inside with a jerky nod of her head. “*Give me one reason, and I promise I will take back everything you stole from Lena - with interest.*”

Widowmaker stared after her for a moment, then finally followed, her expression fading from shock and awe to something more like pained chagrin. “The ‘normal’ one, you said...?”

“Well,” Lena shook her head as she ushered Widowmaker inside, then closed the and locked the door after them. “*Usually.*” Catching Emily heading to the bedroom, Lena gestured to the living room couch. “Just...sit there, and wait, alright?”

To her great relief, Widowmaker nodded, placing her rifle on the coffee table and pulling off her visor and gauntlet before she sat down, while Lena turned on her heel to head for the bedroom.

*Talk about starting things off on the wrong foot...*
Chapter 21

Emily stood in the bedroom, trying to calm down, pull herself back into her human form, and dress herself again, failing spectacularly at all three.

The sound of the door made her turn, and she nearly leapt at Lena when she came inside. “What happened to you?! Why didn’t you call me?”

“Shh.” Lena wrapped her into another tight hug, drawing her head down onto her shoulder. “I’m OK. I’ll tell you all about it, but I am right here, and I’m alright now, OK?”

“She hurt you,” Emily murmured, not even trying to hide her distress. She could feel hot tears filling her eyes and spilling down her cheeks as Lena’s hand carded through her hair. “I felt her hurting you.”

“Yeah,” Lena admitted softly as she rocked them back and forth on her heels. “Yeah, she did. But it’s...well. It’s complicated. Really complicated.”

Emily stepped back, settling down on the bed, and closed her eyes. She took a deep breath, then let it out slowly as she composed herself, pulling herself back into her human guise. “OK. So...I’m listening. Can you try to explain?”

Lena nodded, then joined her on the bed. “So, last night, I was in Dublin. We were looking into a former member of Blackwatch. A doctor who we learned is now working for Talon.”

Emily nodded, making an encouraging noise.

“I went into her house, ended up finding some data she had stashed there, and passed it off to Jesse and Fareeha in a pub.”

“Jesse?” Emily tilted her head slightly as she tried to recall the name. “Oh - right, the cowboy one.”

Lena grinned. “That’s the one. Anyway...” She sat up a bit, lightly touching the back of her head. “I went and had a few pints with them before I left to walk back to the hotel, but someone clocked me on the back of the head hard enough that I didn’t even have a chance to recall before I blacked out.”

“So that’s why you didn’t answer your phone this morning...” Emily sagged a bit into herself, relief finally beginning to replace her earlier fear and anger. “I’d had a bad feeling all day. When you didn’t reply to my texts I was feeling all out of sorts.”

Lena leaned against her in a sideways hug. “That’s why you were home, then?”


“Right. Anyway...” Lena grimaced. “Next thing I knew I was waking up with a hell of a headache, and tied to a chair. We thought that we’d gotten away clean, but it turns out that Widowmaker had been watching the house the whole time.”

“The woman who is now in our living room,” Emily said flatly. “The other demon in the house.”

“Yeah...” Lena straightened up and rubbed her upper arms. “She was supposed to kill anyone they caught going into the house. She was going to kill me. But she decided to try to...um...”
“Feed,” Emily said flatly.

“Except it didn’t work,” Lena confirmed, “and I’m not sure exactly what she was doing. Certainly didn’t feel anything like you do.” She grinned weakly. “And you’re a lot better kisser.”

“She was trying to take your soul, though - and that most certainly would have killed a normal human.” Emily rubbed at her stomach, where she’d felt that terrible pain.

“Yeah. But instead I shook it off, after a minute, and Widowmaker…” Lena puffed out her cheeks. “When we’ve fought, she’s always been cold. Precise. She said Talon didn’t let her take souls very often, and it seemed like mine made her go haywire. She started to get emotional. She said she felt human again.”

“Again?” Emily sat up, her brows knitting. “What do you mean, again?”

Lena gestured towards the living room. “She wasn’t always blue. She said Talon did that to her. Turned her into...whatever she is.”

Emily stared at her, voice full of disbelief. “That’s...not possible. You can’t just turn a human into a demon, love. It doesn’t work like that.” Unless...well. No. There’s no way a terrorist group could have that kind of power...

Lena sat back down with a shrug. “You know a lot of blue people, though?”

“Well...not as such,” Emily admitted. “Though I was too angry to really take a proper look at her, I admit.”

“I don’t know the whole story,” Lena said softly. “But she used to be a ballerina, I guess? She was married to an Overwatch agent - think he did a lot of work for Blackwatch, too. Anti-terror stuff. Talon kidnapped her - it was just when I was joining the Slipstream project. Everyone was talking about it. They tore half the Continent apart looking for her, from what I heard. Busted up a lot of Talon bases before they finally found where she was being held hostage.”

Emily tilted her head slightly. “What happened then?”

“Well, I was gone …” Lena coughed, and put a hand on her accelerator. “Winston hadn’t figured out how to get me back. But…” She looked out towards the living room, her eyes a bit unfocused. “Way I hear it, they kept her under observation a few days before sending her home. Two weeks later, her husband was found dead and his wife had disappeared.”

“Oh. God.” Emily shuddered in horror. “They made her kill him?”

Lena nodded soberly. “That’s why they called her Widowmaker. She started with herself. But we didn’t know that for a long time. Not until she was caught on the Numbani museum cameras when she tried to help Reaper steal the Doomfist gauntlet and we managed a good visual ID.”

“But if she killed him around the same time as your accident…” Emily shook her head. “She’s been like this for seven years?”

“Something like that, yeah.” Lena sighed as she fell back onto the bed. “Like I said - didn’t ask all the details. We didn’t really talk much on the way. But...once she realized there was something different about me - what I did to her - she wanted me to bring her to you.”

“Me?” Emily looked down at her as her brows knit with confusion. “Why?”
“Honestly?” Lena looked up at the ceiling. “Because I don’t think she knows what she is or how any of it works...and I think she’s hoping you will.”

Emily shook her head as she stood up to walk to the closet. “I’m not even sure I have any idea. But...I’ll talk to her, at least.”

Lena smiled a bit grimly. “Beats her shooting at us.” Sitting up, her voice took on a much warmer tone. “So what’s this about me being your ‘thrall’, then?”

Emily snorted as she pulled on a sweater. “The infernal tongue doesn’t exactly have a word for ‘girlfriend’...” She trailed off as she realized what she was saying. “Wait. You understood that?”

Lena nodded. “Not really sure how, honestly - sounded like a bunch of whistles and hisses and bangs...but I knew what you were saying.”

“And I felt when she was trying to tear your soul away...” Emily frowned as she stepped into a pair of yoga pants.

Lena tilted her head slightly. “So what does that mean?”

“I don’t know, exactly.” Emily felt her cheeks heat as she flushed. “Keep in mind that I am not exactly used to having a long term relationship like ours. But...it certainly seems like the two of us might be a bit more tied together than I realized, at this point.” She looked nervously back to Lena. “It wasn’t anything I tried to do on purpose, I swear.”

“I believe you,” Lena reassured her gently. She stood and crossed to her, and Emily melted into her arms again as they came together for another kiss. “Angie said I was pretty unique. Guess this is just one more thing. But it doesn’t change the fact that I love you...or that we’ve got a demon or something waiting out in the living room.”

Emily laughed softly, then pressed a kiss to her lover’s forehead. “How’d I get so lucky?”

Lena grinned. “You must have done something right.”

“Evidence rather suggests otherwise.” Emily lightly stroked Lena’s cheek. “But thank you for the vote of confidence. Here - you get a shower, and I’ll try talking to our...ah...guest.”

“Fresh clothes do sound awfully good,” Lena agreed as she began to unhook her harness. “I’ll plug this in to charge, too. Shouldn’t need it here.”

Emily gave her a dry smile. “I certainly hope not.” She walked to the door, then turned to look over her shoulder. “Oh - and Lena?”

“Yeah?”

“I love you, too.”
Widowmaker normally took pride in her ability to lie in wait. She’d once lain atop a rooftop in Brussels for nearly two days to get a shot, moving only enough to keep her target in sight. She’d wordlessly endured the bitter cold of Siberia. She would do whatever her mission demanded, without fail or complaint.

But here, in this little apartment, sitting on a surprisingly comfortable couch, she could not stop her leg from nervously twitching back and forth as she waited for Emily to come back out of the bedroom she apparently shared with Tracer.

What kind of a name for a demon is Emily, anyway?

What kind of a name for a woman is Widowmaker, her own voice replied skeptically.

I am not a woman anymore. I am a weapon.

I am a monster.

Perhaps, the doubts nagged at her again. Perhaps not.

She turned her head to look out of the window at the London skyline. All of her equipment was close at hand. She could put it back on and leave. She’d seen a balcony - she could slip out before they even knew what she was doing.

But if you do it, you’ll never have answers.

The sound of the bedroom door opening caught her attention and made her turn away from the window.

A redheaded woman came into the hallway, dressed in an oversized sweater and a pair of pants that hugged her curves without seeming cheap. She looked so utterly ordinary that for a moment Widowmaker didn’t really understand what she was seeing.

If she had passed this woman on the street, or seen her through the scope of her Kiss, she’d have dismissed her as harmless, but as the redhead walked closer Widowmaker could see the face of the demon who had burst through the apartment’s door in her features.

She felt a surge of jealous anger rising in her throat like bile. The fact that she could be normal, that she could go through the world undetected, that she could choose …

“I can practically feel the rage rolling off of you,” Emily observed thoughtfully as she took a seat in one of the armchairs that flanked the coffee table. “That’s interesting. I’m Emily, by the way.”

Widowmaker tried to swallow her feelings, pushing them down inside of herself before she finally extended her hand. “Widowmaker.”

Emily looked at her outstretched hand for a moment, then sighed. “Lena didn’t tell you anything about me, did she.”

Widowmaker withdrew her hand, shaking her head. “Only that you were…’spawned’, and some kind of…” She stopped, not sure if she wished to use the word ‘demon’. “That you are...like me.”

“Yes and no,” Emily hedged, then sat up a bit straighter. “First rule: No touching me or Lena without
our express permission.”

Widowmaker frowned. “I understand why you do not wish me to touch her, but I do not understand. Would you not be...immune?”

“I’m not making these rules to protect me,” Emily clarified. “I am making them to protect you. For one thing - you obviously don’t know what I am, or you’d know that I can take energy from you with any kind of touch - even just a handshake.”

Widowmaker stared at her, the initial reaction of shocked disbelief fading to wary acceptance. “Very well. The next rule?”

Emily’s mouth moved, but the sounds that came out were nothing like human speech. A dissonant cacophony that made her head pound. She felt like she should understand what she was being told, but she could not make herself comprehend it.

Emily stopped speaking, but Widowmaker felt as if the words were still ringing in her ears, her eyes screwing shut as she bent over in the chair.

She felt an overwhelming urge to return to Talon. To inform them she required reconditioning. To forget, so the pain would leave her.

**NO! I did not come this far just to run!**

Her hands dug into her head, nails scrabbling at her scalp as if she could tear the thoughts from her mind, and Widowmaker felt as if she was on the verge of screaming when a pair of warm hands settled against her own.

“Shhhh.” Emily’s voice was low and soft, filled with surprising tenderness. “It’s alright. It’s alright. Shh. Just let go.”

Emily gently guided her hands down into her lap. Widowmaker shuddered, her breathing increasingly ragged with pain, ready to push her away when the situation suddenly changed.

She felt Emily put her fingers against her temples, rubbing in little circles, and the pain vanished as a rush of relief passed through her with breathtaking intensity.

“**There, that’s better, isn’t it?**” Emily murmured softly. “Now shh. Just try to relax, and I’ll take care of you…”

Widowmaker gasped as her eyes snapped open wide, feeling tears tracking down her cheeks. “What...what did you do to me?”

Emily rubbed her temples for just a little longer, looking deep into her eyes in a way that would have been incredibly intimate in any other circumstance. “I was made to give pleasure, Widowmaker. It’s part of what I am. Who I am. Using it as a pain reliever is a bit different, but…” She ran her teeth over her lower lip in a way that she could only read as seductive, then stood and walked back to her chair. “Let’s just say I have a fair bit of experience in that area. Aftercare’s important.”

Widowmaker tilted her head slightly, not certain if she was being mocked or flirted with. “But...the language you spoke. The words you used.”

Emily let out a sigh as she settled back into her chair. “That was the language of Hell. The infernal tongue, Demonic, whatever you care to call it. Our language...and you don’t know it. In fact, it seems like someone has gone to quite an effort to make sure you can’t understand it, which is rather
interesting."

"Why?" Widowmaker frowned at her as she lightly rubbed her temple. "Do you enjoy seeing me with a pounding headache?"

Emily returned her skeptical look with a thoughtful one. "After what you did to Lena - and me - I think I almost could, but no. This is…" She tapped her fingers against the arm of the chair. "Words have power, and so do names. That's true in English - or French, for that matter - but even more so in this case. For us…" Emily trailed off again as she struggled with her explanation. "For us, and for Angels and more celestial creatures, we all have a Name. One that captures and defines who we are and what we are. But in many cases we also have a Word. One that encompasses what we do, how we fit into the world. Sometimes very broad ones - War, Judgement, Death, Fire. Sometimes it's a bit more...focused. Things like Courage. Mercy. Satisfaction. Hunger. Adultery. Self-indulgence."

Widowmaker leaned forward in her seat, unable to disguise her interest. "And you?"

"I have a Name. Someday, if there were a reason I wanted to owe you a very serious debt, you might learn it." Emily's smile turned a bit crooked. "As to a Word...let's just say I am a bit unusual, and leave it at that for now."

Widowmaker snorted. "That seems to be your stock in trade."

Emily laughed as she stood up. "You might say that, yes."

Widowmaker watched curiously as Emily went into the kitchen, not quite sure if she should leave the couch. "So - is there a third rule?"

Emily busied herself filling a kettle with water, then put it onto the stove before she replied. "The third rule is that I will not ask you to trust me - I imagine that would be quite difficult under the circumstances - but as long as you are honest with me, I promise that I shall be honest with you."

Widowmaker considered that, then nodded. "Very well."

"Good." Emily went to the cupboard and took down three mugs. "Now - Lena will be out of the shower soon, so I have one last question for you before she joins us."

Widowmaker arched her eyebrow. "Yes?"

"How do you take your tea?"
Lena emerged from the shower feeling clean and a fair bit more human than she had after waking up at Widowmaker’s mercy, but there was still something nagging at her. Something she’d needed to do.

It finally hit her as she was getting dressed in fresh clothes, when she reached into the pocket of her jacket to find her phone, the indicator showing it was nearly out of power.

“...oh. Oh, no.”

Once the phone had been plugged in, Lena groaned as the screen lit up with a flood of notifications and alerts.

**Jesse McCree** - Missed Call (2)

**Fareeha Amari** - Missed Call (1)

! WINSTON ! - Missed Call (3)

<3 EMILY <3 - Missed Call (2)

**Angela Ziegler** - Missed Call (12)

There were a smattering of text messages, all along the same general theme of wanting to know where she was and if she was OK, with one exception.

**Angela Ziegler** - 10:48

I know Emily wasn’t responsible for that.

Lena groaned as she looked at the time - it was nearly half past one, now. She lay back on the bed, careful not to pull the phone back off the charger as she called Angela back.

“*Lena!*” Angela’s voice was filled with a mix of exasperation, fear, and relief as she picked up the phone on the first ring. “What on *earth* happened?”

“It’s a bit... *complicated.*” Lena coughed as she tried to think of how to put it. “Is anyone with you who isn’t, ah, in on the joke?”

“Joke...?” She could almost hear Angela’s brows furrowing. “Oh! No, I understand now. I’m alone in my office.”

“Well, I ran into a spot of trouble leaving the pub last night in Dublin,” Lena explained.

“We’re aware of that - Jesse and Fareeha went to wake you up before they left and found you hadn’t come back to the hotel. I had *hoped* perhaps you’d just done something foolish and romantic and just decided to get on the first train back to London while drunk.” Angela’s tone of voice cooled
considerably. “Then I felt something try to kill you.”

“Yeah,” Lena said reluctantly. “About that. Turns out Talon had Widowmaker watching O’Deorain’s house for her.”

“What? Lena, are you…” Angela’s voice trailed off before she sighed, and Lena could picture her pinching the bridge of her nose. “Tell me exactly what happened.”

“She walloped me on the back of my head with her rifle, first off.” Lena gently rubbed at the back of her head, feeling the bump that was still a bit tender. “Knocked me out cold, and I assume she carried me up to her hiding place on that grappling hook of hers. Woke up with a splitting headache and tied to a chair.”

Angela gave a little hum of interest. “And then?”

“Widow waited for me to wake up. Told me she’d been hoping I’d be dumb enough to get caught, everything you’d expect…and then she kissed me. Except it wasn’t just a kiss.”

Angela took a sharp intake of breath. “Then what I felt…that was Widowmaker?”

“It was,” Lena confirmed. “She said she was trying to take my soul - to feed from it like Emily does, I think, but it was cold. Like hooks and claws of ice digging into me. But it didn’t do what she was expecting.”

“Obviously,” Angela observed flatly, “since you are speaking to me now.”

“Right, but it was more than that.” Lena considered how to put it. “Angela…did you know who she used to be? Amélie Lacroix, I mean.”

“We met a few times,” Angela admitted, “but we were not particularly close. Gérard brought her to several functions, and I was given tickets for a few of her performances.”

“Then you know she used to be human,” Lena said quietly.

Angela’s voice was a bit hesitant. “I know Talon…altered her. But not the extent of those changes.”

“After she tried to eat me…” Lena coughed. “Sorry, bad choice of words. After she did whatever she did…it messed her up. She started talking about how she could feel things again. That she felt human again.”

Angela was quiet for a long moment before she spoke again. “Lena. Where is Widowmaker now?”

“She…um…well.” Lena rubbed at the back of her head with her free hand. “She asked how I did it. How I survived. What I did to her. Which, honestly, aside from the Slipstream doing…well, whatever it does to me, I didn’t know, but I figured Em might. So I sort of convinced her to untie me and take me home.”

She could almost hear Angela pinching the bridge of her nose. “Lena …”

Lena did her best to stop the lecture she knew was coming. “It’s ok! Really! Emily put the fear of God into her when we showed up, and I think between that and what happened earlier Widow’s pretty under control.”

“The last time someone thought they had Amélie under control,” Angela said darkly, “I was required to perform their autopsy afterwards.”
“I get it,” Lena said softly. “Honestly, I do. But she’s...I don’t think she really understands what she is. She knows Talon’s messed her up - she talked about how much they’d taken from her - but not what they did, really. So she seems like she’ll listen to Emily and maybe... maybe we can get something useful out of this. But if you come crashing in - or anyone else drops on top of her too fast - we could lose her, and then she’s out there, desperate, and she doesn’t trust us.”

She could hear Angela drumming her fingers on top of her desk. “If I agree to wait - you will call every morning to let me know you are safe and tell me about the progress you’ve made. And I would appreciate it if Emily would share her insights.”

“That’s fair,” Lena agreed. “I think Em will be fine with that too.”

“And if I feel her harm so much as the hair on your head…”

“You’ll come down like a ton of bricks,” Lena agreed. “OK. I’ll...actually I won’t let her know the details, but I’ll tell her that someone from Overwatch is going to be expecting check ins.” With that settled, Lena sat up a bit more. “Have you looked at the data Jesse brought home? Was it genuine?”

Angela hummed at the change of topic. “Athena and Winston verified there were no viruses or attack vectors on the drive. We are still working to break the encryption on Moira’s files, but we should know more soon.”

“Glad to know it paid off.” Lena bit her lip as she looked at the clock on the nightstand. “I should get back to it - Emily’s been keeping an eye on Widow while I got a shower and cleaned up.”

“I understand,” Angela said with an air of resignation. “But... be careful, Lena. Please.”


Angela snorted. “Yes, that might be a bit too much for him to take at once. I’ll speak to him as soon as we’re off the phone, and let him know you’re safe.”

“Brilliant. Thanks, Angie.”

“You are welcome...and good luck.”

Lena hung up the phone and checked the accelerator’s charge out of long habit, then walked back out to the living room where Emily and Widowmaker were waiting, the latter looking incredibly out of place in her combat togs, particularly drinking out of Emily’s ‘Book Lovers Never Go To Bed Alone’ mug.

“Hello, lovely.” Emily gestured to the third mug sitting next to her on the couch. “Got your cuppa.”

“Thanks, luv.” Lena settled onto her seat and took a sip before giving Widowmaker a look. “Did you have some regular clothes stashed in your plane?”

Widowmaker shrugged. “I have a few things other than this suit, but I did not bring them with me for my mission.”

“Right…” Lena glanced over to Emily. “Shopping trip?”

“Mm…” Emily tilted her head slightly as her eyes narrowed in thought. “Yes, but there are few things I might wish to try to teach Widowmaker first. They might make it a bit easier to bring her with us.”
Widowmaker stiffened slightly, and Lena was certain that Emily didn’t miss the way her eyes
widened and nostrils flared. “What sort of...things?”

“Basics,” Emily said blandly. “Or perhaps you might call it a baseline. Knowledge you should
have, but weren’t given. But first…” Emily sipped at her tea, then put the mug on the table. “I need you to
tell us what you can remember about what happened to you.”

Widowmaker gave Emily a cold stare. “Do you know what you are asking?”

“Yes,” Emily replied firmly, “I do. I am sorry - I know this will be painful. But if I am going to try to
help you, I will need to know.”

Widowmaker put her mug down and stared into the remnants of her tea for a long moment before
she met their eyes. “Then listen carefully, because I do not wish to tell this story ever again.”
“It will just be a few more days, my sweet, I promise.”

Amélie tried to hide the disappointment in her voice as she stared at her dressing room mirror. “Gérard. We are only performing Swan Lake for two more weeks. It’s your favorite and you still haven’t gotten to see me dance Odette.”

Gérard sighed down the phone line, and she could imagine him rubbing his face. “I want to be there, Amé. But Talon isn’t giving me much choice.”

Amélie’s heart jumped at those words. “They tried again?” No wonder he sounds so exhausted.

“They tried again,” Gérard confirmed sadly. “Really, they were trying to kill everyone in the building. Someone was able to replace the normal janitor with a plant who snuck in a bomb.”

“A bomb?” Amélie didn’t bother disguising her alarm as she sat up in the chair. “Gérard - what happened?!”

“I happened to recognize the plant,” Gérard admitted reluctantly. “He was leaving the building when I was walking in. I grabbed him in time, got him to confess to where he’d planted the device, and we disarmed it in time.”

“Where did he put it?” Amélie already knew, really, but she needed him to say it.

“It was big enough to drop the whole building,” Gérard hedged. “It didn’t really matter where they put it.”

“Gérard.”

Gérard went quiet for a long moment before he finally answered her. “It was placed against the back wall of my office. It was set to detonate right at the time I normally sit down at my desk.”

Amélie felt tears welling in her eyes as she folded in on herself. “How many is that now?”

“I’ve lost count,” Gérard admitted softly. “Ten so far this year? Twelve?” He laughed, but she could hear the brittle edge to his normal warmth, and the humor her husband was forcing into his voice. “In a way I suppose it’s a compliment. I must be doing something right.”

“Ten. Twelve. Twenty?” The tears were running now, and she did not try to contain them. “When will it be enough? Worse...what if one of them finally succeeds?”

“They won’t,” Gérard promised firmly. “This will stop. I am going to make it stop, and I will come home to you. I swear that to you, Amélie.”

“I want you back,” Amélie said bitterly. “Can’t anyone else fight Talon? I haven’t seen you in months.”

“I know.” Gérard’s voice softened, so tender it made her heart ache. “I miss you. I miss you so much.”

“Then come back - even if it’s just for a weekend,” Amélie urged. “Please. Come see me dance, let me take you home...”
She could hear the little smile in Gérard’s voice. “Your understudy dances on Sunday, doesn’t she?”

Amélie tried to keep herself from sounding too eager as she stood up, taking her coat and scarf down from the hook by the door. “Yes, Marie will dance the matinee. I wouldn’t need to be back at the Opera after until Tuesday’s pre-show rehearsal.”

“I will see what I can arrange…but I can’t make any promises.”

Amélie nodded as she slipped on her coat. “I understand…but I will hope.”

“I love you - I will talk to you soon.”

“I love you, too.” Amélie put her phone away before leaving the dressing room, humming to herself and feeling far lighter. She knew that she shouldn’t get her hopes up too much, but she couldn’t help the smile that tugged at her lips. *He’s coming home. Even if only for a few days - even if it’s only for a night - he’s coming home!* Her excitement faded a bit as she left the *Palais* and walked to the metro station, the chill of the evening making her shiver a bit even through her coat.

The metro was surprisingly busy given it was well past midnight on a Wednesday, but Amélie found a seat, leaning her head against the window as she looked at the car through the reflection. A few younger men and women, several who looked to be cooks or servers from restaurants. A pair of boys who didn’t even notice the rest of the car as they traded kisses and laughter, like each was the other’s entire world.

It made her smile nostalgically, remembering a few dates with a dashing young soldier who met her at the stage door.

She was so lost in her pleasant memories that she almost missed the man who was clearly watching *her*. He looked rather plain. A tragically ill fitting outfit, a haircut that had probably cost less than his metro ticket, his hand resting a bit too closely next to a chunky shape in his jacket… Stay calm, Amélie told herself. *Don’t let him know you see him.*

She waited for the train to approach the République station - well away from where she normally get off at Rue Saint-Maur, but the other lines running through the station would give her an opportunity to try to confuse and shake her pursuer.

She stepped off the train and reached into her pocket for her phone, thumbing the redial as she put it to her ear.

“Amé?” Gérard’s voice was full of confusion. “What is going on?”

“I forgot about a delivery,” Amélie said in as calm of a voice as she could manage.

Gérard recognized the code phrase they’d agreed on, and his voice took on an electric snap. “How many are following you?”

“Just one,” Amélie said as she caught the man’s reflection behind her again while she walked to the orange line platform. “But it’s going to be soon. I’m not sure I will be home in time. Can you sign for it?”

“I’m contacting a few of my friends in the DGSI,” Gérard assured her. “I will get Gabriel and a few of my team together and head to Paris as quickly as we can. Just stay calm, don’t do anything
foolish. If they want you as a hostage it means you are valuable - and it means they don’t want to hurt you if they can avoid it.”

“That’s wonderful,” Amélie breathed, her mock relief communicating her sarcasm quite clearly to her husband. “I will look forward to seeing it when I get back.”

“I will find you, Amélie. I swear to God and the saints I will come for you and bring you home,” Gérard promised. “I will.”

“I know you will, you silly man.” Amélie caught movement out of the corner of her eye. The man in the jacket was almost right on top of her, one hand tucked into his side. Her voice broke as the fear finally overwhelmed her desperate attempt to hold it back. “I love you, Gérard. I love you so much.”

“Amélie -”

A hand reached out from behind her to muffle her mouth as she was dragged towards a maintenance door, and there was a sharp electric snapping sound as something burning pressed into her side.

She felt the phone fall from her hand, but everything had gone black before she heard it hit the floor.

When she woke, Amélie thought she was still dreaming.

The world had an odd softness to it. She felt as if she was floating, not really in her body so much as just outside, clumsily attempting to guide it as she stumbled to the little chemical toilet she could see in one corner.

She was confused why she didn’t need to take off her pants until she realized her clothes were gone, and she’d been dressed in some kind of patient gown. A hideous checked print of tan and pinks that was probably meant to be soothing, but just made her feel a bit nauseous when she looked at it.

She squatted on the toilet to relieve the pressure on her bladder, and when she had finished she looked down at herself. There was a...thing...in her arm. The kind that you saw in the hospital dramas when they needed to hook a bag to a patient or administer an injection.

She should know the word for it, but it seemed just out of reach.

Amélie stared at the offending device that sat in her vein, but it did not bother to identify itself.

*Port*, some part of her mind finally supplied. *It is a port.*

She wasn’t actually sure that was correct, but it seemed good enough.

She felt terribly uncoordinated as she stumbled her way towards the bed that sat against one wall. She looked around her room, but there were no windows and only one door. The bed and the toilet the only furniture. Not even a clock.

There were lights in the ceiling, she realized, and some part of her brain that remembered the things her husband had taught her wondered if there were cameras positioned behind the lights.

*What was his name? Why did she suddenly have trouble remembering her husband? She loved her husband! She loved him...didn’t she?*

*Gérard*, that same sure voice in her mind whispered. *His name is Gérard, and he is coming for you.*

Oh. Yes, of course! Gérard was her husband, and she loved him. The strength of that love - the rush
of comfort and relief she felt at the thought of him - was so strong that she almost fell into the bed, her knees weak and wobbly as she dropped onto the mattress.

“Hello?” She shielded her eyes with one hand and tried to look past the lights in the ceiling, but she couldn’t tell if anyone was paying attention. “My name is Amélie. I do not know who you are, but I would like some food, and something to drink, please.”

There was no reply.

Perhaps there was no one listening after all.

She shifted herself onto her side, and turned her head to stare at the door.

_Gérard will come for me_, she promised herself.

_Gérard is coming_, the voice confirmed to her.

_He’s coming_, it whispered softly to her.

_Good._
Chapter 25

Amélie didn’t remember falling asleep, but the bright light shining in her eyes woke her up.

“Pupillary response is good,” a low pitched voice said quietly. She wasn’t certain if it was a woman or a man speaking, but they didn’t seem to care if she replied. “Seems we’re awake, then.”

The light snapped off, letting her focus on the figure in front of her. She still wasn’t quite sure of their gender, but they were very tall and angular, with a thick head of styled red hair. “You have such potential. Have you any idea what you could become?”

Amélie shook her head. “I don’t understand. Who are you? Where am I?”

“Where you are doesn’t really matter,” the redhead said calmly. “I’m your doctor. I’m here to improve your condition.” She came a little closer, and Amélie realized the woman had eyes that did not match - one blue, and one red.

She was wearing a suit of some kind, white and black accented with deep, blood red around the armored collar. It was all a bit foreboding, particularly with the headpiece that looked a bit like a devil’s horns wrapped around her head, but something about the doctor’s calm, cool voice was rather comforting. She felt safe with her. Trusted her. “Improve my condition?”

“Yes,” the doctor assured her. “Your husband is coming soon. Gérard, isn’t it?”

Her lips turned up in a delighted smile. “Oh. Yes! He is coming for me.”

“So - you must be ready for him, mm?” The doctor reached out with one slender hand. “We wouldn’t want you to be stuck here, now.”

Amélie nodded as she let the doctor steer her towards a door. How thoughtful this doctor was! “Yes. I must be ready. He is my husband and I love him. I want to go home with my husband. I want to go home with Gérard.”

“We just need to do a few things,” the doctor explained kindly. “Then you’ll be perfect. Or at least as close as you can come, as you are now.”

“As I am now…?” Amélie tilted her head slightly, her brows knitting in confusion. “I’m not sure I understand.”

“Oh,” the doctor assured her with a smile as they entered a small room with several papers on a table, medical equipment, and an odd looking device suspended above a chair, “You will, soon enough.”

The last thing Amélie remembered was signing papers. So many papers. She hardly understood them all as the doctor placed each in front of her.

“Consent forms,” she had said blandly. But Amélie didn’t understand why she had to sign in pens that seemed to be made of glass - and filled with such lovely red ink. Dark and thick, it settled into each piece of paper as if it had always been meant to be there.

“It’s so beautiful,” she murmured as she stared at her own name, neatly inscribed on the line.

“Very,” the doctor agreed with a warm little laugh, “but there are more where that came from.”
Then...nothing. Nothing she could recall, at least. She wasn’t even sure how long she’d been in this little room. There were still no clocks or calendars, but at least the port in her arm was gone - and to her surprise she was dressed again, wearing the same clothes she’d had on when she had been…

Actually, she didn’t recall why that was so surprising, either.

It was all so hazy. How had she gotten here? She’d been talking to Gérard, hadn’t she?

*You told him that you loved him*, the voice recalled.

Of course she had. She loved her husband. That’s why he was coming for her.

There was a loud banging sound outside of the room, and Amélie stood, clutching her coat to her chest for what little protection it could offer.

“*Amélie!*” Gérard was yelling for her! His voice was a bit ragged - it sounded like he’d been yelling for quite a while. “*Amélie, can you hear me?*”

She stood, running to the door. “*Gérard! I’m here!*”

“*Amélie!*” She could hear the relief in Gérard’s voice, and the sound of footsteps as he came closer. “*Stand back from the door!*”

She backed up, moving to the corner farthest from the doorway. “*Done!*”

There was a sharp crack, then a second that made the door shake. The final blow sent the door falling into the room, revealing Gérard standing there in his tactical gear, wearing a black beret with the Overwatch logo and the rifle he’d used to batter down the door in his hands.

She ran to him, sobbing his name as she wrapped her arms tightly around him. “*You came for me!*”

Gérard hugged her back just as fiercely, and she could feel his tears soaking into her hair as he held her, running his hand up and down her back. “*I made you a promise,*” he murmured. “*I told you I would find you.*”

“*You found me,*” Amélie murmured back, feeling so *safe* in his arms. “*You came for me…*”

“*I’m here,*” Gérard assured her, “*and I am taking you home.*”

*Yes,* that voice murmured in her mind, *you are.*

Amélie hardly remembered what came next - it was all a bit of a blur. Gérard had carefully guided her out of the building where she had been held, taking her to the transport that had delivered his team to this place.

Someone had wrapped her in a heavy blanket, and Gérard had strapped her into the seat next to him, while a mix of other soldiers settled in to prepare for takeoff, some in blue fatigues and some in black.

She’d been taken to the infirmary, and the patient gown she’d been asked to change into while someone took her clothes for laundering was oddly familiar, but she wasn’t sure why. The tan and pink patterns of the gown were particularly revolting - she’d never worn something quite so hideous!

Doctor Ziegler had come in and introduced herself, and performed a thorough medical exam before pronouncing her a bit dehydrated but otherwise none the worse for wear.
“I’d like to keep you for a few days for observation, though.” Doctor Ziegler offered her a sympathetic smile, but for some reason it made her tense and uneasy. “You’ve been through a great deal, Amélie. I think it would be best to give you the chance to speak with a psychologist - I have a few who consult with Overwatch on special cases, but it will take a little time to bring one in.”

Amélie shook her head. “I realize you mean well, doctor, but this sounds like you are asking me to trade one cell for another. I’ve been trapped for so long...I really just want to go home with my husband, please.”

“A room in the medical wing is hardly a cell…” Ziegler’s smile faltered slightly. “But I suppose I can understand why it would seem that way.” She closed the tablet she was holding, tucking it into her lab coat. “I would prefer it, though, for your safety. You were in captivity for quite some time - that can leave an effect on the mind that may not be obvious, at first.”

Amélie held her ground, frowning as she straightened up to emphasize her slight height advantage on the doctor. “All the more reason to be in comforting surroundings, no?”

“Perhaps…” Doctor Ziegler frowned, tapping her fingers against her thigh. “It would not be my preference, but I will discuss this with Commander Morrison.”

“Thank you, doctor.”

She watched the doctor go, then closed her eyes and let out a long sigh once the door closed behind her.

_I just want to go home._
Chapter 26

*It’s almost time*, the voice murmured to her.

*Time?* Amélie asked herself. *Time for what?*

*You will know soon*, the voice comforted her.

Amélie woke with a shiver and a gasp, her skin all gooseflesh from the burst of cold that had washed over her. She looked around the room, slowly recognizing the bedroom of their flat in Paris, and a moment later Gérard was gently enfolding her into a hug, resting her head against his bare chest.

“Nightmares again?”

“I don’t know,” Amélie answered quietly. “Maybe. I just...didn’t know where I was.”

The first few nights had been fine, after Doctor Ziegler had been convinced to release her. Gérard had taken her home, just as he promised, and the rush of relief as he’d carried her inside - just like their wedding night! - had left her giddy with euphoria.

They’d taken comfort in each other, that night. Gérard did not speak of what his experiences had been like while she had been taken away, but Amélie knew it could not have been easy for him. They touched each other, kissed, held each other, wept, and made love before falling into a well earned rest.

It was only after the first week that Amélie had begun waking during the night, on and off. At first she’d simply thought it was a need to use the toilet or a bit of restlessness. A reaction to having been kept for so long in that little room with no way to leave. But over the past few nights it had grown worse - she’d almost seemed to be *sleepwalking*. The night before Gérard had woken up to find her in the kitchen, sorting all of their cutlery by the length and shapes of the blade.

He’d managed to snap her out of it, but it had left him quite perplexed. “Have you ever done something like this before?”

*No*, Amélie thought, *never.*

“No for years,” she answered him. “When I was very little, I think my mother found me dancing in the living room. She thought I had been trying to practice my lessons, but when she went to stop me my eyes were closed.”

Gérard laughed as he put the last of their knives away. “You never told me that story before!”

“I hadn’t thought of it for quite some time,” Amélie chuckled. “How strange for it to happen now...do you think we should talk to Doctor Ziegler?”

“No,” Gérard reassured her. “I don’t think there’s any need to do that. I’m sure we can find a capable therapist here in Paris, if you think it would help.”

Amélie hummed thoughtfully as she followed him back to bed. “Perhaps, if this does not go away on its own.”

She’d slept through the rest of the night, after that, and the next day she had thought that might be the end of it...but now she was awake again, and even after Gérard had fallen asleep again Amélie had
lain in bed for almost an hour, unable to sleep.

You must not sleep, the voice in her mind finally told her.

Why not?

Because, it answered. It is time to wake up.

Exactly two weeks to the day of her rescue, Amélie slipped out of bed, careful not to wake her husband.

She moved with certainty and purpose as she entered the kitchen and located the chef’s knife she had selected the night before as the most comfortable in her hand, with the blade honed to razor sharpness.

Amélie tested the knife’s heft and balance in her hand one last time, performing a quick routine of slashes and mock parries in near total silence before she nodded to herself, satisfied.

When she returned to the bedroom, Gérard had turned onto his back, his arms invitingly open and his head tilted back against the pillow. His chest rose and fell, slow and even, and his mouth was just slightly open, as if about to speak.

Amélie walked to his side and gently ran a hand through his hair, watching the way Gérard’s lips turned up into a smile without waking.

He is my husband, and I love him.

That is why he must die.

Her slice was quick and clean across the neck, biting nearly to the bone as she opened Gérard’s arteries and windpipe, the blood spraying beautifully across the white sheets, almost appearing black in the moonlight.

His eyes flew open in shock and pain, but no words came out of his open mouth - just a hissing, wheezing sound from his torn throat, like someone squeezing all of the air out of a bag. His hands came up, reaching for her, but she pressed her hand to his chest, using all of her weight to hold him in place.

Amélie watched as the light faded from Gérard’s eyes, her nose wrinkling in distaste at the smell of shit as his muscles relaxed and his bowels voided.

He was so beautiful. It is a shame to have his corpse ruined by that.

Still, she couldn’t have asked him to go to the toilet before killing him.

I suppose it cannot be helped.

Carefully, she used the knife to stab and cut into Gérard’s chest in an intricate pattern that she’d practiced over and over again during her training, until she had been able to see the Talon insignia she was carving in her sleep.

After her final cut, Amélie carefully set the knife aside, then pressed a kiss to his cooling forehead before she looked down at him with tears streaming down her face.

“I am sorry, my darling. I love you so much.”
She washed her hands in the bathroom sink, dressed, and took the knife into the kitchen, carefully wrapping it in a plastic bag. Her doctor had been very insistent that she return with the weapon that was used to kill him.

It wouldn’t do to leave her mission incomplete.

She pulled on her coat, put the knife into a tote bag, and left their flat behind.

Talon had a car and a driver waiting for her outside.

The doctor was waiting for them at the Talon base that would be her temporary home.

“You’ve done well, Lacroix.” She held out her hand, and Amélie carefully removed the knife from her tote and placed the handle in her palm, still wrapped in the plastic. “How did it feel?”

“Wonderful,” she answered, “and terrible. It was so exciting, but so sad…” Tears had begun to prick at her eyes again. “He was my husband, and I loved him.”

“I know,” the doctor murmured as she set the knife aside. “But this was for the greater good.”

“Yes,” Amélie sniffed. “Yes. The greater good…” It was comforting to know that this was all to accomplish something. That it was important. That she had killed Gérard for a reason.

That she had…

That she had murdered her husband.

Amélie let out a cry of anguish as she sank to her knees, everything she had done crashing down with terrible clarity.

“Shhh.” The doctor’s voice was low and soft, tender and caring as she put one hand on her shoulder, the other gently stroking her head. “Shh. Don’t worry. By the time we are finished…you will understand. This will all have been worth it.”

She looked up to meet the doctor’s mismatched eyes, and for a moment she would swear they seemed to be glowing, the doctor’s skin shining with some terrible inner light.

“When we are finished, you will be perfect.”
Chapter 27

Time passed for Amélie in strange snatches of wakefulness and dreaming. Nightmares and conditioning and waking moments that hardly seemed real.

Much of it had been spent in hospital beds or on operating tables, with Moira often supervising the doctors and nurses that cared for her. A constant presence, sometimes silent, sometimes interacting with the others, but when she spoke to Amélie directly she always began with the same question:

“How are you feeling, Lacroix?”

“Strange,” Amélie admitted as she stared at herself in the mirror that the doctor was holding up for her. “My eyes are different.”

They were a soft shade of yellow now, instead of the dark, almost black brown irises she’d once had. Hers, still, yet not.

“A side effect of the genetic therapy,” Moira explained. “We’ve improved your visual acuity, among other things. Do you like them?”

“They are very unique,” Amélie murmured.

“Oh,” Moira chuckled softly as she put the mirror away. “They are just the beginning.”

There was a pinching sensation as Moira injected something into her neck, and as the world began to fade away Amélie saw her hanging bags of some kind of deep red fluid on the IV tree that sat next to her bed.

“How are you feeling, Lacroix?”

“Faster,” Amélie replied without taking her eyes off the rifle range. Three targets were suddenly launched into the air from hidden dispensers, each at different distances and speeds. She sighted in and fired a single bullet from her new rifle at each one, watching them explode in bursts of light before she made the weapon safe and turned to face her doctor. “I don’t miss anymore.”

“Very good,” Moira purred as she lead her from the range to the small gym where she was allowed to practice. “I’m quite pleased at how you have been responding to your treatments. We’re nearly ready for the final steps.”

Part of Amélie didn’t like the sound of that. The part that still woke in the night sometimes, crying for Gérard, or hesitated when given an order. The part that didn’t understand what they were doing to her, that was still afraid.

When they arrived in the gym, one of the close combat trainers she’d worked with was waiting in the ring, a wicked looking knife in his hand.

“We need to see how your latest enhancements work,” Moira explained as she took a tablet from her coat. “Your previous best takedown was 29 seconds, correct?”

“Yes,” Amélie confirmed.

Moira’s smile turned distinctly unpleasant. “I expect you do do it in less than fifteen.”
She didn’t bother waiting for Moira to tell her to begin. Leaping into the ring, she batted the knife out of the trainer’s hand, hearing the sharp snap of a bone breaking from the force of the blow.

The trainer tried to drop and sweep for her legs, a move that had taken her by surprise the first time he’d used it. This time she whirled back out of his reach, then surged forward to take him in the chest with a palm strike.

The breath was driven from his lungs in an explosive gasp, and Amélie drove him to the ground before stomping her boot down onto his neck, twisting as she heard bones snap, a rush of pleasure flooding through her.

“Nine seconds,” Moira announced as she checked her watch. “Excellent.”

Amélie stepped off the corpse, leaving it on the mat as she walked back to the doctor. “I am stronger, now?”

“Yes,” Moira confirmed with a smile. “Easily the equal of a successful SEP candidate. But we will make you into something more.” She checked readouts on her tablet, and then returned it to her coat. “How does that make you feel?”

Vulnerable, Amélie thought. Afraid.

“I am not sure,” she answered. “I do not know if I ‘feel’ anything.”

Moira looked at her with an expression of undisguised pride. “Brilliant.”

The final preparations took some time.

Moira had ordered her to have no food and no drink for three days leading up to “the procedure,” and it left Amélie feeling parched and starving when they finally lead her into the room where it would be performed.

She had expected an operating room or laboratory, but this felt almost like a theatre. The lights were low, and candles had been placed in a circle, their soft light revealing strange designs that had been painted into the floor. Lines and circles, and a strange angular script that did not match any language Amélie had ever seen, yet she almost felt like she could understand what it said.

Moira waited just outside the circle, next to the only unlit candle. “How are you feeling, Lacroix?”

Amélie had accepted that was just the way the doctor said ‘Hello.’ “Hungry, and thirsty.”

“I’m sure,” Moira said sympathetically as she drew something from her coat pocket. “Don’t worry, dear. This will all be finished soon.” She stepped back and looked at her, taking in the top and uniform pants she wore. “You will need to strip before you enter the circle.”

Amélie shrugged. It wasn’t as if she had anything to be modest about. She pulled the band from her ponytail and set it aside, shaking out her long black hair, then pulled off the top and plain black bra she had worn beneath it.

She stepped out of her boots, shucked her pants, and finally left her socks and underwear atop the pile of clothes before she opened her arms and walked back to the doctor for inspection. “Is there anything else?”

Moira nodded, and offered her a plastic bag. The one, she realized, that still held the knife she had
used to kill her husband.

Somehow the blood on the blade still looked fresh, shockingly red against the gleaming steel.

“You’ll need this.” Moira opened the bag and presented the knife to her handle first. “Take it, and stand in the center.”

Amélie took the knife in her hand. It still fit just as perfectly in her grip as it had before.

*What am I doing?! Stop!*

She entered the circle and turned to face Moira, the warmth of the candles bathing her skin. “What will I do with this?”

Moira knelt down and lit the final candle, then took a few steps back. “You will know, when the time comes.”

As the final candle began to burn, something felt heavy in the air. The shadows seemed to lengthen as the flames flickered and danced, and there was a heady scent of copper that filled her nose.

Amélie looked down at the knife in her hand, and watched as Gérard’s blood dripped from the point, splattering on the floor like some strange abstract painting.

When Moira spoke again, her voice had a strange resonance to it, and she seemed to be dictating to some unseen audience.

“Our subject: Amélie Lacroix, originally called Guillard. Age twenty seven, weight seventy six kilos. She has received extensive hypnotic and chemical conditioning over the last fifteen months, including the initial preparations for the elimination of her husband.”

*Oh, Amélie thought quietly. That is why I have done all this. I was made to do this.*

*Of course you were,* the voice - her voice - answered her. *It was planned from the beginning.*

*But,* she asked, *what will happen now?*

*I do not know.*

Oblivious of her internal conversation, Moira continued on. “Physical preparations have included genetic therapy to improve physical attributes, circulatory and respiratory augmentations, and multiple infusions of what the Soldier Enhancement Program referred to as ‘Transfusion Formula D.’” Her lips quirked in a sly little smile. “But of course we know what that’s really about, don’t we?”

Amélie didn’t. But it didn’t seem to matter if she was in on Moira’s private little joke.

“We have raised her combat skills and effectiveness to the peak of human performance,” Moira continued. “We have advanced as far as human science can take us.” Moira paused, bowing her head in an odd sort of reverence. “It is time to go beyond. What we do now is not just for Talon, or for the War. It is to advance the cause of understanding - to reveal the truth of Creation itself.”

She turned to face Amélie, her eyes shining once again, the red and white of her robes reflecting in the candlelight, while the black portions disappeared into the shadows. “Are you ready to be reborn, Amélie?”

*NO!*
Amélie met Moira’s eyes, her voice cool and steady despite the desperate protests in her mind. “I am ready.”

“In her hand the subject holds the blade which she used to kill her husband. The knife still coated in his blood - a murder committed out of the purest love.” Moira began to walk counter-clockwise around the circle, her voice rising and falling in a steady cadence. “Widowed by her own hand, still grieving beneath her mask. She has been forced to embrace her pain, and it has made her strong.”

Moira’s skin was shining in the candlelight, her hands raised up, singing in a language that Amélie did not understand, yet like the writing in the circle, it felt as if she should. It was oddly lyrical, almost symphonic, yet also contained a strange hissing, sibilant undertone, and occasionally dipped into growling, percussive phrases.

The strange song rose in a crescendo and Amélie’s arm almost seemed to move of its own accord.

You will know, Moira’s voice whispered to her, when the time comes.

Amélie raised the knife until the point rested at the hollow between her breasts, and her other hand came up to join the other on the handle. She watched as the candlelight flickered and danced on the blade, mesmerized.

Everything seemed to fall away as she took a deep breath and closed her eyes.

I love you, Gérard.

As the song reached its climax, Amélie drove the blade into her own heart, and her eyes flew wide as the room was suddenly filled with fire and shadow.

Something burned inside of her as her husband’s blood mingled with her own, leaving an icy chill in its wake that seemed to spread through every artery and vein as she flung out her hands, crying out at the sensation.

The hunger she’d felt intensified until it was doubling her over from the pain and need, greater than anything she had ever felt. The cold grew into a biting sensation that filled every part of her being with ice, and some part of her was aware of the flames guttering in a sudden wind, then being blown out.

The knife handle clattered to the floor, every bit of metal in the blade consumed by whatever had just occurred.

She was shivering with the hunger, kneeling on the floor. She hadn’t opened her eyes, but she could sense Moira standing a few feet away, burning like a fallen star, while another presence was nearby. Something warm, but not nearly as bright or intense as Moira’s form. Weaker, and softer.

She opened her eyes and turned her head to stare at the man who was being lead in. She thought he looked familiar.

He is the one from the Metro.

Oh. Yes. He seemed smaller now, somehow.

Her mouth was watering as she watched him. He had something she needed. Something that would sate her hunger.

<<Well,>> Moira sang to her, <<what are you waiting for?>> She gestured to the man, who stared
at her like he had never seen a naked woman before. <<You’re hungry, dear. Eat your fill.>>

She burst from the circle like a bullet fired from a gun, leaping straight up into the air before crashing down on her prey.

She could feel what she needed, just beneath his skin, and some instinct drove her to press his mouth to hers, hungrily sucking at the warmth she found there.

The first taste was like the finest steak she’d ever eaten, rich and bloody. This man’s soul was soaked in death, and she reveled in the flavor of it.

She shuddered in ecstasy as she tore at the very essence of him, but all too soon it was gone - her hunger quieted, for now, but lingering at the back of her mind.

Still, she no longer felt the cold.

<<How beautiful you are,>> Moira said as she came closer. <<So very lovely.>>

She looked down at her body she was shocked to realize her skin had changed. Blue, now, from toe to top - even her toenails! Where she had stabbed herself, there was no wound - not even a scar. She stared at her hands, taking it all in, then looked back to Moira with a nod. “Thank you.”

Moira smiled thinly. “How are you feeling, Lacroix?”

She tilted her head slightly, and did not reply. That name seemed...wrong, now. Incomplete.

“Ahhh, I see.” Moira tutted softly at herself. “I should have expected that.” She straightened up, tilting her head. “Well, then. Do you know your name?”

“Widowmaker,” she hissed into the darkened room.

Moira chuckled and gestured to the door. “How very appropriate.”
Chapter 28

Lena shivered as she listened to Widowmaker tell the tale of how she had been transformed from a loving and devoted woman to...whatever was sitting in front of them.

She could understand why she hadn’t wanted to tell it more than once. Lena couldn’t even imagine what it would have felt like to be in her place. The very thought of killing someone she loved…

She imagined Emily asleep in their bed, and standing over her with a knife, and the thought gave her chills. She reached out to find Emily’s hand, and squeezed it tight to remind herself she was OK, feeling a bit of relief when Emily squeezed back just as hard.

“After that,” Widowmaker explained, “there were…tests. More conditioning, I think. I was given my new visor, my suit, and the final version of my rifle. It was not long after that I was sent into the field, and began to do Talon’s bidding.”

Emily had been watching her with a guarded expression the entire time, but Lena could see sympathy in her eyes, along with something very close to fear. “How often did Talon allow you to feed?”

“Perhaps every six months,” Widowmaker answered. “Often members of the organization who had...displeased their superiors. Normal targets were always to be dispatched using the Kiss or more conventional methods.”

“Murderers, thieves, and killers, then…” Emily gave a thoughtful little ‘huh’ and considered that. “Relative innocents or civilians by conventional methods.”

Widowmaker shrugged against the back of the couch. “I suppose so, yes.” Her eyes narrowed. “So. Does that help you?”

“It does,” Emily assured her, then closed her eyes as she bowed her head slightly. “And for what it is worth...I am very sorry for what you have endured.”

Widowmaker didn’t seem to know what to do with that, and finally just gave her a silent nod.

“I have a few ideas about where to start,” Emily went on as she picked up her tea. “There are things I can do myself - basics, like I said - but I might need to look into some help, after that.”

Lena raised an eyebrow as she tilted her head to catch Emily’s eye. Oh?

Emily gave a little shake of her head that Lena knew was meant to put things aside for now.

She decided to change the topic slightly. “Angie called me, by the way.” Lena coughed. “Well. Everyone called me but Angie knew what was going on, basically. I called her back and gave her...very limited details.”

Widowmaker stiffened in her seat. “What.”

Emily gave her a look of concern as well, and Lena put up a hand to stop both of them. “I worked a deal. We’re going to call Angela every morning to prove we’re alive and unharmed. Provide details on what we’ve been doing. Read the headlines from the paper or something to verify it’s not a recording. We’ll report progress - if there is any - and we’ll go on.”
Widowmaker shifted slightly, but nodded. “That is...reasonable.”

Lena smiled crookedly at her. “I’m a pretty reasonable person, honestly.” Her expression hardened slightly as she sat up a bit straighter. “But - if we miss a check in, or if anything happens to us they’re going to know what’s happened, and they’ll be after you. Understand?”

“D’accord.” Widowmaker bowed her head. “I accept your terms.”

Lena looked over to Emily. “That work for you, Em?”

“That’s fine.” Emily paused. “Does she want us to call tonight, given the circumstances?”

“Might do,” Lena admitted. “I can text her later.”

“Lovely.” Emily finished her tea, then looked over to Widowmaker. “If you’d help me clean up the mugs and the tea, we can go into the bedroom for your first lesson.”

Lena appreciated that Widowmaker looked just as taken aback by that as she was.

Emily’s cheeks began to burn under their disbelieving looks, and she coughed into her hand. “I could probably have phrased that better.”

Emily led Widowmaker into the bedroom, and gestured for Lena to sit on the bed while she brought Widow to the full length mirror on the wall. “So - as I said, there are ways to make it a bit easier to bring you with us.” She let herself shift out of her mortal form, then gestured to her reflection. “You can see how I change myself from one to the other.”

Widowmaker glared with undisguised jealousy at her in the mirror. “Yes, I see it.”

Emily’s brow furrowed in thought as she considered the best way to explain it. “Your heart has been left cold,” Emily said quietly. She knew Lena was watching them, but for the moment she was focused entirely on Widowmaker, trying to form some kind of connection. “Your true self is not your body, Widowmaker. It is the Heart inside of you, and the spirit contained within. The form you take should follow it’s desires.”

Widowmaker gave her another skeptical look, but forced herself to look into the mirror again. “So you say.”

“You heart has been left cold,” Emily said quietly. She knew Lena was watching them, but for the moment she was focused entirely on Widowmaker, trying to form some kind of connection. “For some of us, that is natural. For some, it is not. I suspect in your case that is part of how Talon has kept you under their control. They gave you just enough to maintain yourself, but nothing else. A flame guttering, starved of fuel.”

“But now…” Widowmaker didn’t quite glance back at Lena, but she came close. “I have considerably more.”
“Yes. So it should be a matter of using that power.” Emily looked at herself in the mirror. “You can feel it inside of you. The way you touch the world through it. Think of it spreading through you - filling every part of yourself. Concentrate on it. Close your eyes if you need to.”

Widowmaker did as she asked, her face taking on an expression of great concentration. “I think...I have it.”

“Good. Now you have a choice. You can let that power spread through you, and let it push the mortal form away, or you can pull it into yourself, and think about it bringing the blue, the demonic, everything that is not mortal with it as you close it inside of yourself.” Emily put a hand on Widowmaker’s shoulder, careful not to touch any of her bare skin. “The first time in either direction it may hurt - you’ve been stuck like this for a long time. But it should grow easier with practice.”

She was not surprised it took time. At first there was no obvious change at all, aside from Widowmaker’s look of concentration changing to a grimace of pain as she endured the change.

The first visible sign was her skin, the blue tones slowly fading as a more natural skin tone began to appear at her fingertips, traveling through her hands and up her forearms. It was a bit like watching a time-lapse video of a spring thaw, the ice melting away to reveal the life beneath. Widowmaker’s hair color was the last thing to change, the blue fading until it was left a lustrous black.

Emily took her human form again, lightly squeezing her shoulder, and watched as the woman standing next to her opened her eyes. “Well. Say hello to yourself, then.”

Her eyes were still that striking golden shade, the dark lashes fluttering as she blinked several times in shock and surprise at the reflection that stared back at her. She reached out with a trembling hand to touch the surface of the mirror, staring at the subtle pink shades of her fingernails, then ran a finger over the reflection of the faint scar from where she had driven the knife into her own heart.

They watched as a thousand emotions flashed across her face until finally - and in a sense, for the very first time - Widowmaker began to weep.
“She cried?” Angela stared at her phone in disbelief, not quite able to process what she was being told.

Lena’s voice emanated out of the speaker with complete sincerity. “Yeah. She had a pretty serious cry after that, and ended up asking if she could go lie down when she was done.”

“I gave her an extra pair of my pyjamas for the moment,” Emily explained, “and put her on the couch with some extra pillows and a blanket, since our spare room is mostly full of Lena’s model kits and my books.”

Lena gave a dry snort of amusement. “She says that like the model kits aren’t sitting on top of all her bookshelves. But, yeah. She looked exhausted after all that. I think the shock of seeing…” Lena paused, and Angela could almost imagine the way she was turning to look at Emily. “Who she used to be, I suppose?”

“Yes,” Emily agreed slowly. “Something like that, at least. I think that Widowmaker might be her Name now, in a very real sense, but I also think that more of her was still Amélie Lacroix than she wanted to admit to herself. Probably as much to protect herself from Talon’s conditioning as anything else. Being forced to confront that was...difficult, and that’s not even getting into the effort of changing her form.”

“I suppose so,” Angela said quietly “Still. Widowmaker crying. It’s just...very unexpected.”

“From what she told us,” Emily replied, “I think several of the things you knew about Widowmaker - and about Amélie - may need reevaluated.”

“Yeah,” Lena agreed. “And O’Deoran. I mean...I never really knew her before everything happened, but some of the things Widowmaker described to us sounded pretty fucking scary.”

Angela couldn’t help but nod to that. “I had her removed from Overwatch because of her constant ethical violations - and her manipulation of others for her own ends. Learning she managed to find a foothold in Blackwatch and Talon is...unpleasant.” She sighed, pinching the bridge of her nose. “I had hoped I would never hear that woman’s name again.”

“If I may ask…” Emily’s voice had taken on a slight tone of hesitancy. “Do you know what she is?”

“Yes,” Angela answered flatly, and did not elaborate.

The line went quiet for a moment, and Lena finally tried changing the topic. “So we'll probably take her out to get some clothes tomorrow. Maybe some real food when she wakes up, see how that goes.”

“That seems reasonable,” Angela agreed. “But please keep a careful eye on her. If she is essentially mourning her husband for the first time, along with everything else, she is likely to be...volatile.”

Emily’s voice was surprisingly sympathetic. “It will not be the first time I’ve been trying to help someone who was struggling with their grief.”

They ended their call not long after, and Angela closed her eyes and sat at her desk for a while, considering what she had learned. Finally she stood and left the infirmary, heading for Winston’s lab.
The scientist was sitting on one of the oversize tires he preferred to a conventional seat, thoughtfully examining the results from one of his experiments as he munched on a wide stalk of celery.

Angela was happy enough to see him eating a vegetable that she chose to ignore the fact he’d spread a rather generous amount of peanut butter on it.

“Good evening, Winston.”

“Mm?” Winston turned look at her and swallowed a bit guiltily before putting the celery down on a paper plate. “Oh! Hello, Angela. I was...ah...just having a snack.”

“It’s fine,” Angela assured him. “I just finished the first check in call with Lena and Emily. I thought I would let you know that everything seems to be going well, so far.”

“That’s good to hear.” Winston’s shoulders slumped forward slightly with relief, and he sighed as he took off his glasses. “I have to admit that when you told me Lena had somehow managed to convince Widowmaker to take her home instead of shooting her, I was...concerned.”

“I was quite a bit more than concerned,” Angela admitted as she settled into one of the extra chairs Winston kept in the lab. “But Lena seems positive they’re making progress, and Emily is confident she can handle things if Widowmaker gets out of hand.”

Winston gave her an incredulous look. “As much as I enjoyed meeting her at Christmas, Angela, Emily works in a bookstore. How would she ‘handle’ a trained assassin?”

Angela winced internally as she realized her mistake, but she managed to keep her expression neutral. “She actually has some experience with psychology,” Angela lied smoothly. “I think it will help with starting to unravel some of what Talon did to her - perhaps even providing some basic therapy.” Really, it wasn’t even entirely a lie. Succubi were natural experts in studying behavior, after all.

“Huh.” Winston picked up his celery and took another bite, chewing it thoughtfully. “I wonder if that’s part of why she and Lena hit it off so quickly.”

“Oh, Angela thought with well concealed chagrin, you have no idea. “While I’m here,” she redirected, “has Athena completed the decryption of the files that Fareeha and Jesse brought back?”

“Almost,” Winston answered. “I believe she was nearly finished. Athena?”

Athena’s voice had a distinct note of pride. “Ninety three percent of the files have been processed. I’ll have the remainder done in approximately fifteen minutes.”

“Excellent.” Angela stood, putting a pleased smile on her face to hide trepidation she felt. “It sounds like I have enough time to grab some coffee before I take a look at them, then.”

“I can page you once the decryption is complete,” Athena promised.

As Angela stood and waited for the coffee to brew, she couldn’t help but wonder if Athena had somehow dumped all of the coffee that had been made earlier as a delaying technique. She wouldn’t put it past the AI to attempt to force her to take a break if she’d been working too hard.

After all, she’d taught Athena to do the same to Winston.

Still, as much as her mortal self could use rest and refreshment, Angela needed to see what was in
those files, and there was nothing that could delay her from that.

Well.

Almost nothing.

“I knew I’d find you in here.” Fareeha’s lips were turned up into a knowing smile. “You weren’t in your office and it’s nowhere near two in the morning, so I knew you couldn’t be in bed.”

Angela couldn’t help herself from laughing as she smiled back. “I do try to maintain a normal sleep schedule when it is possible.”

Fareeha made a point of examining the settings on the coffee maker. “Of course,” she deadpanned. “Most people maintaining a normal sleep schedule drink extra strong coffee with three shots of espresso at eight o’clock in the evening.”

“I have a very high tolerance for caffeine,” Angela reply dryly. “And as I said where possible. The current situation…demands a bit more.”

“I can understand why you feel that way,” Fareeha said with a bit more sympathy. “But you’re not going to be good to anyone if you wreck yourself.” Her eyes narrowed slightly in consideration, and Angela fidgeted with one of the buttons on her shirt cuff under her scrutiny. “When did you eat last?”

“I had a salad at my desk a few hours ago,” Angela answered.

Fareeha arched one eyebrow, causing an interesting effect with how it rose and curved over her tattoo. “A few hours ago.”

“I had a salad,” Angela hedged as she unbuttoned and rebuttoned the cuff. “At lunch.”

Fareeha continued to press her. “Which was when, exactly?”

“Eleven fifteen AM,” Athena answered helpfully.

Angela glared up at the ceiling. “This is a conspiracy, isn’t it?”

Fareeha’s little chuckle was all the answer she needed. “Come have a real dinner, and I promise I will let you get back to work afterwards.”

Angela reluctantly allowed Fareeha to cook for her, sipping at the water that she had been given instead of more coffee, and had to admit the aromas coming from the pan she was stirring on the stove were rather lovely.

“I don’t know how you manage to do so much living off coffee,” Fareeha gently chided her. “You should take better care of yourself.”

Angela tried not to think about the way her cheeks warmed at that, or the shame she felt for her duplicity around someone who had become her close friend.

*Remember your duty and be mindful of the Grigori, Angela.*

*You can care for her, but you cannot love her.*

*You must not.*
“I do try,” Angela tried to joke. “But I didn’t go to medical school because I expected to work bankers hours.” It came out flat and hollow, and she wished she hadn’t said anything.

They lapsed into silence until Fareeha put the steaming bowl of koshary in front of her, and Angela hummed with appreciation at the taste of the rice, beans, pasta, and sauce.

“I shouldn’t like this as much as I do,” she admitted. If that statement applied to more than the meal, well...it was still true, wasn’t it?

Fareeha grinned, swallowing the bite she’d been chewing. “That’s part of the magic. Nobody understands why it works - it just does.” Her eyes had softened with concern, and Angela tried not to turn away from them. “I can tell this has been bothering you. It’s more than just Lena and this... thing with Widowmaker, isn’t it.”

Angela nodded and took a few more bites of her dinner before she replied. “I was very disturbed to find that Moira was involved with all this. Did you ever meet her, before?”

“No,” Fareeha’s eyes went a bit distant as she looked past Angela. “In fact, the only time my mother mentioned her was to tell me to stay as far away from her as possible, before she was dismissed from Overwatch.” She dragged her fork around her bowl, turning some of the rice over. “Sometimes I wonder about what my mother knew about, and when.”

Angela’s heart skipped a beat, and it took an effort to keep her voice calm. “Oh? How do you mean?”

Fareeha grimaced as she looked up from her food. “Blackwatch. O’Deorain’s work. The things Gabriel did. All of it. For all she talked about protecting others...” Fareeha shooed her head as she let out a sigh. “She was the XO under Jack. She served with Gabriel during the strike team days. She would have been briefed on hiring O’Deorain. Even if my mother didn’t know about Moira’s ‘experiments’ before they were exposed, did she know Gabriel brought her into Blackwatch afterwards? Did she get briefed on the ‘wet work’? How many things did she justify to herself even after she knew they were wrong?”

Angela sighed as much out of relief as genuine sympathy. Ah. Good. We have enough problems on our plate without that coming to a head. “I wish I could give you a better answer. When I learned about Moira’s more... questionable ...work I made a point of having her removed, and I had believed that was the end of it until the Venice incident. Even then, I pushed hard for her to be dismissed from Blackwatch as well - it was one of the last straws before I left. But I must admit that I took my concerns directly to the Commander. By that point...your mother and I were not on the best of terms.”

“The rifle,” Fareeha observed.

“Among other things.” Her husband. Her colleagues. My duties. You. Angela rubbed at the bridge of her nose. “I grieved for her when she died. I regretted all the things that had come between us. And then...”

“Yeah.” Fareeha’s voice was almost as mechanical as the absent way she shoveled more food into her mouth. “And then.”

Angela reached out and lightly put a hand on Fareeha’s shoulder. “But that isn’t what you asked me - I’m sorry. Yes, it does bother me. I am worried about what Moira might be doing with Talon. I am worried about what she has done. I am hoping I will find some clues in her files...and I am also very scared of what I could find.”
She finished her koshary and set the bowl aside, not quite able to say what she wanted to. “Thank you for the lovely dinner, Fareeha.”

Fareeha smiled, but it didn’t quite touch the melancholy in her eyes. “I think I liked it a bit better when you were calling me ‘Fari’.”

*So did I.*

Angela stood, and against all her better judgement, kissed Fareeha’s cheek. “I’m not the only one who ought to get back on a regular sleep schedule. You should try to rest, Fari.”

This time Fareeha’s eyes did light up, and her crooked grin was as nourishing as a thousand bowls of food. “Is that a proposition, doctor?”

“Not tonight,” Angela hedged. “But...perhaps another time.”

Fareeha stood up, stacking the bowls and picking them up with one hand, while the other squeezed her shoulder. “Don’t stay up too late.”

Angela walked back to her office, feeling like her feet were full of broken glass.

Thirty seven years living among them. Even with occasional time spent in my true self...all too human.

She wondered if Emily had felt the same, at times. Before meeting Lena, and after.

She sighed as she settled into her chair. Empathizing with two demons, now.

Dominic would have a fit, and rightly so. Her next report would be difficult.

Still - she had work to do.

“Athena?”

“Yes, doctor.”

Angela pulled a pair of glasses on. “Please open the files recovered from Doctor O’Deorain’s home.”

The folder popped up in a window, with a brief precis of each file displayed as she hovered her cursor over them.

“Personal access key: Chokmah Raziel one one eight four.”

Athena paused for a moment while she processed that code. “Access granted. Secured file storage online.”

“Run comparison between my secured files and the O’Deorain files, please.”

“That will take some time,” Athena reported. “Should I look for any keywords?”

“Soldier enhancement program,” Angela said after a moment’s consideration. “And the SEP acronym.”

“Running.”

The search began returning results almost immediately - mostly matching the redacted or partial files
Angela had recovered over the years pertaining to Morrison and Gabriel’s medical care in her capacity as the chief Overwatch medic. But within minutes there were five documents that Angela hadn’t seen before.

Then ten.

Then fifty.

_This is almost the complete program! How did she get her hands on this? It was supposed to have been destroyed..._

The doctor’s files branched out from there, and as Angela skimmed the titles and summaries, the food she’d eaten slowly turned to lead in her stomach.

_This is so much worse than I feared._
Chapter 30

Widowmaker wasn’t sure how long she had been asleep. But for the first time since Amélie Lacroix had been taken from the Paris Metro, there were no dreams or nightmares. No suppressed memories rising to make themselves known, or hypnotic suggestions worming deeper into her mind.

She had just...slept.

She had forgotten what that was like.

The smell of something cooking made her nose twitch. When was the last time she had really eaten?

At some point in the night she’d turned onto her side, and pulled the throw pillow from the couch against her chest. Now she put the pillow aside before sitting up, and looking towards the kitchen.

Emily was there, appearing human while she flipped slices of some kind of oddly dark meat in a pan. She was humming something under her breath while a small pot of beans simmered on another burner, dressed in a similar outfit to the one she’d worn the day before.

Widowmaker watched her cook, and when it was clear that Emily hadn’t realized she was there, she cleared her throat to get her attention.

“Mm?” Emily gave the beans a stir before she turned. “Oh, good morning! How do you feel?”

Widowmaker had to think about that for a moment. “I...am not sure.” She felt a grumble in her stomach, and looked down at herself. “Hungry, I think.”

Emily smiled as she went to pull down a plate from the cupboard. “Well, easy enough to do something about that. Would you like some coffee?”

“If you have it, yes.” Widowmaker frowned as she realized that it seemed to just be the two of them in the apartment. “Where is Tracer?”

“Lena,” Emily gently insisted, “went for a morning run. She usually does, if she can.” She pulled out a mug, and began to fill it with coffee. “We were thinking of that shopping trip today. We could get you a few sports bras and some running clothes if you’d like to join her.”

Widowmaker sat down at the little table and considered that. “You would allow me to be...at large?”

Emily brought over the mug and a little container of milk. “Sugar in the little elephant there,” she explained with a little nod at the white porcelain bowl sitting on the table. “As to ‘at large’...” Emily shrugged as she went back to the stove to finish cooking. “Let’s say, for the sake of argument, that you decided to run back to Talon. What would they do?”

“Recondition me at the very least,” Widowmaker admitted as she sipped at her coffee, frowned, and added a bit of sugar. “Kill me, perhaps.” She took another sip, then frowned as a thought crossed her mind. “Can I be killed?”

Emily stopped in the middle of pulling a plate out of the cupboard, and set it down carefully. “There’s a short answer to that question, and a very long answer that I don’t think you are ready for yet.”

Widowmaker felt a surge of frustration. Emily had promised to be honest. She hadn’t made any
promises about being any less cryptic. “The short answer, then.”

“Yes, but only in certain circumstances,” Emily explained. “Let’s say that Talon might have the capability, for the sake of argument. So - you would want to run from them, too. And Overwatch. Doesn’t leave a lot of places to go, does it?”

Widowmaker thought of the old chateau in Annecy. It was tied to...she wanted to say her childhood, but she wasn’t sure if that was true. To Amélie Guillard’s childhood, perhaps.

*It is mine. My memories. My body. My...soul. Whatever else I have become, I remember it. It is mine.*

Would Talon know about it? Easy enough to research, she supposed. But if she could get control of the property anonymously...

*With what money, exactly?*

She tore herself away from arguing with herself and realized Emily was still waiting for her answer.

“Not many,” she finally admitted. “And not easily.”

“So,” Emily concluded as she returned with a plate of beans on toast and a few pieces of meat. “It would make very little sense for you to run from us - and you still wouldn’t have the answers you’re looking for.” Emily’s eyes softened a bit as she reached out, putting a hand on her shoulder. “That seems like a very lonely, painful life to me.”

Widowmaker shrugged as she speared a piece of the meat on her fork. Rather than answer, she took a bite, and was surprised by how good the rich, earthy flavor was, with a hint of something that made the ache of her hunger ease. “What is this?”

“Black pudding,” Emily explained as she sat down with her own plate. “Do you like it?”

“It is interesting,” Widowmaker admitted. “Something about it is...satisfying.”

“It’s made with quite a bit of blood, among other things.” Emily’s lips turned up in little smile as she speared a piece from her plate. “Technically I don’t get anything *useful* from eating, but I’ve always liked it.”

Widowmaker considered what that implied. “You exist solely on what you...take. Even like this.”

Emily gave her a nod. “Basically, yes. You however, seem to have slightly different needs, which makes sense given the circumstances.” She finished another piece of sausage and part of her beans before speaking again. “Which brings up something I wanted to ask you, actually.”

Widowmaker sat back a bit in her chair, raising an eyebrow. “Yes?”

“What would you like to be called, when you’re like this?” Emily gestured towards her hand, and Widowmaker held it up, still feeling a bit surreal to see a normal skin tone instead of blue. “It’s rather awkward to be at the shops and say ‘Widowmaker, what do you think of this blouse?’.”

Widowmaker frowned. The first instinct she had was the voice inside of herself that shouted ‘Amélie!’ - but was it truly correct? There was one obvious alternative, but every time she thought of the name ‘Lacroix’, she could almost feel a pair of mismatched eyes boring into her.

She looked past her hand and realized that Emily was still waiting patiently for a reply, her food left undisturbed.

“Hello Amélie,” Emily said with a smile as she went back to her breakfast. “It’s nice to meet you.”

Tracer - No, Widowmaker corrected herself, Lena, had come back shortly after they had finished eating, and demolished an even larger plate of pudding, beans, toast, and a fried egg, all while consuming most of a pot’s worth of tea.

She had watched, fascinated and horrified at the sight, while Emily looked on indulgently.

When Lena had finally gone back into the bedroom to shower and dress, she looked over to Emily, not bothering to disguise her shock.

“Where does it go?”

Emily chuckled. “I know! She eats enough for an army, doesn’t she?” She sighed fondly as she put the last of the dishes into the sink, and began to run water on them. “I thought maybe it had something to do with all the running or her accident, but she told me she’s always been like that. She’s got a metabolism that puts a hummingbird to shame.”

“If I had met her while I was still in the ballet,” Widowmaker said without really thinking, “I would have hated her.”

Emily’s laugh at that seemed warmer than it had before. “I wouldn’t have blamed you one bit, Amélie.”

The rest of the day while they drove to the shops to acquire new clothing, makeup, and shoes, Widowmaker considered how it felt to hear both Emily and Lena using that name when they spoke to her.

By the time they had finished picking up dinner and returned to the apartment with their purchases, she had to admit it was starting to feel familiar again.

She was so engrossed in that self examination that she didn’t realize Emily was asking her a question until Lena carefully reached out to poke her arm with the end of a chopstick. “...what are you doing?”

Lena’s grin was annoyingly charming. “Getting your attention, obviously.”

Widowmaker rolled her eyes. “Rude.”

Emily gave them both a bland look. “Regardless - I was saying that I’ve been thinking a few things over, and I don’t think it’s a good idea to work on taking your proper form yet. Not until you can actually speak and understand the language without triggering...whatever that was.”

“I can see your point,” Widowmaker admitted. “But if you do not know what was done - how can it be undone?”

Emily’s smile was maddeningly cryptic. “I have a few people who I can talk to. One or two might even be persuaded to help.”

Widowmaker didn’t bother trying to hide her skepticism. “At what cost?”

“Well,” Emily answered with a piper’s smile. “That’s the question, isn’t it?”
Chapter 31

Lena frowned as she sat on the bed. She hadn’t wanted to question Emily in front of Amélie, but that last bit about help...

Emily hummed to herself as she emerged from the bathroom dressed in her nightgown. “You probably would like a bit more of an explanation.”

“Am I that obvious?” Lena scooted over a bit to let Emily sit down next to her, taking her hand and lightly squeezing it. “I mean, I didn’t want to interrupt, but…”

Emily gave a little sigh as she squeezed back. “Lena, I love you dearly, but you’re always going to be fairly transparent.” Her lips curled up in a little smile. “But that’s one of the many things that make you so special.”

“Aww. Love you too, Em.” Lena straightened up just slightly so she could make full eye contact. “So - someone to talk to? Does that mean what I think it means?”

“Well…” Emily paused, tapping a finger against her chin. “If you mean ‘are they a demon’...yes? And sort of no.”

Lena tilted her head as she tried to follow that. “That really doesn't clear anything up, pet.”

Emily ducked her head. “Sorry. Let me try to explain. Did you ever study the bible when you were in school?”

“Sort of? I mean...basics, I suppose.” Lena shrugged. “Not exactly what I was interested in, and it wasn’t like I was much for church.”

Emily shrugged. “Most of it is bollocks anyway - everything interpreted, altered, or re-translated to best serve the people in power.” She straightened up a bit, her voice taking on a tone of someone telling a well remembered story. “What matters in this case was the beginning - literally.”

Lena’s confusion was going to swallow her up if it got any deeper. “What, ‘let there be light’ and all that? Garden of Eden?”

“Well. A little after the first part,” Emily answered. “But the creation of life, anyway. When god created Adam, and he made the woman who was supposed to become his wife. Lilith.”

“Don’t think I’ve heard of her,” Lena admitted.

Emily chuckled a bit bitterly. “Most haven’t, because not long after she was brought into existence, she found out her ‘purpose’ was to be Adam’s ‘companion’ - without any say in the matter - and she refused. Left what was essentially the basis for the stories about the Garden of Eden, and just kept walking.”


“Funny you should put it like that,” Emily observed dryly. “The Fall - Lucifer and his followers being cast out of heaven - had happened not too long before. So you might say he felt like a bit of a kindred spirit. Someone else who questioned the Divine Plan, and who decided to make their own go at it. So, the legend says, he went to find her.”
Lena raised an eyebrow. “What happened when he found her?”

“Some myths say he seduced her, and she became the first of my kind - the original succubus.”

Emily rolled her eyes. “But that’s not true. I may not have been there myself, but the Pit and most of us - demons, I mean - existed before the Fall. I think that one’s another case of powerful men looking to scapegoat a woman for their own problems.”

Lena snorted a laugh. “Typical. So - what did happen?”

Emily’s voice grew serious. “They talked. Talked for days. And when they finished...they made a deal.”

Lena’s eyebrows rose. “What sort of deal?”

Emily sat back, breaking eye contact to look down towards the floor. “Humans... can’t have a Word. But somehow, when they had finished their bargain, Lilith did. She had become something else. Something entirely different.”

“Like Widowmaker,” Lena murmured. “Is that...do you think that’s what happened? Moira got the devil on the phone or something?”

“No,” Emily’s voice was hard and flat as she looked up again. “Absolutely not.”

Lena frowned. “You seem pretty certain for someone who didn’t think this was possible.”

Emily shook her head as she stood up from the bed and began to pace. “I said it wasn’t possible for Talon to have done it. Not on their own, at least.”

Lena raised an eyebrow. “And Lucifer wouldn’t have done it because...?”

“Because no one knows where he is,” Emily admitted softly. “Because one day he decided he was tired of the War, of the lies, of everything, and he just left.”

“What?!” Lena tried to grasp that idea, and failed. “How’s that even work?”

Emily shrugged. “I didn’t get consulted. But whatever he decided he was looking for, I rather doubt Talon would be able to offer it to him.”

Lena snorted at the idea. “Yeah, ok, fair. So what about Lilith, then? Could she have told Talon how to do it?” She had a thought and gasped at the realization. “Could she be O’Deorain?”

“Never,” Emily hissed with shocking vehemence. “No. Not possible.”

Lena raised her hands defensively. “Easy, pet. Just trying to figure this out...”

Emily blushed as she sat back down, bowing her head apologetically. “Sorry.”

Lena reached out to a hand on her thigh, giving it a little squeeze. “‘S ok. Can you tell me why she wouldn’t be involved?”

Emily’s hand closed over hers, and her voice was weighed down with several emotions when she replied. “Because her word is Freedom. She might make a deal with someone - she makes deals all the time - but she’d never agree to making someone else a slave.”

Lena bit her lip as she considered the last few things Emily had said, then looked carefully at her. “Seems like you know a lot about her.”
“Yes,” Emily admitted in a whisper. “I do.”

Lena kept quiet, giving Emily a chance to explain herself. It didn’t take long.

“I’ve never told you my word,” Emily began softly. “Because...I don’t have one. Because I gave it up.”

Lena’s eyebrows were up in her hairline. “I mean, I have no idea how this works...but...you can do that?”

Emily shook her head, her eyes distant as she looked up towards the ceiling. “Sometimes you’re given - or more often take - a new word. But the old one is still part of you. The Fallen - Lucifer and the Angels who took his side - took words once they claimed power in Hell. Lucifer was still Light, but also Lies, for example. But...that’s not what I did.”

Lena shivered at Emily’s tone. “This is starting to sound like you were pretty desperate.”

“Oh,” Emily chuckled bitterly, “I was. Desperate, and tired. Like I told you, I didn’t want to hurt anyone else. Didn’t want to kill any more people, or take more souls. But as the hierarchy of the pit goes...” Emily shook her head. “I was - I am - what an old book once called ‘an exceedingly minor demon.’ Which meant I answered to quite a few others who wouldn’t like to hear that - and had the power to destroy me for it. So...” She took a deep breath. “I needed to find a way out.”

“Lilith?”

Emily nodded. “She was - is - still out there. As powerful as some of the Fallen and the Princes. Not because she’s particularly strong, but because she kept making deals, large and small, with demons, mortals...some even say she made a few with an angel or two. So I went looking...and eventually I found her, right where she needed to be.”

Lena scooted over on the bed so she could draw Emily into a hug. “You made a deal, then.”

“My word,” Emily confirmed as she curled into Lena’s arms, “for my freedom. She severed my ties to others - but the price of my freedom was that I will never have a word again.”

Lena gently rubbed circles along her back. “Did...did it hurt?”

Emily shrugged in her arms. “It’s hard to describe, honestly. Sometimes, I suppose. Like thinking of someone you know you’ll never see again, or missing a place you can’t go back to.”

“Oh.” Lena thought of the slipstream, and hugged her a bit tighter. “So...you think she might be able to help Widow? Amélie, I mean.”

“Oh, I’m almost certain she can,” Emily said quietly. “But as I told Amélie - there will be a cost. And I don’t know if it will be something she’s willing to pay.”

Lena thought of all the things Talon had taken from Amélie Lacroix in creating Widowmaker, and really didn’t think that Lilith could ask for anything she hadn’t already been forced to give.
Chapter 32

Angela locked the door to her office, pulled the privacy curtains shut, and made sure Athena was not in monitoring mode before she settled into her chair and waited for Dominic to arrive.

She’d left word that an in person visitation would be necessary, and counted the days until her scheduled check in with increasing dread.

As she felt her Superior’s song resonate through the room, heralding his arrival, Angela closed her eyes and bowed her head, focusing on the surface of her desk until she felt Dominic’s hand gently fall on her shoulder.

“You seem very troubled, Angela.”

She looked up into the piercing blue of his eyes, and let out a broken laugh. “It has been a rather difficult week.”

Dominic frowned and gave her shoulder a light squeeze before he retreated to his normal chair. “Perhaps you should begin there, then.”

She reached into her pocket, and produced a data drive. “This is a copy of a great deal of information we obtained from Moira O’Deorain’s home in Dublin. Among other things, it includes extensive details on her attempts to replicate - and ‘improve’ - the Soldier Enhancement Program...and her first test subject.”

Dominic’s eyebrows rose as he took the drive, turning it over in his fingers. “This is...remarkable, Angela. Obtaining this is quite a success, I should think.”

Angela let out a soft sigh. “That is not the end of the story.”

“Ah.” Dominic’s eyes flashed with something between sympathy and a dry amusement. “It so rarely is.”

“The test subject was a woman named Amélie Lacroix.” Angela wet her lips. “Now the Talon assassin known as Widowmaker.” She looked her Superior in the eye. “We know this because she captured Lena in Dublin, and Lena and Emily...captured her in turn.”

“The succubus defended her lover?” Dominic seemed as taken aback as he was fascinated by the idea.

Angela shook her head. “It’s an even stranger situation than that.” She leaned back, letting her eyes go to the ceiling. “You see...Emily knew Lena was in danger because Widowmaker attempted to feed from her spirit.”

Dominic went utterly still for a moment, and when he spoke again his voice was eerily calm, even for him. “I was given to understand that Amélie Lacroix was a human woman.”

Angela nodded. “Yes. But Widowmaker is not, it would seem...and somehow I failed to detect her nature when she has appeared on the battlefield.”

“Given the circumstances,” Dominic said quietly, “it is difficult to criticize you for this.”

“Nonetheless,” Angela shook her head. “The fault was mine.”
Dominic gave her a concerned look. “It’s not like you to punish yourself unfairly. I think you should give yourself a bit more leeway.” When Angela did not respond to the suggestion, he gave a soft sigh before changing the subject. “So this Widowmaker was captured? Where is she currently being kept?”

Angela coughed, and she had to stop herself from fiddling with the buttons on her sleeve. “She is in what you might call...protective custody...in Lena and Emily’s home in London.”

“A demon guarding another infernal creature?” Dominic raised an eyebrow. “Is that wise?”

“If I am honest,” Angel admitted, “I do not know. But from the daily reports Lena has been providing to me, Widowmaker has been...reasonably compliant.”

Dominic tilted his head slightly. “How does one define ‘reasonable compliance’ in this situation?”

Angela straightened up, letting herself focus on the report rather than her churning stomach. “From we’ve learned from these files, and what I have been told, Widowmaker was...trapped, essentially, between a true mortal semblance and whatever infernal form was created by O’Deorain’s work. When she took from Lena…” Angela considered how to explain the situation. “She was attempting to kill Lena, but instead the experience seems to have awoken some remnant of her humanity. In exchange for her cooperation, Emily agreed to help Widowmaker with asserting more of her human nature.”

Dominic gave a low hum as he considered that. “This is rather concerning on several levels.” He met her eyes with an unflinching gaze. “One could make a case that by allowing this, you are providing succor to the Enemy.”

“Perhaps. But if, as it appears, Amélie Lacroix was...transformed...against her will, I could also argue I am following my Word in allowing Emily to grant her some measure of peace, even if it comes at the risk of allowing Widowmaker to gain more control of her infernal powers.”

“I will need to consider that, but should the matter be raised by anyone else, please inform them I am aware of the situation.” Dominic turned the drive over in his hand, then made it disappear into a pocket. “O’Deorain’s influence was clearly greater than anyone believed. Do you expect she - or Talon - will attempt to retrieve their missing asset? Or the data you acquired?”

“Both seem likely.” Angela bowed her head again. “Which, in a way, brings me to the other matter I wished to discuss.”

Dominic straightened up, and gestured for her to continue.

Angela swallowed hard, then forced herself to spit it out. “I must respectfully request reassignment. I no longer feel I can perform my primary mission.”

Dominic closed his eyes, then gave a regretful shake of his head. “Even if I could make a plausible excuse, Angela, and remove you from Overwatch - who could I replace you with? Who is there to send?” He opened his eyes again, his voice still low and even. “You are - and have always been - one of the most trusted Cherubs in my service. No one else would be suitable.”

“Mea maxima culpa,” Angela whispered as she bowed her head again, tears coming to her eyes. “Please. Please. I cannot do this. I am too close...we’ve become too close.” She shook her head. “I am no longer an impartial observer and protector. Not in her case.” She looked up sadly, feeling the tears run in hot tracks down her cheeks. “I am not certain I ever was. Forgive me.”
“Angela…” Dominic’s voice was gentle and hushed as he put his hands on her shoulders, gently sitting her up before he produced a handkerchief from his suit pocket. “I know it is difficult. It is a duty I hope may never come…but I admit that the more Overwatch might face forces tied to the Infernal powers, the risk will grow.”

Angela took the handkerchief, twisting it in her hands, her voice a broken whisper. “Please. Do not ask this of me.”

“I must.” Dominic’s voice was sympathetic, but there was firm steel beneath the velvet glove. “If she should become a danger, you and I both know that she would be a threat to herself as much as those around her. You might be the only one who could prevent innocents from coming to harm.” He stood and walked to the window that looked out over the Strait, watching the reflection of the sun against the waves for a time before he spoke again. “You asked me to trust your judgement, Angela. I continue to do so - and for that reason your request for reassignment is denied.”

“Even if…” Angela trailed off, not quite able to bring herself to say it aloud.

“Even if you love her?” Dominic’s voice was tinged with sadness, but it held no surprise. “Yes, Angela. But there could be...consequences, depending on what followed. Consequences that I might not be able to shield you from.”

Angela dried her eyes with the handkerchief, then folded it over in her hands. “You are Judgement. If I am deserving of punishment in your eyes, I will accept that.”

“But true justice will always be tempered with Mercy,” Dominic said with a sad little smile before he took the handkerchief back. “So I will offer you a parting thought.”

Angela sat up, tilting her head slightly as she tried to guess at what the Seraph would say.

“The sin of the Grigori was not love, Angela.” Dominic held eye contact with her, letting the statement hang in the air a moment so she could process it. “It was what they chose to do with that love. Something which, perhaps, you should reflect upon until next we meet.”

Fareeha raised an eyebrow at the knock on her door. The two quick taps, a momentary pause, and one last firm knock was very, very familiar…but it was only six o’clock.

For as long as she’d known Angela, the doctor would spend her Friday afternoons on paperwork, usually sequestering herself in her office from mid afternoon until well into the evening. Even now that her position was unofficial (and arguably illegal), Angela’s routine often kept her occupied until nine or ten - sometimes later.

As she rose and headed for the door, Fareeha couldn’t help the feeling that something was very, very wrong.

A suspicion that was confirmed when her door opened, and Angela’s face was streaked with tears, her eyes red and puffy.

“Angela? What’s happened? What’s wrong?”

Angela shook her head and stepped inside, the door closing behind her, and just clung to her as if she was drowning.

Fareeha didn’t really understand what was going on, but she didn’t need much understanding to know her friend needed comfort. She wrapped her arms around Angela’s back, rocking her gently
back and forth.

“I’m sorry,” Angela said in a hoarse voice. “I’m sorry.”

“Shh,” Fareeha murmured. “Shh.” She rubbed one hand in a circle over Angela’s back, keeping her voice low. “Whatever it is...it’s OK. It’s going to be OK.” She couldn’t even think of what Angela would be apologizing to her for. Maybe just the act of crying? Like she didn’t know there was a human being under that halo and the angel wings?

Whatever the reason, she just held Angela a little tighter.

“It’s going to be OK,” she murmured again, and Fareeha promised herself that somehow, she’d find a way to make it so.
Chapter 33

The London weather had begun to descend from a hot and muggy summer to a cool and rainy autumn.

Emily shook off the umbrella she’d been carrying before letting the door to the cafe close behind her, giving herself a moment to let the last of the rain drip off of her coat before she took a look around.

The woman sitting at a corner table caught her attention immediately. Stirring a cup of coffee with her spoon as she looked out the window, she hadn’t touched the piece of cake that sat next to her mug.

She had a long face and a narrow jaw that was set off by the cupid’s bow shape of her lips, wide eyes in a striking shade of pale green, and a nose that might be called ‘aquiline’ by someone being complimentary, or ‘beaky’ if they weren’t.

The woman seemed to be in that slightly timeless part of middle age where she could have been in her late thirties, but learning she was a very well preserved fifty wouldn’t be shocking, and a green silk scarf struggled to contain the falls of her dark, curly hair.

Anyone else would have missed the fact that when Emily’s eyes caught her reflected gaze, the woman stopped stirring.

Emily left her umbrella in the stand before she crossed the room, settling into a seat at the other side of the table without a word.

“You’re looking well,” the woman observed as she took her spoon from her coffee, and set it on the side of her plate. “How long has it been?”

“A very long time,” Emily said, her voice just a bit guarded as she picked up the menu that had been left out for her. “I wasn’t entirely sure you’d get my message. Or show up, if you did.”

Lilith gave her a slightly hurt look. “I think you know me a bit better than that. When someone close to me needs my help, I’ll be there.”

“You were bloody difficult to track down before,” Emily observed with a touch of acid. “I seem to recall barely being a step ahead of the Game before you finally deigned to let me find you.”

“We weren’t close then,” Lilith explained blandly. “And you needed to be absolutely certain about what you wanted.” She sipped at her coffee before setting the mug back down. “I don’t recall you complaining so much at the time.”

Emily sighed, just slightly exasperated. “I didn’t say I wasn’t grateful. But you made it a bit harder than it had to be.”

Lilith’s smile turned a bit wicked. “Well...it was more fun for me that way.”

Emily glared. “This is why we don’t talk, you know.”

“I thought we didn’t talk because you felt awkward about hanging out with your ex,” Lilith observed dryly.

“You are not my ex,” Emily replied, but she could feel her cheeks burning.
“Liiiiiiiiiar,” Lilith sang with amusement.

“We had two weeks of very complicated getting to know each other. And a few months of what I will admit was very satisfying if somewhat emotionally lacking sex,” Emily clarified. “Upon which we had a Deal, you were off to see what else was going on, and I -”

“You were on your own,” Lilith interrupted. “And you’ve done remarkably well, I must say.” She reached out, and Emily couldn’t help her smile when Lilith lightly put a hand on her arm. “Your Deal wasn’t exactly simple, you know. Even I wondered if you’d have to break it, someday.” Her gaze turned thoughtful. “But even though you hardly look starving, you haven’t, have you? What’s changed?”

“No.” Emily sat back, and their conversation was interrupted while she gave a waiter her order. Once he’d gone, she smiled to Lilith as she picked up the thread. “Would you believe I met someone?”

Lilith picked up her spoon and made a show of stirring a bit more cream into her coffee until the waiter had returned with Emily’s dark chocolate mocha affogato. “I almost might. Though I’m almost as curious about who as I am about how on earth you can drink that thing.”

“I like sweet things,” Emily observed dryly. “And I think the line is that she’s someone very special.”

“Yes,” Lilith said after a moment. “I suspect she is.” Her eyes had gone slightly unfocused, and Emily could feel her patron examining her, like fingertips brushing the edges of her Heart. “Oh...you are close, aren’t you? But she’s not…” Lilith’s face screwed up into a perplexed frown. “What... how...did she do that?”

Emily gave her blandest smile after a quite satisfying sip of her drink. “One of the papers I read on the subject referred to it as ‘a dramatic insult to the fabric of temporal causality’.”

“...huh.” Lilith turned that over, and finally shook her head. “You’re impossible, darling.”

“I seem to be very good at it, I admit.” Emily tried to keep her voice even. “Which...is part of why I wanted to see you.”

Lilith leaned forward slightly in her seat, her voice growing a bit hushed. “I figured this wasn’t a social call - though it’s nice to catch up. Looking for something, then?”

“Yes, but not for me.” Emily took a breath, looked down into her coffee, and looked back up. “Have you ever heard of a woman called Moira O’Deorain?”

Lilith sucked a sharp breath in through her teeth. “Emily. Please tell me you’re not mixed up with her.”

Emily shook her head, but her stomach clenched at Lilith’s reaction. “Not me. But...a friend was. We’ve been trying to help her. But I can’t do it on my own.”

“No,” Lilith agreed. “Not if your friend is...who I think she might be.” She let out a little groan of frustration, then speared a bite of cake on her fork. “This is over your head, Emily.”

“Why do you think I called you?”

Lilith finished her cake before she spoke again. “This friend wants...what, exactly?”

“She can’t understand us,” Emily said. “Literally. She can barely control her semblance. When she
tries...headaches. Pain. I thought she was going to have a seizure on my living room floor when I tried speaking to her in our native tongue.”

“Your native tongue,” Lilith corrected absently, then took another drink of her coffee. “Still...that’s an interesting problem. I’m quite sure that was by design.”

“I’m sure it was.” Emily dipped her spoon into the ice cream. “So you’ll help?”

“What does she want,” Lilith asked again, her eyes calculating.

Emily met her eyes with a level stare. “She wants to be free.”

Lilith dropped her fork onto her empty plate, her voice a pained whisper. “...god damn you, Emily.”

“I’m sorry,” Emily apologized, surprised at how sincere it was. “But it’s the truth. And it’s why I knew I would need your help.”

“I’ll do it.” Lilith ran a hand through her hair, pulling the scarf down to her neck. “But if you thought your Deal came at a high price…”

“I’ll make sure she knows.” Emily stood, and left a few notes on the table. No sense in adding to the bill. “Where, and when?”

“Send me your address,” Lilith answered as she looked back out to the rainy street. “You’ll see me soon.”
Chapter 34

Lena looked over at the clock in the living room and frowned. Emily had been gone nearly two hours, and even though she’d assured them both that she didn’t need anyone shadowing her meeting with ‘an old friend’, it was hard not to be a bit nervous.

And then there’s the spider in the room…

The more she’d understood Widowmaker - understood what had happened to Amélie - she’d had more and more sympathy for her. But she still had moments of...concern.

“You feelin’ okay, luv?”

Amélie looked up from one of the books she’d borrowed off Emily’s shelves. “I am fine,” she said flatly, but Lena could tell she wasn’t entirely confident in that.

“You sure? You’re...um. Lookin’ a bit blue, is all.”

Amélie frowned, putting the book aside to stand and look at her reflection in the window. Lena could tell her color was off. Not the bizarre periwinkle shades that Lena tended to associate with Widowmaker, but certainly washed out and pale, as if she’d been sick, and her hair had a distinct blue tinge to it. On anyone else she’d guess it was a rather nice dye and highlights job, but in this case…

Lena watched Amélie frown at her reflection for a moment, then close her eyes. She closed her hands until they’d tightened into fists at her sides, and after a long moment the color began to return to her complexion, and her hair darkened until it was her ‘natural’ black again.

Amélie’s expression didn’t really change when she opened her eyes, but Lena thought her shoulders relaxed just a bit at the sight of herself, saying nothing more as she returned to her book.

“Is it...hard? Keepin’ yourself…” Lena stopped, not quite certain she wanted to say ‘human’, under the circumstances. “The way you want?”

Amélie glared at her from over the top of the book, and Lena couldn’t help but feel relieved that the Widow’s Kiss was locked up in her bedroom and not still sitting on the coffee table. “I told you, I am fine.”

Lena frowned as she stood up. “C’mon, Amélie. We can’t help if you don’t let us.”

“I…” Amélie scowled, and finally put the book down on the coffee table. “I have felt...restless. Unsettled. It was easier, at first.”

“Well, Em’s going to be back soon, hopefully.” Lena walked a bit closer, but made sure to leave Amélie some space. “Maybe she could talk through some things? If it’s just feelin’ cooped up, we could go for a walk.”

Amélie shrugged, but Lena had gotten to know her well enough to read some uncertainty in her expression. “Perhaps.” She looked back towards the window, and the frown became a bit more thoughtful. “I do not know if it is ‘just’ being here. I do not know if it is ‘just’ anything.”

“You’re still gettin’ used to - well. Feelin’ things again.” Lena settled into one of the chairs. “When I got back...I had trouble with the opposite. Little bit too much of everything. All the things I kept
seeing. Possibilities. Drove me half bloody mad.”

Amélie looked as if she was about to say something pithy, then stopped herself. “I suppose you want me to ask about how you handled the problem?”

Lena nodded. Amélie being sarcastic but at least open to an idea was a pretty good improvement, really. “Did a lot of mindfulness. Meditation stuff - being in the moment.”

“I am impressed you were able to sit still,” Amélie said dryly.

Lena snorted. “My point is that maybe try to do some of the same. Just focus on how you’re feeling right now. Separate things out. Let stuff come up or go as it needs to. It might help just as much as the...y’know. Demon stuff.”

“Demon stuff,” Amélie said with just a bit more frustration, “that I can barely learn, or understand.”

“So that’s part of what’s botherin’ you, then.” Lena resisted the urge to smile and point out she’d already started making a bit of progress.

“Yes,” Amélie admitted after a moment of silence. “Having to stay here...it is better than returning to Talon. But knowing I could go out without attracting as much attention...and not being certain if I should.”

“Ahh,” Lena nodded along. “Because of Talon? Or...”

“If I do not control...’it’...enough.” Amélie’s gaze went out to the window again. “I feel...hungry, at times. But it is not for food.”

Lena’s eyebrows rose. “Thought you said you’d taken more from me than you could hold, back in Dublin.”

Which, she silently admitted to herself, is another thing we really haven’t talked about...

“I did,” Amélie said quietly. “I do not feel that need.” She reached up, tapping the side of her head. “It is in here.”

Lena’s mouth went dry as she made the connections. “Y’want to kill someone.”

“I do not know if it is because of Talon,” Amélie confirmed, “or simply who... what I am. But it is distracting.”

“Well,” Lena grinned. “I appreciate that you haven’t tried to kill me. And maybe once Em gets back...”

“Too late,” Emily said tiredly as she came into the kitchen. “She’s already here.”

“Hey!” Lena turned as she stood. “You OK, Em? You look...awful, actually.”

“She said yes,” Emily said as she walked over to join them. “But I’m not proud of how I got her to agree.” She looked over to Amélie. “And she was very clear that the cost will be great.”

Amélie nodded soberly. “As you warned me. When?”

“Soon,” Emily answered, “but I don’t know exactly when - Lilith told me she’d contact me with more details.”
“Fine,” Amélie said flatly, and went to pick her book back up.

“So what don’t you want to tell me,” Emily asked casually, and Lena caught the way Amélie’s jaw tightened.

“You should tell her,” Lena said quietly. “But I’m gonna go...look for some socks.”

As excuses went, it was incredibly lame, but at least it gave her a reason to go back to the bedroom and give them both some privacy.

She’d gotten comfortable on the bed and was just starting to consider taking a nap when Emily came in, her face still drawn.

“Did she talk to you?”

Emily nodded, kicking her shoes off with a sigh before she fell heavily onto the bed. “She’s angry about her control slipping. Embarrassed, too...and scared.”

“Because she thinks it’s all tied together,” Lena mused quietly. Not quite asking, not quite saying. “Killing, the blue, the hunger, the...stuff. Everything she’s become. So if one thing is slipping…”

“Everything is, as far as she’s concerned. Yes.” Emily looked up at the ceiling, biting the edge of her lip. “I don’t think that’s entirely true. But she’s...well. She’s complicated.”

“Too bloody right,” Lena snorted, then grew more serious. “I hated her. Because of Mondatta.”

“And now…?”

“I don’t know.” Lena found herself tracing the little flaws and old plastered over cracks in the ceiling. Trying to focus on them a bit before looking at how she felt. Taking her own advice. “How much choice has she really had, since she was taken? Since they...remade her?” She rubbed at her breastbone through her shirt, remembering that night. “I didn’t tell you a lot about what happened.”

“I could tell it wasn’t an easy subject.” Emily scooted until she could lean against her, and Lena closed her eyes with a soft little sigh as Emily took her hand. That little tingle… “I know you blamed yourself. Seemed like talking to his brother helped, from what you told me.”

“Yeh.” Lena squeezed back, her other hand still rubbing where she’d had the wind knocked out of her. “She had me dead to rights, after.”

Emily was silent, and still, clearly waiting for the rest of the explanation.

“I’d asked her why. Had my hands on her, and was closer to trying to wring her neck than I want to admit. And she laughed.” Lena felt her anger bubble, then thought about the woman who’d wept on their bedroom floor, and tried to let it go.

It was easier than she expected.

“She pulled a move, while I was shocked. Tossed me off the side of a building...but I think she knew I’d hit the balcony below us. I was hurt - accelerator on the blink, too. Lying on my side on the ground. She could have taken me out in a heartbeat...but she turned, and walked away.”

“You want to know if she chose not to kill you.”

Lena nodded.
Emily pushed herself up onto her elbow so she could look at her. “And if the truth is that she doesn’t know?”

Lena sighed. “I don’t know if I forgive her. But...I understand her. In ways I never thought I would.”

“For what it’s worth, I’m quite glad she didn’t shoot you,” Emily said with a dry smile. “I think she is now, too.”

“Hah.” Lena reached up so she could bring Emily’s lips to hers for a proper kiss, and they occupied themselves with that for a moment before they parted, and Lena brushed Emily’s hair out of her eyes. “Feeling better?”

Emily gave a noncommittal bob of her head as they got comfortable again. “Kissing you is always lovely, obviously.”

“Oh, obviously,” Lena agreed with a little imitation of Amélie’s deadpan tones. “But...?”

“I don’t really like who I am, sometimes.” Emily’s voice softened as she spoke. “That’s how all this started. At least for me. Talking to Lilith...it wasn’t bad. But it reminded me of things I’d rather have left behind. And I’m not proud of the fact that I did use her Word against her. To make sure she’d agree.”

“If you were...well.” Lena had to take a moment to consider what she was about to say. “A normal demon. Would you have felt bad about it?”

“No,” Emily admitted. “I’d likely have felt pleased about getting what I wanted, and not thinking about how I affected her. I certainly wouldn’t have considered it a low blow. So there is that, at least.”

“There’s that,” Lena agreed before she kissed her again. “So - Amélie. Not much else to do but wait, then?”

Emily nodded. “I gave her a few suggestions but...basically, yes.”

“All right.” Lena slipped off the bed, went to the door, and locked it. “Then we have a little time for us.”

Emily’s eyebrows rose. “I...well. Yes? If you want...”

“Yeah, I want.” Lena said softly as she walked back. “Since this whole thing started in Dublin. So...yeah. I want.”

Emily’s fingers caressed the side of her face, and this time the kiss was a little slower, and deeper. “I want, too.”

They took their time, starting with undressing each other and ending in a contented tangle, Emily’s hair spilling off one shoulder, Lena’s even more askew than usual.

“Mine,” Emily whispered softly into Lena’s neck, and Lena shivered just a bit at the intensity of the word.

“You know I am,” Lena murmured back. “Better, pet?”

“Mmhmm.” Emily cuddled against her with a contented little sigh. “I think after everything...I needed that. Not just the physical, or even the...sustenance, but the closeness.”
“It’s been a lot,” Lena agreed.

Before Emily could say more, the sound of a phone buzzing made her groan. “Oh. Don’t tell me…”

Lena sat up as Emily rolled off the bed to retrieve the device from her pants, but she was fairly sure she already knew what Emily was about to say.

“She’s on her way.”
Widowmaker tried to keep the annoyance off of her face as she went to answer the knock at the door. She’d done her best to ignore the sounds coming from Lena and Emily’s bedroom, going so far as to try to read her book on the balcony instead, but Moira’s work had made her hearing a bit too good to allow her to completely tune them out.

Especially since it seemed Emily had a tendency to be loud.

Still - she was the intruder here. It wasn’t her place to tell them to stop, particularly after what she had put Lena through.

And if you feel a bit jealous, mm? She really wasn’t sure if it was her own doubts teasing her, or some strange representation of the split between the woman she had been and the creature she was now. How long has it been since anyone touched you like that…?

Of course, if someone in Talon had tried...what would you have done?

She tossed her head as she reached the door, trying to silence the questions. Such contact would have been unwanted, at best, and the very few who did not flee from her presence were all unlikely to have ever considered it.

And if someone had been stupid enough to force themselves on me, I would have killed them.

The knock came at the door again, and Widowmaker forced herself to focus, putting herself into a bit of her ‘normal’ mentality to keep her expression flat and imposing as she unlocked and opened the door.

“Yes?”

The woman standing there with crossed arms and a little smirk raised an eyebrow as she quickly looked her up and down. “Well. I didn’t expect to meet you quite so quickly.”

Widowmaker frowned, her brow furrowing. “Excuse me?”

“Well, you’re not Emily, and you don’t seem to be the other one…” The woman’s green eyes narrowed slightly. “Though you...you’ve had a taste of her too, haven't you?”

Widowmaker stiffened and flushed, a mix of both anger and embarrassment washing through her - and a bit of something that might have been shame. “You must be Lilith, then.”

She could hear Emily coming up behind her at something close to a run. “Yes, sorry, she texted and I thought she meant she was on her way across town, not downstairs!”

Lilith took a look past her at Emily and her smile turned rather smug. “Oh, did I interrupt something?” She looked back, and Widowmaker had to resist a strong urge to backhand her. “No wonder you’re so annoyed! She really is greedy. Particularly since the other one seems to have more than enough to share...”

“Lena has a name,” Emily muttered as she tugged the hem of her sweater down a bit lower, “and so does Amélie. Stop trying to piss off the trained assassin and come in, please?”

“Oh, if you insist,” Lilith grinned as she came inside, and Widowmaker followed them back into the
living room, unable to stop her feeling of unease.

Lena was waiting there, sitting on the couch, and Lilith stopped dead in her tracks when she saw her.

“... and she has a Cherub watching over her?” Lilith turned, an incredulous expression on her face. “Emily, your girlfriend is a complete celestial slut.”

Lena’s face turned a fascinating shade of red as she stood up, hands on her hips. “Oi!”

Emily just rolled her eyes. “I know exactly where she’s been, thank you. Now - are you going to sit down and discuss this properly?”

Lilith sighed dramatically, settling into one of the living room chairs before she unknotted her scarf and let her hair fall down her shoulders. “You really aren’t letting me have any fun.”

“No,” Emily agreed. “How horrible that we’re going to sit down, have tea, and actually talk.”

“Fine,” Lilith pouted, then looked over to where Widowmaker still stood. “Would you please sit across from me? It’ll be more comfortable for both of us when I start taking a proper look at you.”

Widowmaker nodded reluctantly and crossed the room, while Lena moved over to allow her to sit. There was something oddly intimidating about the woman, despite her lacking Emily’s volcanic fury or Moira’s threatening radiance.

Her eyes, she finally decided. Something in those deep green eyes was very, very old, and Lilith seemed to have a love of mischief that would put Sombra to shame.

I must not underestimate her, no matter what she offers me.

The room settled into a silent sort of detente as Emily made tea, and finally Lilith made a little production of adding milk and sugar to her mug before she spoke.

“So. Amélie, was it?”

Widowmaker looked down at her hands. “They have been calling me by that name, when I am...like this.”

Lilith took a sip of her tea. “And what do they call you when you’re not?”

She closed her eyes tried to let the cold spread through her again, feeling it reach the tips of her fingers and toes like a slow ache. She tried to reach out further, to see if perhaps it was possible now, but could not push the sensation beyond herself despite Emily’s previous insistence that it could be done.

When Widowmaker opened her eyes, her skin was blue once again, and she let the ice settle into her core as she stared back at Lilith. “Widowmaker.”

To her great surprise, Lilith actually snorted with amusement. “Oh, how utterly over the top.”

Lena coughed nervously. “She...came by it pretty honestly.”

Lilith gave that some consideration before she put her teacup down. “I see. Well, then, Widowmaker, do you know why I’m here?”

She nodded, her voice steady despite the little clench in her stomach. “You have come because I have been...made like this. Because I cannot understand the language as I should.”
“No.” Lilith shook her head. “Those are symptoms. Not the root cause. Not the reason.” She leaned forward, and her eyes were dangerous. “Do you know why I am here?”

Widowmaker closed her eyes, and thought about what Emily had told her. What Lilith had done for her. What Lilith was.

“Because Moira and Talon took me, against my will. Tricked me into signing away my life while addled and drugged. Forced me to kill my husband. Forced me to become this.”

Widowmaker let every ounce of the grief and pain she’d finally felt after seven years of numbness turn to rage, the fury burning in her eyes as she drew herself up and stared back at the first woman.

“You are here because I have been chained, and I cannot break them without your help.”

Lilith’s face grew still and serious, and there was just the hint of a smile on her lips when she finally spoke.

“Very good. So - let’s get started.”

Fareeha turned away from the sizzling pan of eggs, following the sound of music.

She’d heard it all her life - never so loud as to be distracting or disabling, just something that came and went, changed and shifted, depending on who was around, or the circumstances she was in.

It was one of the very few secrets she’d kept her entire life - never even telling her parents, out of fear that her mother would have used it as another reason she couldn’t pursue her dreams.

Fareeha knew they weren’t hallucinations, and at times it almost seemed to help her react to rapidly changing shifts in battles or while on her patrols. Given the way it shifted and changed over time, she’d decided long ago it must be some mild form of auditory synesthesia, and had just gotten on with her life.

In this case, the sound of hopeful woodwinds rising above low, almost mournful strings told Fareeha that Angela had come into the room, and she smiled as that strange instinct was proven correct.

“Hey. Sleep well?”

Angela nodded, clearly still a bit drowsy. “Coffee?”

Fareeha chuckled and pointed to the pot. “I’ll have some eggs for you in a minute, too.”

To her surprise, Angela came up and hugged her from behind, wrapping an arm around her waist. “Thank you, Fari.”

Fareeha smiled as she leaned in over the pan. “You’re welcome.” She might not have expected this after the last few days, but she certainly wasn’t complaining about it.

Once Angela had her required coffee and Fareeha had served up the eggs, toast, and a side of chicken sausage, she waited for Angela to make a reasonable amount of progress on the food before trying to touch on the elephant in the room.

“Feeling better this morning?”

Angela cheeks heated. “Yes. Yes, I think so.”
“OK. Good.” Fareeha took a few more bites of her eggs. “Can I ask…” She fumbled for a moment, not quite sure of the right words. “What was bothering you?”

Angela looked down at her plate, tapping her fork against the edge nervously, then looked back up. “I...had a realization, last night. About how I had been handling my responsibilities lately. How i’d let my duties take precedence over my feelings. How...I’d been pushing away my friends. The people I care about.” She paused, licking her lips nervously. “Because I felt I needed to be objective. Because I was afraid that if I did not...I might not be able to do what needed to be done, as a doctor, and as part of the team. Because I was afraid I might not be able to keep that objectivity and fulfill my responsibilities if...when... someone I loved was involved.”

Fareeha’s mouth felt dry as she thought about the implications of all of that. Of the distance she’d felt when she first came to Gibraltar to join the Recall. Of how Angela had acted over the last few months, except in moments where her fatigue or distraction had made the professional mask slip and crack.

“...oh.”

Angela looked guiltily up at her. “Yes. And...I hurt you. I hurt several people, I am sure, but I know I hurt you, and I am sorry for that.”

Fareeha finished her eggs and her toast before she finally spoke again, trying to choose her words carefully. “I think...part of me understood what you were doing, and why, even if I didn’t always like it. But...you’ve been my friend, even through that.” Fareeha reached out to put her hand over Angela’s, and the doctor turned her hand over so she gave her a reassuring squeeze. “And I have always trusted you, and your judgement.”

Angela gave a weak smile. “People keep saying that to me.”

Fareeha squeezed her hand again. “Maybe you should listen to them.”

Angela hesitated for a moment, then took a deep breath and leaned across the table, and Fareeha moved to meet her.

The kiss was brief, and fairly chaste compared to a few first kisses Fareeha could think of, but there was a warmth to it that lingered, leaving a tingle Fareeha felt all the way down to her feet, and somehow the music she heard in that moment was full of joy.

“Maybe I should,” Angela agreed with a smile.

“It doesn’t have to change anything out in the field,” Fareeha said softly. “I don’t think either of us want it to. But I’m glad to know how you feel. Because I feel the same.”

Angela nodded. “You’re right - it shouldn’t, and I will do my best to make sure it doesn’t. But...yes.” Angela stood, and Fareeha let out a breath she hadn’t realized she’d been holding when Angela settled against her side, hugging her tightly. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Fareeha assured her, then kissed her temple. “Always.”

“I’m afraid there’s something else we have to talk about, though.” Angela scooted back to look at her, and Fareeha could see the sincerity and conflict in her eyes. “I have to ask you something, and I wish I didn’t.”

“O’Deorain’s files,” Fareeha realized as she looked at Angela’s grave expression. “You found something.”
“I found...a lot of things.”

Fareeha nodded. “And the thing you need to ask…?”

Angela let out a long sigh. “I need to know if there’s a way to contact Ana. Because I am afraid we’re going to need her help.”
“I think have a fairly good idea of what was done to you,” Lilith said as she settled back into her chair. “There’s just one last thing I need to test.”

Widowmaker did her best not to sigh. She’d spent the last few hours doing...very little, really. She’d sat in a chair while Lilith had stared at her, walked around the room muttering to herself, and formed...some kind of conclusion, but she really had no idea what.

“Emily,” Lilith said as she tapped a finger against her chin, “I need you to talk to her.”

Emily frowned. “What would you like me to say?”

“I don’t care, actually - but I need you to do it in your language.”

Widowmaker stiffened. “I am not interested in experiencing that again.”

Lilith shrugged. “Unfortunately, you need to - or rather, I need to see you go through it. Last piece of the puzzle, I’m afraid.”

“I’ll try to help you recover,” Emily assured her.

Widowmaker sighed. “Fine. Let’s just...get it over with.”

Emily gave her a sympathetic look, then said... something, but this time there was no pain. Widowmaker frowned and looked back and forth between Emily and Lilith, then shrugged.

Lilith hummed and nodded. “Now tell her to pick up a book or something. Give her a command.”

Emily gave her a skeptical look, then spoke again, but this time the reaction was different, and immediate.

Just like the day Emily had laid out ‘the rules’, the hissing, dissonant words twisted and pounded at her. The urge to return for reconditioning tore at her until she was doubled over, her hands wrapped around her ears as she tried to force it to stop.

<<OK>>, Lilith sang, and Widowmaker understood her, the lyrical words cutting through the pain like a beacon through fog. <<I think I’ve seen quite enough.>>

Widowmaker felt Emily’s hands on her temples again, and shivered as the pain was washed away, the compulsion to turn herself in to Talon slowly fading in its wake.

“Shh,” Emily murmured. “Easy. We’ve got you.”

Another hand was on her shoulder, and when Widowmaker looked up, she saw Lena looking at her with concern in her eyes.

She took a deep, shuddering breath, and then willed herself back into her human...guise, as Emily had put it. Pulling the cold back, and crossing her arms over her chest as she did so, wrapping her fingers into the sleeves of her blouse.
“Sorry,” Lena said softly.

Widowmaker steeled herself. “It...is nothing you should apologize for. You did not do this to me.”

“Mm, no.” Lilith picked up her teacup and took a long sip. “Clever, though. Very clever.” She sighed, shaking her head. “That bitch.”

Despite everything that had happened, Widowmaker found herself laughing darkly. “I see you’ve met.”

“Oh,” Lilith sneered, “we’ve crossed paths before, Moira and I.”

That made Widowmaker feel a bit more comfortable. Angels, demons, favors, deals, magic...those were still things she didn’t fully understand. But spite and distaste? That she understood.

“So,” Lilith said briskly as she clapped her hands. “I believe we need to discuss some things. Emily, would you and your little bicycle mind stepping out for a few minutes?”

Lena’s face was almost scarlet as she took a step forward. “OK, no, I don’t care what you call me but we’re not leaving her alone with anyone after all that, especially not -”

“Lena.” Emily took her hand, and squeezed it. “She’s not trying to be any more predatory than normal. This...it’s part of how this works. The Deal is between the two of them. It’s part of the rules.”

“You’re welcome to sit on the balcony,” Lilith observed. “Just keep out of the way. Oh, and Emily, I’m well aware you read lips, so if you wouldn’t mind sitting with your back to the door…”

Emily nodded, her expression a bit grim, then looked over, giving Widowmaker a flicker of a smile that she thought was meant to be reassuring.

Lilith waited for the door to slide shut before speaking again, and when she did her voice was a bit kinder than it had been before.

“The first thing you need to know is that you could not have saved Gérard.”

Widowmaker let out a shocked hiss and turned to look towards the patio.

“She didn’t tell me who you were,” Lilith answered her unspoken accusation, drawing her attention back. “I saw you dance...oh, eight or nine years ago, now? Just after you were married, I think.”

Widowmaker frowned. “Then why…”

“Lie?” Lilith grinned. “Knowledge is power, darling. Don’t ever forget that.” She settled back, and her eyes softened a bit. “And because Emily clearly was trying to protect your identity as best as she could. I respect that, and wasn’t going to be an ass about it.”

Widowmaker nodded, accepting the explanation. “You said I could not have saved him.”

Lilith nodded. “I can practically feel the guilt - the pain - that you’ve been carrying with you. Even knowing that Moira and Talon manipulated you. Controlled you. But they’d been trying to kill him for years, hadn’t they?”

Widowmaker nodded. “More times than I care to remember. The bomb in Rome came closest, before…”
“Some people are fated to die,” Lilith explained. “Gérard, I think, was one of them - and even if you had somehow managed to realize what Moira had done and broken her control, they would have found another way. But as it was…” She shook her head. “From the moment they took you, his fate was sealed, but you need to accept that even if his death was by your hand, it was not your fault.”

Widowmaker found her throat unexpectedly tight, and had to make herself swallow before she spoke. “I cut his throat. I stabbed him in the chest. Again, and again, and again.”

“While your mind was so thoroughly addled that you had the equivalent of a major head injury. Do you even remember half of what was done to you?”

“...no,” Widowmaker admitted finally. “Very little, really, before his death. After...is much more clear.”

“Because afterwards they didn’t have to drug you and continuously condition and compel you. Your mind was grieving, but it was whole.” Lilith sat back, tapping the side of her face. “But you probably wonder why I’m telling you this.”

Widowmaker nodded. “The question occurred to me, yes.”

“Part of it is simply because I want you to understand, when I offer you a Deal, that I am not them. No compulsion. No deception. You will be clear headed and completely aware of everything involved before we agree - and that you have the right to refuse.”

Widowmaker hummed thoughtfully. That made a surprising amount of sense. “And the rest...?”

Lilith’s eyes unfocused slightly. “Because that pain you carry made you strong, but it also made you brittle - which was exactly what Moira intended. To become whole again - to truly realize your potential - you must let it go. Or those chains wrapped around you will never be truly broken, no matter what I do for you.”

“I...am not sure if I can. I do not even know where to begin.”

Lilith’s smile was a bit wistful. “You may have more help than you think.”

Widowmaker looked down at her hands, then back to Lilith. Part of her wanted to look back towards the balcony, but...no.

Emily was right. This was for her, and her alone.

“Very well. Now - tell me your Deal.”

Lilith straightened in her chair, her posture taking on an air of great potential, ready to be unleashed.

“Here is what I offer you: I will break the remaining conditioning and bindings upon you, Widowmaker. I will give you access to your full strength, and the chance to unlock the power that has been sealed in your Heart.”

Widowmaker nodded. “And in return?”

Lilith smiled darkly. “Seeing as how I’m proposing to sever Talon’s hold on you, I think it’s appropriate to offer you a job.”

Widowmaker raised an eyebrow. “You wish me to kill someone?”

Lilith blinked, then laughed at herself. “I should have phrased it a bit differently. No, I don’t
anticipate that, at the moment, but…” She considered her words, this time. “The most direct way to break the power that is being held over you is to make you one of my Servitors. But I have no interest in holding you constantly at my beck and call. You’d be free to do as you like unless I have need of you, and should that day come I will expect you to drop what you’re doing and come running.”

Trading one master for another. A curious bargain for someone who valued freedom so highly, but…

“How long would you plan to...keep me employed?”

Lilith tapped her chin. “Hmm. Shall we say...nine years?”

Widowmaker tilted her head slightly. “Not ten?”

Lilith’s smile had a bit of that same enigmatic flavor that she’d come to associate with Emily. “These things work best in threes. It’s not that bad, though. An eyeblink, really. Like I said - I don’t even know if I would necessarily need to call upon you in that time.”

Widowmaker nodded slowly. “And if you should not?”

Lilith gave a little shrug. “We’ll keep in touch, obviously, and I’ll likely invite you out for a drink. Perhaps we discuss if you’d like to stay on - perhaps not. If you’re of the mind to go another way, I’ll release you, and you’ll be free to do whatever you like.”

Widowmaker considered that. “Like Emily, then?”

That made Lilith pause. “Emily...is not a typical case. But I admit she does as she wishes. Or doesn’t, which is often the problem.”

She couldn’t help but laugh at that.

Lilith joined her, then became serious again. “There’s a few things you should know. As I said - I’m going to make sure you’re completely clear about what things will involve.” She folded her hands into her lap, and made sure she had the complete attention of her audience.

“Being my Servitor also means I will know your Name. Capital N. That’s not something I take lightly, and neither should you. It’s part of how I can call upon you - but it also means I have the ability to compel and command you.”

That did give Widowmaker pause. “Emily said...she thought that Widowmaker might have become my Name. I don’t think I was meant to overhear her, but…”

Lilith shook her head. “No. It is a name - one you’ve used, certainly, but not your Name.”

Widowmaker frowned. “But when Moira asked me…”

“I think, on some level, you understood not to trust her. That your Name needed to be carefully guarded. So you gave her an answer, but perhaps not quite what she wanted.” Lilith smiled thinly. “If she did have your Name, you wouldn’t be here - and she wouldn’t have needed to put that failsafe in place.”

“Failsafe?”

Lilith nodded. “When you heard Emily try to command you, you weren’t just in pain, were you?”
“No…” Widowmaker shook her head. “I wanted...I needed...to return to Talon. To Her. To be reconditioned, so I could forget.”

That got a thoughtful hum. “And when I spoke to Emily, you understood me, didn’t you?”

“...yes.” Widowmaker looked up. “I wanted to ask why I could understand you, but not her.”

Lilith raised an eyebrow. “Care to give me your best guess?”

“You...were not using the same language she was.”

Lilith grinned with obvious delight. “You really are clever. If you do say yes, I’m looking forward to having you on call.”

Widowmaker chewed over the implications of that, and finally took a deep breath. “Are there...any other conditions?”

“Oh,” Lilith smiled. “I should mention you’d be receiving a significant signing bonus.”

Widowmaker blinked. “You are offering me money?”

“God, no, that’s far too pedestrian.” Lilith smiled that crafty little smile again, and Widowmaker still considered slapping her, but she had to admit it was beginning to grow on her. “I’ll give you something much more useful - and valuable. I’ll give you a Word.”

“...a Word?” Widowmaker frowned. “From what Emily told me, that is a rather powerful thing to offer as a ‘bonus’.”

“Perhaps I consider your service that valuable. And consider that my Servitor or not...I cannot un-learn your Name, once I have it.”

*And that, Widowmaker realized, is the TRUE price of my freedom.*

Still - Emily had made a Deal with Lilith, and seemed no worse off. And from everything she had seen, this woman’s value of Freedom above all else made it seem highly unlikely that she would act against her nature by attempting to enslave her the way Talon had.

*Perhaps the secret is that Lillith’s Deal is not as unbalanced as it seems.*

She thought it over while Lilith waited, and then finally nodded. “Very well. I accept your Deal, and your terms.”

“Oh, fantastic. Here I was worried I’d have to do more of a sell job.” Lilith stood, and walked to an open part of the floor. “Now - if you’d like to come over here? It’s *traditional* to be on your knees, but as much as I might enjoy the view I won’t insist on it.”

Widowmaker snorted as she rose. “I think I am beginning to understand why you are Emily’s ex girlfriend.”

“That’s *really* hurtful,” Lilith said dryly. “Especially considering what I’m about to do.”

Widowmaker smirked as she gracefully lowered herself to the floor. “Is this adequate compensation?”

“Ohhh,” Lilith purred, “even if I don’t need you to take care of anything for me I’m going to *enjoy* having you around.” She reached out, placing her hand on a shoulder. “Now - last chance. No harm
done if you decided to back out now, no consequences. You do this willingly and enthusiastically, or not at all. Do you agree to my terms?"

Widowmaker looked up into her eyes without flinching. “Yes.”

Lilith reached out with her other hand, and Widowmaker could feel her drawing some kind of symbol on her forehead with her thumb. Not a pentagram, as she might have expected, or a cross. Something entirely different, with a shape she couldn’t quite define before Lilith placed her hand over it.

<<I am Lilith,>> she sang in a smoky alto, <<The First Woman. The Prodigal. The Princess of Freedom. By our agreement and our bond, I take you as my Servitor, and break the chains that were forged around you. For nine years you shall serve me, and in exchange I bind to you the Word of Reinvention.>>

There was a strange but not unpleasant tingling sensation as Lilith’s song seemed to wrap around her - a warmth from the contact of her hand upon Widowmaker’s forehead that spread until it had filled every part of her. When the two met, it felt as if weights she didn’t know she had been carrying were cast away, her whole being suddenly lightened, and when Lilith named the Word that was to become part of her, she felt a rightness to it that took her breath away.

She felt a itching sensation on her left arm, just above her wrist, and when she looked down, she saw a faint scar that had not been there before - a series of interlocking rings, like a chain, broken by a jagged strike that had shattered what would have been the central link.

Lilith removed her hand, then gently pulled Widowmaker to her feet. “It is done,” she said in formal, almost stilted tones, and then relaxed back into her normal attitude. “How do you feel?”

Widowmaker laughed, because to her delight there was only one answer that truly fit.

“I feel alive.”
Chapter End Notes

Art provided by occasional beta reader and full time amazing creator Sarah!

Thank you so much!
Chapter 37

The payphone rang, but no one moved to answer it.

La Chingada was one of the worst cantinas in the city, and the men (and rarely women) who drank there knew it. You didn’t go to La Chingada by choice. You went there because you’d been kicked out of everywhere else.

The phone rang again.

Normally someone might pick it up. After all, anyone dumb enough to call this shithole deserved to be on the end of a nasty joke, or worse.

But today was the second Wednesday of the month, and everyone knew the phone was not to be touched.

Not if you knew what was good for you, anyway.

It rang for a third time, and it was as if the whole bar was frozen in place. Even Rafael, the bartender who managed to keep the place open by sheer will (and at times, the shotgun that was nestled beneath the bartop) didn’t dare speak. His eyes flicked back and forth between the phone and the door, and when a silhouette could be seen coming out of the mid-afternoon heat, he might have let out a little sigh of relief.

The phone rang for the fourth and final time as a woman’s hand wrapped around the receiver, and pulled it off the hook.

She sat down at the stool that had been placed in front of the phone after her third or fourth visit to La Chingada, and turned so her back would be facing out of the booth before she put the phone to her ear, waiting for the person the other line to speak.

“Hello, Ana.”

For a moment after Ana Amari recognized the voice on the other end of the line, she considered just hanging up. To leave, and tell Jack they were compromised before she went to Gibraltar with a mother’s fury in her heart.

Fortunately for the angel on the other end of the line, Ana’s pragmatism always won out over her temper.

Well, she thought as she reached up to touch her eyepatch, nearly always.

“Good afternoon, Angela. Where is Fareeha?”

It took effort to keep her voice cool and professional, but she managed, and she gave the doctor some credit for doing the same.

“She’s sitting outside my office. I was going to ask her to come in after we spoke, and I will leave the room.”

Ana scowled at the payphone. “Then you have ten words to convince me not to hang up.”

“Ana, please -”
“Eight words,” Ana snapped with just a bit more heat in her voice.

The line went so silent that for a moment Ana wondered if Angela had hung up on her.

“Moira O’Deorain has successfully reverse engineered the Soldier Enhancement Program.”

Ana was so shocked by that answer that she didn’t even take Angela for task for using ten words instead of eight.

“You’re lying.”

Angela’s voice was as quietly grave as Ana could ever remember hearing it. “I very much wish I was.”

“The SEP was utterly destroyed,” Ana said as her voice dropped to a harsh whisper. “Your Superior saw to that.”

Angela refused to rise to the bait. “Apparently much more survived than we had been lead to believe. I am looking at files stolen from O’Deorain’s home as we speak. The complete program, her plans for the ‘next step’, and files on her test subject.”

Ana shivered as she put the pieces together. “Lacroix. She ‘improved’ Lacroix, didn’t she.” Widowmaker’s lightning quick speed, her unnerving precision, the inhuman skin tone and eyes...yes. It all made too much sense.

“Yes, she did.” Angela sounded weary in a way Ana had rarely heard. “And she did not stop there.”

That statement had several implications, and none of them were good. But…

“Why are you telling me this, Angela? What do you want?”

She could hear Angela’s frustrated little sigh. “I am telling you this because I am asking for your help. We have...detained...Widowmaker, but I am certain Moira will want to reclaim her work - and I know I cannot stop her on my own.”

“You have Winston, Lena, and everyone else who responded to his Recall there already.”

“Perhaps, but you know what is really at stake,” Angela countered. “And as angry I am about the way you twisted my work, it means you may be able to help with finding ways to counter Moira’s own...derivatives.”

It made sense, Ana had to admit. Even if Fareeha hadn’t been involved, it would have been a compelling argument. But because she was involved…

“If I agree to help, what are you offering in return?”

“My Superior,” Angela said archly, “as you put it, has given me a free hand to negotiate. Up to and including a pardon for Samuel for his...acts.”

Ana closed her eye and bowed her head, and when she opened it again, she wasn’t surprised that her face was wet with tears.

“And Fareeha?”

Angela’s voice softened. “I swear to you that I will watch over Fareeha to the best of my ability.”
Ana considered that for a long moment. “That could be interpreted several different ways.”

There was real pain in the angel’s voice when she spoke again. “I love her, Ana. But I cannot promise you any more than that.”

Ana scowled. “Because of your duty?”

“No,” Angela answered in what was nearly a monotone. “Because of hers.”

“Then you will have to make certain that ‘the best of your ability’ will be enough.”

She could almost hear Angela slumping in her desk with relief. “So you will come?”

“Yes.” Ana straightened up on the stool. “Now - I would very much like to talk to my daughter.”

“Of course,” Angela agreed. “Just a moment - I’ll have her come in and give you both some privacy.”

Emily hadn’t wanted to listen in on Lilith and Widowmaker. She’d been sincere when she’d told Lena the Deal had to be between the two of them.

Still, she wouldn’t deny being curious, and if Lena hadn’t been out on the balcony with her there was a good chance she’d have ended up with her ear pressed to the glass, trying to find out exactly what was being exchanged.

Thankfully, Lena had some rather lovely ideas about how to distract her.

They were in one of the patio chairs, Lena carefully balancing atop her as they kissed and caressed each other, when Emily felt Lilith’s presence flare up into a blaze as the Deal was struck.

Even though part of her was happy to keep kissing Lena, the rest of her attention was pulled towards the inside of the flat like a moth to a flame by the power that was being unleashed.

It faded after a few moments, but the shift in reality lingered. Widowmaker’s presence had always been a bit murky and difficult to put her finger on before - something she’d put down to the way Talon (or, more properly, Moira) had altered her, but now it had a new clarity - still perhaps a bit cold, but...purer, somehow.

And more dangerous, now? Perhaps...but it was a risk worth taking.

She tried to let herself relax and apply herself back to the task at hand, reaching up to bury her hand in Lena’s hair. The effort was rewarded with a little growl that started deep in her lover’s throat, and Emily broke their kiss to lavish attention on that lovely neck, her hips bucking as Lena started to rock into her.

“Ahem.”

Lena jerked upright, nearly unbalancing the chair, and Emily had to grab the balcony rail to keep them from falling in a heap before she turned to give Lilith a bland look. “Oh, are you finished?”

“Something like that,” Lilith breezed, then gave Lena a look as she stood up and straightened herself out. “Were you really trying to distract me by making out with my ex?”

Lena smirked. “Nah, just showin’ my girl a good time so she wouldn’t have to worry about whatever you were up to inside. The rest was just a bonus.”
Lilith gave a snort. “Well. I’d say exhibition was a new kink for you, darling, but we all know it’s a lie.”

Emily felt her face go red, and ducked her head as she rose. “I do not—”

“Monaco,” Lilith interrupted.

“The point of being an exhibitionist,” Emily countered, “is you expect someone to watch - or to be caught. A private beach doesn’t count.”

“I never said it was private,” Lilith smirked. “I said we weren’t going to be interrupted.”

Anyway,” Emily said as she turned Lilith back around and not-so-gently pushed her towards the door. “The Deal is done?”

“Very much so,” Lilith confirmed as she went inside. “Though I will want to take Amélie out to finish a few last bits of business before I hit the road again.”

“Business?” Lena frowned as she shut the balcony door. “What sort of business?”

“Oh,” Lilith smiled back at them. “I’m not going to have her murder anyone, if that’s what you’re worried about. Just a giving her a bit more instruction in how to handle her new gifts. Or her old ones, properly, now that she’s truly been given control of them.”

“Oh.” Lena thought about that a moment, then nodded. “Guess that’s alright, then.”

“Don’t worry,” Lilith assured her. “She’ll come back to you safe and sound.”

“That’s…” Lena trailed off, and Emily reached out to take her hand, squeezing it reassuringly.

We’re the first people to be half decent to her in years. Maybe the only friends she has left. It’s fine to be worried for her...and she’s certainly decorative, too.

Well. They’d deal with that later, if necessary. Best to just focus on the most important thing, which was making sure Amélie had gotten the help she’d so desperately needed.
“Why are we here?”

Widowmaker hadn’t really been sure what to expect when Lilith had taken her from the apartment and ushered her down to a street corner where a cab seemed to have been waiting for them.

Arriving at a hospital wasn’t really on her list, though, and certainly not the hospice care ward.

Lilith turned around. “I told you before - a bit of instruction. Consider it your last lesson, at least from me. Emily can handle the rest.”

She frowned as she took a few steps closer. “But you would not allow her to teach me this?”

Lilith’s normal smirk turned to a more sober frown. “No. Not in this case. She could ... but I think it would be better if I took this one.”

Widowmaker raised an eyebrow, waiting for her to elaborate.

“You can’t rely on Emily’s little battery to feed off of,” Lilith finally said. “You need to know what to do - and from what I’ve seen, I think you’ll find this...enlightening.”

Lilith turned to walk down the hallway, and Widowmaker followed until they reached a specific room.

Inside, a man slept in a hospital bed, his skin almost paper white, his frail body swallowed up beneath the IV line and a web of monitoring leads.

“Edward Frese,” Lilith read quietly from his chart. “Fifty eight years old. Diffuse intrinsic pontine giloma - a cancer that started in his brain stem, spread through the cerebellum and down through his spinal cord.” She shook her head as she closed the chart and put it back into place at the foot of the bed. “Inoperable, obviously. Nothing more to do but keep him comfortable until he dies or the insurance money runs out.”

Widowmaker felt a pang of something very much like sympathy. “An ugly way to die.”

Lilith nodded. “I agree. So - we’re going to arrange something a bit kinder. Or, rather, you are.”

“I don’t understand.”

Lilith’s smile was muted now. “You will. Now - Emily gave you some instruction on taking on your mortal form, and you obviously figured out how to get back to the state Talon had you in. But it’s time you move past that. Time you knew who - and what - you really are.”

Widowmaker looked down at the man in the bed, who still slept peacefully despite their presence. Whatever Lilith had planned, it seemed it would involve his death.

She remembered Gérard’s sleeping form beneath her, and shuddered at the memory of cutting his throat.

*Is that what I truly am?*
Lilith seemed to sense her turmoil, and walked over to place a hand on her shoulder. “Don’t worry. This...is an act of kindness, for both of you. I promise. Just close your eyes.”

Widowmaker let out the breath she’d been holding, and closed her eyes. She placed her hands on the footboard of the bed to steady herself, and waited.

“Your Heart was chained. Locked. Crippled,” Lilith explained quietly, her voice seeming to fill the room even though she was speaking just as softly as before. “I’m not entirely convinced Moira knew, at first. She was simply too caught up in her desire to master Creation to notice her ‘errors’, and then would have set about correcting the ‘flaws’ in her procedures.”

Widowmaker remained quiet, but couldn’t help but smirk a little at the annoyance in Lilith’s voice.

“I’ve broken those chains,” Lilith said, “but there is one last thing you need before you’ll truly take the form you’ve had waiting inside of you. And once I give it to you...I think the rest will be relatively easy.”

Lilith seemed to be right beside her now, and Widowmaker could feel the warmth of her breath as she began to murmur a song in that same language she’d used before.

<<Your Name is Amélie Marie Guillard, and it always was. Even she did not have the power to change that.>>

Somehow the use of her full name in the celestial tongue brought a clarity to it that Widowmaker - that Amélie - had never had before. More than a name, each word seemed to carry volumes and volumes of meaning. A life - before and after - encapsulated in each one.

As she looked inwards, reaching for that power inside of herself, it felt as if a piece she hadn’t realized was missing had finally fallen into place. She drew it up and let it flow out of herself, and this time the chill was not numbing, but bracing. The sensation of stepping out of a warm house to newly fallen snow, or slipping beneath cool water on a blisteringly hot day.

It washed over her and through her, and suddenly she knew her Name, in every way that mattered, and knew that she could be Widowmaker, be Amélie Lacroix, be Amélie Guillard, and each was true, correct, and valid. Aspects of the whole being she now was. Each with their own times and places.

The Word that had been bound to her seemed to fill Amélie with a sense of rightness as she took a moment to process it all, and when she opened her eyes, everything seemed to be clearer than before.

Is this what it is like to feel so alive?

She heard Lilith suck in a sharp breath from behind her, and Widowmaker felt her wings twitch slightly in response.

“Well.” Lilith coughed, and then pointed to the mirror mounted by the room’s closet. “I was expecting something like that, but I’m still quite impressed. Take a look, would you?”

When she reached the mirror, it took her a moment to process everything she was seeing.

Her skin was a deeper, richer blue now. The color of the twilight sky just before the night, the glow of her golden eyes like the first evening stars.

She was no longer wearing the street clothes she’d walked in with, but was wrapped in a loose black gown with accents of bone white, her arms and shoulders bare to allow for the skeletal, almost
chitinous looking wings with leathery membranes that stretched and flexed as if ready to catch the wind.

Instead of the lustrous blue and black, her hair had turned perfectly white, spilling loose down one shoulder, and she could see faint scars along each of her cheekbones, making them even sharper against the rest of her features, and when she looked closely there were similarly raised patterns in the membranes of her wings that put her in mind of a spider’s webs spreading through the surface.

“What…” She put a hand to the mirror, stunned. “What am I?”

“Something new,” Lilith answered as she came up behind her, gently placing one hand on her shoulder. “Or something very old, depending on how you look at it.”

Widowmaker reached up to brush her hand away, the little twist of fear at her own reflection blending with the frustration in her voice. “Could all of you stop speaking in riddles?!”

Lilith sighed. “It does get to be a habit, I’m afraid.” She stepped around her so she was looking at Widowmaker directly. “You see - Moira was attempting to transform you from a human to some form of demon. But she didn’t really consider what that meant - not just for your soul, but for the materials she was using in the process.”

“The dead have always been a...complicated matter,” Lilith continued to explain. “The Pit trying to claim some, the heavens others. Some souls not wanting to leave the fetters of their old existence behind. Souls that needed to be guided, or released.” Lilith reached out to take her hands, palm to palm.

“The angels had the elohim. The judges, and seekers. The ones who weighed them in the balance, and took those worthy of paradise, or redemption, and left the rest. But the pit…” Lilith looked up. “Before the Fall, there were those who filled the same functions, before many of the Fallen took their place - often by destroying their predecessors. Some called them Reapers. Some called them Punishers. But they called themselves the Halaku.”

“And I...have become one?” She tilted her head slightly.

“Close to one, at least. I had wondered if you might be closer to a Habbalite - the name that most of the Fallen elohim chose for themselves - but I wasn’t quite on the mark.”

“Then I am to punish this man?” Widowmaker frowned as she turned to look back at the guttering flame of a life that lay in the bed, barely strong enough to maintain itself. “You said this would be an act of kindness.”

“As I said, that was what others called them.” Lilith walked to the side of the bed, and gently put a hand on Frese’s head. “The point of...well, of both sides, really, was not to punish, but to take away the old, and allow for the new. Just like you did. There’s no punishment needed - all you need to do is help him let go.”

She walked slowly around the bed, wings settling themselves against her back. She felt a little tug at something within her at Lilith’s words. Some part of her that knew what had to be done, if she would just follow it.

As Lilith stepped away from the bed, Widowmaker stroked his forehead, gently smoothing what little hair the man had left, then leaned down to gently press her lips to his.

The kiss was brief and chaste, but in that moment she could feel the essence of him, trapped in this sick, broken shell.
It is time, she told him as she gently embraced his essence with her own. You have done enough.

She felt the weak hold he had maintained on his life slip away, what little strength he had to give offered up to her while the rest of him faded away like the final notes of a song echoing in a concert hall.

His body went still, and out of the corner of her eye she noticed Lilith lightly touching the monitors to silence the alarms.

“We’ll have a few minutes,” Lilith explained. “They wouldn’t really notice you right now, anyway, but it’s better if we’re gone before anyone notices.”

Widowmaker walked back to the mirror and concentrated on drawing herself back as Emily had shown her. Faster, and easier this time. Without the painful resistance she’d felt before.

Amélie was pleased to see her clothes were back to normal as well. It would have been rather awkward to explain where they’d went.

They left the room in silence, and didn’t discuss the matter again until they’d reached a Starbucks a few blocks away.

“Will it always be like that?”

Lilith shrugged. “That’s up to you. It’s certainly one way it can go. You’ll be able to find them now - or take them, as you did when Talon made you kill for them to feed yourself. But I think you’ll find it easier to release, for now, than to ravage.”

Amélie considered that. “I was feeding every six months. Now…?”

“Now is up to you,” Lilith said before taking a sip of her coffee. “You’ll know when you need to. You’re an adult, Amélie. You can tell the difference between need and want, and I imagine you’ll decide what to do from there.”

Amélie stirred a packet of sugar into her coffee, and watched as the splash of cream she’d added swirled into the darker liquid. “When I...took from others. From Lena. It hurt them. Even if I enjoyed it. This was...different.”

“Those others - even Lena - had something in common.” Lilith raised a challenging eyebrow. “Care to guess?”

Amélie shook her head. “No. I want you to explain.”

Lilith rolled her eyes. “You’re really not making this fun, you know.”

“If you wanted fun, you would have brought Emily and Lena along to tease them.” Amélie put her spoon down and locked eyes with her. “This is business.”

“So it is,” Lilith admitted. “Killers. Every one. Even Lena. Perhaps done for the right reasons - perhaps not. But each and every one has taken other lives, and each was being taken before their time in turn.”

“Then that pain was their punishment for their actions?” Amélie considered that. “While the man I helped today…”

“He was a good man. Not to say that Lena isn’t a good woman - she seems decent, if a bit easy to
wind up. But he’d never been a soldier, a fighter, or anything like that.” Lilith looked away, her gaze
distant as she turned towards the window. “And it was his time.”

Amélie’s eyebrows rose. “Who was he to you?”

“Technically no one,” Lilith said as she turned back to her coffee. “But his grandfather and I had a
Deal once...and I decided I might do both of you a favor.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to Beta Reader / Awesome person Sarah, we have this gorgeous art of
Widowmaker's demon form!

Also, check out this beautiful commission of Emily done by Atheris!
Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Emily felt Widowmaker return, in a very real sense of the word. Where her presence before had been an oddly muted sensation, it blazed like a torch now, making her quite aware that another demon had come to her home.

She still felt...off, somehow. Or perhaps the better word was unfamiliar. There was something in her presence that Emily felt she should recognize, but couldn’t quite put her finger on it.

“Lena? Could you get the door?”

Lena frowned as she looked up from where she’d been pretending to watch the TV. “Did I miss the bell?”

“No,” Emily began, but a firm knock interrupted her. “It’s...well, you heard.”

“Right, ok!”

When Lena returned, she wasn’t surprised that Amélie was alone. Lilith had said she was wrapping up, and she didn’t care to linger after making a Deal unless she expected there was another to be made.

She wasn’t exactly sure she had missed Lilith, but Emily was at least glad they’d parted on better terms than their last meeting.

“So,” she smiled to Amélie as she returned her attention to the matter at hand. “How did it go?”

Amélie seemed to consider that as she took off her coat, hanging it on one of the hooks before she finally gave them an answer. “Well, I think.” She turned back, giving them each a long look. “Perhaps it would be easier to show you.”

Lena took a step back, a little frown on her face. “Is that...I don’t know. Allowed?” She turned to Emily with a raised eyebrow. “You said there were, y’know, rules.”

“Well, yes,” Emily admitted as she put a reassuring hand on Lena’s arm. “But that was more about the Deal itself - it had to be between Amélie and Lilith. For this? Not so much.” She gave Amélie a smile and a wink. “Nothing wrong with showing off a bit, I suppose. Past that, anything you wish to tell us about the Deal is your choice. We don’t have to know, and you don’t have to tell us if you don’t want to.”

Amélie nodded, then rolled up the sleeve of her blouse to show them her arm. “I do not think she would mind me showing you this.”

Emily saw the new mark on her arm and took a sharp breath. “That... oh. Yes, I suppose that would explain what she meant about the cost.” She met Amélie’s eyes, worrying at her lip a moment as she worked up the courage for the obvious question. “How long?”

“Nine years,” Amélie answered. “She said it was...not very much time, really.”

“No,” Emily admitted. “Not for us, anyway.”
Lena’s brows knit as she looked between them. “Nine years? Nine years of what?”

“Service,” Emily explained. “Or...well. *Servitude*, really, though she doesn’t treat it that way.” She walked over and let her fingers hover just above the mark. “May I?”

Amélie shrugged. “I seem to recall being told I was the one who could not touch you.”

Emily gave her a little look. “I also told you that consent was important. So, I am asking for yours.”

Amélie tilted her head slightly, then nodded. “Very well.”

“Right.” Emily reached out and tried not to shiver at the icy intensity of Amélie’s spirit. What had been a dull, aching sort of chill in her fingertips the last time she’d touched her skin was now a bracing cold, like stepping out onto fresh snow. “So - you see what looks like a scar here?”

“Yeah,” Lena nodded along. “It’s...kind of pretty? Looks like you had it done at a shop or something.”

Emily gave a little snort. “Or something, yes. This is essentially a brand - a mark given to show who she serves. A sign that she is, at least for now, at Lilith’s command as one of her servitors. She broke the chains Talon put on you by essentially claiming you as one of her own.”

Amélie nodded. “A temporary arrangement, compared to Talon’s perpetual one.” She took her arm back, and rolled the sleeve back down. “In exchange...she said that she unlocked the power that Talon had kept from me, and gave me...something else.”

Emily nodded. “Yes, I thought she might.”

“Might what?” Lena looked between them, clearly a bit frustrated at not being able to follow everything. “You’re saying there was something else?”

“A Word,” Amélie answered before Emily could. “My...signing bonus.”

Lena sucked in a sharp breath. “Not... *your* Word?”

Emily shook her head quickly. “No, I shouldn’t think so. It wasn’t...I can’t imagine it would have fit this situation, and mine was far from the only one that Lilith would have to give.” She looked thoughtfully over at Amélie, who had crossed her arms over her chest. “She might have even created a new one. I know it’s possible, though it takes quite a lot of power.”

Amélie shrugged again. “I cannot say, but I know it is *mine* now.”

“As it should,” Emily agreed, then couldn’t help her curiosity. “So...if she did all that, did she show you how to change your semblance, finally?”

Amélie’s answer didn’t come in words. Instead, she bowed her head a moment and closed her eyes. It took a few moments longer than when Emily took on her own demonic form, but that wasn’t a surprise. She was sure it would come in time.

The deep blue of her skin made Emily think of a moonless night, and the golden glow of her eyes were like stars, piercing out of that darkness. The snow white hair was interesting, but the *wings*...those were captivating.

She knew her jaw had dropped when those came into being, and it took an effort to resist her urge to kneel at the sight.
Widowmaker was, knowingly or not, a very powerful being, and was likely to become even more powerful as she learned to control her abilities.

“Oh,” Lena breathed in a mix of surprise and shock, “hell.”

That got a dry snort from both Emily and Widowmaker, and she couldn’t resist taking on her own form with a smirk. “That’s rather accurate, yes.”

Lena approached Widowmaker cautiously and gestured to her wings. “So do those actually let you fly?”

“I have not actually tried,” she admitted with a tinge of bashfulness. “I did not think it was wise to attempt it in the middle of the afternoon.”

“No,” Emily agreed as she took her mortal form again. “Generally we can step around things like cameras and video, but people could still see you, which might cause a problem.”

“What about when you met Angie?” Lena tilted her head slightly. “You said she was…”

“That was different,” Emily interrupted. She really didn’t want to complicate things by letting Angela’s true nature slip just yet. “And the simple answer is she cheated.”

Amélie folded herself back into her human semblance with a frown, then looked suspiciously between the two of them. “Angela Ziegler…knows about this?”

“Yeah,” Lena confirmed with a nod. “Well…basically, you might say.”

She’d expected Amélie to react with surprise or annoyance, but instead her eyes flashed with anger. “Then how did she not understand what Talon - what Moira did to me?”

“Because she likely didn’t realize she needed to look,” Emily answered her in a gentler tone as she put a soothing hand on Amélie’s bicep. “Keep in mind that with everything that happened...she would have been looking for physical or chemical causes, not supernatural ones - and that in any case it’s clear Talon hid their work well.”

Something in her words and the contact seemed to reach Amélie. She closed her eyes for a moment, then took a deep breath and let it out. “I suppose you are right.”

“It’s hard,” Lena said reassuringly. “Knowing someone might have changed things. Might have stopped it if they’d noticed something, or double-checked. Believe me, I know. But...it happened. Can’t change that. Just have to figure out the best ways to go on.”

“I suppose you would know,” Amélie admitted as she walked to the couch, settling down on it before she spoke again. “Lilith said I will need to learn to let go of my pain. Of my guilt for….” She stopped, and seemed to steel herself. “For Gérard.”

Lena let out a sigh of her own. She knew those feelings all too well. “It’s not easy. Took me a few years before I really started to deal with the Slipstream. Still am, some ways.”

Amélie gave a nod, and the ghost of a smile appeared on her lips. “I was told...I might have more help than I thought.”

“When it helps to talk, we can both listen,” Emily said as she sat down next to her. “When you just need some distraction, we’d be happy to do that too.”
“But for how long?” Amélie gave Lena a speculative look. “You will need to report back to Overwatch eventually.”

“Sure,” she agreed. “But c’mon, luv. We both know time is on my side.”

Emily groaned at the line, but Amélie didn’t chuckle or scoff as Lena had expected. She just tilted her head slightly, as if considering her, then nodded.

“Yes,” she agreed quietly. “I suppose it is.”

Chapter End Notes

Holy crap, 1000 kudos! Thank you all!
Angela found it oddly appropriate that the skies had grown grey and overcast as she’d driven from the old Watchpoint down to the Port of Gibraltar.

Part of her wondered if she should have asked Fareeha to come with her, but all things considered it was probably for the best to do this alone.

After all, she and Ana had quite a bit to discuss, and much of it concerned matters that neither of them were ready for Fareeha to know.

She turned down the service road that lead through the harbor, turning away from the cruise terminals to head for the cargo docks.

She’d just reached the chain link fences to keep the general public away when she saw a woman standing at the side of the road and pulled to the side so she could let her in.

Ana was dressed as if she had been a cruise liner passenger who had gotten a bit lost waiting for her taxi, complete with chintzy sunglasses and a broad straw hat over her falls of silver and white hair.

The only thing to ruin the masquerade was the heavy looking rifle case that she carried in one hand, and the army surplus duffel that she slung into the back seat.

“You look as if you had a lovely trip,” Angela observed in as neutral a voice as she could manage while she put the car back on the road.

Ana gave a little chuckle. “Certainly not like a woman who stowed away on a cargo ship from Altamira. One of the nice boys who thought I was lost even offered to carry my bags.”

She smiled at the joke, then considered the next topic to approach. “I had wondered if Jack would come with you.”

Ana shook her head. “He prefers not to come to Gibraltar if he can avoid it. Even if everyone knows who he is under that mask, it’s easier for him to pretend otherwise when he’s in the field.”

“And his...condition?”

“Fine,” Ana’s voice had cooled a few degrees from her earlier warmth. “He seems completely in control right now. Nothing unexpected or signs of...degeneration.”

Angela gave an interested hum, hoping Ana would continue.

“We had been hoping to get some sign of Gabriel :-)”

“Reaper,” Angela insisted as her hands tightened on the steering wheel.

She could hear Ana rolling her eyes. “Please, Angela. I know that what happened at the headquarters must have hurt you, but he’s still :-)”

“No,” Angela interrupted again. “He isn’t.”
“That’s an interesting position for you to hold,” Ana said casually, “considering you’ve been - what did you call it? *Detaining* Widowmaker.”

“Amélie Lacroix was an unwilling participant,” Angela objected, trying to keep her eyes locked on the road. “Reaper, on the other hand…”

“Gabriel and Jack didn’t know what the SEP had done to them, either,” Ana pointed out, “and everything that happened started there. Is it really so different?”

Angela was torn between the desire to pull the car over and have a proper argument and to get Ana to the Watchpoint and get away from her for as long as she needed to cool her temper.

In the end, knowing that she *did* need Ana’s help won out, and they drove the rest of the way in a tense silence.

Once she’d shown Ana to her room, Angela retreated to her office and began to pull the files from Moira’s research to review later, becoming so absorbed that she hadn’t realized someone had come in until Ana startled her by speaking.

“I am sorry, Angela.”

Angela took a deep breath as she tried to collect herself, then looked to where Ana stood in her doorway, the tourist disguise replaced with well worn grey BDUs, the black eyepatch a painful reminder of how much Ana had suffered in their war.

“Gabriel was our friend,” Ana continued on, “but for most of the younger members - Genji, Jesse, Fareeha, you - he was very much a father figure.” She tilted her head slightly. “Perhaps the only one you ever really had.”

Angela tensed, the muscles of her shoulders bunching as if she was defensively curling and flaring her wings, and she had to make sure she was still in her human semblance before she stood. “Gabriel Reyes was a good man, but he died, Ana. What returned...it may have his memories. It may have his *voice*, but...it is not him.”

“I don’t believe that,” Ana said firmly, “and neither does Jack. The man beneath that mask is the same we knew. He may have done terrible things, but it *is* Gabriel.”

Angela just shook her head, then picked up the tablet she’d been setting up and offered it to her rather than continue the discussion. “Here is everything we took from Moira’s files.”

Ana took it and began to scan the list of files. “And Widowmaker? Where are you keeping her?”

“She is...off site,” Angela said carefully. “But I promise you, Amélie has been secured.”

The look on Ana’s face made it clear that had done little to placate her. “I believe I have heard something like that before.”

“I admit I was a bit skeptical myself at first,” Angela admitted, “but Lena seems to have matters well in hand.”

Ana’s entire body radiated shock. “*Lena* has no idea -”

“Ana,” Angela held up her hand to interrupt. “Lena is more involved than any of us knew.”

Ana’s eyebrow rose. “Because of her accident?”
“In a sense,” Angela said as she sat down again. “But properly, she is... literally involved with the War, thanks to her girlfriend.”

“The one in London?” Ana looked at her with increasing confusion. “Fareeha said she worked in a bookstore.”

“...perhaps you should sit down.”

Ana had begun to feel a dull pounding behind her missing eye during their conversation about Gabriel, and the explanation of just how Lena had managed to find herself in a relationship with a demon had done nothing to improve her headache.

She’d retreated to the quarters that had been set up for her in an attempt to take some aspirin, lie down, and read a few of the files Angela had provided, but that hadn’t been as successful as she would have liked.

The SEP documents were maddeningly vague and deliberately obtuse when discussing several of their ‘sources’ and the ‘formulations’ given to each candidate, and while Moira had been much more precise about their composition, the sheer volume of her research notes was enough to overwhelm the reader.

It would have been a challenging exercise to absorb it all, even if she hadn’t continued to boggle at the fact that Lena Oxton, charming, energetic, almost impossibly good natured Lena, was sharing her bed with a creature of the Pit.

I suppose it does make me a bit of a hypocrite, she admitted to herself as she finally dropped the tablet on the bedside table, but Sam’s situation is rather different.

After all, it was one thing for an Angel to be barred from heaven, and quite another to be cast out like the Fallen. And ‘Emily’ had been born of the infernal realm.

Still, from what Angela said of the promises Emily had made to protect Lena, she had to admit that the succubus probably would be able to defend her from whatever Amélie Lacroix had become.

She sat up with a sigh and looked around the room for her sandals.

A nice hot cup of tea wouldn’t fix anything, but hopefully she’d at least feel better once she’d finished it.

Unfortunately, the first thing she saw as the door to the kitchen slid open was Angela sitting at a table with her daughter, sharing a meal in a companionable silence that spoke volumes about the state of their relationship.

Oh, Fareeha. You have no idea what kind of pain you are setting yourself up for.

She tried to keep her concern and disapproval off her face, but it was clear she hadn’t been terribly successful when Fareeha looked over to her, the smile on her daughter’s face not quite reaching her eyes.

“Mother.” Fareeha didn’t quite stiffen to attention, but the easy comfort she’d shown a moment ago was gone. “Angela said you had come in. Did you have a nice trip?”

“As nice as a container ship can be;,” she replied as she began to fill the teapot with water. “You’re looking well, dear. How have you been?”
She could hardly miss the way Fareeha’s eyes lingered on Angela, or the way the angel’s cheeks grew pink under her attention. “Better than I have in...quite a while.”

Ana hummed and busied herself with the tea. She really didn’t wish to aggravate things further tonight if she could avoid it.

“I am sure you two would like some time to catch up,” Angela said as she stood and took her plate to the sink.

Fareeha frowned as she followed with her own dishes. “You don’t have to go.”

“It’s all right,” Angela assured her as she stopped to kiss Fareeha’s cheek. “I have a few things to finish in the lab. Just find me when you’re done.”

“Alright,” Fareeha relented as she returned the kiss. “I’ll see you later, then.”

Ana waited for the tea to steep, then settled into the chair that Angela had left.

“You don’t approve,” Fareeha observed as she sat back down.

“I didn’t say that,” Ana objected before she took a sip of the mint blend. “But I admit to being...surprised.”

“You two were friends once,” Fareeha pointed out, and Ana grimaced.

“Things changed, habibi.”

Fareeha shrugged. “Nothing says they couldn’t change again. Personally, I would like it if my mother and my girlfriend got along.”

Ana had to swallow her first reaction. Telling Fareeha that it would be much easier to get along with Angela if she didn’t have to worry about the day where the angel might attempt to kill her daughter was not going to improve the situation. “I came when she asked for help. Isn’t that a start at...getting along?”

“I suppose it is,” Fareeha admitted, then sat back. “So - have you talked to Sam lately?”

“No,” she admitted, “but I will after I’ve finished helping Angela go through O’Deorain’s work.”

Fareeha’s pleased smile was a nice break from the tension and disappointment. “I think he’d like that.”

Yes, Ana thought as she sipped her tea. *Especially depending on the news we have to share.*

Chapter End Notes

Sorry, I know it’s been a while. Life has been...a lot, to put it simply. But this story is not abandoned, and never was.

Hope you enjoyed this chapter - more soon!
“I think we missed something.”

Angela frowned as she looked up from her latest attempt to investigate Moira’s work. “I’m sorry, I don’t understand.”

Ana turned the file she’d been reading so Angela could see. “This note - did you catch it?”

The file was a discussion of some of the SEP practices, one that she’d skimmed and then forgotten in favor of trying to decipher more of Moira’s more recent work.

As she read the highlighted note, Angela had to admit that may have been a mistake.

While Lacroix was a flawed success, the fact remains that she helped prove that the work begun by the SEP could be taken to the next logical step.

Given her imperfections, I have no real issue with allowing ‘Widowmaker’ to be placed entirely under Talon’s control, and the bindings that have been placed upon her will ensure compliance.

But the next will be mine, and mine alone. I simply need to find a suitable candidate for the process.

20-NOV-2071

“You think she found her ‘suitable candidate’, then?”

Ana nodded. “It’s been five years since that note. With the resources Moira has access to between Oasis and Talon, I think it’s quite likely she’s done this to someone else.”

“Mm. Knowing her urge to ‘perfect’ her work, I’m afraid you’re probably right.” Angela’s stomach lurched as she considered the fact that someone else was likely out there, bound into Moira’s service directly. Would they even truly understand what had been done to them? It made her want to put her head into her hands.

This situation is perilously close to getting out of control.

Lena smiled as she made her way inside Watchpoint Gibraltar. Being home with Emily had been wonderful, but it had also made her very aware of how much needed to be done to stop Talon.

At least things with Amélie are pretty under control.

She wasn’t entirely sure she understood everything that had happened during Lilith’s visit - wasn’t sure she could, really - but Amélie seemed much calmer. Settled. Not the blank, expressionless behavior she’d shown as Widowmaker, either. She’d seen plenty of Widowmaker’s negative emotions - frustration, anger, irritation - but it had been quite an experience to watch her laughing at something on TV, or to listen as she discussed the book she’d been reading with Emily.

She’s a person, Lena thought as she wove her way towards Winston’s lab. Who would have guessed.
That train of thought kept her occupied until she reached the lab door and gave it a good knock.

“Winston? You home, luv?”

An unexpected voice answered, sending a shiver of surprised recognition up her spine.

“I believe he’s down in the workshop right now.”

Lena turned, unable to keep the shock out of her voice. “Cap?!!”

She’d heard rumors that Ana Amari had somehow survived, but seeing her in the flesh was something else again.

The black eyepatch was the most obvious change, but the lines of age and wear on her face had deepened, and the hair that had once been grey was now a pure white.

Ana’s smile seemed a bit melancholy, but there was a genuine fondness in her eye as she looked her up and down. “Hello, Lena.”

In the space of two steps and a quick blink, she had the older woman wrapped up into a hug. “I never expected to see you again!”

Ana rocked a bit with the impact, but after a moment’s hesitation her arms came up to return the embrace. “It’s good to see you, too.”

“So...are you back?” She took a few steps back, cocking her head slightly. “Does Fareeha...know?”

Ana looked away at the mention of her daughter. “She knows. She has known for some time. But I was hoping to run into you, actually.”

“Oh?”

Ana nodded. “I am here because of what you found in O’Deorain’s home. I wanted to ask you a few questions about that - and what you’ve been up to.”

Lena nodded, trying to keep her sudden nervousness off her face. “Oh, ok. Not sure there’s much to tell, but I’ll answer what I can!”

“Good. Would you join me for a cup of tea?”

Five minutes later Lena had a steaming cup of mint tea in her hands, but felt no less confused as she watched Ana finish preparing her own cup and settle down in the chair across from her.

“So - I understand you’ve met someone special?”

She couldn’t help the smile that came to her face. “Emily? Yeah. She’s wonderful - honestly, I’ve never met anyone quite like her.”

Ana savored a sip of her tea, nodding, before she put her cup back onto the saucer. “I imagine not. Demons are not terribly common, after all.”

Lena’s blood felt like it had turned to ice water, and the tea she’d drunk had transformed into a slowly cooling ball of lead in her stomach. “Demons? Wha...why would you say that?”

“Don’t lie to me, dear. You have a terrible face for it.” Ana brought her hands together in her lap, her eye gleaming. “Now - let’s try that again.”
For a moment she sat and stared down at her tea, unable to meet Ana’s gaze until she finally managed to find her voice again. “Sorry, Cap.”

Ana reached out and put a hand on her shoulder with surprising gentleness, her tone softening. “I understand, Lena. More than you know.”

Her head shot up, and Lena would swear her eyebrows hit her hairline. “You do? Does that mean…”

Ana smiled a bit mysteriously as she leaned back and picked up her mug again. “Let’s just say I’ve been in...a similar situation. So - Emily, was it?”

“Yeah.” Lena would swear she could feel her heart starting to beat again. “Met her at my local when some of her friends at the bookshop convinced her to go out for drinks one night, but didn’t get to really talk to her until I ran into her again at Pride. Went out on dates where we could, moved in together not too long after, and...well. Here we are.”

“I am glad you’re happy together, Lena. This life...it is rarely kind to us, or to those we love.”

Her words hung in the air as they sat there, until Ana finally dropped the other shoe.

“I must admit I’m also very interested in hearing about your...houseguest.”

Lena bit the inside of her lip to keep herself from blurting anything else out until she had a second to think about what to say.

“I don’t know how much I can say about that, Cap. I think it might be good if I talked to Angie or Winston first.”

Ana smiled over the rim of her teacup. “I’m impressed that you’re finally learning a bit about operational security. I remember that report from London after you blurted out practically the entire security protocol to that barmaid. Naomi, wasn’t it?”

There was nothing Lena could do but sputter into her tea, but to her relief Ana held up a hand. “Feel free to speak to Angela - though as I said, I am studying those files you retrieved, and she’s discussed in quite a few of them. My only request is you do not mention anything to Fareeha about her - or Emily’s...heritage.”

“Oh. Well, yeah, ok. Far as I know Angie’s the only one who was in on the joke.”

Ana nodded with approval. “Then let’s keep it that way unless absolutely necessary.”

“Angela? Are you in there?”

Angela’s eyelids fluttered open as she lifted her head off her desk with a groan. “Nnngh. Yes?”

The office door slid open, and Fareeha gave a soft sigh as she walked inside. “I thought you were going to stop working all night.”

“I know, I know…” Rolling her neck back and forth, she stood and stretched her arms as far as she could to help pop the kinks from her back and neck. “Your mother found something in Moira’s notes. I’ve been trying to see if I can learn more.”

“All the more reason to get some sleep.” Fareeha gave a severe look, then leaned in to kiss her cheek. “You need a break.”
“I can’t -”

“Yes,” Fareeha insisted gently, “you can. Come get some breakfast, take a nap, and then go into town with me. Lena is back and I was going to take her to do some shopping.”

“It... would be nice to catch up with Lena. I’ve been getting her reports about Widowmaker, but that’s rather different than just sitting down with a coffee for a talk.”

“So there you go,” Fareeha smiled, and Angela couldn’t help but smile back. “The files will be there when we get back.”

I...suppose there’s no real harm in it, is there?

It’s not as if we expect to fight another one of Moira’s ‘candidates’ any time soon.

She let Fareeha lead her away from the desk, then drew her arm back so she could give her a gentle kiss.

“Thank you for coming to check on me.”

Fareeha’s smile could have lit the heavens. “Trust me, it was my pleasure.”
After all the upheavals, Emily had to admit it was rather pleasant to get back to the shop and just be a perfectly normal girl for a few hours. Working the register, stocking the shelves, indulging in a bit of banter with her friends.

“Excuse me, miss - do you work here?”

Oh. Yes. And helping customers, of course.

She put on her best customer service smile before turning around to face the woman who had spoken, her mouth already on autopilot.

“Yes, I do - how may I help you?”

The woman she now faced was just slightly shorter than her with white hair done up in an elaborate bun. Emily’s eyes were drawn to the shockingly pink fur trimmed jacket that looked like it cost twice her yearly pay, overwhelming the dark high necked blouse and pristine white trousers tucked into black leather boots that she wore beneath it.

“I was looking to see if ya’ll might carry any Western novels?”

“Hm.” Emily considered that, reaching up to tap a finger against her chin. “I can think of several kinds, actually. Is there a particular style or genre you had in mind?”

The woman smirked slightly, her eyes twinkling with mischief. “Romance, mystery, crime...all of the above’s even better, if you take my meaning.”

Emily smiled back as she considered that. “Hmm. Yes, I think I just might. If you’ll come this way, I think we have something that may suit you.”

“Oh, it’ll be my pleasure,” the woman drawled, and something at the back of Emily’s mind shivered.

The woman certainly had a rather lovely voice, and it was all too easy for her to imagine how it would sound in the throes of passion, those lovely boots thrown over her shoulders.

No. No, I don’t need that, thank you. I have quite enough at home!

Her imagination didn’t quite take the hint she wanted, the little daydream shifting as she walked towards the shelves where mysteries were kept, imagining Amélie in all her newfound demonic glory spread out beneath her like a feast while Lena rode that lovely face.

Focus! You can’t lose control here!

Emily’s fingernails dug into her palms as she clenched her hands in front of her, feeling the bite of claws against skin before she finally pulled herself together, hands returning to normal as she reached for a recently published hardback. “I think this might be to your taste, miss...?”

“Ashe,” the woman introduced herself with a sultry smile, and when she took the book their fingers brushed together, sending a spark up Emily’s spine that had nothing to do with the little sip of energy she’d just taken. “And you are?”

“I...ah..Emily,” she stuttered. “I’m Emily. Very nice to meet you.”

Ashe gave a little wink as she took the book and tucked it under her arm. “Oh, now I’m sure the
pleasure’s all mine.” She picked another up, examined the jacket and took it with her as she turned, the tails of her coat doing an interesting little swirl.

“So - I know how much the books run - but just how expensive would it be to get your number?”

Emily blushed at the compliment, but managed to keep her composure and her imagination in check. “Seeing as I have a girlfriend, I’m afraid it’s not for sale.”

That made Ashe laugh, turning back enough to catch Emily with one eye. “Everything’s for sale, darlin’.”

Something about that attitude made the flames of her hunger gutter as if Ashe had poured a bucket of water over them, and it made it easier to shake her head without an ounce of regret.

“You know the old saying: If you have to ask, you can’t afford it.”

“Hmph.” Ashe gave a little roll of her eyes as she huffed and turned back towards the register. “Your loss.”

Now she was very glad she’d given the woman the brush off. “I’m sure,” she continued in her best polite customer service voice. “But I do hope you stop in to visit us again.”

She waited until Ashe had disappeared around the corner, then made her way towards the back where Stefan was working on inventory.

“Is Chrisann on register?”

“Yeah,” he confirmed with a nod. “What’s up?”

“Woman in pink with a rather obnoxious hat. She didn’t seem very interested in taking no for an answer.”

Stefan’s face hardened and he straightened up to his full height. “Right. I’ll give Chrissy a little wave in case she needs help and make sure Ms. Hat gets on her way.”

Emily smiled gratefully. The staff of their shop really had become a little family of sorts, and it was nice when they looked after each other. “Thanks so much. Do you mind if I take my break a little early?”

“Not at all - I’ll cover it if anything comes up. Go text your girlfriend who is totally not a superhero and try to relax.”

She rolled her eyes, but couldn’t stop herself from smiling as she went into the back and unlocked her phone on the way to their little break room.

15:18

Hello lovely. Busy?

I always have time for you. :)

July 18
Flatterer. ;)

Seriously, you ok? Is everything all right?

I don’t know exactly. Can I call you?

The answer to that question came with a buzz as her phone began to ring, Lena smiling warmly back at her from the screen before Emily answered and put it to her ear.

“Well, I assume that’s a yes, then.”

Lena’s giggle was a gentle bath for her frayed nerves. “We’re going into town in a few minutes but I really did mean it. Especially if something’s got you upset.”

“Mm…” She frowned as she sat down in one of the plastic chairs that surrounded the little lunch table. “I don’t know if I’d say *upset* exactly, but…”

“Emily,” Lena insisted firmly. “Come on - what is it? Something up with Amélie?”

That made her blink in surprise, but she could see why Lena has asked. “Oh. No, no, she’s fine. Just an odd sort of customer at work.”

“Yeah?”

She could almost imagine the look on Lena’s face, and the way she was leaning back, listening attentively. Emily couldn’t help but smile, her nerves easing.

“Mm. She was rather… *forward*.”

“Ohhh. Wouldn’t take no for an answer, eh?”

Emily shook her head with a sigh. “Not one bit. She seemed to be the type who always had enough money to buy her way through - and American, at that, come to think of it.”

That got a giggle. “Oh, that’s even worse then!”

They laughed together, talked of happier things until Lena needed to leave, and Emily reluctantly gathered herself up to finish her day.

Several blocks away from the shop, Ashe stomped to where B.O.B. stood waiting next to the limousine they’d rented for use while she was in the city, and shoved a bag of books she hadn’t wanted into his hands.

“Throw *that* in the damn trunk!”

The omnic looked down at the bag, blinked, then shifted his gaze back to her.

“No! She gave me some damn books and sent me off to the register.” Ashe spat with disgust as B.O.B. opened the door, then threw herself into the backseat. “Can’t afford it *my ass,*” she growled, making a mockery of the redhead’s accent. “Like I ain’t good for it?”

There was a thump as the trunk closed, and the limo jostled on its repulsors slightly as B.O.B. got behind the wheel, putting a black chauffeur’s cap on before he met her eyes in the rearview mirror.
“So what if she has a girlfriend! I never took no for an answer before, and I’m not about to start!” Ashe crossed her arms, pouting. She didn’t even want to take the girl to bed that badly, but she’d never taken rejection well, even when it was part of a job.

B.O.B. just blinked again, then leaned forward slightly to start the car.

“Yes, yeah,” Ashe agreed as she tossed her hat onto the seat next to her, and began letting her hair down. “I know. Just once I’d sort of like things to go the easy way, but that’s fine. Get us back to the hotel.”

B.O.B. nodded as they pulled smoothly into traffic as she scowled out the window, radiating displeasure.

“It’s fine,” she repeated as she began to undo her jacket. “She wants to do this the hard way? Then that is exactly what we’ll do for her, and after we take both of them down we’ll see what is what.”

B.O.B. didn’t say much as they sailed through the flow of traffic, but Ashe knew how to read the set of his shoulders.

“Suppose you’re right,” she admitted. “I’ll make a call back at the hotel while I’m getting changed.”

The phone rang, and long fingers marked by atypical cyanosis and scarring reached out to answer it.

“Yes?”

The woman who answered the phone listened patiently, then nodded before she spoke in a low voice.

“I suppose if it cannot be helped, you must simply press on. I have every confidence in you.” She paused, then nodded. “Yes - take them directly there once you’ve acquired them, and I will meet you there.”

Moira smiled to herself as she walked to the window, looking out at the craggy face of the Rock of Gibraltar, and the Watchpoint that was nestled beneath it.

“I must see to a few matters of my own.”
Chapter 43

Fareeha liked the sprawling street markets that filled La Linea on Wednesday afternoons.

Food stalls, produce, flowers, craft goods, clothing, and more were all on offer, with vendors calling out in English, Spanish, and Portuguese to get the attention of the browsing crowds, blending into a cheerful din that brought a smile to her lips as she stopped to occasionally get a better look at something, or to appreciate the smells wafting up from a hot pan.

If she closed her eyes, it wasn’t hard to imagine herself being back home. There were times she got deeply homesick for the Cairo markets, and coming down here often helped to ease that pain.

Of course, she thought as she watched Angela thoughtfully examine some kind of electronic widget, being here isn’t so bad either.

There was a warmth swelling in her ribcage as she watched the doctor laugh at something the vendor said, then put the widget down and picked up a box, giving it a little shake.


Getting to see her in the lab or around the Watchpoint was one thing, but watching Angela out in the world just doing day to day things was still special and new, and Fareeha found herself grinning at how lucky she really was.

She was so focused on Angela that she didn’t even notice Lena walking up beside her until the shorter woman’s giggle snapped her out of her reverie.

“Oh, you’ve got it pretty bad, don’t you?”

Even though Fareeha could feel herself flushing, she tried to play it cool. “I have no idea what you mean.”

“Sure you don’t,” Lena smiled as she leaned in, giving a friendly little bump with her elbow. “Seriously, though - good on you, luv.”

“I...thanks, Lena. I appreciate it.” An idea struck her, and Fareeha grinned back. “So after we figure out the situation with your...guest...should we plan a double date?”

Lena’s expression turned thoughtful. “May be waiting a while. Not exactly sure what the long term plan is, honestly, but...yeah! Yeah, that’d be nice!”

“Good. Sounds like a plan, then.” Fareeha smiled and scanned the markets again, catching glimpses of Angela’s ponytail, when she felt a little whisper of an idea.

She loves chocolates, doesn’t she?

She did. Fareeha clicked her tongue against her teeth as the thought began to take hold. It would be a cute surprise. She was pretty sure there was an actual chocolate shop not too far from here, if she remembered one of her last trips to the street market correctly.

“Why don’t you see if you can talk to Angela about it, too?” Fareeha turned back to Lena, tapping a hand against her hip. “I just thought of something I should look for before we go back.”
“Course,” Lena grinned back at her. She had obviously figured out it would be something for Angela. “Well, go on then, off you get.”

“Thanks,” she said absently, and started walking. It was this street, wasn’t it? Or perhaps the next one over.

Swiss chocolates, something whispered as she kept walking. She loves Swiss chocolates. The finest ones.

Fareeha frowned as she tilted her head. She must have heard Angela mention it before, she supposed.

Another street over, and she found a shop that was just what she was looking for. Hotel Chocolat, the sign proclaimed. Finest Chocolates, Imports, Luxury Sweets.

Perfect. She nodded to herself as she walked over, not really noticing someone beginning to trail behind.

She’d just begun to browse some of the displays, hoping to see if she could find anything marked as Swiss without asking the woman working the counter, when part of Fareeha noticed the jingle of bells as the door opened.

She’d been about to dismiss it when the undercurrents of music in the back of her mind changed. Strangely muffled, as if someone had put a mute on them, yet dissonant and alarming. A battle cry. A warning.

Danger!

Fareeha had just begun to turn when there was a strange sound, a bit like a vacuum cleaner running underwater, and her body suddenly felt weak and sluggish.

“Ah. How good it is to run into you here,” a low pitched voice purred.

Her vision was narrowing to a tunnel as the sound stopped, the barest hint of some kind of purple energy lingering around the hand of the woman who had spoken to her. She’d never met Moira O’Deorain, but the sharp features were unmistakable. Those mismatched eyes all too full of intelligence and interest as Fareeha tried to call out, only able to manage a soft groan as her knees began to buckle.

“Don’t worry,” Moira said as the floor rushed up to meet her. “I shall take very good care of you.”

Emily yawned as she got out of Stefan’s battered old Citroen, turning to give a little wave before she shut the door.

“Thank you for the ride, that was very sweet of you.”

Stefan ducked his head, a bashful smile on his face as he fiddled with the wheel. “Well, after that business this afternoon none of us thought you should have to walk home.”

Emily smiled back, touched by the concern of her friends. “I’m fairly sure there’s little chance of running into whoever she was again, especially on the tube, but...still. I appreciate it. See you tomorrow?”
The lanky man gave a little gesture somewhere in the direction of north. “Off tomorrow - going up to that rare books sale in Cambridge. Might see if I find anything worth bringing home.”

“Ah - I’d forgotten!” Emily pulled her keys out of her purse, and stepped back onto the curb. “Well, good luck then!”

There was a muffled ‘Thanks!’ as the door shut, and with one last wave Stefan put his focus back on the road, pulling out into the early evening traffic while Emily let herself into her building and began climbing the stairs up to her flat.

That really had been the oddest day. Still - maybe she could see if Amélie wanted to go out for dinner? It would be nice to have a treat, and she wasn’t really in the mood for takeaway.

She pushed the stairwell door open, and Emily blinked in surprise.

A woman in a long grey coat and a broad hat stood casually in the hall, alongside one of the biggest omnics Emily could remember seeing that wasn’t a pure industrial or military model.

“Well,” Ashe said with a fierce sort of pleasure as she turned, her hair now loose instead of the elaborate do she’d had at the shop. “Ain’t this a pleasant surprise?”

Emily took in the omnic, the leathers, and the pistol grip she could see peeking out of a holster, and grit her teeth. “Not terribly much of one, no.”

Are they here for Lena?

Ashe’s lips tightened in a smirk, and as she came closer Emily began to feel some of the same odd fuzzy, simmering sort of desire from before, tinged with something oddly familiar.

Wait. Is she…?

No. No, that couldn’t be right.

“Don’t suppose you’d like to invite me in? B.O.B. and I need to have a little chat with your little houseguest.”

Amélie? Emily’s blood ran cold. How would they know anything about her? How would they know she’s here?

“Sorry,” she said blandly as she tried to play dumb. “Haven’t anyone home except quite a lot of books at the present. Did you happen to enjoy the new LaTour novel I suggested?”

Ashe snorted. “If I’m honest, I ain’t the reading type.” She opened her hand, and the omnic (B.O.B., apparently), slapped a rifle into it. “Now - you going to be a good girl and open that door?”

Rage ran through Emily as she stared down the gun barrel, and her eyes burned like coals as they met Ashe’s deep red gaze.

“You really have no idea who you’re dealing with, so I will make this offer exactly once: Leave, and forget this ever happened. I won’t do anything to stop you, so long as you don’t come back.”

“So they know who Lena is too, and where we live. Damn and hellfire.”

“Lena knows I’m quite capable of looking after myself.” She tensed, preparing to toss away her
mortal form. There was no way to warn Amélie, but she suspected the assassin would figure things out quickly enough.

“Too bad,” Ashe tsked in mock disappointment. “I guess we’ll just have to handle this the old fashioned way.” She jerked her chin in Emily’s direction, her voice snapping with command. “Get her, B.O.B!”

Emily let her mortal seeming fall away as the big omnic charged, hand outstretched for her.

She let her body harden and sharpen as the rage filled her, and time seemed to slow as a war song filled her ears.

As B.O.B. lunged, she ducked his grip and sprang back up, her claws throwing sparks as she severed the hand, metal fingers clutching and then going slack as actuators lost power and artificial muscles relaxed.

Emily whirled to face Ashe, but the woman wasn’t running. In fact, she didn’t even seem terribly afraid.

“Well,” she drawled as she tossed her rifle and hat aside. “Ain’t that interesting?”

To Emily’s shock, the woman seemed to change very much like Amélie had, the night she helped her return to human form, but where Widowmaker had slowly lost the blue cast to her skin, Ashe was turning almost monochrome, the color leeching away until she was a true white, with pale grey accents, the red of her eyes spreading until her entire sclera seemed to burn with red and orange fire.

“Now,” Ashe said as she took a step forward, the carpet beneath her boots burned to cinders beneath her feet. “Let’s really get this party started!”

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