Don't Make It Weird

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/12291357.

Rating: Explicit
Archive Warning: No Archive Warnings Apply
Category: M/M
Fandom: Overwatch (Video Game)
Relationship: Jesse McCree/Reaper | Gabriel Reyes
Character: Reaper | Gabriel Reyes, Jesse McCree, Original Blackwatch Character(s) (Overwatch), Original Characters
Additional Tags: Fake/Pretend Relationship, Undercover as a Couple, Honeypot, Pining, Mission Fic, Cruise Ships, Blackwatch Era
Series: Part 4 of SALTapalooza
Stats: Published: 2017-10-07 Words: 21347

Don't Make It Weird

by fabrega

Summary

Their mission window is a little less than two weeks. Two weeks of sun and sea, two weeks of swimsuits and too-expensive cocktails, two weeks of island excursions and sharing a room booked for a couple--two weeks of Gabe and McCree pretending to be a couple.

And the thing is, it's not going to be hard for Gabe to pretend.

Notes

It's Week Three of SALTapalooza! Today's prompt was "Fake Dating", because of course it was.

Reminder that this is a fourteen part series that will update every Saturday for the next eleven weeks!

Feel free to come yell at me or smarshtastic on twitter about this!

SleeplessCap on twitter has done some amazing (nsfw) fanart for this! and I love it so so much. ♥
Gabe's at the transport, waiting for Edwards to show when McCree sidles up. He's got a large roller-bag behind him, and he looks determined and a little bit like he's trying for innocence. Gabe is… worried.

"Ready to go, boss," McCree says, giving Gabe his standard, lazily-sarcastic salute.

"You're not coming on this mission. Edwards is coming on this mission." Gabe makes himself sound more annoyed than he actually is to cover his growing panic.

"Edwards was in the gym late last night getting in one more session when he landed on his arm wrong and broke it in two places. I'm surprised you hadn't heard."

Gabe gives McCree a skeptical look and steps out of the transport to comm down to the infirmary. Dr. Ziegler answers his call and confirms McCree's story: Agent Edwards had suffered an unfortunate sparring accident. It'll be two or three days before he's back to one hundred percent, and Gabe and this mission don't have two or three days to wait for him--the window on this is narrow, and they have to go now.

He thumbs off his comm, pinches at the bridge of his nose with a sigh, and heads back into the transport. McCree is waiting for him there.

"We could scrub the mission," he says to McCree.

McCree narrows his eyes at Gabe. "We miss this window, the data's gone for good, and we both know that's unacceptable when it's this close."

"Isn't there somebody else who could fill in?"

"Not on this short notice," McCree says. He gives Gabe a curious look. "Why, Commander Reyes, I'd almost think you didn't want to go undercover with me." His voice is teasing, with a little bit of a strange waver to it.

"It's not that."

(It's exactly that. Well, not exactly that--they've gone undercover together plenty of times before. They work together incredibly well, Blackwatch's deadliest, most effective team, and Gabe wouldn't trade the time he's gotten to spend with Jesse McCree for anything. This mission, though...)

"I need you holding down the fort here. What will Blackwatch do without its commander and its commander's right-hand man?"

McCree grins a little bit at this, the way Gabe calls him his right-hand man; honestly, the way it makes McCree preen is about eighty percent of why Gabe ever even says it. "As soon as I found out about Edwards, I briefed Valdez and Prithi both about what they can expect over the next few weeks. Between the two of them, I don't doubt they'll have this place running better than I even would. Also, Stef can man the comms for us here, do the check-ins we had planned. I wrote out my schedule for her and a few more notes, and she'll do just fine."

Gabe tries to think of another argument, one McCree can't shoot down, but is coming up blank.

"You know it makes sense."

He's right, it does make sense. Outside of Edwards and Gabe himself, nobody else knows the details
of this mission like McCree does. He'd been involved at every stage of the planning, and he's absolutely able--and willing, apparently--to carry out the mission professionally and well. The tickets they'd acquired had been expensive and he'd had to beg, borrow, and steal out of the budget to justify them. They'll miss the window if they don't go now. It's just--

"Now, do you have any other objections, or can we get this show on the road?" McCree's voice softens, and he says, quietly, "We can scrub the mission if you want. Just say the word."

"Give me the rundown," Gabe says, more sharply than he means to, sharply enough that even the transport's pilot turns to look at him in surprise. "You're coming on this mission, I need to know that you know what you're doing."

"I helped to plan the thing, boss, I know what--" McCree stops talking as Gabe gives him a look. "Okay, fine."

He outlines the plan. They'd received two valuable pieces of intel from the agent they've got inside the largest drug cartel in Latin America. First, the cartel is getting ready to move a lot of important data that they don't want to trust to the net, instead physically transporting it, whatever it is, on a memory device. They're using the cover of a commercial cruise to move it, dropping the memory device off at one of the ship's stops. Second, the courier they're using to move the data is a cartel guy with a history of results but also a very specific kink that has also turned out to be a disciplinary problem. It's apparently common enough knowledge that even Blackwatch's embedded agent had heard: on his courier runs, the guy goes out of his way to make moves on guys he knows are in relationships. It's gotten him in trouble before--several angry significant others have had to be dealt with using cartel resources--but he's dealt effectively with more than a few problems with customs and law enforcement, and he gets results.

Armed with these two facts, Blackwatch had come up with a plan. They need to get their hands on the data, whatever it is, and so Gabe and his partner (previously Edwards, now McCree) are going undercover on the cruise, posing as a couple. They'll get close to the target, and then one of them--whichever the target ends up liking more, so probably McCree--distract him while the other bypasses his (minimal, paying passenger) bodyguards to acquire the cartel's important data. The stop he's supposed to debark at is the cruise's last, so their window is a little less than two weeks. Two weeks of sun and sea, two weeks of swimsuits and too-expensive cocktails, two weeks of island excursions and sharing a room booked for a couple--two weeks of pretending to be a couple.

And the thing is, the thing is, it's not going to be hard for Gabe to pretend. His feelings about McCree, those feelings about McCree, aren't something he's going to need to fake. At some point over the nearly a decade they've worked together, Gabe did the thing he swore he was never going to do: catch feelings. First he liked Jesse McCree, then he liked Jesse McCree, and as much as he'd resisted the former, the latter is absolutely unthinkable. There are a thousand reasons why it's a bad idea, why Gabe couldn't, shouldn't, can't.

Gabe had--has--mostly resigned himself to just friendship with McCree. The closest he'd ever come to actually making this goddamn mistake, trying to get to the thing he wanted but couldn't have, was the planning session for this mission where they'd finally needed to pin down which agent was going to be accompanying him on the cruise.

McCree had asked: Do you have anyone in mind?

And Gabe had felt his entire face stop working, had been unable to answer because he could not give the only answer he could come up with, had felt the silence stretch out between them in interminable seconds, just McCree looking at him and Gabe looking back.
Then McCree had suggested Edwards and the moment had passed, and Gabe had resigned himself to the right thing the rest of his life. What did he have to offer to somebody like McCree anyway? It was better if they didn't even try.

And now--

McCree finishes his mission summary. Gabe has only been half-listening.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Gabe asks. He has to give McCree this out. He has to be sure.

McCree gives him a disbelieving look. "Two weeks on a fancy cruise taking down bad guys?" He snorts, sarcastic. "Oh, no, anything but that."

"That's not a yes, McCree."

McCree pauses, takes a deep breath, gives Gabe another one of those are you stupid looks. "Yes, boss, I'm sure about this. You haven't given me this much shit before any other mission--what's different about this one?"

Gabe feels his jaw work as he tries to figure out an answer to that.

McCree continues, undeterred, "I know it's important. If you're worried about me and--" he stops, making a vague hand gesture that Gabe assumes encompasses the cruise and the importance of the data and all the money they're spending on it, "--don't, don't worry. I can be professional. I have a strong record of being professional."

He's right again; he's handled every important mission and function Gabe's ever thrown at him. He'd taken charge during the snafu in Canada, he'd handled the thing at the film festival, he'd been irreplaceable during the last two Presidential inaugurations, and he'd even managed to charm the shit out of Director Petras at the big Overwatch function last month. (Gabe can still see McCree in that tux, when he closes his eyes. He has a problem.)

"I believe you," Gabe says. "I trust you."

His voice is too soft, but McCree just laughs. "After that mission last year in Georgia, I sure as hell hope you do."

Gabe laughs too, and yeah, he can be professional. He will manage this. It'll be fine.

Their transport from HQ takes them to an airport, where they rent a car and then drive to the port from which their cruise is departing. They'd changed on the transport. Gabe's got on shorts and a golf shirt and glasses. McCree has on a tank top and a pair of tight jeans and has his hair pulled back into a very tiny ponytail. He's also got a disguise sleeve over the very-recognizable tattoo on his forearm. It's kind of hilarious how hard he is to recognize without the hat--still handsome, Gabe's mind offers unhelpfully--and McCree has assured him more than once that the glasses really are all he needs to become unrecognizable himself.

Once they're actually there, facing the ship, McCree grabs his hand and laces their fingers together, giving him a big, excited grin--perfectly in-character--and Gabe's heartbeat speeds up.

Their cabin is nice but not too nice, as nice as they could wrangle on their budget without having to involve too many people at the cruise company. They've got a balcony, McCree notes as Gabe is suddenly confronted by the bed they're going to have to share for the next two weeks. It's...smaller than he expected, not much bigger than the one he's got back at HQ.
McCree doesn't seem to notice or mind, though, coming back in from the balcony and taking a seat on the edge of the bed, giving it one or two experimental bounces before flopping backwards across it. He tips his head back enough that he's looking at Gabe, upside-down. He watches as Gabe checks their cabin for bugs, making idle, innocent small-talk about how excited he is about this cruise, until Gabe gives him the all-clear.

"So," McCree says, rolling onto his stomach, "We probably ought to talk about boundaries before we go any farther."

"Oh?"

"I mean, it wasn't in the mission plan because I figured you and Edwards would work it out on your own, but... we never really talked about what we think 'acting like a couple' looks like."

Gabe gives him a surprised look. Of course this was a thing they needed to work out, but somehow he'd been so wrapped up in the thought of all of it, of the feeling of Jesse's hand in his, that he hadn't thought ahead to the logistics of actually going through with it. "You want, what, a list of things we should be doing?"

"How romantic," McCree says, amusement and sarcasm seeping into his tone. "I don't need a checklist, boss. It's gotta be affectionate, it's gotta be public; it's pretty easy to figure out. But since our cover says we've been dating for a while, I would probably know if, say, you're real sensitive on your right side or if you don't like having your ears or your feet touched or whatever--that kind of boundary."

"Oh, yeah, that makes sense." Gabe stops to think. It's been long enough since he was in any kind of relationship that he's not able to easily call anything to mind. "I think I'm probably good with whatever," he says carefully, after what feels like a little too long. "Anything I should know about you?"

"I'm...a little ticklish," McCree admits. He points out a couple spots: inside of the elbow, behind the knee, a patch of skin right above his hip. "Doesn't make much sense, but there you are. Everything else is fair game."

Gabe makes a mental note, tries not to think too hard about every other part of McCree being 'fair game'.

"One last thing." McCree gets up off the bed and steps a little too close to Gabe...well, it can't be too close, they're dating. He gets into Gabe's space, gives him a look, and says quietly, "I'm gonna do this now, in case it's weird." Then he takes a deep breath, leans forward and kisses Gabe, and Gabe's brain short-circuits. Gabe barely has time to register what's happening--McCree's lips against his, sweet and everything and nothing like he'd ever thought it would be--before it's over and McCree is standing three respectful steps away from him.

"Glad we could get that out of the way," Gabe manages, and McCree grins. Gabe wonders McCree had meant, in case it's weird, but there's a ship-wide announcement that it's time for the mandatory lifeboat drill, and Gabe follows McCree out of the room before he can ask.

The lifeboat drill goes fine, nothing too unexpected. Gabe takes the initiative this time, looks at McCree and thinks this is my boyfriend and then stands close to him with a hand at the small of his back. McCree takes to the part like he has every other undercover role Gabe has given him, believably and seamlessly, leaning back into Gabe's touch and occasionally looking over him and smiling with so much fondness that Gabe has to remind himself more than once that this is just a mission.
They don't manage to spot their target at any point during the drill, so afterwards they meander their way through the ship. To a casual observer, it looks like they're exploring, checking here and there to see what sort of things they have to look forward to over the next two weeks. If somebody was keeping track, though, they'd see the two of them making their way, slowly and surely, via winding and circuitous routes, through every public part of the ship. They don't need to see what's available on the ship; they'd both basically memorized the ship's layout as part of the mission planning. The cartel had paid for this cruise as a cover, and undoubtedly the target will be doing the same kind of fake vacationing they are, so they're hoping to find the target now, get eyes on him and maybe get his eyes on them in return.

(They stop along a railing and watch as the ship pulls away from port. They're on their own now.)

McCree spots the target--blond, in his late thirties, has a ticket booked under the name of Brock Nash--seated at the bar at a drinking establishment on one of the top decks. They make another lap of the deck and come back, and he's still at the bar when they return. By now, it's been an hour or two since the lifeboat drill, a couple hours spent lazily circling the decks, and while Gabe's not tired exactly, sitting down wouldn't be the worst thing in the world.

"What does seasickness feel like?" McCree asks quietly as they step through the entryway of the bar. His voice is low enough that Gabe's pretty sure it's not acting, and the pained smile he gives Gabe reinforces that.

"Oh, sweetheart," Gabe says, more loudly, and he ought to be terrified by how quickly and easily the endearment rolls off his tongue, "Are you not feeling well? You should've said something."

"Didn't want to worry you," McCree says. His smile is a little weaker this time.

"You should know better than that." Gabe ushers him into a seat at a table midway between the bar and the entryway, then heads for the bar. He squeezes between Nash and a tall woman in a fancy sarong and flags down the bartender to place an order for a ginger ale. He concentrates on the row of bottles behind the bar and watches Nash watch him in his peripheral vision.

McCree sips at the ginger ale when Gabe brings it back to the table, lets his head tip over onto Gabe's shoulder when Gabe scoots his chair around beside him.

"We've definitely been noticed," he murmurs, his face close to Gabe's ear.

"That's all we needed to do today. You can relax," Gabe says back quietly. He makes meaningless small talk while Jesse finishes his ginger ale, nonsense about the made-up holiday plans their cover identities are going to spend together and how much his parents are excited to see them at Christmas. McCree makes small, affirmative noises at all the right places, but doesn't look like he's feeling any better.

"We've got seasickness medicine in the room. Come on, let's get you back there." Gabe stands, offers McCree a hand up.

A look of panic flashes across McCree's face. "You don't have to come with me. I can manage."

"I know I don't have to. I want to," Gabe says. He can't read the look McCree gives him, but McCree takes his hand.

They walk back to their cabin slowly, one of Gabe's arms wrapped around McCree's waist. When they get there, Gabe deposits him on the bed, does another quick sweep for bugs--better safe than sorry--then digs in his bags for the medicine.
When he comes back up with a small bottle of pills, McCree sits up on the bed, his hair pulled down from its ponytail. McCree then stops abruptly and darts for the bathroom. The door swings nearly shut behind him, and then Gabe hears the sound of McCree emptying the contents of his stomach. Gabe pauses for half a second before pushing the door back open and going in, stepping behind McCree as obviously as he can. McCree retches a couple more times, going until his stomach is empty. Gabe crouches beside him, doing his best to hold back McCree's hair.

When he stops, Gabe hops up and brings him a glass of water and the seasickness medicine. McCree makes a grateful noise and takes both. "You know," he says, giving Gabe a somehow-distressed look, "We're not in public here. You don't have to do this."

Gabe snorts. "Am I not allowed to take care of my agents, McCree?"

McCree pauses to swallow down the pills Gabe's handed him, then gives Gabe another, more distressed look. "You've kissed me now, boss. I think I'm probably just Jesse."

Gabe's stomach flips. Jesse. All this time he's spent using names as distance, and here they are. "Then I guess I'm Gabe," he hears himself saying. He tries to lean nonchalantly on the counter and misses.

Jesse, luckily, does not notice, clambering to his feet and making his way past Gabe and collapsing back onto the bed. He throws an arm over his eyes and says, "I'm gonna see if I can't nap until the meds kick in. You really should get back out there."

Gabe gives him a skeptical look, which he absolutely does not see. "You'll be okay?"

Jesse waves his free hand at Gabe dismissively. "I'll be fine. Go."

"If you're sure--"

"I'll be fine." Jesse's voice is final. "I'll nap, maybe get some room service. You go do that thing we're here to do."

"I've got my comms if you need anything." Gabe taps his ear, and Jesse nods under his arm.

Gabe takes him at his word, lets the door fall shut behind him and heads back to the bar where they'd seen Nash last. Nash is still there, still at the bar, still drinking something dark and neat. Gabe also clocks two guys, both big and menacing, in the same spots they'd been before too, not close enough to Nash for it to be obvious that they're with him, but close enough that they can react in time if they need to.

Gabe schools his expression into something long-suffering but fond--a man whose boyfriend is maybe going to make their vacation a little miserable, no matter how much he loves him--and takes a seat at the bar, a couple places down from Nash, and orders a (not obviously non-alcoholic) beer. He sips at the beer, picks at the label on the bottle, and waits.

It's about five minutes before Nash sidles over. "Hey," he says, sounding like a bored business traveler--an odd choice for a cruise ship. "I saw you in here earlier with your...husband?"

"Boyfriend," Gabe corrects, even while the word husband echoes around in his brain. "The Seasick Wonder is Jim. I'm Clark." He extends a hand and a naive, friendly smile to Nash.

Nash shakes his hand. "Nice to meet you, Clark. What're you drinking?"

Gabe turns the bottle so Nash can see it, and Nash orders another one for him. Gabe makes sure he
looks suitably impressed. He keeps sipping at the beer, finishing the first one and starting the second while he answers Nash's questions: where are Clark and Jim from, what do they do, how did they meet, what's the occasion for the cruise, what their plans are--plus a lot of very pointed questions about Jim. Gabe gets nothing back from Nash, not even his name, but that's not the point. The point is to get Nash on the hook, and by the time an hour has passed and Gabe has nearly run out of cover backstory, he's pretty confident he's done that.

He finishes the second beer, thanks Nash, and starts to get up. "You know," Nash says, and something in his tone makes Gabe freeze, "You seem familiar."

Gabe gives a good-natured shrug and adjusts his glasses. "I get that a lot, actually. I always look like somebody's cousin or gym teacher or neighbor down the street. Guess I've just got one of those faces."

Nash squints at him, unsure, but lets the whole thing go. Gabe readjusts his glasses, waves at Nash, and makes his way out of the bar and back to the room.

When he gets there, Jesse's asleep, starfished across the bed, almost snoring. He starts awake when Gabe takes a careful seat on the edge of the bed.

"Feeling any better?" Gabe asks.

Jesse nods sleepily, rolling onto his side to look up at Gabe.

Gabe looks away, out the balcony door at the clear blue sky. "It seems like things are starting to move. Nash was still at the bar, and he's definitely interested in us. He seemed especially interested in you, so get ready for that."

"I cannot begin to tell you how thrilled I am," Jesse says through a yawn. "It's about dinner time, right? Think we can go rustle up some food?"

They don't see Nash at dinner, and that's fine, they don't need to, Gabe just enjoys Jesse's company. He keeps looking over at Gabe with adoring eyes, and that's something Gabe is going to have to try not to get used to. After dinner, they swing through the casino. Gabe doesn't intend to stop, but Jesse, in-character, convinces him to wait and try the slot machines. In-character, Gabe can't say no to Jesse, and as himself Gabe has a lot of trouble saying no to Jesse when he makes that face, so they stand in front of the machine until Jesse gets one payout--worth less than the money he's pumped into the thing, but worth it for the way Jesse's face lights up.

Daring, Gabe plants a kiss on Jesse's cheek, and Jesse's smile gets even brighter.

They call it an early night--plenty of fake vacationing to do tomorrow, after all--and retire to their room. Jesse lays the maps of the ship out across the bed and plots a course of action for tomorrow while Gabe gets on the comms with Valdez to check in.

He goes through their first day, meeting Nash, the mission overall. He answers Valdez's questions when she has them, and when they're done, he thanks her quietly for stepping up like this.

"We've got your back, Reyes, whatever you need. I hope you and Jesse manage to have at least a little fun." Before Gabe has a chance to respond, she presses on. "I stopped by the infirmary today to check on Edwards. He's fine--a whiny baby about any kind of injury, of course, but fine. I can't believe that dumbass has gone three years with no injuries in the field and managed to break his arm in training on base."

"That's pretty weird," Jesse calls from across the room, and Gabe has to agree.
After the check-in, they get ready for bed. Gabe starts to strip down for bed, he hesitates. He'd known he was going to have to share the bed with Edwards when he'd packed, so he has a sleep shirt. (It's a soft and threadbare old thing with the Claremont McKenna logo on it; one of his sisters had gotten it for him years ago, when she'd gotten her first degree there.) He doesn't have any kind of sleep pants, assuming a cruise was not the place for sweats and that he and Edwards would manage in their underwear.

With Jesse, though--

Jesse notices his hesitation, because of course he does, he's a well-trained and highly-capable agent, one of Gabe's best.

"Everything okay over there, uh, Gabe?" Jesse asks, stumbling a little over Gabe's name.

Gabe looks at the bed, then up at Jesse's face, nervous, and nods.

"If you want, we can alternate nights on the floor or something? I don't want anything to be weird."

There's that word again, weird. "Do you want to sleep on the floor?"

Jesse shakes his head. "No, and I can't imagine you do either." He offers Gabe a small smile. "Okay then!"

The bed may or may not actually be too small for comfort; Gabe finds himself absolutely unable to judge. He's pretty sure that if Jesse was sleeping just inside the cabin door and he was out on the balcony, he'd still feel like he was too close to Jesse to sleep.

He turns onto his side and tries not to think about Jesse kissing him earlier.

When Gabe wakes in the morning, the bed is empty, and Jesse is standing through the open door on their balcony, in yesterday's tank top and boxer-briefs. Gabe looks at Jesse, just for a moment--the sweep of his shoulders, the line of his torso, the curve of his ass--before his brain catches up to his other parts and his face goes hot with embarrassment. He rolls over, carefully and quietly, facing the opposite wall and breathing steadily, trying to will his treacherous blush away. He hears Jesse pad back into the room while he's waiting it out, hears him rifle through his luggage and then head into the bathroom, hears the shower start running.

Gabe sits up in the bed and scrubs at his face, reminds himself that he's a professional and he absolutely can do this.

They go for breakfast once they're both cleaned up. Jesse says he's feeling better today, but he's still a little wobbly, and Gabe is more than happy to offer him an arm to lean on.

After breakfast, they go back to their room and get ready to spend most of the day at the pool. Gabe changes into his swimsuit in the bathroom, a pair of nearly knee-length black trunks that he'd pulled from his own clothes drawer back at base. He's not sure when he'd last worn them--or, for that matter, been on anything approaching a vacation.

He takes a minute or two to apply sunscreen to as much of himself as he can reach. He's absolutely not going to get sunburned on his first full day on the ship.

He takes a deep breath, bracing himself for the task he knows he needs to do next as he exits the bathroom. He'd done his best with the sunscreen, but he's going to need help. He's going to have to
ask Jesse to apply sunscreen to the parts of himself he can't reach. He wonders for a brief moment when his life became a romantic comedy cliche, but all other thoughts fall out of his head when he comes back into their room and sees Jesse.

Jesse has changed for the pool too. His swim trunks are a little shorter and a little tighter than Gabe's. They are also bright yellow with a pattern of tiny green cacti on them. Gabe stares at them for a long moment before managing to drag his gaze upwards, where he sees the deep crimson blush that's permeating Jesse's face and spreading down into his chest and shoulders.

"I'm guessing you didn't get those from Supply," Gabe says.

Jesse crosses his arms across his chest defensively. "Shiga got them for me when we went to visit his folks in Hawaii."

"Of course he did." Gabe chuckles and tosses Jesse the sunscreen. "When you're done, can you get my back?"

Jesse blinks at him, then nods. As much as he wants to watch, Gabe finds something else to occupy himself with while Jesse rubs the sunscreen into his skin, instead checking and double-checking the tech they're going to be using today.

Jesse clears his throat, and Gabe looks up; he's holding the sunscreen out to Gabe. "I'm gonna need your help too."

Gabe takes the proffered sunscreen, squeezes some out into his hands and motions for Jesse to turn around. He can do this; it's a practical, utilitarian thing. It won't be meaningful--or weird--unless Gabe makes it either of those things, and he is an adult and a professional. Applying a little sunscreen shouldn't intimidate him, and he won't let it.

He puts his hands on Jesse's back, spreads the sunscreen carefully and thoroughly. Jesse's back feels tense, and he concentrates very hard on making sure that he doesn't miss anywhere. He does his best not think about the broad expanse of Jesse's bare back right there in front of him and how it feels under his fingers.

When they're done, Jesse takes the sunscreen from him and slathers up Gabe's back. Gabe finds himself drifting while Jesse's hands work their way across his skin; he's pulled back at the sound of Jesse's voice saying, "You have freckles on your shoulders."

Gabe cranes his neck around to look. "Huh, I guess I do," he says. When he casts his eyes back further, Jesse's face is very close to his.

Jesse looks startled, and Gabe jumps.

When the sunscreen is all applied and they're both ready to go, they head for the pool. Gabe lounges poolside with a book, half reading and half watching the HUD on the inside of his aviators that's showing him information from the tiny camera on the book's cover about the passengers around him. They don't know who Nash is doing the hand-off to or if they're on the boat already, just the date and time of the transaction (eight days now) and it's better to be safe than sorry.

Jesse, for his part, swims laps of the pool the same way they'd traversed the ship, seemingly at random but with a secret purpose, chatting with people, being overly Southern in that way that makes people open up to him, drawing them into the range of Gabe's camera. He's a charming motherfucker--it's part of what makes him such a good agent--and Gabe's fascinated watching him work.
Occasionally he'll make his way back over to Gabe, making sad noises about Gabe not joining him in the pool, pleading noises about needing another drink. In-character, it's turning out that he's a bit of a brat, but the pouting face he makes--Gabe can't resist it, in-character or out. Gabe gets up every time, brings back drinks for both of them: non-alcoholic piña coladas, basically elaborate, expensive pineapple smoothies because neither one of them ought to be drinking on the job. The drinks are nice, though, tasty and cold, and Jesse hoists himself up out of the pool to sit on the edge near Gabe while he drinks his. His cover absolutely would ogle Jesse on his way out of the pool, so Gabe lets himself do so too, watching the water cascading off Jesse's abs as he shakes it out of his hair in a move Gabe can't help but imagine in slow-motion.

Jesse is the one to spot Nash, flashing Gabe their prearranged signal, and once he's looking the right place, Gabe sees him too, on the other side of the pool, in shorts and fancy loafers. Nash takes a seat that's not directly in Gabe's eye-line (but still caught by his camera) and Gabe watches him watch Jesse. It's the mission, Gabe reminds himself. They can't afford for his stomach to flip with jealousy like this; there's no room in the mission parameters for real feelings.

Jesse obviously has an eye on Nash as well, because he keeps up his friendly laps for another fifteen, twenty minutes before making his way back over to Gabe. His words and tone are him pouting for drinks, but his hands, hidden from Nash's view between the two of them, signal to Gabe not to give him this one.

"I think you've had enough for now," Gabe says, giving him a stern look.

"You're not my dad, Clark," Jesse says, getting out of the pool and toweling himself off angrily.

"Thank god for that. It'd make this--" Gabe gestures between the two of them, "--really weird." He frowns. "Where are you going?"

"To get my own damn drinks!" Jesse yells, and then he stomps off.

Gabe sighs, nudges his aviators up high enough to pinch the bridge of his nose, and buries his face back in his book. Across the pool, Nash gets up and heads off in the direction Jesse had gone.

It's almost an hour before Jesse comes back, a drink in each hand.

"Bar was busy?" Gabe asks. He eyes the drinks Jesse's holding.

Jesse hands him one and shrugs. "Met a guy at the bar, we visited, he bought me a couple drinks." He takes a seat next to Gabe on Gabe's lounge chair, their thighs pressing up against each other.

Gabe raises an eyebrow at him, takes a sip of the drink. If there's alcohol in this one, he can't taste it. "Taking drinks from strange men?"

"He seemed nice!" Jesse protests. Gabe scoots over on the chair, precarious on just half of it, making room for Jesse. Jesse takes the invitation, laying back in the free space, Gabe's arm around his shoulders. He kisses Gabe's cheek and then, a moment later, Gabe's lips. He tastes like piña coladas and a hint of sunscreen, and for that moment, Gabe can pretend.

They regroup before dinner, and Gabe doesn't realize until twenty minutes in that he's sat a little too close to Jesse on the bed and that Jesse hasn't said anything.

The next day is a lot of the same, Jesse finding an excuse to separate himself from Gabe and Nash materializing at his side almost immediately. Their intel on him was obviously, almost laughably
"He said he's going on some kind of outing tomorrow when we make port, asked me to come along," Jesse says through a mouthful of room service burger. Gabe swats at him good-naturedly, and Jesse finishes chewing before speaking again. "I didn't tell him yes or no, only that I'd have to think about it. Pretty sure we can play the 'dumb Southerner' card if the two of us show up tomorrow for the snorkeling or whitewater rafting or whatever the hell it is he's trying to woo me with, say I misunderstood the invitation."

"I need to perfect my drawl," Gabe says, shaking his head. "You could get away with actual murder by playing the dumb Southerner card."

Jesse laughs. "What can I say? Being the charming idiot has its uses sometimes."

This is how Gabe finds himself getting strapped into a zip-line harness, after hiking thirty minutes into the jungle with Jesse and Nash and a bunch of other excited cruise-goers. He stares out into the canopy of trees the zip-line runs through and wonders briefly if he's been taken in by the charming idiot as well.

"Are you excited?!" Jesse asks him, standing to the side as the woman stationed at the zip-line finishes strapping him in.

Gabe is not excited. Six weeks ago, he and McCree and a team of other Blackwatch agents had been on a mission in Sri Lanka where the lack of an insertion point had meant rappelling out of the transport. That had been from higher up than this zip-line, with more urgency and also guns, and it had just been a Tuesday. The zip-line does not impress Gabe.

The zip-line would impress his cover, though, so Gabe musters his best slightly-terrified smile, adjusts his glasses, and gives Jesse a thumbs up, and then he's off. It's about as thrilling as he expects, but he does make a vaguely excited noise until he's out of earshot of the rest of the group. He waits at the base of the zip-line for Jesse to come down, and it's longer than he expects--Nash is still up at the top, and while Gabe knows that this is all according to plan, it's still--

It's still--

Nash comes down before Jesse. He flashes Gabe a knowing smile as he swings in, and Gabe resists the fleeting urge to elbow him in the nose, opting instead for a serene smile, as though he's unaware that Nash thinks they're competing.

Jesse swings in next, with a loud 'yeehaw' that Gabe can hear coming long before anybody at the foot of the zip-line has eyes on him.

"Your boy sure is noisy," Nash says to Gabe with a look that's toeing the line of 'leer'.

(Gabe blushes, but probably not for the reason Nash thinks.)

"That was great!" Jesse tells Gabe as he's unfastened from the zip-line harness. "We should try it again sometime!"

Gabe thinks about Sri Lanka and smiles as Jesse takes his hand. "I'll have to see what I can do."

When the rest of the group has come down, the guide gathers them all back up again and leads them back towards shore, to the third and final portion of the outing. The first had been the hike through the jungle to the zip-line, the second had been the zip-line itself, and now--
"A submarine?" Gabe says aloud as the thing emerges from the water.

"A sight-seeing submarine," the guide corrects.

Next to Gabe, Jesse goes stiff. Gabe knows why. Jesse's fear of small, enclosed spaces is well-documented in his Overwatch file. After the incident in Peru six years back, they've been careful, and there's an Overwatch therapist that Gabe had gently suggested McCree go see--and then, after another incident a year or so later somewhere over China, had strongly suggested McCree go see.

"We don't have to do this," Gabe says quietly. "We can just go back to the ship."

Jesse shakes his head. "No, no, I've been seeing Dr. Harrington. I should... it should go better than the last time we tried something like this."

"You don't have to do this," Gabe repeats.

"No, we've paid for this, I don't want to--"

Gabe turns Jesse towards him, grabs his shoulder and holds eye contact. He hasn't had to talk to Jesse like this since their early days with Blackwatch. "It's not about the money, sweetheart," he says. He doesn't say Jim, because he isn't talking to Jim, he's talking directly to Jesse. "You're more important than the money. You know that."

Jesse nods slowly. He squares his shoulders. "I know. Still, I think I can do this."

"If you're sure."

"C'mon, Clark," Jesse says, and he grins. "Don't you trust me?"

"With my life."

On Jesse's other side, Gabe sees Nash twitch.

The submarine trip does not go well. Jesse is stoic on the boat all the way out to the sub, manages to stay stoic as they take their seats in front of a big porthole, but as the guide starts talking and the sub begins to descend into the water, Gabe hears Jesse's breathing start to go funny in a way he recognizes and dreads.

"Hey, hey," Gabe says, trying not to let the panic seep into his own voice, "Stay with me. You're here with me. You're gonna be okay."

Jesse doesn't answer, just looks at him, then up at the ceiling, at the wall in front of them, at the porthole.

"Breathe with me," Gabe says. He takes a deep, deliberate breath, making sure his chest and shoulders rise and fall visibly. "In, out."

"In, out," Jesse repeats. His shoulders don't move nearly as much as Gabe's hand, and the breath he takes is a little rattly, but he does it: in, out, in, out. The guide starts telling them about the various kinds of fish they can see out the window, and Jesse tucks himself up under Gabe's arm, buries his face in Gabe's chest and keeps breathing.

Gabe presses a careful kiss to Jesse's hair and finally allows himself one good glare at Nash.

Jesse's shaky when they exit the submarine, and Nash is nothing but apologetic. "If I'd known that this wasn't something you would enjoy, I wouldn't have suggested it. I'm so sorry." He only sounds
as sorry as he has to be to get laid, which infuriates Gabe a little. "Let me make it up to you."

"What did you have in mind?" Jesse asks.

When they get back to the ship, Jesse makes a beeline for their room, and Gabe follows him. When they get there, Jesse stops in the doorway and turns back to Gabe.

"Can you--I need a little space, if that's okay."

Gabe nods quickly. "Of course. I'll have my comm if you need me." He takes off before Jesse can say anything else.

He wonders if Jesse can tell how much he's meant every bit of affection so far. He wonders what part of what he did today spooked Jesse, which line he's crossed was the one that made Jesse need space. (Because this is about him, his rational brain offers sarcastically, and certainly not about the claustrophobia-related panic attack they'd just barely managed to stave off.)

He wanders through the marketplace on one of the middle decks, passes by a group of women doing yoga in the sunshine, stops to watch a group of kids in the pool playing Marco Polo, spends a little time in the art gallery--there's an auction in a few days, and it can't hurt to be familiar with the pieces before then.

His comm buzzes with a message from Jesse. Can you bring some dinner back to the room? I'm not feeling up to going out. They need to spend some time debriefing anyway, so Gabe picks up some passable Asian fusion food from that place on one of the lower decks and heads back.

Gabe sits at the table by the door and eats his food, and Jesse sits across the room with his back against the balcony door and shovels the food into his mouth with his chopsticks. They go over what they accomplished today, what they learned: Nash is definitely on the hook, and Jesse got his room number and the promise of further interactions.

"He told me to call him Brock," Jesse says, swallowing his food. "It is a good thing that Jim is a dumb Southerner, because I don't know who else I could be who could stand him."

Gabe shrugs. "If you can get him to take you off the boat, I can beg off and go for the data and we can finish up early."

"I'll see if I can't suggest the outing this time--maybe something nice and soothing, like white-water rafting or base jumping."

Gabe laughs. Tomorrow they're back on the water, so they'll try to get something planned for the following day. They'll be six days in at that point, five days away from the drop, and while the groundwork they've been doing is good, they're running out of days to get results.

Jesse finishes his dinner, sets the carton aside and looks up at Gabe. "I wanted to say sorry, for today."

Gabe looks at him, surprised. "You did great today. You were sympathetic, we got what we needed, and you made it through a really tough situation. Nothing to be sorry for there."

"A tough situation I put myself in."

"A tough situation," Gabe repeats. "It worked out."

"That's not--" Jesse stops, begins again. "I felt like I went too far. I didn't want to..."
"Make things weird?" Gabe finishes for him. He nods. "It's the mission, Jesse." (The name is soft in his mouth.)

Jesse snorts. "Even if it is, I kept thinking about having to...having to come back here and face you, after. There's this delineation, between you and me on the mission and you and me in here, and I'm finding that I'm thinking about that line a lot."

"If turning it on and off is the problem, if that line is a problem, why not remove the line? Just be undercover the whole time, even in here?" The words are out of Gabe's mouth before he can think about them. This is a bad idea. This is maybe his worst idea. The lines already feel like they're blurring for him, and he honestly has no idea how he's going to cope at the end of the mission, when they have to go back to Blackwatch, when he has to go back to Jesse being McCree again.

"You think that'd work?" Jesse looks understandably skeptical.

"You wouldn't have to worry about any of this until it's over, and then--"

Jesse interrupts, which is good, because Gabe doesn't actually know how that sentence ends. "We debrief and never speak of it again, right?"

That's the most Gabe can hope for, so he nods.

Jesse stares at him for a long, long moment. Gabe can see the wheels turning in his head, but can't bring himself to ask.

"Okay," Jesse says finally.

"Okay?"

"Okay, I won't worry about it."

Even though Jesse's smiling at him, Gabe still can't read his expression. "I won't worry about it either," he says. This is followed by an awkward pause, and then Jesse moves to the bed and Gabe moves to sit next to him. He's a little too close this time too, but like he said, he's not going to worry. He tells Jesse about the art gallery, about the piece he thinks he's going to try to bid on—it's middlingly expensive and ungodly ugly, and he intends to submit it with the expense report and a suggestion that Morrison hang it in his office to celebrate them bringing down the cartel.

"This I have to see," Jesse says, and he takes Gabe's hand, pulls him out of their room and all the way to the art gallery. There, Jesse guesses with increasing glee which piece Gabe had been talking about, perfectly in character, and when he finally guesses it, they both burst out laughing.

They get some ice cream and find chairs by a railing and watch the sunset, Jesse's head leaned onto Gabe's shoulder.

"Thank you," Jesse says quietly.

"You're welcome. What for?"

Jesse waves a hand vaguely. "For today. For this. For this cruise—it's nice to get some time with you away from work, Clark."

"It is nice." Gabe smiles. "I work too much. I'm glad you convinced me this was a good idea."

Jesse leans further over and kisses him, an ice cream-flavored, slightly-sticky kiss. He says, "I love
"I love you too," Gabe says, reacting better and faster than he expects for how much surprise and panic is currently churning in his gut, meaning every goddamn syllable of it.

Later, back to the room, they check in with Valdez. It's becoming routine, although today they have more to report than usual. Valdez gets the abbreviated version, Gabe very aware of the Jesse's nearness to him and the comm, of Jesse's eyes on him as he relates the events of the day. He skips neatly around the details, missing Jesse's claustrophobia episode entirely. The important thing, Gabe says aloud, is that they're getting close.

In bed that night, Jesse shifts restlessly for a while, obviously trying to decide how close to Gabe he--wants to be? thinks he can get away with? After ten minutes of this, Gabe sighs, turns on his side and scoots close to Jesse so his back is pressed against Jesse's shoulder and arm.

Jesse freezes.

"Come on, I know you want to," Gabe says, and he feels Jesse shift a little more and then settle in behind him.

"Didn't figure you'd be a little spoon kind of guy," Jesse says by his ear.

Gabe feels himself blush, hot across his face and ears and neck. He tries to wriggle away, but Jesse's arms around him are strong.

"Hey, no, I'm sorry," Jesse says, the terror evident in his voice. Maybe he's just realized he's not letting go. "I didn't mean anything by it. I'm sorry."

"We're undercover," Gabe says into his pillow. "Clark has a stressful job and likes to be held sometimes."

Jesse kisses his clothed shoulder once, then twice, and it's almost ridiculous how calming Gabe finds it. "Jim understands and acknowledges this. I think Jim likes to help, however he can. I'm sorry."

"It's fine. Let's just get some sleep."

(Gabe wakes up the next morning after some of the best sleep he's had in recent memory, and the bed is already empty.)

Jesse does the heavy lifting with Nash the next day while Gabe relaxes in the spa, hanging out in the sauna and getting a fancy massage. They regroup before dinner--Nash has apparently invited both of them to sit with him at the VIP table tonight--and Jesse fills Gabe in on how his day had gone.

"Brock wants to take me horseback riding," Jesse says, rolling his eyes.

"Even without the hat, you still scream 'cowboy'." Gabe picks up the guide the cruise had provided about the available outings and begins to flip through it, looking for the horseback riding. They won't make that submarine mistake twice.

Jesse looks miffed. "No, I believe that what I screamed was 'yeehaw', on the zip-line. Nash extrapolated from that and...didn't wind up being entirely incorrect."

Gabe snorts with laughter when he finds the horseback outing in the guide. "It's literally listed under
the 'romantic' subheading," he says.

Jesse comes over and leans his chin on Gabe so he can read over Gabe's shoulder. "Romantic!" he says, in an exaggerated Southern accent. "Why, sugar, I do declare! How forward of the gentleman!"

Gabe turns his head to look at him, knocks their foreheads together gently. "You're not even that kind of Southern."

"You say that like Nash is going to care." Jesse flops onto the bed behind Gabe, curls himself around Gabe with his head pillowed on his elbow by Gabe's hip. "I'm trying to decide if Jim is great at horseback riding or terrible at horseback riding."

"Has Jim ever even seen a horse?" Gabe leans back against Jesse without thinking, and Jesse makes a little pleased noise. His undercover skills are superb, and one of these days Gabe is really going to have to get around to finishing up the necessary paperwork to put him in for a medal from the UN.

"He has certainly seen a lot of cowboy movies." Jesse snorts. "Yeah, no, Jim is terrible at horses. Nash is gonna be able to teach him so much, it's gonna be so exciting."

"I'm almost sorry I'm going to miss it," Gabe says with a laugh.

The real invitation comes at dinner, all three of them dressed up a little for the VIP table. When Nash asks, Jesse looks over at Gabe expectantly. "Can we go?"

(Nash, to his credit, does not flinch at 'we'.)

"I can't go tomorrow, honey," Gabe says, adjusting his glasses, his voice apologetic but not apologetic enough. "Work got in touch with me today, and I'm going to have to spend tomorrow cleaning up one of their messes. They gave the new guy access to the admin console, and he pressed all the buttons on it for fun."

Jesse huffs. "You said--you promised--no work on our vacation. You promised it would be just the two of us and I wouldn't have to compete with your goddamn job for your attention."

"You know I didn't promise you that. I can't promise you that. The job--"

"Fuck your stupid job!" Jesse slams his hand down on the table, and everybody jumps. "Someday you're gonna have to pick between me and the job for good, and what'll you do then?"

"Jim, come on, that's not--"

Jesse glares at him. "No, we're not doing this. Not now." He turns to Nash. "I would absolutely love to ride some horses with you tomorrow. I'll see you then." With that, he shoves back from the table and stomps off.

Gabe apologizes to the other people at the table long enough for Jesse to get a plausible head start and then follows him out of the dining room. He heads back to their room, although he knows that's not where Jesse is going. They're having a fight, after all. They'd worked it all out ahead of time, but Gabe's stomach still feels a little queasy as he checks and double-checks his gear for tomorrow, watches something brainless on the holo-vids, waits for it to get late enough for Jesse to get back.

He stands in the bathroom and stares at his own face in the mirror. "I'm an idiot," he says aloud. His reflection appears to agree.
Jesse goes the next day, wearing a comm in his ear. He's sure to be flouncy and angry about Gabe and the work Gabe has to stay behind to do, and his guileless flirting with Nash is the background music in Gabe's ear as Gabe gathers as much equipment as he can plausibly carry on a cruise ship and heads for Nash's room.

The cartel had sprung for a very fancy suite for Nash, big enough for Nash and the two bodyguards Gabe's seen lurking around with him, on a nicer deck than where Gabe and Jesse are staying. Security on the door is better than Gabe expected, extra on top of what the cruise ship provides, and so he improvises—he knocks on the suite next door, and when he gets no answer, breaks into that one instead. From that room's balcony, he makes his way across to Nash's balcony, where he pauses to take stock.

"Jesse," he says into his comm, "Any chance you know how many of Nash's goons are with you guys now?"

In his ear, Jesse says, "You know, Brock, it's nice to get to spend some time with you like this, one on one."

Okay, one guy with Nash, one guy still on the boat. That makes sense—you don't want to leave your important shit entirely unattended. Gabe peers harder through the balcony door, trying to determine if the bodyguard is still in the suite, but it's not obvious either way. He does spot an important-looking briefcase on a table in the middle of the room, and a closer look via his scope reveals that it has a pretty complicated electronic lock on it. That must be the thing they're here for.

Gabe sighs. "Today's gonna have to be recon only, I think. I don't have the right tools with me, and I'm not going to risk it without eyes on both guards."

Jesse lets out a frustrated sigh on the comms. Somebody on his end says something Gabe can't quite make out, and Jesse says, "Oh, no, it's just, the horse. I don't know why I thought this would be easy." Another pause, and Jesse chuckles. "You're right; it does look easy in the movies."

Gabe snorts and makes his way back to the rest of the ship. He's not sure where the other bodyguard is, so he goes straight back to their room, where he's supposed to be holed up doing work all day. It's a couple more hours before Jesse gets back, and Gabe keeps his comms on, just in case. It ought to help, listening to Jesse fake-date someone else the same way he's been fake-dating Gabe, but instead it twists irritably in his gut.

When Jesse eventually makes his way back to the room, he falls face-first onto the bed with a groan as soon as the door has closed behind him. "Who knew that it was so hard to ride a horse badly," he says into the mattress. "My back is killing me, and my legs, ooh boy."

Gabe approaches the bed, sits a little too far away from Jesse, and Jesse turns his head to look at him. "You could go up to the spa, get a massage," he offers. "It's worth it."

Jesse moves his shoulders in an abortive shrug. "Too far away. What if I just laid here instead?"

"You're an adult, no one can stop you." Gabe scoots a little closer. "Where does it, uh, where are you sore?" Another shrug from Jesse, so Gabe reaches out and puts a hand between Jesse's shoulder blades. They'd made it past the first awkward application of sunscreen, doing that pretty much daily now without incident, so he takes this risk, pressing into Jesse's back with careful fingers.

The noise Jesse makes is almost obscene, a satisfied moan that makes Gabe's dick twitch alarmingly.

"There," Jesse says, "Right there."
Gabe moves even closer, adds a second hand. He can feel the knots of muscle under his fingers, and he works into them methodically, between Jesse's shoulder blades and then lower down his back. Gabe hadn't known how intimate this would feel. Jesse goes loose and pliant under his touch, and he doesn't make any more particularly obscene noises, just directs Gabe higher or lower and makes small, pleased sounds when Gabe does as he's told. Jesse's breathing goes slower too, steadier, and Gabe uses less pressure and eventually stops as it becomes apparent that Jesse has fallen asleep.

He stands cautiously, being careful not to move too fast and disturb Jesse. Once he's safely away, he heads immediately for their bathroom and locks himself in. He jerks off as quietly as he can, biting back Jesse's name as he fucks into his own fist. He comes, and immediately hates himself for it.

The next few days are a blur of planning and movement. Gabe's doing his best to be professional, but he can't quite shake the feeling of whiplash. In public, his and Jesse's relationship has to have a plausible edge to it, something that makes it believable that Jesse is unsatisfied and might be looking for something or someone else. In private, they're still dating--fake-dating--like normal, like before. Jesse is sweet and affectionate in private, and Gabe finds himself leaning into every touch like a drowning man given air. It ought to be embarrassing, but Jesse doesn't seem to mind, stays in character and keeps doing it, leans into Gabe's touches a little himself.

Nash is friendly--really friendly--and that's good, Gabe reminds himself. That's what they want. They meet Nash for squash, go to a show with him, sit at his table at dinner, buy art with him at the auction. (Nash buys the painting Gabe had picked out, for Jesse, and now Morrison has to hang it in his office.) Gabe plays the harried, naive boyfriend while Jesse quite literally bats his eyes at Nash right in front of him.

Some ugly feelings are making themselves known in Gabe's gut: anger, pettiness, jealousy. Jesse's never really dated anyone seriously while he's been in Blackwatch, at least not that Gabe's seen, and so this green-eyed bile has been something he's never had to deal with before. It's unseemly and he doesn't like it, but all he can do is shove it down, lie awake in the bed they share at night and wonder what's going to happen when he has to deal with it for real, when Jesse someday starts to date somebody at Overwatch (which he's obviously going to, he's too handsome and personable and great to stay single for too long).

He doesn't know how they're going to go back to normal at all after this.

After dinner one of the nights, Gabe and Jesse end up at a dance, the kind of thing that Gabe would on principle avoid--he doesn't like dancing, it makes him feel exposed and vulnerable--but they know Nash wants to make a move and they know that he'd love to do it somewhere public, for maximum effect, and this is their best bet.

("Can you even dance?" Gabe had asked Jesse, as they'd planned their evening before dinner.

"I'll have you know that I am excellent at line-dancing," Jesse had said. The snort Gabe had let out in response had been about eighty percent teasing.)

The music starts, and Gabe and Jesse settle back at one of the tables that line that dance floor. Jesse wheedles, trying to get Gabe to dance, and Gabe hems and haws, both of them very carefully not watching Nash where he's standing across the room. After an appropriate amount of time, Gabe gives in and lets himself be led out onto the floor, just as the music slows. Jesse grins at him a little and snakes his arms around Gabe's neck and pulls him close.

"See?" he says in Gabe's ear. "Not so bad."
"No, no it's not." Gabe closes his eyes for a moment and tries to memorize this feeling, this moment. He wants so badly to kiss Jesse.

The next song is upbeat, a little bit swing, and Jesse, the goddamn liar, shifts his hands onto Gabe's torso and leads them both across the floor adeptly in some dance Gabe ought to recognize. A laugh escapes from Gabe, the sound pure delight.

There's one more upbeat dance, and Gabe makes all the requisite noises they'd planned, him not wanting to keep dancing and Jesse wanting to, obvious discord Nash could observe. During the next slow song, Jesse whispers *I'm sorry* in his ear, and then Nash is there, cutting in. Gabe, as planned, takes a seat at a table on the edge of the dance floor and does his best not to look too seethingly jealous.

That's part of the plan, he reminds himself as he watches Jesse get spun around the floor, close in Nash's arms. The jealousy is part of the plan. It's allowed. It's good.

He feels an elbow in his side, and he turns to find one of the other occupants of the table. The guy is blond; he's wearing loafers, his collar is popped, and his snapback is turned at an odd angle. "You gonna just let him muscle in on your man like that?" he asks Gabe, looking genuinely concerned.

Gabe shakes his head. "It's complicated."

The guy looks at him, then out at Jesse and Nash on the dance floor, then back again at Gabe. "Doesn't look that complicated. Looks pretty simple to me."

"It's also none of your business."

The guy shrugs. "Okay, fine, sorry. Just trying to help." He pauses, looks over at Gabe again. "You wanna dance, bro? Handsome guy like you shouldn't be sitting this out, and it might make you feel better."

Gabe considers it, just for a moment--then his professionalism kicks back in. (He knows he shouldn't have even considered it.)

He shakes his head.

"Your loss, man," the guy says, shrugging again. "You want me to go cut in on the happy couple on the dance floor? *That* might make you feel better."

Gabe shakes his head again, more vehemently this time. "Please stay out of this. It's--"

"None of my business, yeah, yeah, I know." The guy sighs and sits back in his chair.

They sit there in silence for a minute, until a man in a nearly-identical outfit (pink polo shirt, ridiculous loafers, stupid hat) comes over and punches the guy too-hard in the arm. "Chad!" Pink Polo Shirt says. "Jeremy's buying rounds of tequila shots! You don't want to miss this!"

The guy, Chad, casts a look over at Gabe that he ignores, then rises to his feet to follow Pink Polo Shirt out. Before he leaves, Chad turns back to address Gabe one more time. "It's your life, man. I don't know about you, but I wouldn't want to spend it as unhappy as you obviously are."

"Thanks so much for your input," Gabe says, but he's already gone, leaving Gabe to contemplate what he'd said.
Before they know it, it's time. The drop is tomorrow, when they make port at their last little island destination. If they're going to get the data, it has to be now. The pieces are all in place: Jesse is going to be forward and bring Nash back to their room, and while they're doing whatever it is they're going to be doing (Gabe is resolutely not thinking about whatever it is they're going to be doing), Gabe is going to be taking all the appropriate gear, breaking into Nash's suite, and downloading the data.

"How do I look?" Jesse asks, when they're ready to head out. He spins once in front of Gabe, showing off pretty much the same outfit he's worn every day so far, pulled-back hair and a tank top with a picture of a cartoon snail flexing its biceps on it.

"He'd be crazy not to want you," Gabe says, more sincerity in his voice than there ought to be. Jesse pauses, then looks at him with concern. "You're sure you're okay with this?" he asks. There's a worried, plaintive note to the question. He knows, Gabe thinks. He has to know. Gabe's been so obvious, he might as well have been waving a goddamn flag, spelling it out in skywriting. Jesse has to know; why else would he ask like he expects Gabe to say no?

"Of course," Gabe lies. "It's the mission, and the mission has to get done." He overcompensates and ends up sounding a little harsher than he means to. Jesse's eyes search his face for a moment.

"You know I'll always like you best," Jesse says, his voice quiet, and then he gives Gabe a bright grin and steps forward to kiss him. Gabe reaches up with one hand to cup his face without even thinking, lets every confusing feeling he's felt over the last two weeks leech into this one kiss, just for a moment. (They're not confusing feelings; Gabe knows exactly what they are, wishes he was stronger.)

He comes back to himself, steps away. The look on Jesse's face is almost distressed, and he forces his own visage into a frown. "You don't--"* have to do this, he wants to say. You *don't have to humor me like this. I don't get to keep this, so I shouldn't get to have it. "Just--don't."

Gabe looks away, unable to face Jesse as he tells him this; when he looks back, Jesse's expression is a slightly uneasy grin. He moves away to finish getting ready. "You'll have your comms in, right?"

"Because you need to know when Nash's suite is clear, and I'll need to know when it's safe to let him go."

"Right, of course." That makes sense. That Gabe is going to have to listen to the two of them...together, that's just an awful, unfortunate side effect. Gabe slips his comm into his ear, and then they both head out to do what needs to be done.

Gabe sits in the coffee shop by the art gallery with a laptop, pretending to do whatever it is that his cover does for work, until he hears Jesse meet up with Nash. The conversation doesn't take long--Jesse is angry that Gabe has to work, again, and Nash has been waiting for this for a while.

"He's out all day, I think" Jesse says in Gabe's ear. "Come back to my room."

Gabe's stomach flips, but he counts to two hundred before he closes the laptop, picks up his gear, and heads for Nash's suite. "En route," he whispers into his comms. "You have the guards with you too?"
"So," Jesse asks Nash, "The two big guys, are they going to watch, or--"

A pause.

"Good, because there could be trouble if my boyfriend comes back, and I do want you all to myself."

Okay, so the guards are with Jesse, on the lookout for Gabe at their room. Gabe wonders if the cartel knows that this is what Brock Nash is doing with their men; he doesn't seem nearly important enough to be getting away with this. He arrives at Nash's suite, pulls the electronic lock-pick out of his bag and makes short work of the door security, and lets the door slide shut behind him.

In his ear, Jesse has stopped talking, the absence of conversation filled instead with small, breathless noises that Gabe now recognizes as Jesse kissing.

Gabe quickly sweeps the suite for bugs and then makes a beeline for where he'd seen the briefcase during his reconnaissance. No need to stretch this out any longer than they have to.

Security on the briefcase takes longer to crack than the door had, but in the end, it opens up too. Inside the briefcase, there's a sheaf of papers and a single memory stick--that has to be the data they're after. He pulls out the complicated apparatus he'd brought from HQ and plugs the memory stick into it. The Blackwatch techs had assured him that it was plug-and-play, that it would make a complete copy of whatever data storage device he plugged into it in a completely undetectable way; Gabe just needs to sit back and let it work. He occupies his time a little by photographing the sheaf of papers, sheet by sheet; he's not sure what they are, but if they're important enough to send with this data, they're almost undoubtedly something Overwatch will want to see.

"Found the data," Gabe says into his comm. "Copying now. You just...hold tight."

There's a noise from Jesse that could either be acknowledgment or pleasure, and Gabe shivers a little. After a minute, Jesse's voice says in his ear, breathy pauses inserted into each clause, "You know, I'm glad we get to do this. I've been wanting to." A pause, and Jesse laughs. "You'd be surprised how long." Gabe can't make out what Nash is saying, but Jesse responds, "All you had to do was ask."

Gabe knows Jesse isn't talking to him, but he could easily say those exact words directly back to Jesse and mean every one.

He checks the display on the copy apparatus: 48%. The noises on Jesse's end have turned louder, more like moans, and Gabe does his best to block them out, to concentrate on the task at hand and not think about what Jesse's doing. Then he hears it: the thread of discord in Jesse's noises, the note that sounds like every time Jesse hits the mat in training. Gabe's not sure he's even supposed to be hearing it; if Jesse needed help, Gabe knows he wouldn't have to guess at it. Still--

"Jesse," Gabe says quietly, "Are you okay?"

No real response, but then again, Gabe's not sure what he was expecting. Jesse's busier than he is now; all Gabe can do is watch the percentage tick up on the copy apparatus display.

"You need me to come get you, you just let me know," Gabe says. The number ticks up: 52, 53, 54. He thinks about Jesse hitting the mat, and what he's done then that's made Jesse feel better. He's always responded well to encouragement?

"You're doing great, Jesse," he says into the comms. "So good. We couldn't do this without you." He pauses, feeling embarrassed. Why did he think that would help? Why did he think that would even be welcome? Jesse may be actively having sex; he doesn't want to think about his commanding
"Ooh," Jesse says in his ear, "I like that. Don't you dare stop."

Gabe is silent; surely Jesse doesn't mean him. The number ticks up: 59, 60. He shouldn't even bother to ask, but... "Were you talking to me?"

"Oh god, yes," Jesse says. It's unlike anything else Jesse has been saying, and Gabe can only assume it's intended for him. So he starts again, tells Jesse how well he's doing, babbles mission-related praise as he watches the number tick up: 77, 78.

"Come on--guy like you, I know you can do better than that," Jesse says, a smirk in his voice. From Jesse's end of the comms, there's a noise that sounds like Nash laughing, far enough away from the mic that Gabe isn't sure.

Well, if that's what Jesse needs, that's what Jesse needs. The mission has to get done, so Gabe finally lets himself think about what's happening in their room, says, "I bet you look so good, laid out like that. So much bare skin, ready to be touched, wanting to be touched."

"Yeah," Jesse says. "Yeah, god yeah."

"So good," Gabe breathes, his eyes on the display. The number ticks up: 94, 95, 96. "So gorgeous."

"So close," Jesse grits out. "Tell me you want me."

Without thinking, without hesitating, Gabe's voice goes low and he says, "I want you."

In Gabe's ear--in Jesse's ear, presumably--Nash growls, "I want you."

Gabe feels like a fool.

The number hits 100, and the apparatus beeps at him cheerfully. Gabe turns his attention to it instead of the obscene noises Jesse is making. He unhooks the memory stick from the copy system, closes the briefcase up, puts everything back where he found it. "I've got what I need," he says into the comms. "I'll let you know when I'm clear."

No acknowledgment from Jesse, but in fairness, he did sound like he was a little...busy. Gabe gives the room a final once-over, then heads out. He goes back to the coffee shop, pulls out the laptop and settles in at the same table, lets Jesse know that he's out.

"You should probably go," Jesse says in his ear, talking to Nash. "You can't be here when Clark gets back, and really, we're lucky he hasn't come back already." A pause, and Nash must ask where Gabe's gone, because Jesse answers, "To work, I think at the coffee shop? He said the internet there is better than the shit we get in the room."

A minute or so later, Jesse tells Gabe that Nash has left, and a few minutes after that, Nash sweeps through the coffee shop. He sits at Gabe's table, gives him a smarmy smile and makes conversation that would be totally innocent if Gabe didn't know where he'd just come from. Gabe is sure to look suspicious enough of Nash and his conversation that it won't seem like too much of a coincidence when he gets up after Nash leaves and heads back to their room.

The door to the bathroom is shut when Gabe gets there, and he hears the shower turn off. Gabe announces that he's back, then moves around the room, securing the data, getting unpacked. The comm Jesse had put into his ear earlier is on the table, and there's a tied-off condom in the trash can.
He takes a seat on the floor by the balcony door and stares at the bed, at the dirty mess of rumpled sheets that Nash has left them. He knew--of course he knew, he'd listened to it--but somehow, here, confronted with the evidence...

He opens the balcony door and goes out to lean on the railing, staring out at the sea, trying not to think. If the fresh air it lets into the room clears out the sex smell that had been lingering, well, that's all the better.

He realizes suddenly that the shower had shut off a while ago, but he hasn't heard any evidence of movement from the bathroom. He goes back inside and knocks on the bathroom door, anxiously calling Jesse's name. He gets no response to that, and no response to the statement that if Jesse doesn't answer, Gabe will have to come in there, so he takes a deep breath, says he's coming in, and opens the door.

Inside, Jesse is standing at the sink, staring in the mirror. He's naked except for the towel wrapped around his waist, and while Gabe is trying not to look, he can't help but notice the pair of bruises above Jesse's hips. Something bitter and mean flames to life inside him.

Jesse's head snaps up at Gabe's sudden appearance, and he swears and stumbles backwards. Gabe lunges forward to catch him, grabbing his arm and hauling him back upright, and they stay there for a couple beats too long, Gabe's hand wrapped around Jesse's wrist between them.

Gabe lets go quickly when he realizes, feels the blood rushing to his face, and flees back out into the safety of the room. Jesse comes out a minute or so later, wearing his boxer-briefs and the same tank top from earlier.

"Are you okay?" Gabe asks, standing from the seat he'd taken again on the bed and cautiously approaching Jesse.

Jesse shrugs. "Been better."

"Did he hurt you?"

"Did he--" Jesse stops, laughs mirthlessly. "That's not... I'm fine, boss. Gabe. I'll be fine."

"Can I see?" Jesse gives Gabe a look he can't read but peels off his shirt anyway, points out the bruises Gabe had noticed, a couple he hadn't, a single bite mark on his neck. Gabe's fingers skate over each place Jesse shows him, touching each gently in turn.

"You ain't gotta be so nice to me. You wouldn't be so nice to me if you knew... if you knew what I'd just done." Jesse laughs again, this time shakier, with a little more actual amusement in it.

Gabe goes over to the suitcase with the gear and rummages through it until he finds a biotic pack, which he cracks open and hands to Jesse.

"You didn't have to do that," Jesse says, even as he takes the biotics from Gabe. "I'll be okay."

"You can be okay now, though. If we need this later, something has gone massively wrong and we'll need more than just this. The hard part is over. It should be smooth sailing from here."

Jesse sits on the bed, and Gabe takes a deep breath and joins him there; when Gabe sits down, Jesse leans his head over onto Gabe's shoulder. "Smooth sailing," Jesse echoes quietly. They're dating, Gabe reminds himself, even in here, and he lets himself press his face into Jesse's hair.
I want you, Gabe mouths into the darkness that night, Jesse sound asleep beside him.

There's no way this mission ends well, is there.

They're up bright and early the next morning. It's the day of the drop, and the plan is to tail Nash to the drop location and make sure that the hand-off goes as expected. They head off the ship with all the other passengers disembarking at this stop, making sure to keep an eye on Nash. He loiters in the port town first, perusing the little shops, eating something he purchases from a street vendor, presumably killing time until the drop. One of the bodyguards wanders off for a little bit, and Jesse nudes Gabe when they spot him again, in close conversation with somebody from the cruise company. The bodyguard gets out his wallet and passes the man some cash; Gabe raises an eyebrow, and Jesse shrugs back. They'll have to keep an eye on the cruise guy, he's undoubtedly important. When Nash splits from the main group, Gabe and Jesse follow, stalking along behind at a safe distance. Nash looks impatient, like he wants to be done with this, and he's so focused on where he's going that Gabe's pretty sure they could close the distance between them to ten feet and Nash wouldn't even notice. His bodyguards, on the other hand, are far more vigilant, to the point of jumpiness even, so Gabe and Jesse stay far back and wait.

They wind up a couple miles inland, at the edge of a compound surrounded by a tall chain-link fence topped with barbed wire. Gabe and Jesse are still a good distance away, Gabe watching through a pair of binoculars, Jesse squinting down the scope of a rifle they're both hoping he won't have to use. Nash is met at the gate of the compound by a tall woman in a blazer and sunglasses, somebody Gabe remembers from the cartel org chart they'd managed to piece together back at HQ. The woman Nash is meeting with is a lieutenant, reporting directly to the cartel boss himself. From this distance, they can't hear anything, but Jesse's pretty good at lipreading, so he murmurs snippets of the exchange as they both watch. Nash looks annoyed and hands over the briefcase, and the woman opens it and checks its contents.

She says something that makes Nash smirk. "She says it's all there," Jesse says quietly. "She didn't expect..." He trails off as the woman nods at the bodyguard closest to her, who draws a handgun from a holster at his waist and shoots Nash in the kneecap. Nash crumples to the ground, and they can hear the howl he lets out from here.

"Holy shit," Gabe says under his breath.

Next to him, Jesse hasn't stopped looking down the rifle scope. The woman is still talking, and Jesse's still repeating: "You thought that you could... Not worth..."

The bodyguard shoots Nash's other kneecap, and he screams more loudly than before.

"Ability?" Jesse says. "No, no, 'liability'. She's saying he's a liability."

The bodyguard moves to stand over Nash, points his gun down at Nash's head.

Gabe looks over at Jesse. Without looking up from his rifle, Jesse says, his voice low and icy, "Let him rot."

There's a final gunshot, and the woman turns on her heel and takes the briefcase back into the compound, both bodyguards following her. Nash's body remains on the ground where they'd left it, and Gabe and Jesse beat a hasty retreat.

Back at the ship, back at their room, Gabe realizes that with Nash and his bodyguards gone, there's
not really any reason left for them to pretend to date. It makes sense for them to finish out the trip, in case any of the other passengers notice, but Gabe wouldn't blame Jesse if he wanted to stop everything as soon as possible. They'd started this whole thing with Jesse not wanting things to be weird, and despite his best efforts, Gabe's pretty sure he's spent the entire mission doing exactly that, making things weird for Jesse.

Jesse stops up short outside their room, drops the bag with their gear between him and the door and turns to face Gabe. "Today was good," he says. "I think we can officially declare this cruise a success." He kisses Gabe gently, and it's all Gabe can do to keep from gasping against his mouth. Every time, every time Jesse has kissed him, it's been a surprise, something he can't quite believe.

"I'm sorry for how I've been acting," Jesse says when he pulls away. "You're great, and you deserve better than...this. Than me."

"I'm sorry too," Gabe says. He pauses, trying to choose his words carefully. Jesse is still in character, and Gabe is too, mostly, but he owes Jesse several apologies, both in- and out-of-character. Maybe he can manage all of them at once. "I haven't been thinking about you and how my behavior would affect you, just about what was important to me. I should've prioritized you, and I regret that I didn't."

"Your job is more important than my feelings," Jesse says, and Gabe feels the frown start to form between his eyebrows. He reaches out and laces his fingers between Jesse's, and Jesse's gaze darts down to where they're touching. "Your job is why we're even here. Don't worry about my feelings."

"I promise, our next vacation will go a lot more smoothly," Gabe says, not letting go of Jesse's hand. "You're not going to stop vacationing with me forever?" Jesse squeezes his hand, smiles at him.

"Unfortunately for you, you can't be rid of me that easily." Gabe says I love you, and even though he means it, he hopes that Jesse hears the I'm sorry that's nestled inside of it.

Jesse must, because he says I love you too and it sounds the same--apologies on both sides.

Jesse kisses him again, the lightest brush of his lips across Gabe's. Gabe is less surprised by this one, lets himself lean forward and kiss back. It's how this apology session would end if they were dating, he tells himself. It's reasonable. It doesn't invalidate the apology he'd just given. Jesse started it.

Jesse grabs the front of his shirt with one hand and keys into their room with the other, kicking the gear bag backwards and then pulling them both in without breaking the kiss. When the door closes behind Gabe, Jesse lets go and puts some distance between them, giving him a look of inexplicable grief. "I need a drink," he says.

Gabe's not clear if Jesse's actually talking to him or just saying the words aloud, but he says, "We're off the clock now. You want to go get a drink?"

They get dinner first, and then they head to the bar where they'd first met Nash. Gabe sips at a drink or two over the course of several hours--he'd never had a very high alcohol tolerance, and it had only been made worse by that SEP shit--but Jesse keeps going back to the bar and getting more drinks for himself, enough that Gabe loses track a little. Jesse's an adult though, and a professional, so Gabe's not too worried. And Jesse is exactly that, a professional; he sits just the right amount of close to Gabe, brushes his knee against Gabe's under the table, pressing his hand to Gabe's back every time he comes back to the table from the bar.

At one point, Jesse leans in a little closer and tells Gabe, very seriously, "You know, I'm kind of glad
Edwards broke his arm. I mean, ain't wishing ill on anybody, but... I'm glad I got to do this. I'm glad I'm here."

Gabe, with what little alcohol he's had buzzing in his veins, says, "I'm glad too."

Jesse leans back, regards Gabe. The space between them seems to stretch out to something almost insurmountable. "Why Edwards?" Jesse asks. "We both know I should've been the choice for this one."

"You know why," Gabe says. Because I wasn't ever supposed to get to kiss you. Because I don't get to have this. "You're the one who suggested Edwards. Why him? If we both know-"

"You know why." Jesse finishes what's left of his drink in one gulp and heads to the bar to get another, leaving Gabe at the table by himself to stare into his own glass. Jesse suggested Edwards because of Gabe's crush. That makes sense. As much as it hurts, it makes sense.

When Jesse comes back, he brings Gabe another drink too. Gabe does not sip this one.

They make their way back to their room before it gets too late. Gabe is worn out from the mission and tired from how tightly it feels like he's been holding himself the last few hours. What's been easy for the last few weeks suddenly feels impossible, and Gabe wonders if the other shoe has finally dropped.

He tries to take up as little room in the bed as possible, curls in on himself and does his best not to touch Jesse, does his best to give him space. He stays like that for several long minutes, drifting closer to sleep, until he feels Jesse's hands on him, turning him over, pulling him off of his side and onto his back. "What are you--" Gabe starts to ask, and then Jesse is on top of him, straddling Gabe's hips, staring down at him with a strange look in his eyes. "Jesse." Gabe means for it to sound stern, like a question. Instead, it's almost tender, and he hates himself a little bit for it.

"I'm just... Just once, okay?"

Gabe nods, not entirely sure what he's agreeing to but okay with whatever it is. He's concentrating more on his dick, which he can already feel growing hard under Jesse's ass where he's seated atop Gabe.

Jesse puts a hand down on the bed on either side of Gabe's head and kisses him, up his throat, down his jawline to his lips. It's the most real that any of this has felt, and even while he's kissing Jesse back, Gabe is terrified. He shouldn't let Jesse do this for him. They can't--

On the nightstand, Gabe's comm chimes insistently. The only people he's talked to on it have been Jesse and Valdez, and he knows that it's not Jesse.

"I should probably..." Gabe begins, looking up at Jesse, who nods and rolls down off of Gabe. Gabe sits up, turning to face the balcony as he grabs at the comm and answers it with a curt Reyes.

"Oh, good," comes Valdez's dry voice from the other end of the comm, "You're alive. You haven't checked in for two days, boss. Did you get the data? Did the drop go okay?"

Gabe gives Valdez an abbreviated version of the last two days, how he'd retrieved the data while McCree had kept the target occupied and how the drop had probably not gone the way that Nash had been expecting. Valdez is glad to hear that everything had gone as well as it could have, and Gabe makes sure before he signs off with her to verify that they won't be making any more check-ins before the end of the cruise.
He hangs up and turns back to the room, and Jesse is nowhere to be found. He checks above and below the balcony, the bathroom, under the bed, but finds nothing. His stomach sinks. Jesse is gone.

(He locks himself in the bathroom and thinks about the feeling of Jesse's ass on his dick, comes into his own pumping fist. If he thought he'd felt bad last time, well.)

He wakes up in the middle of the night, still alone in the bed. When he'd started the mission, he hadn't thought this bed would ever feel too big, but god, does it now.

Gabe is up, showered and dressed when Jesse comes back. Jesse's smile is too-bright and wobbly as he closes the door behind him, and the look he shoots Gabe dares him to mention it.

"I made back pretty much the entire mission budget at the blackjack table," Jesse says, looking proud of himself.

"Did you get any sleep?"

Jesse gives him a look. "No, I was playing blackjack. You not listening?"

"Jesse," Gabe starts, but Jesse cuts him off.

"Just--don't."

He collapses face-first onto the mattress next to where Gabe is sitting. Gabe reaches out a careful hand to touch him, but hesitates.

"You should go get some breakfast, hit up the pool. I'm gonna--" Jesse waves a vague hand, at an awkward angle since he's still face-down on the bed. "I'm gonna take a nap."

"Are you sure? I could--"

"Just go, Gabe. Please."

Gabe's stomach drops, but he grabs his phone off the table and goes. He eats breakfast by himself; when he sneaks back into the room to change into his swim trunks and put sunscreen on himself as best he can, Jesse has maneuvered himself around and under the covers and is sound asleep. He doesn't stir when Gabe stubs his toe on the bathroom door and swears loudly.

Gabe bravely, stupidly, leans down over the bed and touches Jesse's hair, running his fingers through it gently, half-hoping that Jesse will wake and they'll have to talk about this. He doesn't, though, and Gabe waits until his blush has subsided to go to the pool.

Morning gives way to afternoon as Gabe floats lazily in the water, watching the couples that walk or swim past and trying not to feel sorry for himself. He shouldn't be surprised. Going into this, he knew that it was going to end; that he'd gotten it for this long, even under these circumstances, even if Jesse never meant any of it, is a minor miracle. He should be thankful that he got it at all, not upset that it's ending.

This knowledge does nothing to quell the ache in his chest.

He pings Jesse later in the afternoon, when he abandons the pool and heads for the spa. You should come get a massage, the message reads. He refrains from mentioning the massage he'd given Jesse.
or trying to make a bad joke about loosening up.

He doesn't really expect Jesse to show up, but he waits outside the spa ten minutes anyway, scrolling through the news on his phone. He looks up when a shadow falls across it—it's Jesse, grinning at him like nothing has happened.

"I thought you were napping," Gabe says carefully.

Jesse waggles his eyebrows. "I heard that there were massages to be had."

"This vacation's been a little rough on you. I thought you deserved it."

Something flashes across Jesse's face and is gone just as quickly, and he leans forward and kisses Gabe. "You're so thoughtful," he tells Gabe, and they both head into the spa.

They get the massages Gabe had talked up, plus a fancy expensive skin treatment that Jesse picks seemingly at random from the catalog of available services; Gabe feels refreshed and renewed, in more ways than one. Jesse tugs Gabe's hand up to touch his face, to see how soft it is now, and Gabe runs a thumb along his cheekbone and hums appreciatively.

"Very soft," he says, and Jesse smiles at him.

They have dinner, and they dance, and they watch the sunset holding hands, and Gabe is just about feeling like he's got his feet back under him when they get back to their room and Jesse puts as much space between them as possible.

"Told you I could be professional," Jesse says. There's a smirk in his voice that hasn't made it to his face.

Gabe turns away, looks at the wall above the bed to hide the regret on his face. "I always thought you could."

There's a pause, and then from behind him, Jesse says, "Can you toss one of the pillows and a couple of the blankets over here? I'll take the floor tonight."

"You sure?" Gabe asks. He walks over to the bed, picks up one of the pillows and holds it in front of him, not tossing it yet, his fingers clenching into its surface.

Jesse shrugs. "Yeah, it's fine. If you're really worried about it, you can take the floor tomorrow."

They sleep like that, Gabe spread out across the too-big bed, Jesse on the floor by the balcony door in a little nest of blankets. It's somehow lonelier than the previous night.

"Good night, McCree," Gabe says quietly up into the dark--trying it out again.

There's a pause, and Jesse says back, just as quietly, "Good night, boss."

The rest of the cruise is uneventful, the two of them moving around each other but never quite touching, a couple in public but light-years apart in private. It's better that way, Gabe thinks. There's one more day at sea, Gabe sleeps on the floor overnight, and then they debark, head back to where they'd left their rental car, drive it back to the airport where the Overwatch transport is waiting for them.

Back at base, they debrief together with Valdez and Morrison, turning in the data they'd copied and
the photos they'd taken. They finish each other's sentences in that easy way they have for years, the way they did before they left. It feels strange to Gabe now, and he's pretty sure everyone can tell, given the look Valdez and Jesse exchange partway through.

(They make a big show of giving the art they'd brought back to the Strike Commander, who doesn't quite manage to hide his grimace--the best reaction Gabe could've hoped for.)

After the group debrief, Morrison pulls him aside to go over the course of action going forward--it all depends on what the data on the memory stick looks like and how long it takes Athena to decrypt it. Ideally, Blackwatch won't have to be involved any further; ideally, Overwatch and local police forces will be able to sweep in and shut the whole thing down in one massive, synchronized operation. It'll look great on the holo-vids, and Jack will undoubtedly get a medal for it. That's fine, though. That's not why Gabe does this. The work he does is reward enough--it has to be--and the people he works with--

By the time Morrison wraps up, Jesse's gone. He's not in the mess or his quarters, and Gabe starts to realize that he really shouldn't be looking at all. Whatever's going on with Jesse--with McCree--now, it feels delicate, like the kind of thing that Gabe could easily push the wrong way by cornering him or by giving him anything that feels like an order.

He'll keep his distance, wait to see if Jesse--McCree--comes around on his own. If he doesn't, well, that's an answer in itself, one that Gabe will have to respect.

Surprisingly, the bed in his quarters feels too big and empty now too.

Gabe's first full day back is spent doing paperwork, only crawling out from under the pile to grab a meal and stretch his legs. He thinks he spots Jesse in the mess hall once, but someone taps his shoulder, and when he turns to look and then turns back, Jesse's gone. A second day passes, then a third, and still no sign of Jesse--but surely that's not out of the ordinary? He tries to remember back to how they'd been before the Nash mission, but all he can think about is the mission, the way Jesse had kissed him, the way Jesse had _looked_ at him, the feeling of Jesse on top of him...

It's becoming a problem, all this thinking about the mission and Jesse. On the fourth day, he's pulled into a briefing with Ana and Jack; they've got a chunk of the files decrypted already, they're starting to plan, and, as the one most recently in contact with the cartel, they could use his input. No, Gabe tells them, they hadn't discovered anybody else from the cartel on-board besides Nash and his bodyguards--but then again, once they'd found Nash, they'd sort of stopped looking--

--then Gabe is back on the dance floor with Jesse, Jesse's hands on his waist, Jesse's eyes meeting his, pressed up against each other--

--and then Jack is saying his name like it's not the first time he's tried to get Gabe's attention. Gabe looks up just in time to see Jack and Ana exchange a look he does not appreciate.

It's worst at night, when it's just him and the bed and the darkness. Unable to sleep, he winds up touching himself, one hand on his dick and one hand fingering himself, eyes squeezed shut tight and the memory of the noises Jesse had made on the comms fresh in his mind. It makes him feel better for a minute, when he comes, and when he feels worse after, at least he's too exhausted to do anything but sleep.
It goes on like this for a week, then two. People are starting to remark that he looks tired. Overwatch sends their cartel mission out, and Gabe sits in Morrison's office with him and Ana and helps command the troops. When the whole thing is over, a resounding success, he looks for Jesse--to share the good news, to maybe talk about this--but Jesse is still nowhere to be found.

Finally, Gabe gets a day off, no paperwork, no missions. Rather than sit with his feelings, he decides to go work out, get the endorphins flowing, maybe kick-start feeling less terrible. The locker room is empty when he changes into his gym clothes, but when he gets into the exercise room proper, Agent Edwards is there, up against one of the punching bags, jabbing into it in a staccato rhythm. Gabe nods at him from across the room, heading to one of the weight machines, and Edwards stops what he's doing to make his way over to Gabe.

"Hey, Reyes, you made it back." Edwards says. He leans up against the weight machine and attempts to wipe the sweat out of his eyes with an already-sweaty forearm, which does not work quite as intended. "Hadn't seen you in a while, thought maybe Jesse had tossed you overboard."

"No, just busy." Gabe grunts as he settles back into the machine. He's not going to start his reps yet if Edwards wants to talk. "You're looking well. Heard you broke your arm."

Edwards laughs. "Oh, yeah, Doc Z had that patched up in no time. I was back and good as new in three, four days. Those bone-knitters they've got really are something. Do you know, it used to take six weeks to heal a broken arm? If it took that long, I never would've agreed to--" He stops speaking, very abruptly, and goes bright red.

"Agreed to what?"

"I thought that Jesse had told--did Jesse not tell you?" Edwards' voice starts high and rises even higher the longer he speaks.

"Tell me what?" Gabe hasn't moved, hasn't made his face or voice any more menacing than usual, but Edwards still squirms.

"I--I know that when you asked me if I could do this mission, I said yes, but the longer I thought about it, the further into the mission prep we got, the less sure of that I was."

"You should've said something." Gabe sits forward on the machine, props his elbows on his knees. "My door is always--"

Edwards cuts him off. "Always open, yeah. Your door may be open, but your office is intimidating as hell, boss. And this was pretty late in the game; I didn't want us to have to scrub the mission. I knew how important it was, so...I went and talked to Jesse, and we worked something out."

"Did Jesse break your arm?"

"No, no, of course not!" Edwards takes what looks to be an involuntary step back. "He didn't lay a finger on me. He just...helped me figure out my options. It helped a lot that he was so willing to fill in for me." He pauses, looking thoughtful. "I don't know why you didn't just take him in the first place. He seemed like he wanted to go; I'm surprised he hadn't told you."

"Apparently I'm intimidating," Gabe says dryly. "He didn't want this mission. I gave him the chance to take it and instead he suggested you."

Edwards mumbles something. Gabe gives him a look, and he repeats it, louder this time. "He thinks that I'm your type. He didn't think that--no, you know what? No. I'm not gonna have this conversation with you. You want to talk about why McCree didn't want to go on your mission? You
ask McCree. I'm not gonna get in the middle of this when I don't even have half of the facts. You two can sort this out yourselves, like adults. I've already said too much." With that, Edwards retreats back to his punching bag. His face is bright red, and the punches he directs at the bag echo loudly across the room.

Gabe watches him for a minute, then asks, "Wait, so you would rather break your own arm than go on a mission where you have to pretend to date me?"

Edwards glares at him and does not answer.

Gabe sits back against in the machine, lets his body move the weights while his mind races. Jesse had known from the beginning what the mission entailed, had been involved in the planning since step one. If he'd been willing to go but had suggested someone else, that had to mean...something.

Gabe finishes his reps, grabs his clothes and heads back to his quarters, where he showers in his own bathroom and then gets dressed again in his t-shirt with the Blackwatch insignia on it and jeans. He swings by his office to pick up the most urgent portion of the stack of paperwork the Overwatch mission had generated; he takes this to his quarters and paces there for a minute or two before pinging Jesse's comm. *Would like to talk about the cruise ship mission, if you want. I'll be in my quarters all afternoon.* Then he settles in at the small desk in his room, ready to spend all afternoon on the paperwork, ready for his ping to be ignored, ready for this to be the rest of his life.

His comm pings. *It's my day off.*

*Not an official meeting,* Gabe writes back. *Only if you want to.*

It's nearly an hour before the door chimes. When it slides open, there stands Jesse in jeans and a button-up shirt with the sleeves rolled up, looking uneasy.

"You said you wanted to talk?" He steps into the room. Gabe gestures for him to take a seat on the sofa, but he refuses.

"Only if you want to," Gabe is quick to reiterate. "This isn't official. No orders, no ranks, doesn't leave this room. You can go whenever you want."

Jesse nods slowly, but still doesn't take a seat. Gabe keeps standing too.

"I talked to Edwards earlier," Gabe says. Jesse goes completely still. "He really broke his own arm?"

Jesse shrugs. "He needed it to be believable--you called down to the infirmary."

"Seems like a lot of trouble to go to, just to get out of a mission."

Jesse shrugs again. "You know what it's like when you don't want to scrub a mission," he says carefully, "You end up doing all kinds of things you didn't think you would."

"If you'd wanted to go, you could've just said, I can be--"

"You didn't pick me for this mission," Jesse interrupts. He takes a step closer to Gabe. "Why?"

Gabe looks away first. "You know why."

"I need to hear you say it. Rip that bandage off quick." Gabe looks up at him, surprised. "No orders, no ranks, doesn't leave this room. You said."

"You're sure?"
The look Jesse gives him is surprisingly hurt, and he takes another step closer. It feels a little like a dare. "Gabe, please."

Gabe takes a deep breath, then turns away from Jesse and launches into it—rip the bandage off, right. "I didn't pick you for the mission because I like you, McCree. I have for a while. You don't need to hear me say it to know it, it's been all over my goddamn face for ages, we both know. Everything we did on that cruise, it's all stuff I actually want. And I don't get to have it, I know I don't get to have it, for a million different reasons, so when you didn't suggest yourself, I wasn't going to push it. I'm sorry for how unprofessional I've been these last few weeks. You deserve better, and I understand if you're upset."

He finally turns back, and Jesse is staring at him, wide-eyed. He's upset, Gabe knew he would be upset, how can they fix this--

"So, on the comms, when you said you wanted me...you meant that?"

Gabe's shoulders go up around his ears and his face goes hot, flushed with embarrassment. He had somehow managed to, if not forget that, at least push it to the back of his mind. "Yeah," he says quietly. "Yeah, I did."

Jesse closes the distance between them before Gabe has a chance to react, takes Gabe's face in his hands and kisses him.

It takes Gabe a second to push him away. His voice is rough when he manages to speak. "What the fuck? I was honest with you, like you asked, and you give me, what? Mockery? Pity? I don't need you to humor me, McCree. You've done enough of that already."

Jesse shakes his head vehemently. "It's what I want, Gabe. I want you too. I didn't think I'd ever get to kiss you, and then I did and now I never want to stop." His eyes search across Gabe's face. "I thought you knew. I thought that was why I wasn't on the mission. Every time I said that you knew why, I thought that was what you knew."

Jesse pauses, obviously waiting for Gabe to say something; Gabe hopes that the stunned look on his face speaks for itself. His brain is in overdrive, going over the entirety of the cruise again, filtered through this new information. All the things that had felt weird before slot neatly into place now, but then he realizes--

"I made you sleep with Nash. You thought that I knew and that I still made you sleep with Nash." He exhales disbelief and horror. He remembers the way Jesse had looked at him after. "You must have thought I was a monster."

"It was the mission," Jesse says, shrugging. "And you were in my ear, which, truly, I figured was as close as I was ever gonna get to the real thing. I really thought I'd pushed you too far, on the comms. The things you said--" He goes a little pink, and Gabe steps closer, their bodies almost touching. "I didn't want you to stop me. Just knowing you weren't okay with it would've been enough."

"I'm sorry."

Jesse reaches out, brushes his fingers along Gabe's bare forearm before letting his hand fall again. "Don't be. We're here now."

Gabe raises his hand to touch Jesse's face, hesitates for a moment. "I'm going to kiss you now," he says.

Jesse meets his eyes, nods, and says, "Please."
Gabe kisses him. He is gentle, so very gentle; he needs to make sure Jesse knows how much he cares, how seriously he's taking this.

"You deserve this," he says when Jesse pulls away. "You get to have this." He's not sure which of them he's talking to.

Jesse kisses him this time, and it's insistent, greedy. He keeps kissing, pushing Gabe backwards until Gabe hits the wall. Gabe gasps against Jesse's mouth when he hits, and then his hands reach out, grabbing for Jesse, tugging his shirt and undershirt up and making contact, electric, with the skin of his torso. Gabe clutches his fingers into Jesse's skin, greedy himself, running them up over Jesse's abs, down towards his hips. He thinks about the bruises he'd seen on Jesse, after Nash, and moves his hands to skirt around that spot even though he knows the bruise isn't there anymore--

Jesse jumps away, squirming.

Gabe apologizes, confused, and then he remembers: "Ticklish. Right."

Jesse nods, biting his lip. "We did this thing all out of order, didn't we." He sounds amused, not upset, and he grabs Gabe's hand, places the palm flat across the ticklish spot above his hip. The gesture feels trusting, intimate, and Gabe stares at Jesse for a long, adoring moment before kissing him again and again and again.

He pulls at Jesse's shirt, and they part just long enough for Gabe fumble with the buttons and get it open, to ruck up Jesse's undershirt, giving him access to the expanse of Jesse's torso. Gabe's hands wander across the now-bare skin, through the thatch of chest hair, and he pauses to peel his own shirt off, pulling Jesse against him. Gabe's thigh ends up between Jesse's legs; Jesse ruts up against it, making a desperate noise in the back of his throat. Gabe's own cock twitches at the feeling of Jesse, so hard, against him. "Please," Jesse breathes, pulling just far enough away from Gabe's lips to speak, "Please, Gabe, please--"

Gabe reaches down, rubs his hand against the bulge in Jesse's pants, and he's rewarded when it jumps under his touch. Jesse lets out a low whine and kisses Gabe harder, licking into his mouth as Gabe fumbles to get Jesse's pants undone. He finally gets it, shoving the pants aside and reaching past the waistband of Jesse's underwear to drag his fingers up the length of Jesse's dick. Jesse draws in a sharp, sudden breath as Gabe wraps his hand around it. He pulls up over the soft tip, watches as Jesse's eyes go half-closed. After a moment, Jesse wriggles his hips against the clothes currently confining his dick, and Gabe lets go of it long enough that it can spring free.

"Come here," Gabe murmurs. He puts his free arm around Jesse's waist and maneuvers them so that Jesse's back is to the wall instead. Gabe strokes him slowly, kissing at his neck as he does, just listening to the little noises Jesse makes.

He sinks to his knees in front of Jesse and nuzzles his dick, rubbing it on his cheek, against his beard, not breaking eye contact with Jesse. Jesse sucks a breath past his teeth as Gabe licks at the tip, swirling over the head and its soft flesh and sensitive folds.

"Jesus, Gabe," Jesse says, "No, you don't--"

Gabe pulls away, sits back on his heels and sets his hands in his lap. Jesse looks down at him helplessly, and Gabe gives him a confused look in return. "You said no. I stopped."

"No, no, that's not what--" Jesse stops, shakes his head. "You don't have to do this."

Gabe grins up at him. "I know I don't have to, but god, do I want to." He pauses. "Is that okay?"
"Yes." Jesse's voice goes low with want, sending a thrill down Gabe's spine. "Yes."

Gabe sits forward again, puts a hand on each of Jesse's thighs. He noses gently at Jesse's balls, the thicket of pubes, before licking a stripe up his dick and taking as much of it as he can into his mouth. He's a little bit out of practice at this but he does his best, using his mouth and his hand in tandem, trying to take a little more each time. Jesse doesn't seem to mind--the fingers of one of his hands are clenched into Gabe's shoulder, and the others are tracing random patterns in Gabe's hair in time with Gabe's mouth.

When Gabe looks up, Jesse's head is tossed back and he's breathing hard. "God, Gabe, fuck, I'm gonna, gonna--"

Gabe pulls up off of Jesse's dick, keeps working it with his hand. "You gonna come for me?"

Jesse nods emphatically, his eyes squeezed shut, and Gabe barely manages to get his lips back around Jesse's dick before Jesse comes, spurting hot into his mouth, moaning as his hips stutter forward. Gabe swallows him down, licks up his dick one last time, and rises to his feet.

"Good?" he asks, leaning forward to press slightly sticky kisses against Jesse's neck and then his lips.

Jesse breathes out, opens his eyes slowly and nods at Gabe. "That was...good." He smiles.

"Good." Gabe kisses him again.

"What about you?" Jesse asks, once he's recovered fully.

Gabe is leaned against the wall next to Jesse, shoulder to shoulder, and he shrugs. "What about me?"

"I'd like to...reciprocate. Make you feel good too." Jesse turns his head and fixes him with a serious look. "Maybe have you fuck me?"

Gabe feels himself flush. "I don't--" He cuts himself off, looking away.

"I don't--" he starts again. He hesitates, but Jesse's right. He should just say it. "I'm not usually the one doing the fucking. I am usually the one getting fucked. I'll try whatever you want, but..."

He looks over at Jesse now, and Jesse's grinning at him. "We can absolutely work with that. Do you need to do any prep, or--"

Gabe's face goes even hotter. "I...I'm ready. I've been--" he winces, but powers through, for the sake of Using His Words, "I've been...thinking about you."

Jesse's face lights up. "Really."

Gabe nods, and he lets Jesse lead him through the front room of his quarters to the bedroom. Jesse pushes him down onto the bed and strips him. Gabe's cock is still almost painfully hard between his legs, but Jesse doesn't touch him yet, doesn't do anything yet, just stands by the bed; Gabe lies still and watches Jesse watch him.

"Everything okay?" Gabe asks carefully, after what feels like too long.

Jesse shakes his head, looking almost startled. "No, yeah, everything's okay. I just..." He trails off.

"You just...?"
It's quiet for a second, and then Jesse says, "You know those moments you just wanna...keep? You want to, I dunno, trap it in amber, or memorize it somehow?"

"Me naked on the bed is a moment you want to memorize?"

Jesse goes red. "No! Yes. Not this--" he gestures at Gabe's naked body, "--but this." He gestures at himself, at the room, at Gabe. "If you threw me out of here now, I'd still have this. I get to have this, even for a second, and I want to keep it."

Gabe props himself up on an elbow. "I'm not going to throw you out of here now."

"I know you're not. I mean, I hope you're not." Jesse grins at him, a little unsure. "But saving the moment ain't worth much if I'm not also in the moment, so..." He shucks off what clothes he still has on and joins Gabe on the bed. Finally, finally, Jesse touches him, climbing on top of him, knees bracketing Gabe's hips and a hand on either side of Gabe's head. There's space between them still, just enough that Jesse's already-hardening cock brushes up against Gabe's, soft and tantalizing, its head just starting to peek out from the foreskin.

Jesse sways above him, dragging his cock along the length of Gabe's, and Gabe sucks in a breath past his teeth.

Jesse leans down to nip at Gabe's neck, then pauses, smiling against Gabe's skin. "Did you know you have freckles on your shoulders?" he asks, pressing his lips across them.

Gabe smiles. "Yeah, somebody had mentioned that recently."

"Sounds very observant, whoever he was," Jesse says, kissing down the slope of Gabe's shoulder to his collarbone and then to the expanse of his chest. "Probably handsome too."

"I certainly thought so," Gabe agrees, and Jesse kisses him again.

"You have lube?" Jesse asks when he pulls away. Gabe nods, pointing at the drawer in the bedside table. Jesse stretches up to reach it, one knee lifting from the bed but staying as close to Gabe as he can, and Gabe lifts his head to kiss at Jesse's torso as it moves above him.

Jesse makes an inquisitive noise, and Gabe belatedly remembers that the drawer has his lube and condoms, yes, but also two different dildos and a long, coiled length of red nylon rope. He hadn't thought anyone else would be looking in there anytime soon. He braces himself for some tease or smart comment, but nothing comes; Jesse returns with the lube, grins at Gabe, and says, "Let's see if we can't get you feeling good."

Even with the warmth of Jesse's body so close to him, Gabe shivers.

Through unspoken agreement, they maneuver for a minute, Jesse sitting back and watching as Gabe positions himself, facing down, leaning forward with his forearms on the mattress and his knees tucked up under him.

Now Jesse sits forward again, his thighs up against Gabe's ass, and presses a hand to Gabe's back. "Alright?" he asks.

Gabe nods into the mattress. He hears Jesse open the lube, and peers back over his shoulder to see Jesse applying it to liberally his fingers. Gabe hisses as Jesse's slicked-up fingers find his hole; it's not unpleasant, or even unexpected, but somehow it surprises Gabe anyway how much he wants it, how good it feels. Jesse applies a little more lube, then carefully inserts a finger into Gabe. It's all he can do not to rut down against the mattress as Jesse moves inside him, seeking and twists before finding
the spot that makes Gabe's toes curl.

"Still alright?" Jesse asks.

Gabe nods again, not quite trusting his voice. Jesse adds a second finger, presses teasingly as Gabe writhes beneath him. He pushes his head into the crook of his arm, trying to stifle the noises he knows are building in his chest.

"Want to hear you, darlin'," Jesse says, low and certain. He twists his fingers again, brushing against Gabe's prostate. Gabe lets the noise out this time, still muffled against his own skin but definitely audible, and Jesse moans in response.

They stay like that for a little bit, Gabe making hoarse noises as Jesse works him open insistently, until Gabe can't take any more and finally says, "Fuck, Jesse, I need you."

"All you had to do was ask, Gabe," Jesse says. "All you ever had to do was ask."

Jesse withdraws his fingers, and a few moments later, Jesse's slicked-up cock presses against his hole. Gabe's breath catches as Jesse grips his hips and slides inside him slowly, slowly. Gabe stays very still, relishing the stretch and the movement, feeling absolutely filled-up.

When Jesse is finally flush with Gabe's ass, he stops for a moment, making a small, satisfied noise that makes Gabe's cock jump. Then he crowds down over Gabe's back, one arm wrapping around Gabe's chest and the other reaching for Gabe's dick. Gabe grabs for the hand that's under his chest and laces their fingers together, squeezing. Jesse's other hand finds his dick and wraps around it, pumps in time with the thrusting, and Gabe gasps Jesse's name.

Gabe holds on as long as he can, but it's tough, with Jesse stroking him and whispering sweet, dirty things to him. "I'm close," he manages to bite out, and Jesse picks up speed. Gabe feels Jesse come first, his body jerking against Gabe's back as his cock throbs in Gabe's ass. Gabe comes a few seconds later, moaning loudly as he spills across Jesse's fist. They stay like that, close together and spent, while they each try to catch their breath.

_The moment frozen in amber_, Gabe thinks, the words seeming very far away.

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Afterwards, when they're all cleaned up and they are each seated on the edge of the bed, more space between them now, Gabe asks, "Was that okay?"

Jesse nods. "Do you know how long I've wanted to do that?"

"You said I'd be surprised how long," Gabe says. Jesse looks surprised. "What? You told me that. I just didn't know I was supposed to be listening."

"You know, I also said that I loved you."

Gabe smiles at him. "I don't know if you were listening, but I said that too."

Jesse grins and kisses him, and even after all the sex they've already had, Gabe feels like they're close to giving it another go. Then Jesse pulls back, and his expression soberly quickly. "I guess we have to have the serious talk about fraternization and secrecy and all that bullshit, right?"

"That's up to you."
Gabe had been careful to keep his voice measured, but Jesse scoffs anyway, a little outraged. "After everything, after all this, you think I wouldn't want to? If you think I ain't taking this seriously, or if you're not taking this seriously..."

"No, no, that's not what I meant." Gabe puts his hands up placatingly. "I'm serious about this. I promise. What I meant is that it's up to you whether you want to sneak around or not."

"What?"

"Overwatch has an HR department that's built to deal with this kind of thing."

Jesse's shoulders come down from around his ears, and he looks cautiously intrigued. "Even--even in your case? They won't transfer me to somebody else's strike team or to Overwatch or something?"

"Not unless you want them to? Blackwatch doesn't really have an org chart, but you're pretty much my second-in-command; it's not like I'm taking advantage of some green new recruit. We'll fill out some forms, probably talk to some nice people from the UN Oversight Committee. They'll make sure you're not being coerced and don't fear retaliation, probably assign the two of us a sort of informal minder to make sure you aren't receiving preferential treatment going forward."

"And the other option is the sneaking?" Jesse asks.

"The paperwork and the interviews, that's all...official. You'd have to tell people, sign your name to it. Only you can make that decision--it's part of the whole 'not being coerced' thing." Gabe looks away, suddenly unable to meet Jesse's eyes. "I know it's a lot to ask this early."

"No," Gabe says, unable to keep the smile from his own face. "You do not get to do the Southern thing with me--"

"Pumpkin--" Jesse starts again, grinning now.

"Jesus, is that how it's gonna be?" Gabe says, laughing. "Why are you like this, what have I just agreed to?"

"You wanted me, you got me." Jesse scoots in closer to Gabe, knocks their shoulders together. "I'll sign whatever paperwork, tell whoever you need, shout it from the goddamn rooftop if they need me to. We get to have this."

"We do." Gabe smiles and leans his head onto Jesse's shoulder. "You know, we should take Edwards out for drinks sometime, thank him for breaking his arm."

"I can't believe he would rather break his arm than spend time kissing you," Jesse says against his scalp. "What kind of nonsense is that?"

Gabe glances up at Jesse, sees him looking down at him and smiles. "I don't know, I think it turned out okay."

And Jesse smiles back, and nods, and says, "Yeah, yeah it did."

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