The Way to a Heart
by drivelings

Summary

An army marches on its stomach, and it's the responsibility of a chef to keep everyone fed. This is the story of the chef of Watchpoint: Gibraltar.
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

When Hanzo first joins Overwatch, it was just as tumultuous as the world around him.

Experiences of each agent—clashing ideologies were a focal point that nearly every argument gravitated around, and tensions only mounted with the addition of world-famous ex-weightlifter, Aleksandra “Zarya” Zaryanova, and Vishkar architect, Satya Vaswani into their fold. (They are perfectly fine people on their own--barring their prejudices that make conversation outside of the simulations a bit terse--but it is not an issue Hanzo concerns himself with.)

The defunct Overwatch nearly crumbles on its own foundation before it’s even able to take off, the barrier of differing morals and methodologies is their greatest barrier to overcome. Fighting Talon is easy. Fighting for a cause as loose as ‘world peace’ is a fool’s errand made more complicated by the differing standpoints of each agent.

Hanzo understands this well, but needs no part of it, seeking refuge in either the highest elevation of the Watchpoint, the training rooms, or the cool and impartial cafeteria where the only judgment passed is from himself unto the limited food choices presented to him on the terminals. He found himself visiting the latter more often than he himself would have expected.

The cafeteria is a sanctuary where everyone is servant to the whims of their stomach, and he is no different. Here, no arguments take place, mouths stuffed full with food, and plenty of space for bickering agents to avoid each other. High domed ceiling like those in Western movies that his brother once fancied, and a sturdy pillar every few meters, and its ever present deacon presiding over them, the ‘Chef’ (named aptly so by the other Overwatch members).

He’s never exchanged any words with this ‘Chef’ who is never there at the service window long enough for him to do so, and he has no desire for idle chatter like the American cowboy or the chronically-challenged pilot, retreating into his familiar—but prickly—solitude once he has his meal. The food is filling and demands for seconds are made equally as delicious as the first without question. (His first meal here was undoubtedly Japanese—not quite the gourmet he once had as the master of the Shimada clan—the miso soup too watery, and the rice not quite correct in texture, but he devoured it with gusto regardless, shamelessly ordering seconds and thirds.)

The cafeteria is convenient, although a bit restricting at times: off-menu requests were often left not honored, an issue that the abnormally intelligent gorilla—‘Winston,’ his memory supplies—explains is due to the lack of shipping routes to this area. Too dangerous, too conspicuous. Especially with the Royal Gibraltar Police around—it’s hard to say if they’d rat out Overwatch to the UN, but it’s a chance that Winston did not want to take.

However, restrictions aside, it is much better than those days he spent on the run, eating nothing but skewers of chicken or riceballs and, if he was feeling particularly luxurious, ramen. There is no shortage of seafood or rice dishes for some inexplicable reason. (It’s cheap and easy to obtain, he later finds out.)

This delights some members of the new Overwatch crew, and not so much the others, who seem to be more used to dishes of a different variety (or more variety, really), but the creative ways that fish can be prepared is something that Hanzo secretly delights in, even if he doesn’t always enjoy them.
(The seabass two nights ago, and the clams before that, and the bream before that contained far too much butter. And there always seems to be an abundance of bread–European bread with crust too hard and too dense for his liking.)

But what he wouldn’t give to have some actual meat in his diet. It seemed like an era ago since he’s had any. There was lamb during his second week here. That, too, was doused in butter and far too many herbs, but it was indeed delicious with none of the pungent gaminess that lamb is known for having. Each day, he peruses the digital menu, growing more and more disappointed with the lack of meat choices.

However, he’s quick to take notice of the extensive stock of tea that the Gibraltar kitchen has to offer him. There’s even a ‘no preference’ option which he has always skimmed over in favor of something more familiar: sencha, genmaicha, hojicha.

Even if he had no company he could truly call “friend” here in Overwatch, the cup of tea he usually has in his hands and the faceless chef behind the counter makes for a good filler.

But the solitude does not remain for long, especially after a few near-misses during the few missions he’s quickly volunteered for. Saving another person’s life and having your life saved in return always seems to have a strange way of bringing people together.

Admittedly, it was uncomfortable, but not displeasing.

More and more people find their way into his previous life of solitude, prying him out with different activities that barely give him the time to sink into the darker recesses of his mind. People slowly begin pulling his attention left and right for this reason or that.

Training with Genji.
A friendly rivalry with the cowboy, McCree.
A sort of mentorship with Hana.
An unexpected understanding with Roadhog (which spells very, very terrible things for the other junker).

Discussions on strategy and team composition with Soldier: 76.

He even partakes in Ana’s afternoon tea time at her behest. Not that he would ever refuse a woman who could knock his arrow out of the air with a single shot, and who is his senior in more ways than one.

Yes, his days slowly fill up with the company of those whom he could begin to call comrades.

Hanzo no longer needs to visit his previous haunts or hide from the loose companionship being offered to him.

However, his first sanctuary remains ever unchanging.

Even now at four in the morning after some harsh nightmare, he would be able to order some tea for himself—he’d normally go for sake, but his brother promptly tried smashing his bottle the first time around, so tea would have to do. And if he is lucky, sometimes it’s accompanied by an unsolicited sweet. (He was secretly delighted when he was gifted with anything containing chunky red bean—the sticky rice cake with red bean filling last week was divine, especially lightly fried on both sides and still hot from the pan—he came down every day after that for a taste, but was
disappointed when his efforts went unrewarded.)

The lights of the cafeteria would be off, but not long after setting foot in the cavernous room would everything come to life—kitchen included.

He orders at the terminal as always and waits with his back against the wall, listening to the quiet clattering of the ever-working chef. You must be an omnic. Only omnics are awake at all hours. Or a service-bot. In all his time here, it’s never really occurred to him that you could be anything else.

It would take several minutes before a tray would be ready at the service window which spans the height of lower chest-to his hip with a partition splitting it horizontally. It is a wide window, meant for many dishes to be put out at once. It may have proved its use back in Overwatch’s heyday, but now, it now more of a fanciful decoration than anything else.

Like the many times before, the sound of a service bell—how old-fashioned—goes off, and his tray is there: iron pot with a handle-less teacup, an extra kettle thermos just in case he requires a second steeping. And like before, he does not dip his head to take a look at the one who has provided him such a service, but he does stand at the window for a moment, glowering at the lack of treat.

(He doesn’t dare complain because he knows it’s fruitless. He’s tried and was met with the pathetic echoes of his own voice.)

He takes a seat by the window, bathed in the silver moonlight and pours out the tea. A light green, almost yellow. The smell of wet grass is overwhelming. The correct amount of heat and tea leaves that slips down his throat easily, leaving none of that overwhelming bitterness on his tongue that usually accompanies a poorly made cup or poor quality leaves. The chef makes a nice brew.

He raises his cup briefly to the moon shining through the windows, to the chef, and to this sanctuary.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading; it took a year of back and forth before I decided to post this anywhere. I can only hope that I have the discipline to finish.
Your day starts whenever your customers demand it, whether it be seven in the evening for Reinhardt’s warm milk or three in the afternoon for Ana’s ‘tea parties’. The three main meals of the day are also ad-hoc as the agents are always coming in and out of the base at unpredictable times, work through their mealtimes, and (perhaps the worst offense of all) just plain refuse to eat.

Your day ended whenever all agents have retired for the day (or night); those days are few and far between. It wouldn’t do to be unavailable when an agent is going hungry, so the time in between orders are filled with other tasks: cleaning, prep work, checking inventory, attending and scheduling remote meetings, planning menus, updating ledgers, maintaining the kitchen tools, etc. The days of twenty chefs in the kitchen at its peak hours (six at its lowest), everyone with a specific responsibility, are long gone.

Sleep came in the form of naps that pass in a blink. A proper night’s rest was impossible with agents like McCree, who is constantly haunted by nightmares and seek the companionship of alcohol to keep them at bay, and Agent D.Va, who refuses to sleep at an appropriate time and wanders often into the cafeteria in search of a late night snack (and some interesting, albeit one-sided, conversations).

Mornings, however quick they come, bring about the need to double check inventory to ensure that no one has come into the kitchen and filched anything. While Athena keeps the place under close watch while you sleep and will alert you of any intruders, she’s not omnipotent.

You bite your lip as you go through the numbers, slipping in and out of the walk-in freezer, counting up near-empty containers, meticulously labeled in blue tape and sorted by category.

It shouldn’t surprise you so much since the growth of the organization would naturally come with the growth of appetites, but whenever Agent Hanzo orders, the food supplies deplete rapidly. At first, you had chalked it up to malnutrition from being on the run for so long and not having a proper meal, but it is beginning to wear on your limited resources. It’s lucky he’s not at the base often, having to get shipped off with other agents for various missions. (Though, the demands for seconds never fails to make you smile and your heart swell—nothing is better than to know your customers have a healthy appetite and enjoy your cooking.) Between him, Agent Zarya, Agent Reinhardt, and Agent Roadhog, it’s impossible to predict just how much food you’d need without over-ordering.

“Athena. Stats, please.”

From one of the screens high above the kitchen, once (and still is) used to show the incoming orders, the statistics of how many calories each agent has burned and a rough estimate of how much they consumed (and lost) within the past twenty-four hours are posted for your scrutiny.

You thin your lips and pace the kitchen, tapping the notepad in your hand. Agent Soldier: 76 has been at the top of the charts lately, and returning his food only half-finished and cold hours later. (It’s painful in more ways than one when you have to scrape off the crusted remains; it makes sleep even more difficult to come by). There’s also the matter of Agent Symmetra’s dietary restrictions; Agent Mei’s lactose intolerance; Agent D.Va’s preference for spicy food; Agent Reinhardt’s health; the list goes on and on.

As disappointing as it is, it’s also a blessing that some agents do not require food (like Agent Zenyatta, who politely passes by your window with a gentle greeting and a friendly wave that you
would return shyly. Agent Winston, on the other hand, refuses to eat much beyond peanut butter related delectables and takes the combined effort of Athena and yourself to convince him to eat something different.

You flip through your list again, already mentally trying to piece together a menu for today’s meals and snacks from the limited ingredients. There’s always an abundance of rice, so you may have to stick with that again. Maybe some congee for breakfast with some shredded ginger on top (extra ginger for Agent Soldier: 76 to open up his appetite). That could help with the rationing, but it’s not necessarily something that all agents would enjoy. Maybe oatmeal should also be given as an option today. But then it’d require toppings that you don’t have.

You turn a page, pursing your lips.

Perhaps the flour reserved specifically for Captain Amari’s cookies may have to find its way into everyone else’s food. (It’s a secret stash of ingredients specially ordered for the woman’s afternoon tea gatherings. You took great joy in watching these sessions from the screens in your kitchen, oven still hot and kettle at the ready in case more provisions were needed. You had watched friendships forged over the buttery, crumbly treats, and several relationships mended from a single cup of tea.)

You shake your head of the thought. No, you could never do that to her. The old Head Chef would have your head (but not before Captain Amari did).

Perhaps from another source…

Your sigh echoes in the cavernous kitchen.

The notepad is placed onto an empty counter, and you roll up your sleeves.

It’s four days until the next shipment, almost all agents are present. Running out to buy more ingredients is plausible, but risky, and funds were being allocated elsewhere at the moment. If you’re careful and creative enough, you can stretch the current inventory over these remaining days.

And the health and well-being of the agents always came first.

You’ll make this work somehow.

Two days have passed.

You chew some mint leaves, the soothing taste counteracts the slow burning in your stomach that is slowly crawling up into your chest that you steadfastly ignore.

‘Captain Amari prefers this without sauce and a lemon wedge,’ you remind yourself as you finish plating the fish. You reach into the garnish counter with shaky fingers and place the citrus slice beside the well-seasoned, pan-roasted sea bass fillet with blistered asparagus and grape tomatoes. Two slices of thick bread (no butter), her tea (dark like the night with mint), and her appetizers are at the ready on the tray.

You deliver it to the window where the woman waits—you didn’t even have to ring the bell.

The woman slides the tray over to the side, leaning in and down onto the counter. “Have you eaten yet?”
The insides of your stomach prickle and aches at the question, and you have to resist the urge to press down on it. Captain Amari is far too sharp for a woman of her years.

You thread your fingers together to disguise the trembling.

A thick french accent rises from your memories, sharp and loud, “Chefs do not eat until their customers have eaten.” It echoes in your mind, stabbing itself into your stomach repeatedly.

“I will,” you lie. “After, after I have served everyone.” The paltry numbers of today’s inventory flashes through your head.

She huffs, disbelieving. “In that case, I will not be having my cookies today.”

“You…won’t?”

Your mind betrays you and immediately begins concocting recipes that could make use of the eggs, flour, butter, and sugar that the sniper’s cookies normally call for. Tortillas, pancakes, velouté sauce, pretzels, soufflés–the possibilities stream in like a torrent at the behest of your aching stomach. It’s enough to make you salivate just a bit.

“No, I believe I’ve had my fill for now.”

Integrity shocks your mind out of its gluttonous stupor of handmade pasta, puff pastry, vol-au-vent, and pierogi, and you slap your hands against the counter in alarm.

“Are the, the cookies no longer to your satisfaction? Do they require adjustment? Too much sugar? Too little sugar? Should I change the flour?”

She chuckles, one bony hand resting firmly atop yours. You jerk back, but her grip is too strong. She leans down and pokes her head through the window to peer at you with her single eye. You lean back and look away–her gaze is too sharp, she can likely see the weariness beneath your eyes and the crackling of your lips. You run your tongue over them self-consciously.

“Feed yourself,” she chides firmly, wagging a finger. “Do not make me come in there.”

It is against the rules for non-kitchen staff to enter this sanctuary, but even so, you take her threat to heart. “Yes, madame.” Your voice is barely above a whisper.

“Close the kitchen for an hour, and eat.” Without giving you any room for argument, she picks up her tray and walks away, the tail of her jacket flowing behind her.

The quiet holds you for a moment before you look up at the screen. It’s blank, but the clock is nearing noon. Closing the kitchen now would mean that the agents would have to wait until you’re finished, and that wouldn’t do. Maybe you could get by with chewing on some more mint until after lunch is served.

You suddenly grab your midsection when the fire in your stomach flares up angrily as if to protest your decisions, dry coughs disappearing into the sleeve of your elbow. It takes a few moments for you to compose yourself, but by then, your vision is swimming with dots of blues, greens, and whites.

Maybe you should heed Captain Amari’s wisdom, after all.

When Ana comes for her afternoon tea, before you hand off her order, you ask again, “Arre you
absolutely certain you would not like to have your cookies, Cap–Agent Ana?”

Granted, it would take half an hour to make them at this point, but the nagging in your mind remains.

“I’m very sure,” she assures you. “Have you eaten yet?”

Embers still burn in your stomach, but it’s bearable—not worth a mention.

“I have, thank you.“

It’s the spare heads, fins, and tails of the seabass you have served everyone made into a broth over some leftover rice, but was still a meal that placated your stomach. (You had decided to save the ingredients Captain Amari so generously offered for another occasion—maybe make her some *aish baladi*—Egyptian bread. It’s not your strong point, but it was something you were willing to attempt for her.)

"Good. You must keep yourself in good health, we are counting on you.”

“Yes, madame.”

She scoffs, muttering something fond under her breath as she hefts the tray. "Now, I don’t suppose you could join us today?"

It’s not the first time she’s asked you to join her for tea. But what if someone orders and you’re not there to receive it? What if they see you sitting around, joking, laughing, and making merry with the other agents while they stand at the terminal, waiting?

Your hands fly to your face and you inhale sharply. No, that won’t do. Eating with your customers is something you can’t do. A chef does not eat before or during their customer’s meal times without someone there to cover.

“Thank you for the offer, but—I couldn’t.”

The older Amari hums contemplatively. “We’ll get you to join us one day.”

“Please enjoy your tea,” you say, pretending that her comment was just kind teasing and not a threat.

“Where are the cookies?” is the immediate reaction from Hanzo, who has started to become a regular member of these little get-togethers.

“Why, is that all this old woman is good for? Are the cookies the only reason you keep me company?”

“I–no, you are mistaken.” Hanzo looks away, crossing his arms tightly against himself.

“I’m just teasing,” she says warmly, placing the tray of cups and kettle on the table. Hanzo grunts, acknowledging the sentiment, but still indignant.

"Oh, let me.” Mei is quick to lay out the cups and pour the tea while Ana takes her rightful seat. Hanzo looks irked that he would not be having Ana’s specialty cookies today, but a quick pat from the senior sniper on his arm changes that.

“Don’t pout. We’ll have some next time.”
“I do not pout. Do not be ridiculous.”

She gives him a smug look over the rim of her cup that he tries to pointedly ignore with a loud slurp of his tea and winces at the taste–just a little too dark, doused far too heavily in sugar and mint.

From the kitchen, you stifle a laugh behind your hand as you watch Hanzo’s reaction from the screens where the orders normally appear, jotting down in your notepad to make up for this lack of cookies, and that Agent Hanzo dislikes Koshary tea.
For the first time since his arrival two or three months ago, the terminals are all off, an obstinate “Closed” message written across them in glaring red letters when Hanzo enters the cafeteria at four in the morning following another sleepless night.

It’s an odd sight that has him staring at the terminals longer than necessary.

Why is the kitchen closed? It’s never happened before. Perhaps you needed repairs? A recharge?

He can’t rightly say he knows how Omnis work. Or a service-bot. Whichever you were. It’s only vaguely embarrassing that after so long, he’s still never interacted with you in any capacity. It really shouldn’t be necessary, you’re just a cook, after all. Although, you’re a considerate one who occasionally grants him desserts with his tea and made an attempt to cook something resembling Japanese cuisine when he first arrived.

Maybe you’re just resting or on standby? He walks up to the service window and squints through the darkness of the kitchen.

It is pitch black, bereft of any presence.

“Chef?”

“The chef is presently unavailable, Agent Hanzo, please come again later.“

Hanzo nearly slams his head against the partition in surprise, and it’s only through years of practice that he manages to play it off like he’s pulling his head from the wall’s gap. The archer glares at the ceiling briefly, annoyed that the AI did not inform him sooner. Maybe she wants him to look foolish, or took some sick pleasure in watching people struggle.

It’s hard not to let biases get the better of him after all these years.

“You should have informed me sooner,” he snaps.

“My apologies.”

He’s sure it’s not really apologetic–probably doesn’t even know the meaning of the word (he’s guilty of the same). With an annoyed huff, he goes around to the kitchen doors. Surely, no one would mind him going into the kitchen for tea.

The doors do not budge, only rattle loudly beneath his hands. Confused, he tries again. Still, his entry is denied.

“The kitchen is off-limits to all non-kitchen personnel, Agent Hanzo.”

“I just require some tea.”

She does not respond, but Hanzo hears nothing that would indicate that the doors have been unlocked.

“Open these doors!”

“I’m sorry, Agent Hanzo. I cannot allow that.”
He scowls, irritation building slowly in the pit of his stomach—a result of weariness and a treat denied. It’s ridiculous that he cannot even get a simple cup (albeit, very delicious) tea without the chef’s supervision.

If he crawls through the service window, he’d get his prize, but he’s not so desperate as to get caught shimmying through the partition with his behind sticking out of it like a fool.

He turns his face (and irritation) upward. “When will the chef return?”

“Unfortunately, that is not known at this time.”

Again, this is ridiculous.

“Please return later,” the disembodied voice insists more firmly.

Hanzo doesn’t like the idea of being bossed around by an AI or an absent cook. (Though, he prefers having a chef than not—he’s not sure if he really wants the other agents cooking for him based off their questionable stories and tastes.) There should be no reason the kitchen should be considered a restricted area.

There is likely a story behind this that he’s not privy to. Not that he cares for it, but this is a point of ire for him.

“Fine,” Hanzo spits out, barely restraining the urge to slam a fist into the doors. “I will return.”

Begrudgingly, he returns to his room and produces a few crumpled bags of tea he’s had since before his arrival and a tin cup. There’s a water dispenser not far from his room that he can’t seem to adjust the temperature of. It’s not only is it ridiculous that he’s not allowed to enter the kitchen, it’s also ridiculous that they’re not allowed to have any small appliances in their personal rooms. Something about fire hazards and limited electricity.

When Hanzo sips his new cup of tea, he grimaces, a violent shudder from the tip of his tongue goes through straight to his toes and makes his jaw tingle and ache.

It is bitter.

The warehouse is abuzz with activity, even at the break of dawn. Couriers, chefs, and other personnel are running back and forth, loading up trucks and yelling out orders. The areas smells delightful, savory, and utterly mouth-watering. Your stomach bubbles and aches, calling out to the sinful abundance of food in the area. It’s been a rough two days, ingredients running out just the night before—it’s a relief that no one seems to have noticed, orders for seconds still coming in from your regulars.

The clock on the warehouse wall reads: 04:20AM. You really hope that Agent Hanzo or Agent McCree didn’t have another sleepless night and was looking for you. You’d hate to disappoint them or anyone else who may need your services, but this took precedence. You hide a yawn behind your hand, tipping the courier’s hat over your eyes, squinting to read the list on your holo-tablet. This is why you prefer your notepad—sometimes you don’t feel like staring at the light for too long.

“Did you receive satisfactory rest, my dear?”

Ignoring the question, you tap the tablet close. “Is the truck loaded up?”

An omnic woman, dressed in black slacks and an elegant white button up shirt does an exaggerated
she’s an odd sight in a warehouse full of such casually dressed people. “Loaded to your satisfaction.”

"Don’t take credit for something you didn’t do, Argus,” yells a man who comes out the back of the vehicle. He’s dressed less formally in white slacks and a tank top, a towel wrapped tight around his head and curly hair sticking out of it.

The woman—Argus Twenty (best known simply as Argus)—laughs, covering her mouth plate with her hand. “I jest, I jest.”

You ignore the two’s playful bantering, long used to their antics, counting the boxes of raw ingredients—tomatoes; bell peppers; rice; spices; instant noodles; six different hot sauces—in your truck when you come upon a tank-like appliance.

“What’s this?” You splay your hands over the glass window and gasp. “Is this a whole tuna? Wait. No way, is that Bluefin!?”

The man gives you a thumbs-up. “Cryogenically frozen, straight from the shore of Japan. Thought you’d like it, boss.”

Seared tuna steak, tartare with medley of herbs and a balsamic vinaigrette reduction, marinated seared tuna with a citrus combination, breaded with beer batter and fried—you practically salivate at the thought before you shake yourself out of it.

“I can’t take what I didn’t order, you know this, Asim.” As stern as your tone is, you can’t help but think of the possibilities.

“But it’s on the house, dear,” Argus says, a smile in her voice.

“You should take it. I mean, you wouldn’t want it to go to waste, now would you, boss?”

For a minute more, you observe the fish inside, seemingly asleep and blissfully unaware of its intended fate (or perhaps it’s long been conscious of it—the animal kingdom is eat or be eaten, after all). You inspect the tank, feeling all around and checking the settings.

There’s no internal debate after your inspection and you bodily haul the entire tank out of the hatch. Both man and Omnic scramble to help, but you elbow them off.

“I don’t take what I don’t order. It screws up my menu plans.”

“I saw your ingredients list,” Asim huffs indignantly as he slowly wheels away the tank, “you don’t have enough protein. How do you expect them to keep their muscle mass?”

You give him a long sweeping look from navel to top, sarcastically and silently asking, ‘And you’re the one to talk?’ He only flexes one mildly impressive and scarred arm in response. It’s nothing compared to the guns on Agent Hanzo or even close to the ones on Agent Zarya.

“If you won’t take the fish, you should at least stay for breakfast, you must be hungry,” the Omnic offers knowingly. You don’t have time to be indignant as someone comes up from behind Argus, and she has to go shout orders at another crew of truckers who scurry off to do her bidding. You pull the hat tighter over your eyes.

How long has it been since someone’s cooked a meal for you outside of tastings and evaluations? Maybe not since the days you stopped being an apprentice. It is a nice thought, but you had customers waiting for your return (probably), and the burning of your stomach reminds you that
it’s probably time to get some medicine in it.

“Thanks for the help, you two,” you shout, catching their attention, “but I need to head back. I have a lot of prep work to do.”

You slip the tablet into the deepest pocket of your courier jacket.

You close the doors of the cargo area and get into the driver’s seat. The woman gets up and hauls herself up through the open window, arms folded. You’re sure she’ll ruin her nice shirt with the filth and grease on the side of the truck.

“I really wished you’d stay longer, it’s very lonely without you, dear.” Her voice drops suddenly. “By the by, my dear, one of the members of the EU came here yesterday, he wanted to make a donation.”

Leaning into her, you ask quietly, “A donation or a ‘donation’?”

She responds with air quotes and then slips you a sliver of paper. You take one look at it and slide it into your pockets. She jumps off the truck which rattles and groans in displeasure. It’s an old thing from a bygone time, but it still runs and is the perfect size for your mission. Inconspicuous and reliable.

“Got it, I’ll take care of this. Keep an eye on things for me.”

“Will do, dear!”

“And I’ll make sure she does, boss.”

You watch the man clap a hand onto the Omnic’s shoulder, give them a wave before you start up your truck and drive off, watching them both and the warehouse slowly disappear through the side-view mirror.

Now then, what should breakfast be?

Hanzo returns to the cafeteria a couple of hours later, still miffed that he was jilted not long ago.

Already, the smell of breakfast reaches his nose. It’s salty, spicy, and smells to be much more than the meager spread you’ve been serving the past week—congee, really?

Roadhog, surprisingly, is an early-riser. Reinhardt and Ana, as well. Oddly enough, they all seem to get along quite well if the way they talk (and Roadhog listens) over breakfast is any indication.

He’s surprised to see the menu to be longer than normal. It’s diverse and boasts more than just the usual ‘regular’ menu and ‘vegetarian’ menu. Eggs; toast; home fries; pancakes; sausages; bacon; a full American style breakfast. It’s almost enough to make him forgive being served congee for almost a week. He doesn’t question the sudden increase in choice.

Hanzo orders all that he can (and the sencha he’s been craving several hours earlier) because while your timing is inconvenient, at least your cooking does not disappoint.

Breakfast is served with the ring of the service bell, and he has half a mind to demand where you were this morning, but you’re already gone. There’s shuffling and the clinking of metal, everything to indicate that you’re busy and in no position to speak or hear his grievances.

Fine. You’re just a cook, anyway.
“Hanzo, come join us!” Reinhardt, even at this time in the morning, is far too loud for his own good.

The archer knows he should decline if he wants his day to begin peacefully, but that smile that Ana gives him—it’s strange how such a serene smile from this woman can be considered a threat—makes him reconsider. When he first arrived, he would’ve ignored that look (but these past few months taught him it’s much better to entertain the senior sniper’s whims than to go against them lest he wants to be without healing in the upcoming battles or get humiliated during simulated matches).

He takes a seat beside the Junker who acknowledges him with a grunt. The two of them have a mutual understanding of each other: stay out of the other’s way and all will be well. Though, it seems that Roadhog is lesser of a homicidal maniac off the field, often a literal force of reason, which is much appreciated when Junkrat or other members of Overwatch are involved.

“Good, good. Now, where were we?” Reinhardt combs through his whitened beard. “Oh, yes. The next week mission—” When conversing, however, the crusader’s voice takes on a much more solemn and quiet tone—something that Hanzo appreciates especially at this hour when his ears are not yet ready for it.

He notices when he sets down his tray that everyone else’s dish seems to have colorful red, yellow, and green peppers among their home fries. His own are completely devoid of them, and an indescribable feeling oozes down his back.

Not once has he ever told anyone his likes and dislikes—it’s considered a weakness and childish. It’s unbecoming for a man of his age to be picky about his food, and to be able to eat so well after being on the run for so many years is a blessing. Any time he’s encountered peppers, he would eat them with as much maturity as he can muster, but he’d chew through them much faster than usual and sometimes chase it with a drink of tea (or sake, depending on his location). However, the lack of bell peppers in his food is thorough proof to him that food preferences are not so well guarded, after all.

It should disturb him that his eating habits are being monitored so carefully. He should take a page out of Winston’s book and tell Athena to stop monitoring him. You and the AI must be hooking up to each other and sharing information.

But it’s a very considerate gesture he appreciates, nonetheless. He would never say it aloud, but it’s much more preferable than having to shove it into his mouth and force himself to eat any, politely pretending that the acrid taste doesn’t make him want to spit it out.

Reluctantly, he decides that he could probably forgive you for not being available this morning in deference to your kindness. However, even as he listens to the conversation between the two former Overwatch members, the question of why the kitchen is forbidden to all agents settle firmly in the back of his mind.
There’s a spot in the Watchpoint where there’s a perfect view of the horizon that separates the sky from sea, where the fishing boats can be seen bowing to the will of the waves, and the birds dot the skies like shooting stars. It’s almost impossible to get to unless you are able to climb, jump, or fly (which an unfortunate amount of people are able to do here).

It’s one of the base’s precious few blind spots, safe from cameras and that intrusive AI. Oftentimes, Hanzo finds himself here after a quick trip to the kitchen for some perfectly brewed tea before he became more acquainted with the organization’s residents.

Today, he sits here with his terribly cheap, bitter tea, sipping it more out of comfort than for taste. It really shouldn’t stay on his mind for as long as it did, but the lack of peppers in his dish is something he can’t get ignore or dismiss.

To say that it unnerved him is an understatement.

For an assassin, a detail like this could mean life or death. It’s a sign that he’s being observed far more closely than he would prefer, and it’s a weakness that can be used against him.

There was a survey when he first arrived, asking if he had any allergies or dislikes. All of them were left blank—if he was being fed for free, there’s no reason for him to be picky about his meals.

But when was the last time he had eaten peppers? He had wracked his brain, trying to remember all of his previous meals.

His first meal here was katsudon with miso soup. The following meals were seafood, rice or pasta, but nothing stands out (except that lemon chicken stuffed with risotto, that was worth remembering if only for it's interesting execution). All he could really remember are the late night desserts—a single pan-fried red bean cake, jam cookies, lemon cookies, a scoop of ice-cream, a sliver of dense but decadent cheesecake.

Maybe it’s because it was absent that it never crossed his mind, and he never ate often enough with anyone else to notice when it was missing. Not until recently anyway.

Dinner is the same. He could've passed it off as a lucky guess or a coincidence or a forgetful mind, but not during dinner.

It was pepper steak. With no peppers. The taste was there, that acrid, bitter tang on his tongue, but he was spared from eating any of it. McCree and Pharah, on the other hand, had extra heapings, eating it like it was delicious.

But as far as his recent memory can recall, not once did he ever eat anything here that had peppers. So how did you reach this conclusion?

Hanzo takes in a lungful of salty air.

Maybe it was his face. Or something common in all people who hate peppers. A look about them,
perhaps. Similarly to how he could tell when someone is left-handed or right-handed, or whether they’d be an easy mark or not. Maybe you had the same understanding in your programming. Maybe there’s a specific algorithm for people who hate them, or maybe—

“So this is where you have been all this time.”

Hanzo inclines his head to the side—“Genji.”—keeping his eyes out toward the sea.

It’s an unspoken invitation to sit which Genji takes with a ridiculous grace that he wouldn’t never expected from the younger brother he once knew. (The Genji he knew would’ve just plopped down, no grace or any finesse at all.)

He does his best to ignore the uncomfortable feeling that pools in his stomach and crawls up his skin.

“Brother, have you become more familiar with Overwatch?”

Hanzo still isn’t sure if he prefers to be called ‘brother’ or if he prefers ‘Hanzo’ coming from Genji. Neither seemed appropriate. The mechanical timbre is difficult to associate with the loud, reckless young man that Hanzo had to chase after in his youth (and then force him to sit in seiza while lecturing him).

His eyes drop down to the tea cup in his hand, the steeping teabag obscuring his reflection.

Since coming to Overwatch, there are several things that Hanzo required adjustment to.

Firstly, he realized his world is vastly different from the other agents’.

Hanzo understands that his life is different from the average person’s, he knows this almost too well. No two person’s life is the same, not by any stretch of the word, but there was something that connected the other Overwatch agents in a way that he could not even begin to comprehend. (This is also one of the reasons why he feels closer to the Junkers and Satya than the rest.)

The difference did not become more apparent than when he went on his first group mission.

He had argued nearly every step of the way because Soldier: 76, the team’s acting leader, had planned a mission tactic that was a clear inefficient use of manpower—it would take far longer than necessary for a mission of this magnitude and runs the risk of being caught too soon. The hardened vigilante did not budge on any of his decisions. Even Hana, normally so rebellious and outspoken, only has a few snide remarks, but no outright opposition to Soldier: 76's tactics.

It leads to him grumbling on the plane, strapped in next to Hana who only half-listened to his griping.

"Why do you not argue his plans? You must also know that if we all gather at point C, it would increase the risk of being ambushed."

Hana popped her gum nonchalantly with a gaze in her eyes that make him question the true age of this young woman. "Because," she said slowly, "he's the leader right now. What he says, goes."

"But there is a better way," he insisted. "If we drop each one of us at regular intervals between point C and E—"

"He is the leader."
"His plan takes too much time! It is not a proper method—"

A hard hand claps over his shoulder and he barely stopped himself from flipping that person over. Though, looking at whose wrist he grabbed out of instinct, he doubted it would go down so smoothly.

Zarya gives him a smirk and sits down beside him.

"You hear what he says, yes? We are all soldiers now. We must act like soldiers. Soldiers do not question their commanders or their leaders."

Hanzo has an insult at the ready in his mouth, a nasty retort about the Russian woman's homeland and its leader's current state of affairs, but the stinging of his shoulder keeps him from being unnecessarily callous. Especially not when this woman could knock the breath out of him without even intending to. He settled for some incoherent grumbling that had Hana smiling at him the whole time.

Though, it's with begrudging reluctance that he admits the mission went off without a hitch under Soldier: 76's strict instruction. Hanzo still insists it could've been done much faster if they had followed his suggestions instead.

(He doesn’t hate the old soldier. The man reminds him too much of his father—authoritative with that exact tone of voice that will not yield to anyone who back-talks him. It almost makes him feel like a little boy again. But perhaps, that’s why he’s so reluctant to accept the fact that Soldier was right.)

There is a lot more communication that he’s used to: he was forced to check in with everyone when he’s used to staying silent—his ears ring with the residual orders of the silver-haired soldier long after he’s taken out his earpiece. They were split into teams, coordinating with each other and taking their sweet time to secure the target. All of this is outside of Hanzo’s comfort zone; he prefers working alone, taking his victories alone, securing his superiority by his lonesome.

It's through this mission that he realizes how different his life was—again, he knows the difference between himself and an ordinary person, but between assassin and military. There is a distinct difference in their discipline. When Soldier: 76 tells them to jump, there is no question that Hanzo would follow his orders, but not without a fuss. Hana and Zarya (among others) would do it without question because soldiers do not question their commanding officers.

Soldiers are not supposed to think. They must follow orders lest it get the whole squad or battalion killed.

Assassins must be thinking at all times. They are given free reign over a mission and are expected to take the best and quickest form of action with minimal instruction.

Everyone surrounding him was or is military. They all received the same type of instruction, something that he’s far removed from. He hasn’t gone on a mission with Genji yet, something he’s both grateful for and anxious, but he has no doubt that if he were to see him now, Genji would also exhibit hints of the same behavior.

Here, he is not in control, but in that same vein, he does not need to be in control.

Truthfully, it’s both irritating and comforting.

Speaking of irritating…
Another aspect of military life he does not quite have a taste for, literally: MREs, IMPs, ration packs, or whatever you want to call them.

Sometimes, there is no restaurants nearby or any time to go out and grab any food during a lengthy mission. Granted, he’s only been on two of these—both were stakeouts.

Hanzo has done stakeouts before—an assassin’s job requires close monitoring of a target’s habits. He had long learned to carry odorless, easy to consume foods: onigiri, jelly-pouch drinks, bread. Now he has to accustom himself to the strange prepackaged crackers, dry meats that he’s supposed to warm up with a heat pack, and shitty desserts that makes him wish he were back at the base or in Japan where he had access to a conbini.

The disgust he feels each time he’s handed a ration pack does not escape anyone’s notice. (He’s teased about it by several people, and tolerates it from even less, vowing to save an arrow for each of them. It’d be a miracle if he didn’t start to have nightmares about the drab brown packages and its unappetizing contents.)

However, the other members do not seem as adverse to it, even making comments about the packaging and cheerfully gossiping about how their rations are much different in their respective countries.

It makes the after-mission meals back at the base something to look forward to. (He’ll even tolerate the ridiculous amounts of butter you slather onto their meals if only to eat something that looks and feels like it hasn’t been chewed up and spat out by a bird.)

Whenever a team returns from a mission, fresh food would already be prepared for them, piping hot and waiting no matter the time as if you already know when they’ll return. Regardless of how tired he is, he’ll always force himself to trudge to the kitchen for a meal. Though, he prefers to have his meal alone and after a hot shower, he will eat his fill to make up for the sad excuse for rations he was forced to eat during his mission and possibly contribute to the strain of an already thin budget.

Budget—money—is another thing that he cannot get a satisfactory answer for.

Overwatch is a defunct organization that is outlawed all across the world. Anyone caught operating under the guise of Overwatch or supporting it could find themselves in a very, very uncomfortable position. It goes without saying that monetary help is also illegal.

So, it’s certainly a surprise to Hanzo when Winston—something else he has to get used to—gave him access to a private bank account with credits in it. The numbers on one of the many computer screens show the exact amount allocated to him.

“Sorry it’s so little,” Winston said as he rubbed the back of his head, “it’s all we can offer at the moment. It takes a lot to run everything.”

“You have money to give us?”

“Well, uhm, you guys need to be rewarded in some way, right? Think of it as a salary for yourselves.”

Hanzo flipped the card back and forth; the numbers on it shone in the dim light. It’s not as though he does not have any spending money for himself—he’s completed enough ‘jobs’ in the past ten years to sustain himself, and he’s sure that the other members are the same. (Not that he would ever tell anyone that—especially not Genji; he likes to have a positive balance on his accounts.)
“Where does this money come from?” He waved the card. “Surely the UN is not so incompetent as to miss any of Overwatch’s accounts.”

It’s fascinating to watch the gorilla’s fur rise up in alarm. Winston fumbled with his glasses, wiping them on his shirt as he speaks. “No. No, Overwatch’s assets were all seized during the…shutdown years ago. This money comes from donors heard about the Recall and who still believe in what we do.”

Hanzo’s eyebrows rose up. “‘Donors who heard about the Recall’?”

“Yes.” Winston cleared his throat. “I understand that your skepticism of our current financial sources, but rest assured, we—we have it all taken care of. Nothing to worry about.”

He gave a poor attempt at an assuring grin.

“You are certain these ‘donors’ are trustworthy?”

For a second, the grin faltered. “Ab—absolutely. Athena has it all covered, no problems here!”

Hanzo did not need to be a master assassin or have experience as an older brother to know that Winston was hiding something important. This entire situation is suspect, and something in the back of his mind itches to know what, but he nodded slowly, pretending to understand.

The logo of the AI blinked innocently behind Winston. He doesn’t know how powerful it is, but it must not be any minor program if the international community has not yet come down upon them like a tidal wave.

Hanzo Shimada is confident in his ability to evade the law—he’s done it for a decade already and considers himself a little more seasoned than the rest. However, even he has no such confidence (not that he would ever say that out loud) about evading the entire world’s police force. (It would be a fun challenge worthy of his time, but he’s not particularly fond of fearing for his life at every waking and sleeping moment with little to no safe place in the world.)

Still, it’s another thing he adds onto his list of things to think about when he’s not sleeping, and another reason to feel that this new Overwatch is a fawn still new to its own feet (and that coming here was quite possibly a mistake).

“I am adjusting fine,” Hanzo says finally.

Genji gives him a long, long stare, indicative of his disbelief. Hanzo pointedly ignores the unvoiced accusation.

“Really?”

So much for unvoiced.

“Yes.”

He brings the tea cup to his mouth, taking the slowest sip ever if only to subtly indicate his loss of interest in the conversation. He tries not to cringe at the temperature or taste.

“And everyone treating you well?”

A small flare of irritation skitters across his skin. What is Genji trying to get at?

He is a grown man capable of managing his own personal affairs. He does not need Genji looking
after him like some nosy mother-in-law. Since when did Genji give a shit about his relations with other people?

(Previously, it would be Hanzo who would interrogate Genji on his choice of company, demanding that he choose his friends and trysts carefully, to which it falls on deaf ears.)

“Fine,” he grunts.

Even as he says that, he remembers that his first few days here were less than comfortable. He does not know how much any of the agents knew about his and Genji’s past, but he could pick out the ones who knew from those who didn't at a glance.

There is a decided coldness that is beyond the normal medical professionalism that the blonde doctor addresses him with (“So you are Mr. Hanzo Shimada. I have heard a lot about you,”); a careful trepidation from the overly-enthusiastic time-traveler (he still doesn't know how that works or how that's possible, but he knows better than to ask); a particular look in the eyes of the overly large crusader—something akin to pity or a deep sorrow; and other things like furtive glances or irritating whispering that he tries to ignore in favor of familiar solitude.

He can deny it all he wants, but the scornful attention pricked and stabbed at something softer inside he thought he had cast away long ago.

It’s only with people like Hana, Satya, Roadhog, or even Omnic’s like Bastion that he is even the slightest bit at ease. They do not know his past or seem to care. It helps that he cannot understand the omnic. There’s also you, who just does the job that you’re assigned: cooking. You do not engage in unnecessary conversation or judge him for what he has done, and that’s already much better than half the agents he’s met.

“I heard that you beat Jesse’s high score in simulation 12.”

Genji’s shift in topic is a welcome one and Hanzo scoffs, a touch prideful in his new accomplishment. (He’d never tell anyone, but it took him nearly two weeks to do so.)

Genji continues, “He’s been complaining about it.”

“He is loud, and talks too much nonsense. He should put his money where his mouth is.”

Sure, McCree is talkative, but he speaks a lot of nothing for someone who knows so much. The words out of this man’s mouth are honeyed poison; a trap for unsuspecting prey. If anything, Hanzo only trusts the man’s aim, having been saved by it once before and seen it in action many more. Beating his score was a sweet victory that he’s sure he’ll get the pleasure of doing so again.

High scores in many of the simulations never remain the same for long, and the mere thought of it whets his appetite for competition.

“If he is not enough of a challenge, perhaps you should try to beat Ana-san’s score in simulation 7.”

At that, Hanzo pulls a face of disgruntlement. Genji laughs, the tinny edge barely tainting the familiarity of the sound. A bit of nostalgia wells up in his chest and he pinches the bridge of his nose.

“There is no need to feel ashamed. Everyone has been trying to beat it for a long time. You are not the first to try.”
The score is not the reason, but he lets him think it anyway. “Hmph.”

“Maybe you should ask her for advice. You talk with Ana-san a lot, do you not?”

“She talks to me.” Running a hand over his face, he admits quietly, “It is...difficult to refuse her.”

The cyborg nods sagely. “I don’t think there is anyone who would say no to her, not even the chef.”

The image of the sniper’s afternoon tea time and cookies come to mind. Buttery, like everything else the chef makes, but still warm and melts in his mouth. It’s only slightly sweet, occasionally accented with a dollop of jam. It is not an option on the menu and, from what he’s heard from the other agents, impossible to get.

But then, he remembers the woman’s back at the window, loudly demanding that you leave your fortress. To date, she has not been successful.

More cookies for him, then. Though, he doesn’t think it’ll make a difference, omnics don’t eat.

He unconsciously looks at Genji from the corner of his eye. His jaw tightens.

“The chef has refused her before,” he says tersely.

“And let me guess, the chef has refused you, too.”

Hanzo does not dignify that with an answer.

“Maybe you should try to be more friendly. The chefs were always kind to me.”

“Chefs?” There’s more than one of you?

“Hm? Oh yes, there used to be many.” Genji leans back, a little more relaxed in his posture as he drifts off to the years that Hanzo does not know of. “They were a rowdy bunch, but they were all very nice people. They were very...considerate of me when I first joined hands with Overwatch.”

Then, quietly: “I am very grateful to them.”

This time, Hanzo really can’t suppress the guilt that grips him like a vice and threatens to squeeze the life out of him. He wants to just get up and throw himself off this ledge, if only to end the anguish this conversation brings.

But he’s a bigger person than he was several months ago. He forces himself to sit there and take it.

“You should say ’thank you,’ at least. It’s good manners.”

“I don’t want you of all people to lecture me on manners.”

Genji doesn’t need to take off his mask for Hanzo read his facial expression: disapproving, one eyebrow raised with a cheeky frown. “Brother. It is good manners to thank the people who feed you. Would it kill you to be polite?”

Instead, he asks with an accusing edge to his voice, “So you have been watching me?”

Guilty as charged, Genji puts his hands up. “I had to make sure you did not kill the chef for putting something you disliked in your food. Like peppers.”

There’s a smug rise in Genji’s voice as he watches Hanzo’s face shift from one of irritation to one
of realization.

If there had ever been *any* doubt about Genji’s relation to him, all of that went out the window.

“So it was you.”

Genji laughs, loud and obnoxious, nudging him with an elbow. “Were you perhaps worried that the chef can read your mind?”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” *Yes.*

There’s a smile in Genji’s voice that’s almost infectious. “I’m sure Chef would have noticed eventually. The Head Chef trained everyone to do that. So, I am sure even if I said nothing, you wouldn’t have to suffer for long. You are in good hands here.”

He doubts it especially with the way Overwatch currently operates—there are still too many questions left unanswered and too many things that do not make any sense.

Like: “Why is it forbidden to enter the kitchens?”

There is a silence that is taken up by the screech of gulls that he swears is mocking him for even asking such a foolish question.

Before he could even retract it, Genji laughs, a little depreciating and somehow nostalgic.

“I should have expected you to be curious about it.” At Hanzo’s frown, he says, “I heard there is a great treasure kept inside that kitchen.”

That immediately piqued his interest. “A treasure? In a kitchen?” He shakes his head. “Don’t be absurd.”

Genji shrugs. “Many Blackwatch agents have attempted to enter. None have succeeded. Jesse may know more. He has tried to go inside many times without success.”

“The cowboy?”

“You should not try. Otherwise, you may find peppers in your food.”

Hanzo shoves at Genji with an annoyed (but fond) huff, nearly throwing him off the ledge. Genji shoves back.

“Bring it.”

The two brothers begin a strange game of trying to shove the other off the ledge, choked laughter and cursing breaking out between them—only to stop when Hanzo’s tea cup pitches over the precarious landing and straight into the smashing seas below.

“Chef. Chef, Agent Hanzo is here to order. Chef. Agent Hanzo is here to order.”

You snort and your leg spasms as you are immediately awoken by Athena’s announcement. Almost robotically, you get out of bed and slip on your uniform hanging from your door with practiced ease. It doesn’t occur to you that it’s four in the morning and you’ve only slept for a little under three hours, having stayed up to babysit some broth and edit ledgers. By the time you make it out of your quarters and enter the kitchen, Hanzo’s order is already posted on all the screens.
Without skipping a beat, you grab a kettle and fill it up, flicking on the stove on your way to grab the tea. In one smooth motion, you swipe the container, a teapot, a cup, open the drawer, grab the spoon to measure—it is pure muscle memory that drives you. You’re not entirely aware of your actions until you’ve slipped the tray into the window, ring the bell, and start to walk away, determined to get another hour of sleep before breakfast has to be made for the early risers.

“…thank you.”

It’s so quiet, you almost miss it, but even when you hear it, it takes a moment to register that this is the first time Agent Hanzo has said anything to you.

You rush back to the window to answer, awake now. But he’s gone. You bend down to get a peek at the cafeteria, which has gone dark again.

The words, “You’re welcome,” remain stuck in your throat, struggling to escape but without a proper direction.

Maybe you could still catch him?

“Athena! Cameras.”

The screens fill with the man walking down the hall, tray in hand. That’s not the path to the dorms. You watch intently as he makes a turn and the cameras switch to the common area.

“Ah.”

You press your fingers to your forehead. Damn, if you knew Agent D.Va was going to partake, you would’ve made something quick. They could share it and use it as a conversation point and find out their similarities and differences in tastes. Though, judging by the way she welcomes him onto the seat beside him and points to the screen with excitement shows that they already have something in common.

The thought gnaws at you. Nourishing the soul and fostering camaraderie between agents is the job of a chef, too. It would be very, very wrong to interrupt even to bring them food (that you’re supposed to be keeping very careful control of).

‘Who’s going to know?’ a voice whispers in the back of your mind.

Athena because she’s always watching. Then Agent Winston because he is in constant communication with Athena. Then Captain Amari because that woman is sharper than your knives. Then everyone else because that’s the way it is.

The two sit side by side, talking at ease and gesturing at the game. There is a softness to the man’s eyes that is normally hidden by day, and a vulnerable ease around the normally fierce MEKA driver. It felt a little strange to be looking at a scene that looked like it was meant more for a family than an organization of illegal vigilantes.

“Thank you, Athena. Please turn it off.”

Maybe you can make it up to them another time.

If Agent Hanzo or Agent D.Va end up receiving desserts with their next orders, you can say nothing. Except now, the archer will slip a quiet ‘thank you’ that you’re somehow always too slow
or too busy to return.

Chapter End Notes

Hanzo is literally the least reliable narrator ever.

*Conbini* - Convenience stores

Thank you all for your kind comments and support.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Click.

“—efforts are being made to curtail money-laundering in previously unregulated financial institutions in Europe as the EU passes stricter policies—”

Click.

“—tonight, musical sensation, Lúcio Correia dos Santos! Coming at you live fro—”

Click.

“—you. This year’s Olympics will be held in—”

Click.

“—oday, I have with me the esteemed General Manager and head chef of the high-class charity restaurant, Cœur d’Artic—”

Click.

“—OOOAAALLL!! He lands it! He nails it! Seventeen years after the legend—”

Click.

“—year’s United States presidential election will be excit—”

Click.

Hanzo closes the window and shuts off the comm, placing it neatly onto his nightstand where all his other trinkets like spare arrowheads are kept. It was nice of Overwatch to trust him with a private room. He’s sure it’s in no small part thanks to Genji’s interference.

The Watchpoint offers very little entertainment outside of simulations and the games that D.Va brings. Electricity is being rationed carefully and going outside is not recommended lest they all be recognized or caught trying to sneak back onto the base. (Though, necessity dictates that they leave occasionally to pick up basic supplies.) Many of the former Overwatch agents are grouped together in private meetings behind closed doors that he couldn’t possibly even attempt to listen to with all of his cunning, but he is not so invested in Overwatch’s mission that he cares to know. Though, rumors of Overwatch’s resurgence is thick on the internet, and that may be reason enough for the lack of missions and the increased secrecy.

It gives Hanzo time to attempt to meditate, check his equipment, and train to his heart’s content (up until he gets angry enough that he is unable to beat any further high scores), or be swallowed by the lingering doubts in his mind that insist quite loudly that coming to Overwatch was a mistake when he thinks of the secrets steadily piling up, brick by brick. But he is expected to be a soldier, and soldiers do not question their superiors.

(He’s not supposed to question his elders either, but he knows exactly where that would lead him and Hanzo Shimada does not appreciate being burnt twice.)
Days pass since his impromptu meeting with Genji, and Hanzo is definitely not bored and does not linger in the cafeteria during and after his meals under the guise of digesting, staring at the sliver of space in the wall that gives him the barest insight into the inner workings of the kitchen.

He cannot be sure of the interior layout. If he angles his head a certain way that makes him look like one of his assassination targets whose neck has been snapped or a horror movie victim and squints, he can perhaps see a little more of the kitchen—some hanging pans, maybe an island counter.

Throughout this whole time, however, Hanzo has only been able to observe a uniformed torso moving back and forth and little else. That limitation is also in no small part thanks to the people who insists on stopping by the window and insist on speaking to you. There couldn’t possibly be anything interesting to discuss with a cook.

His extended stay does catch the attention of other agents who take it upon themselves to speak to him, hindering his half-hearted efforts even more. The wiser ones keep their distance as they always do. That’s perfectly fine with him—they no longer look at him with such open scrutiny that it bothers him anymore.

It’s quickly concluded that distant observation is a pointless tactic, and he promised himself that he is not at all invested in finding out specifically what type of treasures lay in the belly of Watchpoint: Gibraltar’s kitchen. It is just an innocent pastime, one of the Watchpoint’s lesser mysteries without much at stake.

What if it’s piles of gold?

Vintage cars?

Caviar?

Golden cookware?

He snorts before taking a sip of tea. 'It is a kitchen,' he scolds himself, 'how valuable can this treasure truly be?'

He continually tells himself this, but he makes no moves to rectify his lingering presence in the mess hall.

Perhaps it is a secret weapon of sorts like those villains in those cartoons he watched as a child.

Or a secret lair.

With a mecha.

Hanzo’s head snaps up at the thought. Now that would be interesting. But he laughs into his tea, feeling the slightest bit ridiculous. That sort of thing would be in the hanger, not beneath a kitchen. But the days of speculation drag on and the itch becomes a full-on ache that makes his fingers twitch and urges his blood to run.

The only way to stem this is to find out exactly what’s inside. Athena has already made it clear she’s watching, and it wouldn’t do for him to be without information. And Genji’s already given him the first hint. He just needs to act on it.

Patience, he tells himself. There is no need to be hasty for something so inconsequential.
But in trying to discreetly solve this mystery throughout the past few days, he becomes keenly aware of other information. Like the fact that Genji stops by the cafeteria often.

Most times, he stops by and rings the service bell that’s hidden just behind the the edge of the sill to summon you, leaning into the window and striking up idle conversation. It almost reminds him of the different times he has caught Genji doing some illicit activities that the elders of the clans would never approve of (flirting with people while they work, usually). He tries not to listen like he used to; it is surely private and his brother is not about to shame anyone, and that endeavor is made easier by the fact that he actually cannot hear anything distinct—just garbled noise.

But just as he notices Genji’s increased presence over the past few days, Genji notices him, too. His brother today forgoes disturbing you and takes a seat across from him.

“Enjoying the food, brother?” There is a teasing in Genji’s mechanical voice that Hanzo tries to resist rolling his eyes at.

He looks down at the remnants of his most recent meal—wide, flat pasta swimming a white sauce, marinated shrimp that was just a bit spicy and mushrooms—that was no more than just an oil stain with cream on his plate. The thought of how much butter he actually ate makes him a little queasy, but he tries not to think too hard about it and tries not to think of the minor pains he’ll have to deal with later for having consumed so much dairy.

“It is fatty.”

Genji laughs, slapping his knee twice. A twitch goes off in the corner of Hanzo’s lips. How nostalgic.

“Well, Chef is French-trained. But there were many different chefs in the kitchen, and in turn, many to learn from.”

That would explain the wide range of dessert.

“But do you find it to be to your liking? You were always picky about your food.”

“I am not picky,” he insists even at the risk of sounding like a child. “I just have more sophisticated tastes than yours.”

“Well, I’m sure you have more taste than I do now—”

Hanzo opens his mouth to answer—

And realization strikes him like blow to the chest that has him reeling. It forces him him onto his feet, everything screaming at him to run away lest the demons of his past knock him down, paralyze him, and consume him from the legs up.

Time stops for a tick.

—“Forget the mission, brother, what do you think we’re having for dinner today?”—

Genji also seems to have realized his faux pas.

—“Brother, I don’t want to eat my beansprouts, you eat them!”—

The room is a vacuum of deaden emotion.

—“Come on, try it! This salty watermelon drink is the best!”—
—“Ugh, I can’t believe I just ate all that; brother, if your shitty curry kills me, I’ll haunt you.”—

Time moves again and Hanzo makes a mad dash out of the cafeteria, face pinched and whiter than the sheets they sleep on.

「 Shit.」 Genji jumps up and gives chase, the last of the yellow ribbon already out of sight.

“Hanzo! Brother—wait!”

It would be a lie to say that no one was watching this exchange, and that it’s not quietly discussed behind closed doors by nosier agents.

Hanzo no longer lingers in the cafeteria in the following days.

You stare blankly at the half-eaten tray left behind at the service window, a little dumbfounded. There have been more of this behavior lately.

Your first reaction is to be annoyed at Soldier: 76, but you remember that he hasn't ordered anything in the past day—another worrying issue that you need to address. Your brow furrows as you try to remember who ordered recently.

No one comes to mind. The last person to order dinner did so hours ago.

“Athena. Did you see who left this?”

The chime of the AI’s voice is steady as she reports, “Agent Hanzo returned the tray at 21:40. His behavior seemed...erratic during the past week.”

The fact that he left his tray like this—food still in it and several hours after he ordered it—is enough to validate Athena’s concerns.

You bring the tray in, careful to preserve the scene, and take out your notepad from your apron.

“Erratic, how?”

“Agent Hanzo has been visiting the cafeteria less frequently after an increase in time spent here. His average visits have decreased from 42 minutes to merely 17.”

“Is that 17 because he has to wait?”

“Correct. Three minutes to order, and an approximate fifteen minutes wait. He has been returning to his room to eat.”

You shake your head, marking down that your time has slowed. Being here without the rush of lunch service and the like have made you complacent, rusty. If this were the old Overwatch, this would be considered unacceptable. (But then again, the old Overwatch had many more agents and a much higher turnover of food, so individual portions didn’t have to be made.)

“Thank you. Send me everyone’s average wait times later, will you?”

“That is no issue. I will compile and have it sent when it is completed.”

You take the time to record everything that Agent Hanzo had eaten and left uneaten. It’s perturbing to see a man who eats so well to the point of asking for seconds leave food behind. A cold feeling taps against your back.
Maybe your cooking has been lacking?

Doubt sinks its claws into you, pulling itself up to your ear to whisper taunts and jeers. You try to shake it off, repeating that no other agent has changed habits. You need to believe in your skills—it would be an insult to the people who taught you everything otherwise.

You force yourself to move past that thought—it must be something specific to Agent Hanzo.

Maybe he’s ill?

If he’s ill, you need to change the menu to suit him better.

“Athena. Could I get Agent Hanzo’s basic medical records?”

There is a pause and then the screens above you are filled with data that does not indicate that the archer may be in any way impaired or could otherwise explain his poor appetite.

You tap the pen against your lip.

Maybe it’s a change in his mental state?

Did something happen to him?

There was a bit of a clamor in the cafeteria some time ago. Was it today? Yesterday? The day before? Was it related to him?

Your stomach tingles painfully, reminding you to appease it with either food or medicine before you concern yourself with someone else.

“Chef, I do recommend you speak to Doctor Ziegler about your current condition,” Athena chimes, right on cue. You stare at the ceiling where you know one of her sensors are sitting. “Your condition has been in steady decline since your return, and as overseer of all of Overwatch, I do recommend you keep yourself in good health.”

You bite the inside of your lip, breathing deeply to try to push down the pain as though it could be hidden from Athena’s scrutiny.

“Thank you for your concern, Athena,” you say carefully. “However, I understand that Madame Ziegler is busy, so I won’t bother her with something so small. It’s been diagnosed and I’m managing it.”

She sounds absolutely unsympathetic and very much human when she says, “I very much doubt that, Chef.”

You grit your teeth to prevent yourself from being overly snappish with her. It’s her responsibility to be concerned. It’s nothing personal. “I will do better. Can I ask you to stop surveillance in the kitchen?”

“I would not recommend that, Chef. If anything were to happen to you, we would not be able to assist.”

Leaning back against the counter, you consider her words carefully. Your own condition is nothing you can’t handle or anything that would incapacitate you to the point that you can’t seek help. Her constant reminders only serve to perpetuate a problem that you are very aware of and will handle when you have the time to do so.
Firmly, you order, “I would like surveillance turned off inside the kitchen going forward.”

Hesitation dots her voice as she answers, “Understood, Chef. However, to ensure compliance with security protocol, I have informed Winston that the kitchen has become a blind-spot for the organization.”

You take the elder Shimada’s tray to the dishwashing area and start cleaning everything to avoid voicing your protests to what is essentially a threat from the AI.

Rules are rules. It would do well to follow them, but it is an unnecessary precaution. There is no one to monitor but yourself, and no one will enter the kitchen—no one has, not since the old days. It’s not something you should worry about. And if Winston has an issue with it, you hope that you’ll be able to ease any concerns he has.

Besides, who would bother coming in here anyway except for thieves?

You smile wryly to yourself as you soap up the plates and scrub until everything is clean. There’s no need to use the industrial dishwasher beside you—there isn’t enough of a mess for it.

“Sorry, Bethy, another time,” you murmur, patting the large machine, affectionately named “Bethesda” by previous members of the kitchen staff. It does not react, indifferent in its idleness.

You put everything back in its place and dry your hands on your apron.

“Okay, Athena, back to business.” You pluck a stale piece of burnt toast that didn’t quite make its way through morning service from a plate you had set aside this morning. “Stats, please.”

The familiar numbers of calories and names populate the screens, Soldier: 76 still at the top of the list. A heavy sigh echoes off the tiled walls.

You tap your pen against your lips and scribble down the rankings while chewing through the toast. Another person you have to be concerned for.

Idly, you’re sure that Agent Soldier: 76 would’ve loved to have this for breakfast—whenever you serve it, he returns his tray with the toast gone and everything else half-eaten, but since he hasn’t been eating well, you had to limit his options to something packed full of nutrients in small dishes. You take several bites of the bread, crumbs dropping everywhere.

You need to pick your battles where you could. The silver-haired man lost far too many calories in too short of a time period and refuses to eat enough to balance it. While Agent Hanzo’s appetite and behavior is concerning, Agent Soldier: 76’s was even more so. It’s abnormal and terrifying.

The only people you’ve seen with this sort of metabolism rate were long dead. Though, through the grapevine, you’ve heard that it may not be so (especially since the long-thought-dead Agent Ana showed her face around the base). If it were true, you’d like to be able to cook for them again, just for old times sake.

Though, Commander Reyes was never the type to let other people cook for him.

You laugh to yourself at the memories of Commander Gabriel Reyes bursting through the kitchen doors. It would scare all the newcomers who have learned that non-kitchen personnel were strictly forbidden from entering the space, and annoy veterans who feel insulted that their cooking is so unsatisfactory that the customer has to come inside and do it himself.

But Head Chef Richard would always greet him warmly with two kisses to each cheek and a hug
that may linger for a little too long to be considered customary. He’d personally cook for Reyes, taking over the dishes he has already started in between friendly bantering.

It was…

You look around the kitchen slowly, eyes lingering at the different stations.

Maybe tomorrow you can make arroz con pollo—chicken rice—just the way Commander Reyes taught. You pause yourself for a moment—Agent Symmetra would be opposed to the conflicting textures and Agent Hanzo would be angry if there were peppers. Agent D.Va would like it extra spicy to the point of pain, and while Agent Reinhardt insists he can eat anything you throw at him, you know you should keep his intake of fats and oils to a minimum, and Agent McCree…

Your breath hitches just a bit.

McCree—*Jesse.*

Blackwatch.

Reyes.

Tamales.

You slowly rest your arms onto the counter, eyes fixated on the words of your notes, but not reading them. That’s right. Have you been so busy that you forgot? Tamales. If there were more people in the kitchen, you would’ve liked to make tamales, too.

Commander Reyes always did like making them, recruiting the entire kitchen force into producing mountains of them, and tossing the tamales at his crew at inopportune moments. Before larger missions, he would stay up in the kitchen, wrapping those corn husks and waiting for them to steam before he would distribute them to his people as emergency rations. You were sure the Overwatch agents were envious.

Those tamales quickly became an inside joke: an illegal tamales trade between the kitchen and the Blackwatch agents. They’d be used as bargaining chips or currency in exchange for various tasks. Those days were extremely lively, especially since none of the tamales were ever marked, allowing for some more mischievous chefs to add something a little extra to them. (Commander Reyes would force the unfortunate person to eat the whole thing anyway or do it himself, insisting that food should not be wasted, only to gargle a mouthful of milk later on.)

If you made them, would Agent McCree enjoy them or…?

You cover your mouth, a choked noise dying into your hand, even though there’s no one around to hear it. You inhale a shaky breath and close your eyes, a comfortable sting lingering in them.

“Inspection!”

The pen flips out of your hand and lands on the floor with a clatter.

As though it were a spell, you’re running for the bright red buckets that line the prep area, slamming dunking your half-eaten toast into a trash bin. You pull out a wet rag from the bucket, wring it, desperately cleaning everything in sight, shoving what few stray scraps into strategically placed garbage cans as you passed, mumbling, “Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit.”

It’s not until you hear rambunctious laughter from the service window that you realize there’s no
inspection happening. The rag hits a counter with a wet, angry “shlap”.

You stalk over to the window, your frown hidden by the partition while McCree has himself a grand old time, slapping the flat of the sill with his hand. Your stomach rolls violently with your mood.

“Did you need something, Agent McCree?” The ice in your voice could freeze lava, but Jesse has gotten worse from scarier people.

“Sorry, Chef. Just wanted t’make sure you’re alive in there.”

“I am doing well, thank you,” you answer stiffly. Is everyone on your case today? “If you do not need anything, I warn you to not do that again.”

“But I do need somethin’, Chef.”

You cross your arms tightly over your chest. “If it is an order, please use the terminals—”

“I need t’be straight with me, Chef. You’ve been hidin’ from us.” Your spine stiffens. “I ain’t seen your face in years; you’re not even gonna try to bring me lunch like you used to?”

The sudden shift in tone stuns you, and the question even more so. It brings back burning memories of all the rules you broke when you first started here, of the illicit activities that got you into more trouble than you could recall, the foolish implications and the camaraderie between yourself and several of the Blackwatch agents—

Your answer is sterile: “The kitchens must be staffed at all times, Agent McCree, I—”

“And y’don’t have to speak so damn formal to me—Agent McCree.” You could swear he rolls his eyes. “You know me. You’ve been acting all stand-offish since you got here. Come on, look me in the eyes and tell me we’re strangers. I dare ya.”

You look around, checking for any signs that the two of you might not be alone (even though no one’s been in the kitchen in ages) and you’ve just asked Athena to turn off monitoring. There should be no one watching you be unprofessional.

With a heaving sigh, you bend down, fixing the cowboy with a tired glare.

“Hello...Jesse.”

“Good to see you again, dishwasher.” He grins brightly as a scowl—almost a pout—crosses your face.

“I am a chef now.”

“Y’certainly don’t look the part.”

“I’m perfectly fine.”

He gives you an incredulous look. “You crazy? Have y’looked in a mirror recently? I reckon you haven’t been sleepin’ or eatin’.”

You open your mouth to retort, but close it, thinking better of it.

It’s always exhausting arguing with Jesse, whose silver tongue is so refined, he could talk his way into almost anything. (Besides, he’s right. You know you look like a damn mess. It’s not like
there’s anyone around to criticize your appearance, anyway.) The best thing to do is to just accept it.

With a shuddering breath, you confess quietly, “No, not really.”

Admittedly, it’s been a busy time for you since you’ve volunteered your services for the newly recalled Overwatch. There were many more things to manage now, and so many people to stay in contact with, ledgers to update, orders to place and review, and so many things to update, and—your well-being was never high on the priority list. Not that you’ll ever admit it to Athena or to anyone else.

Jesse voice turns softer. “Why don’t you rest your eyes? Ain’t no one here but me.”

A moment’s hesitation turns into two, then three. You exhale deeply.

“Ten minutes.”

“Make it thirty, and you got yerself a deal.”

You look around one more time, taking note of the time (23:31).

“Pass me a barstool?”

He chuckles. “What, ain’t got no chairs in there?” But he leaves anyway. In the meantime, you grab the previously abandoned rag and wipe down the service window.

The ex-Blackwatch agent returns, passing the stool precariously through the opening in the wall and you bite back a laugh when the smell of bleach hits him.

Situating yourself better, you slowly easing your arms onto the window sill, leaning your face onto them. It’s not quite breaking the rules of the kitchen—your face isn’t actually on it. You’re sure that if Head Chef Richard saw this, he’d give you a terrible tongue lashing in that thick French accent of his. It’d definitely be more welcome than being in here alone with nothing but your thoughts.

A heavy hand rests on your head. You don’t even stir when his voice is right next to your ear; the musky smell of tobacco makes your nose wrinkle.

“See? You’re tired. Ain’t no one’s goin’ t’bother you if I can help it. Close up shop and rest a bit, Chef. Overwatch can’t run without you.”

You wonder if he really knows the depths of the words he speaks, and breathe a shuddering sigh.

“Okay.” Then you add, “You better not be acting nice because you want something.”

There’s an exaggerated gasp above you that gets you smiling. “Me? Never.”

“Dessert? More gourmet coffee from your favorite joint in Route 66?” The word ‘tamales’ get stuck behind your teeth.

He gags. “No, thank you, that stuff tastes like dirt.”

He says that, but you know he visits that diner often (details of agent whereabouts are always carefully recorded by Athena, and you are in constant access of them) and drinks a copious amount of it anyway. You shift your head and shoot him a look that just bounces off him. “Are you sure it’s not because of your smoking habits?”
“If it were, everything’d taste bad, but I know they ain’t, cause your food tastes like heaven.”

Waves of embarrassment from different memories collide (of your first dishes here that were unservable, of your first time approaching Jesse was slighted, the first time someone told you your food was delicious), the remnants of their explosion color your face. “Flatterer!”

Jesse just laughs and laughs, the deep baritone soothing something you haven’t realized built up over the months you’ve been here. “Go t’sleep,” he says, “I’ll wake you up later.”

Hanzo springs up from the bed with a harsh gasp, awaken by false proclamations of: ”You're the best brother in the world,” and a deathly gurgle dyed in red.

He wants to desperately dig into his belongings and pull out his trusted companion, the sake gourd, to deafen the echoes in his ears—“best brother”—but the thought of remaining where his nightmares fester forces him to leave the bed and escape through the door before it even fully opens

Jaw tight and every muscle in his body taut, he quickly makes his way through the base—to where, he doesn’t know, stumbling and nearly tripping over himself without his usual grace, clinging to the wall like a man learning to walk. He knows he is a pathetic sight, hair and beard askew, dressed less presentably than he would normally prefer and sweat-drenched, but he does not care. It is sheer stubbornness that keeps him moving and a deep-seated fear that keeps him from turning back.

The empty halls embrace his arrival with the fanfare of buzzing emergency lights, but they also lead the ghosts of his past straight to him with no doubt to his destination. Mercifully, there is no one to see his disgraceful state.

A physical wash of relief falls over him he stumbles into the mess hall and the doors close shut immediately behind him, trapping his fears on the other side. He takes a moment to lean against the door, heaving, shaking.

The moon is high above, filtering into the windows, bouncing off the pillars and illuminating the cavernous room. It’s quiet. The tables and benches all lined up like pews. It’s not the first time he’s felt that this does not seem like a cafeteria at times, but those churches he sees in movies.

Pushing himself off the door, Hanzo makes his way to the terminals lined up some distance from the dimly lit service window. Since he’s here, he may as well.

He fumbles with his credentials at the terminal, its light burning holes into his retinas, barely able to orders tea—not his usual green tea, but lapsang souchong. He needs something dark to drown and obscure the remnants of his nightmare. If he had been any more impaired, he would’ve even ordered that minty, sweet-bitter tea that Ana drank just to distract himself with the film that would quickly form on his tongue and the sweetness that call upon something resembling cheer.

Shakily, he sits beneath the service window, huddling his knees to his chest. Either so he’s not seen by the chef or so he's not seen by something else—he doesn't know. But there’s an impatient buzz in his veins that screams about him to keep running. His trembling fingers fist into his hair, mouth and nose shoved deep into the ‘v’ of his elbows, his breathing labored.

He tries to focus entirely on the cacophony of noise, even if it is painful to his ears and jars him to the bone. The hiss of a door; dampened yet confident footsteps; the chatter of small utensils against each other; the sound of rushing water filling up a vessel; the clicking of a stove.
Hanzo waits, sweat cooling against his skin. The only light that illuminates the cafeteria is that from the kitchen. It's almost laughable the image that it conjures. He, a broken assassin cast in the darkness, and yourself, a chef with a uniform of white and normality.

‘How nice it is to be a cook,’ he thinks bitterly. To know nothing except the fire and food. To know nothing of having blood on your hands, or the corruption, of the dark dealings, of sacrifice, of the harsh experiences of the people you serve. Only to eat all day and devote yourself to mixing flavors and cultures onto a plate.

Enviable, enviable.

A shaky sigh escapes him, and he shoves his head deeper into his arms. When did he become so weak? When did he start to run from his nightmares instead of trembling through them, gasping and tearing at his gi in the middle of the night with naught by his bottle of comfort him? Envying the life of another? Pathetic. Especially when he deserves to suffer for all that he’s done, for being a spineless coward in the face of authority—

No, he needs to focus.


He doesn’t know how much time has passed. He only knows of his patience that wears thinner and thinner until he's close to snapping at the window when you hit the bell. The ringing echoes in his mind, ripples tearing through out the distant call of a fleeting praise—"You're the best big brother in the world."

Limbs having gone stiff from being so tense, it takes him some time to get up. The light from the kitchen is makes him flinch. It’s far too bright.

The tray sits there, teapot and tea cup smelling of smoked wood and a small plate atop another, covering its contents.

For once, you’re there—or at least, your torso—remains for once.

"Are you alright, Agent Hanzo?"

There's something about your voice that he feels he should pay attention to, but as it is, he's too tired and nerves too worn to dwell on it for long.

“Agent Hanzo?”

He can say nothing, jaw locked lest the demons of his anguish and cowardice spill out of his mouth and take physical form. He can’t stay here. Not with you standing on the other side, judging him for something he does not want bared to the world.

Without answering and with his hands still shaking, he grabs the tray and again creeps into the darkness, seeking refuge at his secret spot overlooking the sea.

“Excuse—wait, Agent Hanzo?” He doesn’t hear you behind him, shouts echoing, “Agent—oh geez. Athena!”

The air is sticky with humidity and warm, but not yet the stifling heat he knows the Mediterranean sun is capable of. The pungent tea does very little to calm his nerves; it is not strong to smother anything.
Maybe he should’ve gone for his sake after all.

He runs a hand through his disorderly hair, the tangles and griminess of it all makes him grimace. A pathetic mess, indeed. He downs his cup and pours himself another and downs that one, too.

These nights are not uncommon, but they are not usually this bad.

It was manageable when he first arrived. His previous nightmares have been tame, bearable up until the recent months. He doesn't know if his mind is now settled enough and free to think of things other than survival that it chooses to plague him with nightmares that are long past due, nipping at his heels with a ferociousness unmatched.

It'd be a lie to say he hasn’t been avoiding Genji since that day.

There are cracks forming in his composure and he's desperate for a distraction. He wants to stare out to the sun until it burns away his vision and leaves his demons withered in its brilliance. He wants to run away like he’s done for the past ten years, surviving and hoping that someone would end him in a life-or-death battle, at the end of a sword that barely anyone uses as a viable weapon anymore.

Another cup is poured, and he breathes in deeply, something still vibrating in his veins. The scent of wood and sea—it’s a cleansing smell. Salt for demons of the land, the ashes of woods for the demons of the sea.

Hanzo digs a palm into his thick brow. If only his demons could be contained so easily.

“Greetings, Hanzo.”

The voice snaps his spine straight.

Zenyatta.

Somewhere inside, irritation claws at him. He does not want to deal with this monk whom his brother speaks such high, genuine praises of, or be subject to his company. (Especially not when the omnic is so easily able to place himself onto the ledge like gravity is of no significance to him.)

It would be a lie if he said he didn't feel like throwing himself off the ledge this instant just to escape what would undoubtedly be a lecture or unwanted abstract advice.

“May I sit here?”

“No,” he snaps. And then, more annoyed: “What do you want?”

The omnic pauses, choosing his words carefully, “I was informed that you were troubled and may be in need of guidance.”

“By this Iris of yours?”

Whatever Enlightenment entailed, he never would’ve imagined it called itself the Iris, nor that it would be achievable by something inorganic. Though, he supposed a machine with a clean slate would have a better chance at achieving it than someone of sordid character like himself.

Before Zenyatta can even answer, Hanzo waves him off, not even turning around to look at him. Exhaustion fills him up like a vessel. “Your concern is wasted on me. Leave.”

“It is not solely my own concern, Hanzo.” The archer grips his cup tight. “There are others who are
concerned for you.”

“Then they should also mind their own business.”

“There are some things that cannot be helped. Genji—”

“Do not speak his—no.” He takes a steadying breath. No, that’s not his right anymore.

Zenyatta continues softly, “Genji was hopeful as was I when we saw your progress with Ms. Amari
and the other agents. We want to ensure you remain on this path.”

The rage he thought he had doused comes back with a violence that makes him slam the delicate
cup onto the ground, tea and shards splashing everywhere, nearly dislodging the tray into the sea.

“So you have been observing me, too!?”

Zenyatta’s face gives nothing away. He tilts his head upward to look into Hanzo’s face, an aura of
serenity about him.

“Perhaps. But know that it is because you are now an ally, and while you are your own worst
enemy,”—even though the omnic’s eyes are merely holes, Hanzo could feel them boring holes into
his very being, an intense energy behind him that makes him feel like he’s been stripped bare
—“your pain is not your own anymore.”

With a delicate motion of his finger that Hanzo did not think that omnics were capable of, Zenyatta
lifts the upside-down plate.

There sits his new favorite treat: pan-fried rice cake with red beans.

"It iz a chef’s responsibility to take care of their customers. Cook ze best food for them. Love them
with all our being. We chefs exist for them. We die for them.”

“...chef, that sound fucking insane. They should be happy you even cook for them.”

“Selfish child! Without customers, we chefs are without purpose! Think before you speak!”

“Chef?”

The sound jolts you out of your light slumber beneath the service window. It takes you a few
moments to remember what the hell you were doing out here. (God, that was the second time in
twenty-four hours you’ve slept out here. The last time before that was the time you all got drunk
and celebrated Agent Genji eating a full bowl of food.)

“A-agent Zenyatta?” You wince at the sound of your own voice and the phlegm in it.

“I have seen to Hanzo,” he says gently. You straighten up, minutely tugging the hem of your
uniform into place. “He has returned to his room for the moment. He is in no danger.”

“Oh.” You breathe a small sigh of relief. “Thank you, Agent Zenyatta. I’m sorry for asking you to
do that.”

“Think nothing of it. It is the duty of those who follow the Iris to help those who are lost.”

You laugh, exhausted and somewhat delirious, the smooth surface of the walls above the window
cool against your forehead. “I suppose it is. Thank you.”
Zenyatta laughs. It sounds almost like chimes. "And to you as well. Good night—oh, good morning, I suppose."

From your position, you could barely see the creeping rays of the sun skating across the cafeteria. Time for morning service, you supposed with a yawn. "Yes. Good morning, Agent Zenyatta."

Chapter End Notes

This is what happens when you plan your chapters poorly. A lot of stuff.

「」indicates speech in Japanese.
“Aww, no fair!”

You choke mid-slurp on the instant noodles you have in your hands, broth splattering all over the notes you were working on.

Agent D.Va pops her head through the partition in the wall. “Are you okay in there?”

“Athe, thena. Why didn't you—kah—why didn't you warn me?” you wheeze, tears in your eyes as you try to dislodge the specks of soup from your airpipe.

The AI dares sound a little smug when she responds, “You had requested for surveillance to be lifted from the kitchen area, and so I have taken the liberty of—”

“You know that’s, kaff—ow, that's not what I meant.”

“My apologies, I shall endeavor to do better in fulfilling your self-destructive requests in the future.”

You glare up at the cameras before remembering that you had Athena turn them off. You clear your burning throat.

“Don’t blame Athena, I told her not to say anything.”

The young lady hauls herself forward, balancing on just her stomach between the two domains. You cringe a bit when you see her hair sweeping against the sill.

It's not sanitary.

You had to turn away, stamping down the internal disgust that squeezes your insides. The bowl of hastily made noodles gets set off to the side as you steel yourself and walk over to the window.

“Please remove yourself from there,” you try to say as neutrally as possible. “What if someone sees you?”

D.Va shrugs, nonchalant, and only slides back marginally. Her hair pools further over the smooth marble sill.

“I want ramyeun, too. Why do you get to eat all the good stuff?”

Good stuff? You over at your bowl; a spare egg and the discarded stems of broccoli from last night’s dinner coloring the little mess of half-assed noodles that are slowly growing fat with too much broth. “That’s not ‘good stuff’. The food you eat is much more nutritious and is catered to your specific dietary ne—”

“You're just hogging the good stuff to yourself,” she repeats with a mock-pout.

“It’s not ‘good stuff.’”

“Say you.”

“...did you just call my cooking bad?”
She skillfully ignores the question.

“Come to think of it, I’ve never seen you eat with us before.” Suddenly alive with mischief and the brewing of a great idea, she chirps, “You should come out here and join us, it can’t be any fun eating by yourself in there.”

Your nose wrinkles.

“Chefs don’t eat with their customers. We’re still needed during service.”

“You should see the chefs back home. They’ll come sit down and eat with us at the table.”

You want to argue that you don’t subscribe to that philosophy, and it’s not the way you’re trained, and that’s it’s positively unprofessional, and your head pounds with an ancient mantra of: “chefs do not eat until their customers have eaten.”

Wisdom keeps your tongue still.

“Hey, I know! How about you make some budaejjigae! That way, you don’t have to cook and you get to eat with us! Win-win!”

You open your mouth to object, but she beats you to it.

“Want the recipe for it? Mom makes it best.” She pulls it up on her communicator and shoves it at you. You go cross-eyed at the bright, floating screen and translated text, averting your eyes as you take it.

Spam, little sausages, kimchi, rice cakes, mushrooms, instant noodles; korean spicy sauce (you make a face; you won’t be able to eat this without paying for it later); the list goes on and on.

With ingredients like this, you could make about three days worth of differing dishes—kimchi musubi, kimchi fried noodles or rice, pasta with garlic sauteed mushrooms, instant noodle carbonara with spam or sausages, that spicy korean rice cake dish with cheese (you hardly remember the person who tried to teach you this; there were just so many chefs back then trying to shove various information down your throat).

To throw all these ingredients all into one dish for just one meal seems like a waste, especially since food drops are few and far in between. If only rationing and strict inventory management wasn’t an issue, you’d have no problems making this. But as it were, you could only hope that Overwatch becomes sanctioned again so that it may return to the days of a bustling kitchen, unmonitored drop routes, and endless culinary experiments.

There’s a darker part of you that reminds you there are several reservoir of funds you could dip into for this request. The ingredients are relatively cheap, and you can likely get most of them in a short amount of time (even the Korean chili paste, which you expect would be hardest to find, might not be such a hassle to obtain). There’s no reason why you couldn’t just indulge in this for Agent D.Va, who is far away from home and presented you with another learning opportunity.

This stew, budaejjigae, is definitely simple enough. Chop, arrange, and boil. But is it really enough to justify throwing all that into a stew? For agents who have such fickle tastes?

You scroll down a little further, and your breath catches when you reach the end.

There are pictures upon pictures of Agent D.Va—no, Hana.
She’s much younger, hair in short pigtails beneath her ears, unevenly slicing up scallions with a tiny knife with an older woman—her mother—at her side; she’s sitting on the floor with what seems to be her family and even extended family jam packed around a small, short table full of food, of which, you could make out the spicy stew; she’s fighting with someone much younger than herself for noodles—she seems to be victorious; the next picture shows she’s a gracious winner and gifts another plate with the hard won noodles.

There are further pictures of older people, wrinkled faces pulled taut by smiles and open mouths; a constant recurrence of a younger boy, a middle-aged woman, a middle-aged man; it’s very, very homely and the sight squeezes a far off memory of chatter and laughter from the depths of your mind: the clanging of pots, the scrapes of spatulas, yells of “hot, hot” and “behind” and “watch your heads.” Of the closest thing to a family you've ever—

“Wasn’t I cute when I was younger?”

The sound of her voice startles you into closing the window, a deep sorrow resting in your gut, warmth just under your cheekbones and seeking exit through your eyes.

Wordlessly, you return the communicator.

She takes it back with a grin that seemed just a bit forced. “Thanks. So? Easy, right?”

“Yes. Easy,” you say slowly, carefully. “I’ll...think about it. But only think!”

It’s too late. She’s already cheering, “Woo! D.Va: one, Chef: zero!”

While it potentially throws off any future dinner plans you may have, the joy she exhibits brings a smile to your face.

Maybe, maybe it won't hurt to indulge her. Though, you'll have to have her keep this secret. It wouldn't do to have agents knowing that you are soft to their wants lest your careful inventory control goes to waste.

“Oh, yeah, I forgot to mention. I have another guest with me.”

“Another guest...?”

You just miss the vicious grin that overtakes D.Va’s features as the clicking of heels has the hair on your neck stand, and someone else speaks.

“Guten Morgen, Chef.”

Your stomach nearly crawls its way out of your throat, and you take back anything nice you were going to do for Agent D.Va.

It’s well after the normal breakfast time when Hanzo finally emerges from his room, tray in hand with empty plates and sans a single teacup.

No, he did not spend any amount of time agonizing about apologizing for breaking the delicate cup. Though, the teapot does look lonelier without its companion. And it was a rather lovely cup even if he didn’t quite remember the exact details of its appearance.

There’s a distinct lack of personnel in the cafeteria, and even in the kitchen, much to his relief.

On the flat of the service window stands a small sign that reads:
BRB

(■з■д■)

with no indication of a return time and every indication this was written by Hana.

Just what mischief did that young lady drag you into?

Though, he’d be lying if he weren’t grateful for her interference. It seems that he won’t have to explain why you’re suddenly short a piece of drinkware any time soon. (Though, he really doesn’t quite know your stance on the matter of missing teacups—Genji was the one who dealt with you the last time.)

He puts away last night's tray in the little return window next to the service one. It’s almost reminiscent of Japan and those self-serve noodle shops where he’s allowed to pick up whatever fried foods he wanted onto a plate before ordering a large sized ramen or two. Those were left for rarer days after an especially rewarding job (in more ways than one).

As Hanzo passes by the service window again, the little rabbit drawing staring at him, he pauses. Now that you’re not in there, it would be a perfect time to find out exactly what lay inside that’s so precious that Athena would not allow him to enter.

It’s more reasonable to think that it’s just a matter of protocol, that it’s to prevent thievery of midnight snackers, or—

“I heard there is a great treasure kept inside that kitchen.”

Hanzo grits his teeth.

It would be in poor taste to try and return your kindness with blatant disrespect for your territory, not to mention that you would likely be annoyed about the teacup. There was no need to compound the marks against him.

Despite his curiosity, he forces himself to turn away and leave.

And nearly runs right into the resident cowboy.

“Whoa there.”

He has to resist his long-learned habit of standing his ground and takes a half-step back. The other man does the same.

“McCree.”

For once, the cowboy is not wearing that obnoxious poncho thing that smells like it’s been doused in pungent tobacco and alcohol. He’s still, however, sporting that hat of his that seems like it’s the only thing controlling that nest of a hairdo.

The man tips his hat up with a thumb, a languid smile on his face that tries to cover something far more dangerous.

“Howdy, fancy seein’ you here.”

Hanzo opens his mouth to respond, but pauses.
Annoyance, an all too familiar emotion, crawls up his back in humiliating waves. What does that mean? Is it really so strange that he’s seeking food in a cafeteria? Or is it that he is aware that Hanzo hasn’t been in here very often?

Is he being watched by everyone?

“Was just gonna grab some grub, but…” McCree’s eyes slide over to the window where the flimsy sign sat, oblivious to the archer’s building ire. “Looks like Chef’s out, huh?”

“Yes, Miss Song seems to be responsible.”

He could swear he hears the cowboy mutter something akin to “‘bout damn time” underneath his breath, but he can’t be entirely sure because it’s quickly covered up by a jovial smile and a tip of a hat. “Guess that means grub ain’t til later. Ain’t that a shame.”

He really doesn’t sound all that disappointed at all for some reason, and the mysteries of Overwatch just seem all that much more blatant, taunting and teasing at him. McCree turns to leave, and Genji’s reminder that ‘Jesse may know more’ echoes in his mind.

Against his better judgement, he calls out, “Wait.”

The thick wall of pride and stubbornness has been chewed up enough by his curiosity. Even the threat of peppers in his food cannot deter him (besides, it is not a crime to seek information).

“Hm? Something I can d’you for, Shimada?”

Hanzo opens his mouth to answer, but pauses for a moment and squints at the man, trying to decipher the question.

“‘Do you for?’”

Seeing the confused pinch in Hanzo’s brow, McCree clicks his tongue and waves it off. “Guess y’never heard the expression. Pay it no mind. How can I help you, Shimada?”

“‘Do you for?’” he repeats, more insistent.

“You know, like doing a person in.”

“You wish to do me in, then?”

Hanzo’s never one to let go of something he didn’t understand. McCree’s shoulders slump, seemingly resigned himself to having done himself in with his own attempt at a joke. He shrugs.

“Depends. You’re not the top of my list, that’s for sure.”

Hanzo can’t help the sudden flare of anger at the insult, and he clenches his fists at his side to keep them from finding their way around the cowboy’s thick neck and just pressing down, down, down until—

“And there is someone more worthy to take down than I?” he grinds out instead.

McCree jerks his thumb somewhere behind him. “Junkers are worth twenty-five a piece. You, on the other hand…”

Bounties.
(Mentally, he has to spell out and count the number of zeroes that the number ‘25’ could possibly entail. It’s embarrassing to say, but he still occasionally misconverts numbers.

It’s only with a sliver of pride that he has never made a blunder as big as Genji, who had argued with a native English speaker that ten million was actually spoken as ‘a thousand-ten thousands.’ )

Twenty-five million is not cheap by any means, but it’s not so high that he would risk getting blasted with shrapnel over. Even before he left Shimada castle, that sort of money would be easily returned after several jobs, and if it were his father’s services, it’d be done twice as fast.

If he were to have a bounty, Hanzo is sure it’d be much higher than a mere twenty-five million.

(On paper, he has no such thing. He’s an assassin—to have a bounty on his head would be to reveal his existence. He’s not so foolish as to ever be caught, and he’s sure that the remnants of the Shimada clan would not want to advertise their young master’s betrayal even if it’s the worst kept secret in all of Hanamura. Just through word of mouth from the assassins that he’s killed does he know his true value.)

“Surely there are other people worth more than them.” Like himself, even if he didn’t have an official number to his name.

The cowboy gives a thoughtful hum and falls silent for a second, and then offers, “Ana herself is worth seventy.”

Surprise colors his face, his eyebrows having risen up to his hairline. “Impressive.”

“In euros.”

Let it never be said that Hanzo Shimada is incapable of being caught off guard, especially with McCree and Athena’s surveillance systems as witness.

“But there are others.”

“Euros?”

Ever since the Omnic Crisis years ago, the balance of the world’s currency had shifted. Most of the world had moved on to ‘credits,’ a universally accepted form of cryptocurrency that emerged after the Bitcoin Bubble burst some fifty-odd years ago. The current system is infinitesimally better regulated and better received. It made purchasing things internationally convenient and transactions even more so. However, locally, the paper (and coin) currencies were still being used as though the people were all still hanging onto whatever nostalgia was associated with such objects.

Hanzo never really cared as long as he was compensated properly for his work, but he still has to take a moment to do the conversion into credits in his head. And the euro, even now after it’s been deemed largely defunct except by local governments, is still strong, stronger than the dollar by almost double.

McCree laughs out loud, drawing him from his shock, a fondness weaving its way into his voice. “Ain’t that a hoot? Woman at that age, still manages to outvalue everyone else on base. I reckon it’s higher than ol’ Soldier’s. But it ain’t gentlemanly of me to turn such a good shot in.”

“Everyone.”

Hanzo surmises that McCree must be including himself. It’s not as though Hanzo came to Overwatch unprepared, but the concept of ‘bounties’ did not really matter so much to him. It’s all subjective, a rough scale of the target’s difficulty level (or an indicator of just how much anger the target has roused). He knows the woman is impressive. He’s seen it firsthand in a single mission
where she managed to fire off a biotic round into his perch that he was certain did not have any openings. He was dead wrong and humbled by the fact that he had such a powerful ally with him.

But to have a number to put to her skill definitely put things into perspective.

“Well, I seem to have strayed off topic. Now then, archer, what can I help you with?”

Hanzo immediately straightens himself up, annoyed that he was so easily led astray from is original purpose.

Though, the question of what’s in the kitchen seems like a trifling compared to the sheer value of the men and women that surrounded him. Whatever is in there likely cannot even hold a candle to each agent's value. But’s not like he can easily betray these people and turn them all in. That would be beyond redeemable. (And he’s sure none of them would go down so easily, anyway.)

"The kitchens,” he tries to say as casually as possible like he’s not curious to know, “I heard that there’s something hidden there, and that you would know of what lies in it.”

McCree regards him with amusement, like he just asked for something silly that is beyond his understanding. He's seen this look from his father's associates and his elders many times before. (He would quickly wipe it off their faces with his feats.) Again, it’s irritating.

“Reckon y’ heard that from Genji. And he calls me a troublemaker.”

He strokes his beard in contemplation. Of course McCree would be hesitant to tell him anything. They weren't exactly on friendly terms, and are likely getting along only due to Genji’s intervention—the troublemaker. This may have been a silly idea. Whatever is in that kitchen cannot be important or worth considering.

“You got time for a story?” he asks, finally.

Whatever Hanzo had expected out of his mouth, it certainly wasn't that.

"If you must, make it a quick one,” he snaps. He does not require an entire prologue, he just needs to know the nature of what he’s dealing with.

“Well try, but ah, this information like this don't come cheap.”

Hanzo scowls. It figures that this information wouldn't be so freely given. But the fact that McCree says this assures him that whatever is in that kitchen is not a mere phantom of Genji’s imagination, and that the information would be sound. Nothing worth having in life is ever free, after all.

“Name your price.”

McCree whistles and Hanzo’s neck goes stiff as he tries keep himself from looking around for the shadows. "Confident, ain't ya?” He jerks his bearded chin at the door. “Walk with me.”

A refusal is immediately in his throat, and half-way through his teeth but it makes sense to not discuss this in front of the place that they are speaking of. (Actually, he’s not sure if it’s ruder to discuss the kitchen in front of it or away from it. It’s a foolish consideration, but he’s probably even more so for having asked in the first place.)

McCree steps aside, sweeping an arm toward the door.

“After you.”
Nodding tersely, Hanzo steps forward and McCree follows. It’s not everyday he allows someone to stand behind him. Every part of him prickles, alert that there’s a man behind him who is capable of emptying half the bullets of his gun into his body before he’s even able to get to safety. These halls have many doors, but are too straightforward. There is little place to hide.

Hanzo takes a breath and keeps walking.

He is not insecure or even the slightest bit doubtful of his own abilities, but it’s been a long while since he’s been surrounded by people who he would even remotely consider on his level. (And that stings more than he cares to admit.)

The topic of their discussion falling further and further behind until McCree directs them to the common room.

There’s already a few people here, scattered about and lost in their own conversations.

Hanzo really does not see how discussing this information in such an open area is any better than talking about it in the mess hall. Some of his thoughts must’ve made its way to his face because McCree gestures at one of the seats.

“Cop a squat, that treasure ain’t goin’ nowhere.”

Hanzo again looks mildly confused at the strange expression, but gets the gist and makes himself comfortable on the seat across from McCree, who does the same, leaning his forearms against his knees.

"Right, so let me tell you about the kitchen before we get into the deal."

Hanzo holds up a hand. "The deal first."

"Now hold your horses. They're related, don't worry. I'm just givin' you a bit of history so y'know what's comin'."

The archer frowns.

Reluctantly, he mutters, “This had better be worth it.” And braces himself for something that isn’t.

“If y’like that bottle on your hip, you're gonna like what I have to say.”

But the implied promise of alcohol keeps him patient. “Go on.”

McCree puts his hands together, apparently in thought as he begins his story.

"See, there's this door inside the kitchen, ain't no one's ever seen what's inside. That's 'cause you need biometrics"—McCree wriggles the fingers of his prosthetic hand—"to get in. And there ain't no one who can get in there without a chef.”

Hanzo highly doubts it.

“What’s behind this door is Gibraltar’s greatest treasure. We used t’call it ‘the Cellar’.”

He almost snorts. That is the most uncreative name Hanzo’s ever heard for anything, but he can't complain. He did pick his alias as plain ‘Hanzo’ after all. (He’s only slightly comforted in the fact that other people seem to have done the same, but remains a touch envious of those who didn’t.)

McCree regales him with the details: it was said that a most exquisite treasure was being kept in
the kitchens of Gibraltar Watchpoint. A treasure meant to sustain the organization. Overwatch, it was said, cannot survive without this treasure and so it should never be disturbed.

The best guess anyone has is alcohol. Liquid courage. Nectar of the Gods. Whatever you want to call it, it is guarded fiercely by the chefs of the Watchpoint—of all people.

Barrels of wine of all types were said to line the entryway leading to several caverns, each carefully temperature controlled for optimal preservation of the liquid treasures held inside.

The ferocity of which the chefs guard their territory gives some credence to this rumor. Anyone caught trying to enter this forbidden territory would be harshly reprimanded and treated to punishment by the Head Chef Richard.

“Big guy, ain’t afraid to take you down a peg or two. French,” he adds.

Hanzo could have guessed that from the overly exaggerated accent in which he says the name.

“But who knows what’s in there now. Some folks said it was cleared out when Overwatch fell. Others say that it was defended to the death and the ghost of Head Chef Richard still haunts it. I reckon only Chef there knows now.”

The previous head chef is dead, then?

“So why have you not attempted anything? There is only one chef inside.”

McCree shoots him an incredulous look. “Listen, partner. You’re makin’ a mistake if you think it’s mano-a-mano.” He points up to the ceiling, voice dropping to a paranoid whisper. “I know when I’m outgunned. Y’really think I can make it past Athena? Nah, I ain’t no ninja.”

Luckily for Hanzo, he is.

"And? You have told me the story. What is your price?"

McCree leans back into his chair, arms crossed. Flippantly, he says, “The treasure. If it’s alcohol, I dare ya to find a bottle and bring it back. T’share, sixty-forty; anything’s good. Reckon it wouldn't be much of a treasure if they only kept junk brew in there.”

It's confidence in his skill and the situation that makes him say, "One? Who do you think I am?"
He is up against a lone chef and an AI. Easy. It would hardly be a challenge and give him something to do other than shoot at the training bots or try to best everyone’s scores in the simulations.

McCree shrugs one shoulder, a lazy smirk playing on his lips, his eyes hidden by the brim of his hat. "Make it as many as your arms can carry, then. Ain't no time limit, by the way. Take as long as you'd like. Oh, and if y'get caught by the chef, no retaliatin'. We all still gotta eat."

“You underestimate me, gunslinger.”

Even the extra condition does not dampen his confidence. The rewards far outweigh the cost, and the temptation of a bounty of alcohol is strong. Ever since coming to the Watchpoint, he had tried to keep his drinking to a minimum, if only to pretend he has some semblance of self-control. (That, and sake is hard to procure in Gibraltar. He saves what precious little he can for days he really needs it. Like several days ago when he finally emptied the last of it, trying to drink himself blind in a sad attempt to drown the memories of Genji’s love for food.)
“Seventy”—Hanzo points to himself, then at McCree—“thirty.”

“Hey now, that info ain't cheap. Sixty for me, forty for you.”

Hanzo snorts, amused by the fact that this cowboy dare questions his math. “I do not see you helping or succeeding.” His eyes drops to the cowboy's spurs, and McCree, who follows his gaze, jingles them a bit. “Seventy-thirty,” he repeats.

McCree makes a noise of contemplation, looking to the ceiling for guidance, and sighs.

“How's this? If you manage to get more than one bottle, then okay, seventy-thirty.” He then points. “But! If you only get one, then it's sixty for me.”

Hanzo ponders these conditions for a moment. So the cowboy does not think he'll get any more than one bottle? He smirks to himself.

"You have yourself a deal,” Hanzo says smugly, already confident that he is the true victor in this exchange.

"Great. Lookin’ forward to your haul, partner.”

Jesse holds out a gloved hand that Hanzo stares at for a moment too long.

"Y’shake when—"

Hanzo grips his hand with more force than necessary and shakes it twice, annoyed that he has to be taught manners by someone who looks like they were accidentally dragged from a different era by the time-traveling woman. McCree returns the gesture, both of them suddenly locked in a life-or-death struggle of who can out-muscle the other.

There’s a tension to McCree’s voice when he says, "Nice grip. Should’ve expected that from you."

"You are...not bad yourself.” He won’t admit to anyone, not even under the threat of torture, but his fingers hurt just a little and he would probably be feeling it for the next two days. “Thank you. For the information.”

Jesse waves him off. “S’long as you keep your end of the bargain, it would’ve been worth it. But remember, you can’t attack the chef.”

"Of course not.” He is not some amateur. Unnecessary injuries is not exactly the product of discretion, after all. Hanzo leaves with this newfound information, fueled by more than just an idle curiosity. This time, he has a bet alongside it.

Tracer, who has been watching this exchange from a distance, comes up behind the cowboy, folding her arms over the couch's back.

"Oh, Jesse, now just you're setting him up."

The cowboy rolls his shoulders. "It ain't like I lied about nothing."

"He'll get Chef hopping mad, luv. Then we’ll all be eating slop for a week.”

“It's tradition.”

“For Blackwatch, not us!”
“Well.” Jesse pretends to stretch languidly before folding his arms into himself. “Ain’t we all soldiers now?”

He’s rewarded with a click of a tongue and a cheeky whack to his shoulder. “Oh, you!”

“Oh, Lena,” he grunts, grabbing his shoulder in exaggerated pain. “I reckon you might’ve broken something.”

“I’m serious, Jesse. You ought to stop him. What if he finds out there’s no treasure?”

“No one ever said there is or isn’t. It was just a rumor back in the day. But don’t you want to see whether he can make it in there?”

She makes a face. “No way, luv. I don’t want to go back to eating rations for breakfast.”

Jesse laughs. “Well, we wouldn’t want that, now would we? How ‘bout you just mosey along, pretend you didn’t hear nothin’. I can stop it if it gets out of hand.”

She puts up her hands in surrender. “So long as I’m not in trouble.”

“Well, nice doin’ business with ya, too, Lena,” he mutters sarcastically. “Nice t’know I can count on you for some good ol’ mischief.”

Tracer scoffs good-naturedly, “Always, Jesse. Now if you’ll excuse me, I need to take cover.” She throws a quick salute and a grin over her shoulder before blinking away, leaving Jesse to his schemes.

Jesse chuckles derisively to himself, and closes his eyes.

There likely isn't such a thing as a treasure. However, it's never been properly confirmed by anyone. Not himself. Not by anyone else he knew.

Though, there was perhaps one person outside of the kitchen staff who could have known, who strode into the kitchen like he owned it (the same way he acted like he owned everything else—with great confidence and a nonchalance that was frightening). It's not like he could ask now though. Or ever.

The Cellar. That damned Cellar started a lot of trouble back in the day.

It didn’t matter what it contained as long as he could get inside just to gloat and say that he did it. It was very unfortunate some of the Blackwatch agents—like himself—took up the challenge like it was a personal insult. It may have saved him a few bruises.

“The kitchen help should be the ones out in the field. They’re meaner than a gaggle of ornery old possums,” Jesse grumbled to Gabriel, who took in his protege’s swollen face and splinted fingers with little more than a loud snort.

“You’re lucky they didn’t make you tonight’s into dinner. Surprise menu: Mystery Meatloaf.” Gabriel returned his attention to the projected map that he was placing lines and dots on. Jesse gagged audibly, slapping a hand over his mouth. Gabriel just chuckled to himself.

At dinnertime, when Jesse selected ‘Set G’ (lemon chicken stuffed with risotto, baby caesar salad, two slices of baguette, and a strong cup of coffee), he gets…meatloaf. And Gabriel, who hovers over him like a hawk, forced him to eat it all.
That became war; a personal vendetta.

That led to many, many more attempts to get inside, and many, many more injuries that could've been avoided.

What could he say? He was hard-headed back then.

But then, there was you. A dishwasher who managed to sneak him food during those times. Granted, it wasn’t anywhere near as delicious as the ones made by your superiors, but he’s not one to look a gift-horse in the mouth. He’s sure you got a good tongue-lashing for it, but the gesture definitely did not go unappreciated.

And now, you’ve trapped yourself inside, unwilling to come out, likely bound by a steadfast obligation to the people who saved your life. Even when he first attempted to coax you out, you had slammed the door on him, declaring with the same ferocity as your previous boss that the kitchens are off-limits. It was lucky that you did not decide to take the same approach he did: beat the shit out of him.

(He wondered just how much they taught you back then—did you inherit all of your boss’s skills?)

Jesse sighs wistfully, reaching up to pluck his choice of high from his lips, only to miss, realizing it’s not there at all. Dr. Ziegler had forbidden smoking indoors.

He eagerly awaits the aftermath of Hanzo’s attempt. Maybe it’ll get you angry enough to come outside and show your face like the old days. Maybe you’d begin to talk to people again. It’d be good for morale. God knows they all need it, even if they don’t all see it.

(That, and it’ll be good payback for Hanzo beating his high score.)

“You’re late, dear,” a mechanical voice says accusingly.

“Sorry, I was...occupied.” The dark space around you is occupied with a rainbow of screens, all fighting for your attention as you hurry to bring up even more.

The good doctor Ziegler had kept you in her office longer than you would’ve liked, running tests and lecturing you while your communicator buzzed in your back pocket.

“Remember to take these twice a day before meals,” Dr. Ziegler said as she presses two bottles of pills into your hands. The woman leans in, catching your eyes, and with the utmost seriousness, said, “And I’m sure you already know this, but avoid acidic, fatty, or spicy foods, caffeine, and absolutely no alcohol. Keep a high fiber diet and get plenty of rest.”

If Argus had any eyebrows, you’re sure it’d be raised. “Occupied with?”

“Doctor’s appointment. So, today’s agenda—”

“Oh, so you’re finally taking care of your health?” Argus sounds pleasantly surprised. “You chefs really don’t know how to take care of yourselves. I think Asim is picking up on your habits.”

You make a face. “Make sure he eats on time. I won’t have my head chef dying of the same crap I’m dealing with. Especially not when he actually has food right in front of him.”

“Truly. Remember when you threw up during dinner service? Or when you fainted momentarily and hit your head on the table? The other chefs just walked right over you.”
You rub your head absentmindedly where you swear you could still feel a dent. “They know better than to stop service like that.”

“Oh, I know,” she says dismissively. You can almost see her fixing her immaculate cuff as she speaks like she always does when she knows she’s right and just rubbing it in. “We didn’t get you to a hospital until after we had closed. You were fortunate.”

You wince at the memory. “So, right. Today’s agenda.”

Conceding momentarily to the change of subject, Argus’s tone becomes more business-like. “The fishing supplier we’ve been buying from has recently undergone new management and are looking to inflate the prices by 15% unless we enter a six-year contract with them. I have expressed that this is an unacceptable change and they were less than cooperative about the matter. I had hoped that threat of terminating our relationship would be enough, but it was ineffective.”

You mark that down in your notepad. “Set up a one-hour meeting between myself and their new owner. In the meantime, contact the previous owner. We might be able to leverage our previous partnership and get connections to another fishing company. We can’t be stuck just because someone wants to play hardball.”

“Understood, dear. I will also send you the previous signed contracts, invoices from the past six months, and a profile of the new company.”

“Great, thank you.” Under your breath, you mutter, “Fifteen percent...are they trying to kill me?”

“The next order of business: donations.”

“The usual ones are coming in?”

“Yes, our interview has reeled in an increase of thirty percent. This should be enough to last us through the holidays since we plan on helping promote the Olympics in a short while, so we’ve been a little busy.”

You nod, jotting that down also. “Good, good. Now if only we could finally get the lease on that other location in the meantime...hey, Argus? Did we finally get that contract?”

Nothing comes over the speakers of your communicators for a moment.

“Argus?”

“My dear, I really wished you would reconsider your involvement with them,” the omnic says solemnly. She says ‘them’ in such a way, it sends a rolling dread through you. “Please. We need you more than they do. Please do not risk everything just for them. Think of us.”

You open your mouth to answer, but another voice chimes in.

“Chef, Agent Soldier: 76 has come to order.”

“Be right there, Athena.” You don’t move from your seat, however, slowly taking in the omnic’s concerns and mulling over your words carefully. “I know, but I trust you guys to handle everything while I try to handle things here. I promise, everything’s going to work out. I’ll make sure of it.”

There’s a bitterness in her voice as she replies, “And on what basis do you make those promises, dear?”
Your tongue lies heavy in your mouth. The silence answers for you.

And the communications go dead.
The halls of the Watchpoint in the early mornings are busier than one would expect.

There are those who are just returning to sleep, like D.Va, who has likely just finished up a gaming session for her viewers in Korea. There are those who seemed like they never slept. Soldier: 76 would be wandering the halls like a poltergeist, never seeming to need sleep, frightening anyone not expecting the glaring red of his visor. Others like Genji and Zenyatta are already up (or having never slept), just about to begin meditations.

Other agents are much more elusive and Hanzo tries his best not to keep track of their habits, but loses out to years of habit.

So it’s certainly a surprise to Hanzo, who is deep in the middle of his *kata*, when Reinhardt stumbles into the training room.

He ignores him in favor of finishing his form. The lack of missions in the past few weeks grows on him, whittling down his senses and nerves. While he’s not fully committed to Overwatch’s mission, he really does hope there’s some action soon. Though, he can’t quite shake off the needles of paranoia that bursts over his skin when he notices the giant watching him with startling silence.

It’s not that he’s not used to an audience—his teachers would often watch him and correct his form and Genji, way before he learned of his independence, would be staring intently to try to imitate the moves—but the way Reinhardt stares makes him self-conscious in a way that neither his teachers nor his family was able to (not until recently anyway).

Hanzo finishes his form quickly, driven by muscle-memory rather than actual conscious effort, a fact that grates on him, but is only amplified when he acknowledges *why*.

Reinhardt claps, a cheerful grin on his face. “Fine form, my friend!”

Hanzo says nothing, his lips pressed together into a tense line, suspicion narrowing his eyes. No, they are not quite *friends* and his form was sloppy and meaningless beyond reason.

“Fine form,” Reinhardt repeats, a smile too cheerful for this hour spreading on this face. “What say you to a quick, ah, sparring session?”

Hanzo raises an eyebrow. “With you?”

“Who else?” Reinhardt says easily, already rolling his shoulders. “Afraid to lose?”

“Never.”

Despite all of Overwatch’s flaws, it had one thing going for it: there’s never a shortage of competition. If this was all that the crusader wanted, Hanzo would be more than happy to indulge.

“What are the terms?”

“Bets; I like that.” Reinhardt strokes his beard thoughtfully, the smile turning mischievous in a way that makes Hanzo reconsider how much time he’s been hanging around Hana. “How about first
ones knees to touch the floor loses? Winner gets beer.”

He tries very hard not to pull a face. “Sake.”

Reinhardt laughs heartily as he tries to bend himself in half, barely able to even touch his knees, let alone the floor. “Sure, if you win.”

At that, Hanzo does make a face.

“You should stretch after warming up,” he says sharply instead.

Reinhardt shrugs him off. “Bah, I’ll be fine.”

A hot flash of irritation goes off in his face. How dare he—a man of his age, a man who is so reckless, he rushes in like he’s eager to die and drag the life of every healer with him—disregard his own health so carelessly. A sharp twinge goes off inside him when something in the back of his mind mockingly reminds him that he says this even though he never asks the others for healing. (“Like you’re punishing yourself,” Ana would say, slyly and infuriatingly smug.)

He decides then that he doesn't care enough to correct him. There’s another bet with alcohol involved, and he’ll be damned if that doesn’t sound like a conspiracy, but it’s not about the prize.

It doesn’t take particularly long for Reinhardt and himself to face off against each other, both taking their respective stances.

At first, they went easy. Slowly trading blows like a practiced dance, stepping back and forth into each other’s space, trying to gain the advantage. Hanzo has faced opponents much bigger than himself before, never really considering his height to be disadvantageous. Reinhardt is no different in that regard, but despite his size, he had a good bit of torque to his movements and Hanzo actually has to consciously avoid the slower than natural blows.

If Hanzo were being honest with himself, this was a little fun, relaxing even.

That is, until Reinhardt began to talk.

“Fighting with your brother still?”

Hanzo’s teeth clicked as he ducked under Reinhardt’s arm, prepared for the elbow that would fold and inevitably come down on his head. He deflects it with a little more strength than necessary.

“We are not fighting.”

“Really.” White eyebrows shoot up to an even whiter hairline. “You have not talked to him for days. Come now, tell me what ails you, friend.”

The response chafes him.

Either Genji is still the loose-lipped fool he remembers from his youth or he is still being observed. That aspect of Overwatch is not unexpected, but their growing insistence in wedging themselves into his affairs is tiresome.

He’s an adult. This is for him to solve. Not for a broken man who pretends that he's larger than the very life that broke them.

“It is none of your concern.”
Hanzo returns the strikes with a few more of his own. Reinhardt actually manages to dodge two and deflect a third, allowing the fourth to collide with a meaty shoulder.

It was simultaneously the truth and anything but. Everything was fine up until that point, bearable even. He supposed he did not truly, wholeheartedly believe that the walking piece of synthetic human machinery could truly be the rambunctious younger brother he always had to chase after and scold. Too many years and too many differences separated them from knowing the other, having only known the person they each kept in their memories.

“You call avoiding Ana’s teatime ‘nothing’?”

The archer grimaces. He can’t such a self-centered man managed to notice his absence. Reinhardt doesn’t even regularly attend these gatherings.

The pace grows faster, steadier, heavier in lieu of an answer. Each strike, each kick has more weight and more meaning to it than a simple, polite call-and-response of fists. There’s a fire behind his skin that only grows.

“You make her sad,” he says solemnly, “and you make your brother sad.”

“That’s none of your business!” Hanzo manages to land an actual hit on Reinhardt’s face, but the tank of a man takes it like it doesn’t faze him. He swears that unseeing eye, so much like Ana’s, is looking through him when he catches sight of it. He almost misses the arm that swings at his ribs and bends over backward to avoid it.

This is the worst place to have this sort of conversation, and he has to remind himself that it would be in very poor taste to break the elderly man’s neck and leave him here for dead. (He’s also not entirely confident he could hide or drag away such a mountain anyway.)

For a while, Hanzo remains in the offensive, but the crusader is becoming a lot more agile than he gave him credit for. Getting this man to hit the floor really shouldn't have been this difficult.

Was it because he's bigger? Or because he has had at least thirty-odd more years of experience than himself?

An open palm suddenly slaps him dead center in the chest—such a short distance, how did he put so much force into it?—and Hanzo wheezes, popping back and then forward in a jump, intending to catch Reinhardt in his blind side.

But the strategy proves to be less sound than he expected—of course, this man had lost his eye for years, there’s no way he would have not be used to such tactics—and Hanzo is again thwarted.

“What’s wrong, Hanzo?” Reinhardt laughs, his voice become just a touch darker and his words become a little more deliberate. “You fight like you want to die.”

Hanzo can’t control the sudden backhanded fist he throws at Reinhardt’s face.

A thick forearm arm blocks his blow, and Hanzo has the sense of mind to create some distance and let some sense sink in and weigh his feet down before it carries him away despite how his heart beats furiously and his raw pride, offended by these careless words that strike too close to home, demands blood.

He cracks his neck and shakes some feeling into his fingers. The stinging of his chest warms him, and the man who caused it stands there, waiting and hardly winded.
It looks like he’ll be able to make up for his subpar morning exercise after all.

Junkrat’s fourth order of fruit salad for breakfast hung over your head like a death knell.

You rub your aching eyes furiously against your sleeve before quartering a set of apples that look like they have seen slightly better days. You really should limit the amount any one agent can order, but seeing the Junker actually dance and shout with joy, you couldn’t bring yourself to, not when something inside you just swells and squeezes and you’re suddenly all restless again, fingers itching to prepare something worthy to keep that joy on his face.

It’s the same with everyone else.

Those who wants seconds will get seconds.

Those who want to eat will be given fed.

The only problem is that you’re on your last bit of fruits (though, truth to be told, you’re on your last bit of everything) and you’re not sure if anyone else would want any.

You breathe to yourself.

Tomorrow morning.

You can wait until tomorrow morning.

The next shipment should be coming in several hours before dawn, and if you’re really desperate, you could always run out to the grocery stores during that time. It was a great risk—Gibraltar isn’t exactly large, the streets themselves were crawling with cameras and surveillance. You’re no Overwatch agent, you can’t avoid them by double-jumping or blinking.

It would be an absolute last resort, you decide.

You mix the apple cubes with the other fruits, mixing it, and plating it with a sprig of mint on top.

Agent Junkrat doesn’t even wait for the bell to go off, having been waiting at the window.

“Mm-MM! Thanks, mate! You’re the best, y’know that? Really blowin’ me away here!” You can see him rubbing his hands excitedly, fingers then descending upon the tray like it’s a great treasure. “Gonna eat you up good.”

You can only laugh breathily as the Junker snatches the tray away, holding it above his head in victory, but a slowly rumble in your stomach that belies a very real threat of pain reminds you that it is in need of something.

You glance at the clock—just a bit after ten—and consider cleaning up before prepping for lunch service and getting some food and medicine for yourself.

Though, something nags at you.

("Chefs do not eat until their customers have eaten.")

Did you serve everyone yet?

The memories of this morning are sluggish, mashed up with the memories from the day before and the day before that. You frown, trying to draw up memories that just seem to be stuck in a bog.
Automatically, your body moves to begin cleaning as you think.

Who hasn’t eaten yet?

You slowly go through the roster of agents, reciting their orders to yourself.

‘Captain Amari had pancakes, coffee black, fruit salad; Madame Ziegler just had the fruit salad with lemon tea; Roadhog is outside, took his pancakes without syrup and lots of fruit; Winston had his with peanut butter and bananas; Symmetra, yes. Tracer, check. Jesse, check. Rein—’

A stab of panic strikes you in the heart, nearly knocking the wind out of you.

Agent Reinhardt and Hanzo haven’t eaten yet.

Hanzo never misses a meal regardless of his strange behaviors recently, and Reinhardt always needs to eat before taking his medications and vitamins as per doctor’s orders. There are agents who would occasionally forget to eat, but you do not count these two among those.

“Athena. Can you tell me the whereabouts of Agent Reinhardt and Agent Hanzo?”

“Certainly. They are currently in Doctor Ziegler’s office.”

Now that was interesting. “Can you tell me why?”

“Agent Reinhardt has experienced a back injury and Agent Hanzo was responsible for delivering him there.”


“One moment, please.”

While the AI tries to find the answers, you procure the medicine bottle prescribed to you by Madame Ziegler from one of the pantry shelves.

Your omnic friend’s words echo in your memory, “I think Asim is picking up on your habits.”

“Don’t be so stupid,” you mutter bitterly to yourself, flipping the pills over before taking two as written. “Especially not when you actually have food to eat.”

“Chef. Agent Hanzo says he will be coming down for breakfast.”

“Thank you.”

“He’ll be having the pancakes, fruit salad, and sencha. With whipped cream and extra syrup.”

You groan. Not the fruit salad. You only have a meager amount left, barely enough to top a full bowl. Do you tell him it's no longer available or do you give him what's left and risk him being unsatisfied? Maybe, just maybe, you could cut up that last orange you were saving for Agent Mei for her post-dinner dessert.

No, that wouldn't do. She always took fruit with her dinner.

What to do?

The options spin your brain around, a constant buzz that you can’t escape, and your thoughts barely
take shape before they’re whisked away.

Shaking your head, you set out for the batter, the familiar weight of a ladle in your hand calms the buzzing, but brings forth a swell of determination.

You can think and worry while cooking.

Their morning training went a little too hard; Hanzo’s pride far too sore from a few more choice words to let the morning spar end, and Reinhardt being too reckless and excitable to back off from the hook he’s sunken into the archer. It ended with a tie, something that Hanzo had to suggest out of respect for his opponent’s unfortunate results. Reinhardt was less than happy about it, but hardly had room to argue when he could barely get up, nearly steering Hanzo into walls as the shorter man tried to help him to the medbay. Hanzo had to hold his tongue, a stern, ‘I told you so’ on his lips.

It was only polite.

Reinhardt took the opportunity to pry some more, throwing in stories that filled the gaps in Hanzo's knowledge of his brother’s later life. He couldn't have been more grateful when Athena requested he get some breakfast, but it seemed that today was destined to be terrible.

Ana is the first to notice his presence when he set foot into the cafeteria, waving him over toward the crowd of people she has around her. “Hello there! Come, you haven’t been joining us recently.”

Hanzo scans the crowd as casually as he can manage. Fareeha, Hana, Junkrat, and Roadhog. It's a strange crowd. The Amaris, he could understand, but the Junkers, too? And where does Hana fit in all this?

Catching Hanzo’s brief glance, Junkrat holds the bowl of fruit close, shielding it from view.

“‘Eh, eyes off! S’all mine. Git your own.”

Hanzo snorts and turns away. He didn't want the fruit anyway. He ordered his own and while fruit is good, he can't wait to sink his teeth into soft, pillowy hotcakes—or, as Athena called them, pancakes.

“I’ve been busy,” is his curt reply to the older woman.

That should serve as explanation enough, but his company were far too nosy, likely bored from the few weeks of idleness they’ve been forced to endure while Winston figures out a strategy to tackle the rumors of Overwatch's resurgence.

Hana’s eyes, though a little red-rimmed, are immediately alight, suspicious and far too invested. “Busy, hm? You don't say.”

Hanzo opinion of the young woman's influence on the other members of Overwatch resurface. She is a bad influence.

Ana scoffs, waving a hand at him. "Don't be a stranger, sit, sit.”

"I have matters to attend to. Another time.” Even to his ears, what comes out of his mouth sounds like half-hearted excuses forged from years of learned etiquette. Though, he really does need to retrieve his breakfast that’s not yet ready.
Fareeha and Ana stare at him with frighteningly similar looks—but of course they're similar, they're mother and daughter—of mischief and knowing. Paranoia crawls up his back, resting its spiny hands against his throat.

“Have a seat, Hanzo. I know what you're up to,” says Fareeha slyly.

“I do not know what you are talking about,” he says flatly, crossing his arms. “If you have some to say, be quick about it. I have no time for your games.”

She shrugs a bare shoulder, unfazed by his threats. “I heard you're taking on Jesse’s challenge?”

Is everyone out to interrogate him today? Unblinkingly, he replies, “And if I am?”

“Good luck,” she laughs. “You'll need it.”

Far from the first time today, annoyance settles on his skin, seeping in and dying his insides in it, ready for a flame to ignite him. His hunger for food is slowly turning into hunger for pride.

“What's Jesse's challenge?” Hana asks, butting shoulders with the ex-Helix guard, eyes shining at the idea of a 'challenge.' “Is there a betting pool?”

Hanzo is quick to react. “That's none of your busi—”

“Athena, is the chef working right now?”

“Affirmative.”

“Can you make sure that Chef doesn't hear our conversation?”

Sounding entirely too amused to be considered a neutral witness to this madness, Athena answers, “I shall do what I can.”

Fareeha fixes him with a certain look that looks too much like the mother beside her. “And there we have it. Chef won't hear us talking anytime soon.”

He stands there, staring. He still doesn't know how to handle this woman. He would have expected the security professional to at least be a little bit alarmed or to be entirely opposed to the operation, not perpetuating it. Even stranger is Athena's reaction. Omnipotent as she is over Overwatch's affairs, why would she willing participate in his success?

The whole world must be conspiring against him if they are so aligned with him.

Fareeha leans forward in her seat, hands raised and dancing as she talks. “When I was young, Gabe used to take me into the kitchens—it was a big deal at the time since no one but chefs were allowed in there. But that's because they have a secret in there.”

“Ooh! What sort of secret?”

Fareeha smirks and Hanzo gets the feeling it's directed at him. “A treasure.”

“Treasure?!? Whotssat 'bout a treasure, eh?”

Pieces of fruit and spittle fly out, and Hanzo physically recoils, looking briefly to Roadhog to stem the madness that is Junkrat. As always, the man is unreadable.

“Oh, that old rumor.” Ana laughs softly into her cup and shakes her head. Hanzo can't help but
wonder if she knew what the treasure was.

“No one knows what this treasure is, but we know it's hidden behind this door that leads to the 'Cellar.' I've seen it open a few times, but couldn't see where it goes. So.” She looks right at Hanzo, resting her chin against her fist. “You think you’re up to it?”

Junkrat seems to be seriously contemplating this new information and gives Hanzo a squinty look.

"And y’plan to steal this treasure? You mad? Y’really wanna mess with the bloke that makes your grub?"

Hanzo has to take a step back to avoid getting a face full of hair or swinging arms. That Junkrat would have standards for stealing is unexpected. Hanzo supposes that there is such a thing as 'honor among thieves'.

“Look, mate.” Junkrat takes on a hilariously serious tone, hand pressed together and pointing directly at Hanzo. “I lo—ve a good heist, but this is food we're talkin' 'bout ‘ere! And that chef in there makes th’ best tucker I had in...ages! Ain’t that righ’, Roadie?"

Roadhog grunts when he’s nudged with a sharp elbow, jerking his head once.

“Point is, y’don’t mess with the bloke that feeds ya. Didn’t no one teach you manners?"" he warns sternly, laughably out of character. “Don't mess with the one who makes your tucker!”

Hanzo largely ignores him, making his way to where his breakfast awaits and hopes that Athena is good on her word and kept you from hearing.

At the window sill, the tray is stacked with a matching set of teapot and cup, a bowl of fruits, and a small server on the side, reminiscent of how he's seen curry served (just much, much smaller now), holds an amber liquid. A stack of four browned discs stars as the centerpiece with a swirl of cream leaning against the stack’s side.

Hanzo’s face falls just a bit.

It seems he either didn't hide it well enough or you're much more perceptive than he realized. You return to the window, or at least, your torso does.

“...is there something wrong with your breakfast? I can remake it if you'd like.”

He presses his lips together.

Did you hear their conversation? No, if you did, there's no indication of it. But there is something
about your voice that bothers him. It echoes slightly around the edges similar to when Zenyatta or Genji speaks, but it’s still contains the proper cadence of natural speech.

For some reason, it sounds so much more human than even Genji. It's not a thought that sits well.

“Agent Hanzo?”

He forces himself to steer his thoughts back to your question.

It is a tempting offer.

When he heard that pancakes were being served, he somehow imagined the hotcakes that he’s more familiar with; they're twice the height of these pancakes and half the diameter and many more times fluffier. His stomach tells him stop imposing and eat it already—it’s not as though the menu gave the option of hotcakes anyway. It’s not your fault he forgot the different between the two.

“No, they are acceptable.” He takes the tray, and after a moment's hesitation, adds, “Thank you for your concern.”

“If they are not to your liking, please let me know.”

The echo is more prominent, more concentrated, but he has little time to think on it before your torso disappears from the space, allowing him the freedom to duck down and take a good look at the kitchen to see who is it that provides for them and to catch a glimpse of the elusive door to the Cellar.

He turns his gaze down at his tray instead, the cheerful arrangement looks back. If he thinks about it a little, he could see that the amount of pancakes is plenty. If he thinks about it a lot and reads into it, he could see that the tray was carefully arranged so that the chilled foods stay away from the hot ones and the utensils are in neither extremes.

You're not a friend, but you're about the only being in this Watchpoint that cared very little about anything other than your job. A blessing, really, when everyone else seemed to have his broken life on the brain.

It would be a shame to cause you any trouble.

Unconsciously, he walks back to the group, who were talking amongst themselves. Likely gossiping.

He sits next to Roadhog, the man served as a good barrier between himself and Junkrat, but that didn't seem to matter.

“Whot—’ey! I didn’t get any oranges!”

“These are mine,” he growls, keeping the tray far, far away from Junkrat’s extremely long reach which is made simultaneously short by Roadhog yanking the man back.


The large man grunts, mask still unreadable, but he sits taller between himself and Junkrat and becomes a bigger barrier than before. Hanzo would have never guessed the Junker would take orders from anyone considering his reputation.
“So, what's your plan, Hanzo? Chef isn't going to let you near the Cellar without a fight.”

“Let him eat in peace,” Ana says again, just as Hanzo is about to sling some sharp words at Fareeha. “All of you.”

“Fine, mom.”

Hana giggles behind her hand, fiddles quietly with her phone. For a moment, Hanzo has the peace he needs to quickly finish his food and leave before Ana allows everyone to again try to spring questions on him.

Probably out of spite than anything else, he eats some of the oranges first. Vengeful glee wells up in his chest when he hears a muffled cry of disappointment and frustration.

Fruit is incredibly hard to come by in Japan at a cheap price. It was almost a luxury that he took for granted when he was younger when gifts of fruit baskets were offered to their family by rivals and business partners alike. He didn't have much opportunity to eat it while on the run.

Sure, there were one-hundred yen stores that sold bunches of bananas and oranges for a dollar per piece, but those fruits were hardly juicy or ripe, incomparable to the jewels given to him when he was younger. It was not essential to his diet at the time and barely cost effective.

(Though, he did indulge at one point and took a hypertrain straight to Tochigi prefecture to graze on their world famous strawberry fields in the dead of night. They were so sweet, so juicy; it quenched a forgotten thirst he had had for days.)

These oranges though, were passable. Still nothing compared to the ones in his memories.

He passes on the rest and moves onto his pancakes, pours some syrup on the edge, slicing a triangle into the thick stack, scooping some cream, and shoving it into his mouth.

Immediately, he began salivating.

Sweet.

Unbelievably light but with enough chew to be considered satisfactory.

He’s had the pancakes made by you before, but each time, they’re different. (It was an unpleasant surprise to his tongue when he eats your pancakes from several weeks ago, expecting them to be sweet, only to find out they’re made of potatoes. He begrudgingly forgave the blunder—it’s his own, really—when you gave him some weightless, crunchy white cream dollops that he doesn’t know the name of.)

He hasn’t checked the menu to determine what type they were, but these were fluffier, milkier, a slight tang to it that’s offset by a hint of lemon and the sweetness of the syrup.

He unabashedly shoves another generous cut straight into his mouth.

Click.

Hanzo’s head jerks up and he sees Hana laughing behind her hand, the other hand holding a phone. She tilts it toward the Amari family who both light up.

“Never knew you could look like that.”

Ana covers her mouth with a hand, but her cheeks smile for her. “You look so happy.”
“I'll send you guys a copy.”

Hanzo glares at her, ready to stand. “Do not dare.”

It bounces right off her, and she gives him a smug look, holding her phone at such an angle that he could see her still typing without looking. “Make me.”

He can barely remember the taste of those pancakes after that—he was too busy trying simultaneously get Hana to delete the photo from her phone and keeping Junkrat from wheedling his way into the fruits on his plate. The Junker insisted on lecturing him on who is considered an acceptable target to steal from. He doesn’t know what tea he ordered anymore—Ana had ‘asked’ for some, which really means she demanded it in a polite manner that would mean his doom if he were to refuse. Fareeha watched with Roadhog, both silently judging them.

Whoever said that meals taste better with other people is full of horseshit.

Unbeknownst to him, your communicator goes off twice, demanding your attention.

The first message is business-related, and you dump that straight into your calendar.

The second is from Agent D.Va and you look rapidly between the camera images of the cafeteria above you and your comm, jaw slack.

On your communicator is an image of Agent Hanzo, fork in his mouth, and the most blissful smile on his face. He almost seems soft, less of a hardened agent and more of a man who has just extended a hand to nourish their inner child. Like he’s made peace with himself.

Pride and joy rushes through you, and you save the image as a careful reminder to yourself of why you came back to Overwatch despite the risks and consequences.

A meeting is called sometime in the afternoon for all agents at the Watchpoint. Much to Hanzo’s relief, it seems that the time for idleness is finally drawing to a close.

Hanzo takes his seat furthest away from any windows and doors, and with the clearest view of the room. The nuance of McCree and Soldier: 76 sitting in roughly the same place as himself is not lost on him.

Cowardly as it is, Hanzo could barely look at his brother when he arrives in the meeting room. Neither of them have really been in the same room since that day. The inaction does not seem to go unnoticed by other members, but to his relief, his brother does not make any attempts to reach out and no one says anything.

Though, the empty seat in the room is a different matter.

A window pops up on the giant screen overlooking the round table, Reinhardt’s face trapped in the little square. “Greetings, my friends!”

Winston looks just a little exasperated. “Reinhardt, why are you not down here?”

The giant looks a bit sheepish. “Ah, too much excitement this morning. My back couldn’t take it.”

Hanzo looks away to feign innocence and to keep himself from thinking too hard about the way Reinhardt kept his name from blame.

“Oh, I see. Sorry about that.” Winston clears his throat. “I hope you get better.”
“I have the finest doctors here, no problem!”

Hanzo could see Doctor Ziegler press her fingertips to her forehead, leaning against the table and muttering something beneath her breath. The Amari family on either side of her each give her a pat on the shoulder.

“Right.” Winston shuffles some papers around. It’s hard to tell if he really needs them or if it’s just for show. “Now then, since we have everyone here, I want to talk about our agenda. Athena. If you please.”

A multitude of images appear on the screen, each of different areas and scenes. For the next hour or so, Winston talks about Overwatch’s future and direction.

“And for the last time,” Winston says, throwing up a hand, “I especially want the prior Overwatch members to take extra care when leaving the base. Some residents of Gibraltar still recognize you and will likely report you if seen. The last thing we need is for the UN to get wise to our operations.”

Torbjörn is quick to retort. “Hard not to recognize a talkin’ gorilla.”

“Or someone with a giant claw,” Ana shoots back just as fast as she fires.

Almost everyone chuckles at the banter.

“Laugh it up, laugh it up,” the engineer grumbles. “Let’s see who fixes your weapons the next time you need it.”

“Settle down, everyone.”

The meeting ends long after the sun has fallen, leaving some members more restless than others, but it gives everyone something to look forward to in the following days to come. For Hanzo, there’s a reconnaissance mission in the coming week, and then potentially an infiltration mission some time after that depending on how things play out. For everyone else, there’s various jobs to be done. He’s keenly aware of Genji’s assignments, an unease rolling in his chest and stomach as his brother is given the option of investigating something with Tracer. While it’s a relief that Winston has chosen not to place him on a mission with his brother, he knows deep inside that his behavior is nothing short of shameful, and that haunts him late into the night.

He lies painfully awake in bed, unable to will his mind to stop chattering or replaying today’s events. The memory of how Reinhardt pulls his back makes Hanzo scrunch up and the noise in his head gets louder. Fareeha and Junkrat run around in his head, a back and forth of goading and unwanted advice. When he tries to think of other things, only the promise of a mission and the intimate details wait for him at every turn.

Even his stomach won’t let him rest, slightly unsatisfied with the offerings it was given.

Dinner was a little lacking, so very different from the breakfast of this morning. (Lunch was a normal affair, quick and filling.) His requests for seconds, though usually granted, was of a smaller portion than usual. It’s childish and petty, but he can’t help but feel slighted. Just when he thought that you could potentially be his only ally in this castle of schemes and uncertainty.

Speaking of which.

He throws the covers off, skin itching with noisy thoughts that filter downward from his mind and infect the rest of him.
Tea. While it won’t put him to bed, it will calm his nerves.

He’s walking into the cafeteria when he decides that tonight he’ll have something more refreshing and soothing. There’s something called ‘moroccan mint’ that Ana introduced him several weeks ago that he took with sweetner. It was much better than that Koshary tea.

The doors to the cafeteria open silently and he is almost at the terminals when the whole world seems to stop.

The terminals are, for the second time, plastered with the word “closed” across their screen.

He stares dumbly at them.

A flicker of anger ignites deep in his gut, and he growls in displeasure.

He was here all day. Why was he not informed that the kitchens would be closed?

Somewhere, a small voice of logic tells him that there’s no way you could have known that he would require tea at this hour. A more obnoxious part of him, sleep-deprived and irritated from the day’s already large pile-up of grievances, reasons that he comes by often enough at this time that you should know better.

Seething and two seconds away from smashing a fist into the terminals, but still controlled, he’s about to turn away when he looks at the hole in the wall.

The pitch darkness of the kitchen through the service window seems to suck him in like an abyss, calling to him like a siren, and he remembers his bet with the gunslinger.

He pinches the bridge of his nose.

No.

No one will be there to witness his crime. Athena has implicitly stated her stance on the matter. There will be no one to stop him.

No, this was, perhaps, the most ill-conceived plan he’s ever had the displeasure of executing. (And that’s saying something considering the escapades that his brother got him into during their younger years.)

It’s opportunity that brings him to this, not any extensive planning or careful calculations, and that does not comfort him in the slightest. Common sense and years of learned espionage tells him to wait for a more opportune time, but he knows that he is not dealing with armed guards or skilled fighters. You’re just a chef. A mere omnic or service bot who makes a nice stack of pancakes and usually has tea ready for him in the dead of night.

He clenches his jaw, body frozen as he’s caught in between two instant crosshairs of thought.

[Closed]

“Don’t mess with the one who makes your tucker!”

“Good luck, you’ll need it.”

[Closed]

“It is good manners to thank the people who feed you.”
“I dare ya.”

He steels himself.

[Closed]

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for your patience, I'm hoping that the next chapter will come faster since that's something I've been waiting to write since forever.

Fruit is surprisingly expensive in Japan. I really feel like I should have made a reference to this banana vending machine I saw in Shibuya.
The warehouse is busy with different people bustling around, chatting, carting items around into trucks, the thick smell of hot food (made even thicker by the steadily rising summer heat) hardly willing to remain contained in their boxes. A cap is pulled tight over your eyes and you remain by your truck tucked deep in the corner of the room, keeping your back to the rest of the crowd, pretending to inspect the ridiculously long handwritten list in your hands.

The loading takes a little longer than usual, but it can’t be helped. You had vowed not to make the same mistakes as the last few times and ordered more food just in case. (There’s a voice in your head that taunts you for your inadequate portion management that you quash with a childish ire.) This was for the protection of Overwatch. The shipments must be carefully timed and portioned out to avoid suspicion from customs and various markets here on Gibraltar. These long intervals you’ve picked masks your presence better and makes you more available to the agents.

You tell yourself it’s the optimal solution.

(There are days that you truly regret having taken Overwatch’s reputation and wealth for granted in the past—abundance of ingredients to play with and test, an unlimited budget for the best of equipment and staff; it is the stuff of recent dreams.)

Asim comes out from the shadow of your fully loaded vehicle and closes the shutters behind him, leaning heavily against his empty hand truck, his tank top thoroughly soaked.

“All done, boss.” He wipes his brow with a gloved hand and brushes his curly hair out of his face. “Man, Argus is lucky. She doesn’t sweat.” Behind you in the middle of the room, Argus Twenty stands out like a sore thumb in her semi-formal wear, giving orders and instructions to various people like a conductor. “Me? I feel like I just took a bath.”

“She’s an omnic,” you reply flatly, frowning over the list, “and you’re still on therapy.”

He shrugs, a sort of self-satisfied smile on his face. “It’s still not fair.”

“You know what’s not fair? The price of fish,” you sigh, leaning heavily against your scorching truck. It shakes against the added pressure. “Even with negotiations and switching to a new vendor, we still had to eat an eight-percent increase.”

“Climate change,” Asim supplies bitterly. “You know it’s been bad lately, but it’s only going to get worse, they say, since the fish are migrating elsewhere and ruining a ton of businesses here. Do not get me started on cryogenically frozen fish or grains—that’s even worse. It’s hard just getting our share even with your negotiations.” He jerks his stubby chin at the general direction of the rest of the warehouse. You turn just head slightly to see some people notice and wave, carts passing around them. A pang of welling pride and equally growing sorrow jolts your insides.

You smile at Asim instead, tugging the hat over your eyes further. “They like you.”

“It’s all your fault.”

“I can’t make people like you.” If you had that power, the world might actually be a much better place. “It’s all you. They like you for who you are.”
The man hides a shy smile into his fist, sealing it in there before looking at back at you solemnly. “If you hadn’t left, they would know you and like you, too.”

“I...I prefer it this way,” you say, resting your list against the lower half of your face. “I don’t regret my decision.”

Asim makes a noise of discontent. “Glad someone doesn’t.”

“What was that?”

“What Asim means is that we'd wish you showed more consideration toward us.”

You wince at the sharp words and Asim give Argus a wave as she comes up behind you both, seemingly finished with her duties. She crosses her arms, staring steadily at you through the slits of her eyes.

“Sorry. I was really trying to keep this order lean, but…” You wave your hands helplessly before resting them over your mouth.

“No, not that,” the omnic starts. “It's just...it’s been several months since you have decided to lend your aid to them, dear.”

"And?"

"Is it not time to return to us?"

Oh. This talk again. You frown, squaring up your shoulders. "They still need my help."

"Until when? Until they've become established again or until they are dismantled?" You clench your teeth, sucking in a sharp inhale. "Please, my dear, the sooner you wipe your hands clean of them, the better."

“Argus,” you say exasperatedly, “you’re the one who said that you’ll go along with this. Please.”

“But not for this long. Two months, three, perhaps? This is too much. We have received rumors of more formers being taken by Talon. It’s only a matter of time...”

Is that why the agents are suddenly getting assigned missions? You will need to ask Athena about the details—it’s not your business and unrelated to your job, but...

“Argus is right, boss.”

You stare at Asim, the weight of something unpleasant in his eyes pressing down on you. “Come on, not you, too.”

“If Talon comes and gets you, everything’s finished.”

“I’m not an agent,” you remind him. “Chefs were never considered agents, so…”

Argus sounds far less patient now. “And under what basis do you believe Talon acknowledges such a distinction? What if they see you there and you become collateral? Will you wait until they’re all killed before you come back?”

Because there's always been that distinction. Because they're heroes. They're brave people who deserve better than a dogged death by an organization that thrives on the destruction of others. "I
have confidence in their operations, and I'll stay there until they don't need me anymore."

"And when will that be?"

Beneath Asim’s accusatory glare, you open your mouth and draw a blank. You thought about this before. You pondered this before, but did you ever come up with an answer? Did you even want to come up with an answer? What did you tell Argus when you announced you'd be helping Overwatch?

"I don't know." The quiet confession leaves a terrible taste in your mouth.

"You don’t—? Are you joking me?" Asim snaps, suddenly in your face. "I'm all about fighting for what I believe in, but not when so many people’s lives are on the line, when your life's on the line."

"We were prepared for the consequences when I decided—"

"When you decided! You didn't consult anyone else!"

"I consulted Argus!"

"After the fact."

Your mouth hangs open at your omnic colleague.

“Listen,” Asim says, “I don't want you to give up everything so fast. You worked hard to get to where you are, to get”—he waves a hand at the warehouse—“all this established. There’s too much that can go wrong, the longer you keep this up. You know what the world will do to you if they find out?”

The unyielding pressure from both sides forces cruel words to shoot up to the surface, cocked on your tongue, words that would cut so deep you knew it'd kill them, but you barely manage to keep them trapped behind your teeth. Your heart races, your face flushes with the effort, and you force yourself to divert your eyes into the ground and collect your breath.

“I will take full responsibility when that happens,” you finally say solemnly, looking both of them in the face.

“Taking full responsibility by yourself isn’t even going to begin to cov—”

“—do you believe your life will cover the damage—”

The two of them stop abruptly, either having realized they’re causing a scene or there’s little point in continuing the argument. The omnic steps forward, a gentle hand on your tense shoulder, tugging gently at your sleeve where the embroidered image of a scaly heart sat.

“I apologize for being short, but we are concerned for you. Promise us. While you still have the chance, I ask you to please return to us. We cannot continue without you.”

"But…"

Asim holds you by the elbow, a stern look in his eye. “If it’s about the food and money, they can get it themselves. They’re not helpless. They don’t need you. You’re not being kind, you’re being selfish.”

For some reason, those words had more force than the ones before it, striking something so very
tender inside you that you choke on the harsh insults and threats you kept stifled inside. They rise with such a vengeance and ferocious speed, you have to yank away your arm and turn away and seek refuge in the cabin of your vehicle. You vehemently ignore them calling your name in urgent, helpless whispers.

You slam the door of your truck closed, fumbling with your seatbelt, and drive off hurriedly through the door with your cap tipped low. Your eyes burn and your skin feels like it wants to burst. You ignore the fading figures disappearing from your mirrors, the feeling of longing and deep-seated sadness solidifying and demanding your attentions.

Overwatch is not a mistake.

What you’re doing is not a mistake.

This was the worst plan (or therefore lack of) that he has ever gone through with, Hanzo decided while wedged up in a precarious corner of the ceiling.

Weeks of saying "thank you" to a tray and the fading echoes of a bell is just a token gesture of his gratitude, but he cannot escape the solemn timbre of his brother's voice, urging him to show his appreciation properly.

And how does he show it? By breaking into the one place he is not allowed in. If he’s honest with himself, he knows he could still leave and pretend he was never here. But pride is so very selfish that it will take away everything from someone else and still never be satisfied. It is so destructive, it will even kill its host and leave behind nothing. Not even itself.

Hanzo knows that it is bad, that it is all-consuming in no productive way, but the thrill that it gives, the little bit of power it offers for just a moment is so very tempting—he’ll have control of his life for a fleeting moment. (After the moment’s passed, well, that’s a different story.)

You’ll have to forgive him for this (if you catch him, that is).

Surprisingly, there are very few places to hide in the kitchen and even fewer with a good view of the Cellar door. The ceilings are much lower than that of the cafeteria’s, compact and spartan. Everything was set up neatly in rows that lead straight from one end of the kitchen to the other, a wide breadth of space between each station for people to come and go without bumping into each other, and a dim light that light up the bottom of these stations and counters. Racks that stood against the walls were all wiry and without anything more solid than the mostly transparent containers that filled them.

There’s no doubt this space was meant to hold more than a single cook, but despite that, there are no obvious hiding spaces at all.

Even more surprising, Athena did not try to stop him, didn’t even utter a word or sound an alarm as he slipped his way in here with little more than the clothes on his back. Perhaps he had an ally in the AI yet. Or maybe she’s waiting for the opportunity to gather incriminating evidence before presenting it to all to see.

He resists the urge to sigh; sound echoes surprisingly well in this space. (It's not particularly surprising—most of everything in here is made of metal.) Neither the subtle rub of fabric or the wink of an eyelash is able to escape notice here, and he doesn’t dare move from his chosen spot.

There’s no telling when you’d be back, but historically, you’ve never missed serving breakfast even for risers earlier than himself, which means that he has another hour and a half at most. It’s
more than enough time to understand this space and plan out his next course of action.

Slowly, he runs his eyes around the room, eyes having adjusted well enough to see the details.

His eyes lingers around the door he knows is his target. It’s a little larger than the four transparent doors lined up beside it. Those lead to small rooms, lined with the same sort of racks that were out in the kitchen, but they were bereft of anything except for a stray box or two and a sack of something. One of them had something a few familiar boxes lined up at the front—the picture of an orange plastered on one and a cow on another. Drinks, then, but far too few to be able to sustain the base for even a day.

He narrows his eyes.

Is that all the food in the base?

No, it cannot be.

A base with people whose appetites are like Zarya’s and Roadhog’s should always be stocked with food. There must be more somewhere he’s not seeing. In the Cellar, perhaps? If you store alcohol in there, it’s not unreasonable to assume that it could store other food items.

No, he shouldn't think so far into it—if all of them have been well fed up until this point, there's no reason for him to think beyond that. It's none of his business.

He redirects his gaze back to the Cellar door.

There’s a biometric panel is integrated directly into the steel, barely standing out among the smooth metal. The door itself looks deceptively standard, but judging by the implements on the door frame, it's a little more sophisticated than it's made out to be. No hinges. No gaps. No seams.

He drags his tongue slowly across his lip.

It smells of a challenge, and reminds him of an old teaching from so long ago: if it exists, it can be killed or destroyed. It has not failed him yet. (Though, there’s a nagging in his heart wants to remind him of a time when that was not true.)

The question is how discreet he wishes to be. While he is no thief, his skillset is closely aligned with one as much as he loathes to admit it. He’ll have to get close to the door, conduct his reconnaissance to determine just how much effort will be required to break through it.

If it managed to stand up against even the covert operation division of Overwatch, it won't be any small amount of effort to get inside. And for that gunslinger to speak well of you, your skills must not be so terrible either. It would be pertinent to take caution, maybe learn a bit more about you from this environment.

Everything else is rather spartan in its own way with little to indicate what could be beyond that door—everything here has a purpose, no more and no less. The floors are lined carefully with black rubber mats dotted with holes. Pots and pans were stacked neatly beneath some counters, all surfaces are clear of anything extra, the sinks at the very far end of the room near the service window seem to be clear of dishes—those are all stacked and lined up in their rightful places.

Though, he can't help but notice on one of the shelves, among the meticulously lined drinkware, there seems to be a small gap where several cups should be. Something nags at Hanzo’s mind about that space, but he's unable to place a finger on it. Maybe because it’s such a careless contrast compared to the rest of the shelves where everything is ordered and neatly aligned, no space
wasted.

If this was anything to go by, he may have just developed a profile of you: detail-oriented; tireless; meticulous, and if he were to interpret this with his few interactions, he could even say that you are a very dedicated omnic, following your program with utmost devotion. It’s admirable.

Though, there cannot be that much to do in a kitchen besides cook and clean, now is there? But if that were so, where are you now?

Looking at this place, immaculate despite the hectic image that the action of ‘cooking’ conjures up in his mind and the number of customers you cater to, spacious despite the single omnic it holds, his impression of this space itself is simply lonely.

He dismisses the thought with a grim viciousness.

Omnics do not get lonely.

You likely connect yourself to Athena, anyway, spying on everyone and their appetites. There is no reason to align his sympathies with someone who hides in the shadows, watching everyone with such attentiveness, compiling data to use for (or against) them.

Without warning, light suddenly floods the kitchen and Hanzo has to tighten his grip against the walls, rapidly blinking the stars out of his eyes while biting back a groan.

You must have returned.

A childish excitement buzzes just beneath his skin at the realization, his heart pressing so hard against his skin, he feels like it will burst with the pressure. He forces himself to calm—there will be plenty to do in the next few precious seconds.

To his surprise, it’s the Cellar door that slides open with a hiss rather than the swinging doors that led to the cafeteria. The speed is surprising considering how thick the door seems, if the door frame was anything to go by, it must be at least ten or fifteen centimeters—thinner than some bank vaults he’s seen in his day, but thicker than any standard door by far in this base. The frame shows that the door is much wider than it initially seems. It seemed to sink into the wall and will not be as simple as just slipping a piece of paper or jamming something in between the door and frame. Maybe he can get through from the other doors beside it? The ones that look like freezers?

From within the darkness emerges the beginnings of a shaky hover-trolley, stacked high with boxes that fill up the empty maw of the doorway with nary a gap. There’s a pause and a shuffle and one of the larger boxes shift. Hanzo dares crane his head out a little more. Are you stuck?

The trolley then comes through slowly and without the frame of the door holding everything in place, Hanzo can see how precariously everything is stacked. The room itself seems to take a sigh of relief when everything makes it into the room, wind rushing into the Cellar door. From his angle, he cannot very well see the person behind it. But the rapid speed at which the door closes tells him that you’ve stepped into the kitchen and the door will not remain open long enough for anyone to barge in after another person.

“Oh geez, I’m late, I’m late.”

That voice.

The faintest hint of an unconscious smile makes its way onto his face. He knows this voice. It is, without a doubt, you.
He’ll finally be able to lay his eyes on the elusive chef—you’ll no longer be a torso and a voice and a bell, but something he could finally put a face to blame if his food is inadequate. He’ll finally know the face of his opponent, the guardian of that rumored door.

“Come on, get it together, me. Allons, allons-y.”

Time seems to slow as the cart backs itself up just slightly and begins to turn. He hears the squeak of a boot against the rubbery floor, and a shuddering sigh. From behind the massive tower of boxes and containers, someone comes into view.

And Hanzo’s breathing stops short in his throat.

His thoughts dissolve into static.

You’re a person.

The archer watches numbly as you begin to unpack the cart, taking box after box and spreading them out onto the closest countertop with single-minded determination and practiced efficiency. While you’re not wearing a chef’s uniform (instead, it’s something darker and plainer with a greenish patch on the upper arm), he’s sure it’s you. There’s a level of confidence in the way you navigate this space, placing things with a familiarity that no one should have unless they’re here often.

Vaguely, it feels as though he’s no longer in his own skin or even in the same reality he was just in mere moments ago.

You are a human.

Not a service bot.

Not an omnic.

He should not be surprised, but he is. Suddenly, he snaps back into his own body and Hanzo finds himself furiously reanalyzing all the information he knows, or thought he knew; the facts are quickly becoming lies.

The tinny echo in your voice could easily be attributed to the metallic (and lonely) nature of the kitchen. The disappearances are not for maintenance, but because you’re human and require rest. He is then reminded of those late nights when sleep escapes and taunts him like some mythical being and how you’re always ready to prepare tea, and that you're already preparing breakfast for the early risers not even two hours later.

Even worse, he overlooked a ridiculously simple concept: omnis have no concept of taste, it is foolish. Their scant decades of existence on this Earth has not yet granted them the technological advancements necessary to distinguish taste, let along masterfully combine them into pleasing dishes that his stomach would not reject. For an Omnic to be a chef is not only ridiculous, it is laughable.

He wants to slap himself.

A disgrace.

The information clicks so cleanly that the implications behind it makes his head spin.

This was a terrible idea.
He should not have taken up the bet. For once in his life, he should have listened to his younger brother, of all people, and left this alone. His heart is not made of steel or stone, and he knows he has better manners than to take advantage of someone who works so hard for something so foolish as a crutch for his own inadequacies.

He glances at the service window, so far away, and back at you who is struggling to keep one of the glass doors open to carry in a large cardboard box.

For a moment, maybe to soothe his own conscience, Hanzo thinks of going down to assist you. It will invite trouble, accusations, and your ire. If these kitchens were as sacred as McCree makes it sound, then he should pretend he was never here.

‘Like a coward,’ his mind whispers.

Hanzo grimaces and makes the amateurish mistake of leaning his head back against the wall a touch too hard.

“Who’s there?”

It’s only due to years of practice and familiarity with those words from the mouths of numerous victims that does not react badly to the sudden spike in his heart rate, that he does not shrink into himself or otherwise even blink, only instinctively isolating his breathing to his throat and clearing his mind of unrelated thoughts.

“Hello?”

As if he’ll answer with a bit of goading, but the thought is endearing naïve.

Beneath your breath, but still ridiculously loud and tinny, you warn, “Jesse, I swear if that’s you…”

Something in his stomach tightens and a chill settles into his chest, and he furrows his brow.

This is becoming risky. He has already gotten basic information regarding the door—there are more questions still (is the door protected by single-factor authentication or multi-layer? Multi-factor? Is it connected to Athena? Are there other security measures beyond the door?), but it doesn’t matter at the moment.

Hanzo waits, endures your slow searching gaze and various attempts to get him to speak until you’re turned around, away from the service window he plans to escape through. (The double doors leading into the kitchen from the outside are out of the question—they swing and there’s no guarantee his exit would not be heard or seen.) He moves carefully but swiftly along the wall toward his destination.

Maybe it was unfortunate timing. Maybe he’s lost his touch having been cooped up in this base without the urgency of needing stealth. Maybe you’re just that aware of your territory.

There are many ‘maybe’s, but it does not erase what happens next:

“Agent Hanzo!”

Something heavy falls onto the ground, probably a package.

Hanzo curses to himself. Normal circumstances would have seen you dead, but these circumstances are far from normal—however, he does not intend to stick around long enough to find out what you will do. (Inside, he gives a brief goodbye to the pepperless-foods that he had the
pleasure of eating during these past few months.)

The sound of metal clips the air from somewhere behind him as he drops to the ground and makes a straight shot for the window only two island counters and one static one away.

A sound behind him that sets off several alarms in his head makes him peek just underneath his arm and he’s surprised to see it: two wide steps and a lunge snaps up the distance between you both and you’re then in his space.

He finds himself moving without thinking, twisting onto the shiny metal surface that are now decorated with the imprints of his shoes to change direction, escaping a flash of silver that nearly clips him.

“My counter!”

To normal people, he would be an indecipherable blur at best. Only people accustomed to his speed, like Genji or Tracer, would be able to chase after him. It should be impossible for a chef who has never seen battle, who has not had to deal with anything faster than the flailing of a fish, who has been nurtured and protected in this self-made fortress.

He didn’t expect your head to whip around and follow.

He can see it now, a long silver ladle in your hand that strikes out at his foot. One flip puts him just outside your range, but it traps him against another counter and the spilled contents of a smashed box—oranges. He glances quickly to his side—the service window, his exit, is just a little distance away.

One strong leap and a jump is all it will take.

“The kitchen is off-limits, Agent Hanzo.”

Your voice is biting, a jarring contrast to the gentle and genuine concern you had shown up until this point. So, even a mouse will bare its fangs if cornered?

At this distance, he can finally get a very clear look at you and see the dark moons beneath your reddened eyes. There’s something slightly familiar about the gnarled look on your face, about the way you hold yourself despite your stance—squared into a straight line—that vaguely reminds him of the reflection that stands distorted in the head of the ladle you have pointed at his chest.

“Is that so?”

Livid may be the most appropriate word to describe you.

“Get out.”

Without waiting for him to comply or even an explanation, you shoot forward. He steps out of the way and then another when you twist and swing to follow.

One part of him that tells him to stay and test your strength. A more reasonable part tells him to take his leave peacefully now that he’s been seen. But there’s something, a pressure that bears down on his chest and up against his stomach that moves his feet, forcing him to watch and step out of your sloppy attacks.

Like an amateur, you broadcast your movements, your tight spirals are too wide and slow, the distance just slightly miscalculated and short of actually hitting him. Your steps are repetitive and
predictable, hardly engaging, and too straightforward (likely the unfortunate nature of your art). But the intensity behind those strikes and the sharpness in which they're delivered keeps him on his guard, forces him to retain focus. There’s a snarl to your lips and a burning in your eyes that, in his encounters with a mirror, seems far too familiar.

Faintly, in the back of his mind, he remembers a story from his youth of a master of tea ceremonies against a samurai and wonders if this is how the story really should've played out.

The ladle enters his space. His reaction, wholly instinctual and for a moment screams ‘DANGER’, makes him smash it out of the way with the back of his hand. The momentum leads it out. You go with it, swoop the ladle down under and up at his chin. He ducks forward, right into your zone and grabs at your attacking arm.

Your retreat is far quicker than he would've given credit for.

But it was too hasty, unpracticed.

He could hear the popping of joints; the result of a rushed and undisciplined movement. You’re wincing, heaving, but still angry—there’s something about that look that makes him wonder faintly of its origins and its target.

Was that all?

As brief as it was, the display of power and skill of your level could not keep out even the weakest of the Overwatch members (and of those, there are very, very few he would dare consider such).

It’s a betrayal of his expectations most foul.

He had expected a challenge, not an insult. Insults thrown at him should always be returned in kind.

A smirk makes its way onto his face.

Very well. Bring it. He will show you the difference between you both in skill—politeness and gratitude be damned. You attacked first and refused reason, after all.

Hanzo waits for you to regain your footing and stance, waits for the ladle to come back up and steady itself. It's not as though you're a true threat; you're just a che—

A flash of silver and the scratchy sting on his face shuts his thoughts up. What a sight he must make. He can’t help but touch his face where his skin meets beard, and pulls away with nothing but heat that drops into him like a fireball, igniting him.

That was a good lunge and a good retreat and a good strike. It was a good reminder.

“Get out.”

His smirk turns a touch carnivorous.

Yes, that was more like it.

Your expression morphs into one of more focused irritation. It’s far from a proper look for someone facing him. Those who know the expectations of the battlefield should at least compose themselves, not let themselves get saddled with worthless thoughts and rush through their movements like a fool.
Hanzo wants to crush that attitude. If he is truly your opponent, then you need to see him as one, not as a target or punching bag.

What carelessness.

What arrogance.

No. He takes a breath to calm himself. There’s no reason to get riled over a mere cook. But he can’t deny the strumming in his veins that call for the absolute annihilation of a mere amateur who dares thinks that they could ever match a master. He will show you where that arrogance will lead. This will be quick, this will be a challenge between his patience and his pride—you do not fit this equation. You are, after all, just a cook.

An unspoken signal—maybe you could see the insult on his face—brings you darting forth again, weapon raised and jabbing. There’s not much he has to do beside mind his space, mind your range, and keep a close eye on you.

All your following attacks are careless, easy to dodge. What happened to that one that managed to scratch his face? Was it because he was standing still or because you had a moment of clarity? As the strikes come, he finds himself slipping deeper and deeper into his thoughts and further and further away from the reality at hand.

Where are you looking, he wonders. What are you attacking? What do you see? What are you trying to strike? Because it sure as hell is not him and it annoys him just a bit.

The ladle’s head enters his reach and thoughtlessly, he folds his fingers beneath the rim and he yanks it. You pitch forward with a yelp. He nearly raises his foot to slam in into your jaw, but a moment of clarity forces him to slam it back down. No, getting lost in one’s thoughts is deadly, even if his opponent is hardly a challenge.

Almost losing your weapon didn’t deter you and you continue going after him, desperation coloring your attacks. What are you doing? If this drags on, there’s no guarantee that he wouldn’t crush you just to satisfy his pride, just to show he is superior and that your hands are ill suited to wield utensils made for cooking as weapons.

This has gone on long enough.

Once more, Hanzo lets the ladle punctures his space. He folds at the wrist, just under the ladle’s head, redirecting it. You attempt a counter-parry, but with a firm chop, the ladle clatters to the ground, muffled by the rubber beneath your feet. To your credit, you do not attempt to pick up your ‘weapon’, instead choosing to retreat in one large step back. Are you giving up?

One inhale. You’re dashing forward again, swoop low to retrieve the ladle, and swing upward—too obvious. He steps inside your reach, pivots behind you. Adrenaline moving his limbs, nabbing your dominant hand and slipping an arm around your neck in a loose, but firm hold. His feet lock against yours. One false move and you’ll be thrown. The fact that you do not even bother detangling yourself shows that you know this much.

Not as foolish as he thought.

But he has won.

“Chef, cease this.”

His own voice, stern and sharp, bounces straight off the walls and equipment. Interestingly
enough, he can see your spine straighten and body jerk as though fighting to follow and resist his request.

In a show of benevolence, he releases his hold slowly and steps back neatly. You turn, still alert, ladle held up steadily. Calm. He has won. There is nothing for him to prove anymore. “I do not mean any harm. I only came for tea.”

Your mouth twists and your expression slackens, but there’s no give to your posture.

“Truly.”

You narrow your eyes, and he thinks he’ll have to defend himself further when nearly a minute passes before the head of the ladle and your shoulders dip. He remains perfectly still while you slowly slip into a more neutral stance, the tenseness in your shoulders dissipating just a bit. Now that you’re calmer, it’s easy to see that you do not look entirely well. There’s a tremble in your hands that he hadn’t noticed before. A result of too much adrenaline? Weariness? Or something else entirely?

“If that is all,” you murmur, not quite meeting his eyes, “please wait outside.” You gesture at the door with a small swing of the ladle.

He blinks and tries not to let his surprise show.

Is it that simple? Really?

“Will it be sencha today?”

“Ah, no. Moroccan mint.”

Naked surprise colors your face. For a moment, he thinks he sees the actual person behind the anger and the person behind the professional facade before it returns.

“I understand. With or without sweetener?”

“With.”

You nod and walk a short distance away, back never left exposed to him, and stop to face him once more. For a moment, he wonders what you’re doing before he realizes you’ve placed yourself between himself and the rest of the kitchen. It’s almost laughable—you do not have the skill to stop him even if you wanted to and you’ve just demonstrated that clearly. If he takes you out, there is nothing stopping him from accessing the Cellar door you’re protecting.

It’s almost disappointing. Almost enough to dampen his desire to uphold his part of the bargain with McCree. A treasure guarded by a weak guard cannot be so valuable.

He resists the urge to sigh. He’ll need to think about this later. The stack of boxes left forgotten and stray oranges on the ground catches his eye.

“Would you like some assistance with those packages?” he asks, gesturing with his chin.

Your face shifts from professional stoicism to shock to embarrassment to a poor attempt at maintaining your composure.

“Thank you for your offer, but I will manage. Please wait outside, I’ll have your tea shortly.”

“It would be no trouble. There are many boxes here.”
The makeshift weapon remains tight in your hands and determination begins to exude from your stance.

“I appreciate the offer, but this place is for chefs only. Please wait outside.”

A flicker of anger and irritation that he’s becoming far too acquainted with reignites inside his chest. Are all the members of Overwatch so unreasonable that they’d even jeopardize their own health? Reinhardt, you; who else on this base is so foolish?

“Do as you wish.”

At least he has gained information on the kitchen and the characteristics of the door; he’ll be better prepared for next time. (If the skill he saw tonight was the extent of your skill, he has nothing to fear. The cowboy’s warnings were far too exaggerated.)

He’s keenly aware of your watchful gaze on his back as the door slowly swing to a close behind him. Then the swinging doors finally rest and he can hear you working, he lets out the long-suffering sigh he's been holding in up until now, deflating.

Well, that could have gone worse.

He loiters around the cafeteria, watching the sun crawl against the ground with static in his mind until the bell rings and a tray with a familiar teapot and teacup slides into view—deep down, as illogical as it may seem, he’s just a little disappointed that nothing accompanies his drink. It feels strange walking up to the window now that he knows what lies behind it. Like some type of magic or illusion has been ruined.

“Thank you for your patience.”

He nods, nearly forgetting that you cannot see it. “No, thank you.”

He doesn't know how he could have ever mistaken you for an omnic. Your voice is definitely nothing like Genji’s. It’s the illusion of the echo and the fact that you talk to a wall that must have confused him. And your hands—human hands—peer restlessly over the sill, tapping just as he’s about to pick up his tray. Do you often place your hands out in the open? Has he missed it all this time?

“Agent...Hanzo?”

“Yes, Chef?”

You take a shuddering breath before saying, “I...I apologize for the misunderstanding. I did not realize how important tea is to you. But the kitchens are off-limits to non-kitchen staff, so please understand.”

If he's playing the part of the fool, he may as well make it convincing. “It is inconvenient to wait on you for something like tea, Chef.”

The words draw a sharp inhale from you and tension to the air.

“These are rules, Agent Hanzo,” you say slowly, “I cannot allow that.”

“Rules set by whom?”

“The previous Head Chef.”
“If I am correct, this Head Chef is not here, and as such, you should make the rules.”

“I don’t—I’m not—I…”

“Oh!”

Winston seems surprise to find anyone here at all, shifting awkwardly in the threshold between the hall and the room before he sheepishly pads his way in on his fists.

“Good morning, Hanzo. Didn’t expect to see you here.”

Hanzo couldn’t say that he expected the same and nods curtly.

“Tea, huh? I guess everyone takes their breakfast different.” Hanzo has no time to correct him when the gorilla turns toward the service window. “Chef, what’s for breakfast today?”

Hanzo winces as you splutter, remembering that his antics likely led to a delay in your schedule. (Well, you refused his help and decided to challenge him despite your lack of prowess; it’s not entirely his fault alone.) He can’t imagine in the few scant minutes you’ve spent preparing his tea that you had managed to put away those boxes or even started on preparing breakfast.

“That’s, um, I didn’t—I’m very sorry, but…”

Hanzo couldn’t stand to remain, the awkwardness of the situation tugging at him and bids a hasty leave, yanking the tray out of the window. Perhaps too hasty or perhaps it’s karma, either way, he could not say it was not well deserved.

The teacup wobble precariously and falls off his tray, rolling against the window sill and smashes to the floor, the sound rippling and tearing through any other noise in the cafeteria. Winston’s mouth drops open, spectacles slipping down his face.

“Oh my.”

Heat creeps up Hanzo’s neck as he chances a glance at the service window. Your hands are frozen in mid-air. He watches as they come down slowly and your torso inches forward, a dull ‘thunk’ accompanying an abrupt stop; he definitely does not feel something squeezing the air out of his lungs when a weepy voice whispers, “...are you kidding me?”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you everyone for your patience. As always, Hanzo is a terribly unreliable narrator and Chef needs a vacation. This chapter didn’t quite turn out the way I envisioned it, but that’s not always a bad thing. I hope everyone continues to enjoy and thank you for your support.

(Many of your comments have left me in happy tears and I appreciate every single one of them very much. I cannot express in words how grateful I am to have received them. Thank you so much.)
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Contrary to what others may think, Hanzo is not the cool, collected, rational man that he presents himself to be.

Genji could easily recount the times that his brother has flung something in anger after being forced to contain it for appearance’s sake or the way he sulks for days on end in that sort of irritating silence that he’s come to know from being on the receiving end of such behavior for years leading up to the...incident.

Rage that once rattled at Genji’s remaining ribcage like a beast had ebbed away into a void-like weariness and then into the occasional spike of all-consuming fury that ate and ate and ate and ate at him until it extinguishes itself with little remaining other than the desire to sleep for a long, long time. Family, obligation, and his past became such a distant thing in Genji’s mind when he was taken in under Zenyatta’s wing. Prior to this, he obsessed over the idea of revenge, believing for years on end that he had done absolutely nothing to deserve the actions taken against him that day.

Things change, he supposed, especially when Winston initiated the Recall. Winston was concerned about the lack of agents that answered and asked Genji if he knew of anyone capable of taking on the mantle of being a hero. While no hero, Hanzo was one of the strongest he knew.

The idea was not his alone, of course, but he was not opposed to it.

He had been worried that his older brother would have delved far too deep into his self-destructive tendencies in these ten or so years of absence to listen to reason or to even continue living—he was not deaf to Hanzo’s betrayal and not immune to the snarky joy he felt, uttering a vicious 「It serves you right, you monster」 that did not give him any satisfaction. His brother is not made of the stone that their elders had envisioned him to be. Genji supposes it’s an equal parts luck and his brother’s pride that prevented Hanzo’s complete destruction.

It’s likely the same luck and pride that allows them to work cordially together for the few missions that Hanzo had been asked to accompany. It was almost as if nothing had changed. Until they had again, like his older brother had slipped into reality and finally come to grips with the exact situation he’s landed himself in.

It gives Genji a sort of nostalgic headache to be the target of Hanzo’s silent treatment again. He had been prepared for it, though, giving his elder brother the space he so required to finally process the situation he had landed himself in. (Their initial contact was going well, far too well for it to have been able to last long.)

Even if Hanzo will not communicate with him, at least the company of Overwatch could be trusted to keep his brother anchored. There’s no mistaking the way he treats some of the members—some with the strict type of respect reserved for those sitting higher in a hierarchy, some with genuine kindness, and only one or two people with a sort of brief unguarded playfulness that Hanzo rarely allows himself to have. (And if Genji were being truly honest, it was a little bittersweet.)

So when Lena tells him in confidence that Jesse had made a bet with Hanzo involving the kitchen, he had to worry that his brother would soon be neck deep in something reckless in his attempt to cope—funny how the tables have turned after all these years. The cyborg is almost tempted to ask
the man what his intentions with his brother are, but thinks better of it. Jesse is known for making calculated trouble, and can be slippery when he feels like it.

And although it's only you remaining in the kitchens now, there’s no doubt you’re dyed in the ideals of your former mentor.

Gabriel often spoke of it and Genji didn’t bother caring too much until now: the kitchen staff will defend their territory to the death and to pry their treasure of them if you dared, but all have big hearts made to give and give and give regardless of the crimes committed against them. Hanzo likely does not know that, however, and would not treat you with the same sort of careful reserve he does with the other members (each with their own strengths and abilities that could be interpreted as ‘threatening’)—you’re a chef, and if he knew his brother, someone that he could not see as a threat requiring him to put up any mental shields against.

Maybe this type of contact, this type of discourse, is what Hanzo needs.

And what sort of brother would he be if he didn’t meddle a bit?

The next few days before his first mission in a long time are perilous. While he is no coward, Hanzo did not know how you would react to him ordering food after his shameless (though disguised) attempt to infiltrate the kitchen.

To his surprise and suspicion, however, all his interactions with you have remained the same—“Thank you, Chef.” “You’re welcome, Agent Hanzo.”—almost as though that night in the kitchen never happened. Though, if he dared let himself think it, the food may even be a higher quality than before—the sauces more flavorful, the food is fresher, the flavors a little more bold. It’s likely his imagination, but he feels no shame in ordering seconds and there is no issue with those orders, either. However, it does not keep him from checking his food over, turning ingredients over and inspecting your dishes until they have gone lukewarm and eating in small bites.

Even more baffling, no one else mentions his attempt, instead just giving him raised eyebrows that simply say, “I’m waiting.”

The only indication that that night ever happened was the stinging underneath his beard where the rim of your ladle grazed that’s little more than an echoing throb.

He finds himself contemplating it.

Hanzo was careless, unfocused in the face of an adversary he seems unworthy. It’s a bad habit, his teachers had told him. Even the weakest of creatures will bare their fangs when cornered, and yet, he had constantly been letting down his guard and catching himself in the act. He only remembers your eyes and the expression on your face that looked too painfully familiar.

While making preparations for the upcoming mission—scouting with Satya and retrieving some items from an informant in America (McCree was mercifully assigned elsewhere)—Hanzo concludes that the chefs must have been either taught to fight (if one could even call the reckless jabbing of a ladle ‘fighting’). A strange weapon of choice especially when you’re surrounded by knives and other utensils that could better serve as a weapon. Judging by your skill, you either have not trained in a very long time or you were not trained very well from the beginning. It’s a gross miscalculation on your part if your intentions were to protect the door. It’s baffling how anyone would think your level of skill would be able to defend against a whole base of agents, or why no one has ever attempted to break in yet.
McCree (and everyone else) must have misjudged you and your abilities or there's something he's not seeing.

He suddenly feels like a pawn in a game, a feeling so eerie familiar, it makes his skin crawl and his lip curl. It makes no sense why McCree himself will not try when your prowess is practically non-existent. McCree, based off their training sessions and scarce missions together, is more than capable of taking you out without trouble.

For a moment, he’s tempted to think there is no treasure, that he's being played for a fool so that everyone can laugh at his failures again, but he remembers his encounters with Fareeha, Genji, and Ana who all say otherwise. It is unlikely that all of them would be dragged into some ridiculous scheme (though he cannot dismiss it as a possibility).

A change in tactics might be prudent, he muses.

The night before his mission, he finds himself venturing to the kitchen in the middle of the night for the first time since finding out you were human; he had tried to grit his teeth and contain himself to his room whenever the feeling of something jittering in his veins strikes now—he does not need tea from the kitchen. It is a luxury that he’s gotten far too accustomed to far too quickly when he has perfectly good (stale) tea bags among his belongings. He had let himself become too spoiled, like a child, like…

The door opens and he stops in his tracks.

Mei, in her pajamas and her hair sticking out every which way and looking so very undignified, chatting at the window. He doesn't know whether to feel relieved that it's not him that is responsible for keeping you from your sleep or annoyed that other people are doing so. He's quick to dismiss that thought, however. This is your job. There is no reason to feel excessive sympathy for a person doing what they're supposed to do.

She seemed very absorbed in talking to you and doesn't seem to notice his presence—it’s funny just how much focus she can have for something as simple as a conversation. Cynically, he thinks that it wouldn’t be difficult to end her if any assassin chooses so. It’d be a huge loss to the world of ecology (and to the world in general), however.

As he approached, he can see that the scientist holds wrapped packages held together by string. It reminds him almost of the onigiri wrapped in bamboo wrapper—ones that he would keep tucked into his clothes when he was out on missions in enemy territory. Food there is never guaranteed to be safe (or guaranteed in general), so it was prudent to have some rations on his person.

"粽子! Oh, I missed these."

Mei’s face lights up as she speaks. Hanzo almost smiles. The scientist’s enthusiasm is always infectious, her smile even more so. In a way, her being here reminds him that there is still good in the world, people who will try their best to save everyone, people who are still naive enough, but strong enough to express their emotions and believe in the best in everyone.

"Oh! With the egg, too? Thank you, Chef! I’ll be sure to bring something back for you."

He can't hear what you're saying, but he can see your hand peeking out of the window, waving —'no, it's not necessary'—and gesturing—'it's okay'. Hanzo wonders why he has never noticed it before. You seem to have them out often enough to prove you were human. Has Overwatch dulled his senses or did he just care so little about the faceless chef—not so faceless now—that he just never took notice?
"Oh, Hanzo!"

"Miss Mei."

In the beginning, he had called her Dr. Zhou, fitting of her status and title. At her vehement and animated insistence that they were *friends* and she prefers him to use her name like anyone else, it eventually led to compromise.

“What are you doing up so late?”

“I could ask the same of you.”

Mei looks down for a moment, contemplative, before beaming a smile right at him. "I am going back to Liangjiang to meet up with a colleague and to visit my family, so I wanted to drop by for some food to take with me before I go.”

*Family.*

Hanzo could only blink, the distinct feeling of slipping into a different plane of existence pulling at him. Family. He’s never heard Mei mention her family before, didn’t know what it was composed of, didn’t know her relation with them—it must be good if she’s going out of her way to see them.

“I see. Good luck.”

The words feel awkward in his mouth. Good luck. What is he wishing her luck for? Her family life likely isn’t as screwed up as his own. Most people’s families, he had long realized, were not so dysfunctional as his own—where dinner talks consist of politics, territories, war strategies, where birthdays are celebrated with lavish gifts and shows of power while sitting at the head of the room with legions of people kneeling, where fun is comprised of sparring sessions and listening to your enemies appeal for your favor and peeling back the layers of greed and self-preservation to see the miserable creatures that lay helpless inside.

Mei didn’t seem to notice his odd choice of words. “Thank you! I’ll be gone two weeks or so. Is there anything that you’d want?”

His immediate reaction is *pineapple cakes*. The little ones from Taiwan. Chunks of pineapple in that gelatin that’s sweet but not excruciatingly so, wrapped in a crumbly skin like the shortbread Lena brings back occasionally, but much more moist. Just the thought of them makes his mouth water.

“No,” he answers instead, swallowing down the suggestion. “Do not trouble yourself.”

“Oh, nonsense! I was planning on getting souvenirs for everyone. Is there any food you’d like?”

It takes a lot of willpower not to speak his desires. “I have all that I need here.”

There’s a twinkle in Mei’s eyes that could just be a reflection of her glasses. “Well, all right, I'll think of something.”

He's about to protest a second time when she asks again, “What are you doing up so late?”

“I was thirsty.” The excuse sounds incredibly lame to his own ears, but it’s much better than saying that he could not sleep because he feared what lurked in the recesses of his mind.

“Oh, sorry, sorry! I didn't mean to take up your time.”
There really isn't anything for the woman to apologize for, but she seems to feel compelled to make herself scarce for a transgression she did not quite commit.

“Good night, Hanzo. I’ll see you when I get back.”

“Good night, Miss Mei.”

She leaves quickly enough, and Hanzo returns his attention to the surprisingly empty window. You’re no longer there, having long abandoned them to their conversation.

Hanzo does not know whether to say it’s rather professional of you to leave them to their ‘private’ conversation or to have left your station in the presence of a customer.

Curiously, he peers into the kitchen, sticking his head slowly through the spacious hole. From this angle, the Cellar door is still hidden from view. The doors beside it that look like they lead into a walk-in freezer are now fully stocked with all types of boxes and seem to be overflowing with various contents. Ingredients for their meals, no doubt.

“Can I help you, Agent Hanzo?”

You come into sight from a blind spot in the kitchen, oven mitts in hand.

“Chef,” he answers as flatly as possible and retracts his head like he wasn't trying to scope out the area. “I was wondering if you were still here or if you had gone off before I could order.”

You splutter, much to his satisfaction, and reply hastily, “I would never—so long as my customers still require me, I will be here.”

“Hm.”

He pretends to busy himself with reading the menu, skimming over the ‘Chef’s choice’ listed all the way at the bottom of the tea list. He could easily skip over it as he had so many times before; he knew what he wanted. It could be guilt, however, that makes him pause over the option. A chance for you to get at a sliver of retribution before he leaves on a mission. He would be putting himself at your mercy, but he is nothing if not unshakable. (Others would beg to differ and he’d like to silence them all the same.)

Tonight, he makes the daring move of selecting it and waits.

It's lucky the cafeteria is so silent; he can hear everything from the kitchen. A quiet yet excited gasp and the hurried yet rhythmic workings of the kitchen: the running of water (...two, three, four beats), the clicking of a stove (...two, three, four), then silence. And the unscrewing of a cap (one, two), and the sounds of utensils; clack, clack (three, four).

There’s a sense of calm that quiets everything in him as he listens. Hanzo catches himself counting. There's a beat to your works that he's never really noticed before, not that he's ever given it much thought. Previously, you were background noise that he cared little to know about, but now, knowing you are human and up at this hour, your presence has become more pressing, more demanding of his awareness. Even your steps, as muted as they are, follow this rhythm. Maybe his mind is attempting to make up for the inattentiveness he's had for his environment and is attempting to cram every bit of information he could glee from you into his brain. Maybe some part of him just feels bad. Regardless, you were an entity he's never considered before and as always, that could be very dangerous in his line of work.

The sound of the bell signals the end of his musings and the slide of the tray, also on beat, ends the
unconscious counts on a four.

Instead of the teapot and teacup he expects, there's a large mug with something milky-looking and a square treat that is still bubbling just a bit. It looks to be some type of steaming, wet, spongy thing that looks like a cross between tamagoyaki with an uneven crust and raisins. It looks borderline unappetizing, but he won't risk asking and making a fool of himself.

“IT’s bread pudding,” you supply.

Now he really isn’t sure if you could read minds. Perhaps he paused too long at the window or you were really able to tell what he was thinking, but the information does not soothe him in any way. Bread pudding. He cannot help the way he grimaces at the idea of it—how can bread be pudding? Or vice versa?

Or maybe he overestimated your professionalism and you’re getting back at him.

But you haven’t served him anything he truly disliked yet, so there’s little reason (other than the fact he tried to break into the Cellar) for him to distrust anything you’ve given him.

“Agent Hanzo?”

“Yes?”

“You have been...checking your meals lately, may I ask why?”

Hanzo finds that he is not as surprised as he should be. You are, as he thought, ridiculously attentive.

“You are not angry about my trespassing?”

You raise your hands up, one holding an elbow and the other straight up as though to hold your chin in thought. He swears he could almost hear the moment the implication clicks in your head.

“Oh. Oh!” You wave your hands erratically. “We chefs would never tamper with your meals. It's against the rules. And a waste of food.” You mutter that last part beneath your breath before continuing. “Even I am angry, I would never do anything to your food that you disliked. I swear it.”

Maybe he underestimated your professionalism.

“But you are still angry.”

“I could never be angry at someone for trying to feed themselves. I was...irate, yes, but that was history. I...remembered some things and...unfortunately, I have taken out my anger on you.” Then, even softer and more sincere, “You didn't deserve that. I'm sorry.”

“No, you do not have to apologize.” It's he who should apologize, but he can't quite form the words. “Is there a reason why no one is allowed in the kitchen?” Hanzo asks instead, casually. “A reason why this rule exists?”

Your torso shifts around, an uncomfortable hum strangles your words.

“The...kitchen must be kept sanitary at all times and there have always been reports of people filching food, so…”

While he's sure your words are partial truths, you're also a terrible liar, almost as bad as Winston. That's fine, this means he has a good chance of getting information out of you later. Patience is key.
His lips quirk up. “So you mean to say we are untrustworthy and dirty?”

“No!” you shout. “That's not what I mean! It's just...we have a very strict code in here from the old days and I'm just trying to keep it together.”

Tradition, yes, he would know a thing or two about that and upholding it. Instead of answering, he takes a thoughtful sip of the milky tea—the chef’s choice—and almost immediately, he's struck by its sweetness.

It's creamy, rich, fragrant, and a bit sweet that reminds him of royal milk tea, except different. Like he's consumed a mouthful of flowers, but it's not unpleasant. He takes another hearty sip and it settles comfortably in his stomach. Something like this could put anyone back to sleep. Maybe he could have this another time.

“How is it?”

An underlying excitement and eagerness betrays your attempts at remaining neutral. The archer is reminded of a puppy, one who seems all too eager to please.

“It is acceptable.”

He could almost hear the smile in your voice and finds himself wondering what you look like with one—all he knows is the anger and the weariness of your features that's already fast fading from his memory—before dismissing the idea with deadly swiftness.

“Oh, excellent. And the bread pudding?”

The slice of bread pudding wobbles when he presses it with the back of the little fork you've provided and seems to ooze just the slightest bit. It smells nice, but just looks plain unappetizing.

Hanzo braces himself and cuts a piece, shoving it into his mouth and chewing quickly. Though, his movements slow and Hanzo ruminates on what he’s eating.

It's warm and sweet, almost on the side of too sweet and the choice of pairing this tea with this bread pudding is questionable but there's cinnamon and raisins and it's bouncy and there’s a slight crunch and—

“Delicious.”

He almost chokes when a resounding “phew!” echoes in the kitchen.

Hanzo and Satya board the Orca late in the afternoon for the maximum amount of cover with the blessings of the other agents who are soon to go off to their own missions.

The trip is many hours too long. The only consolation is, to his surprise, that you had packed them lunches—small, neat sandwiches that's neither soggy or too tough with different fillings each and a cup of hearty broth and other side dishes—in sophisticated lunch boxes that may have once been a relic of an organization that barely exists. It could be a mark of change, then, that this is really it. They're Overwatch.

There's even a small cooling compartment for dessert: tiny fruit tarts that look like they belong on a sauce-decorated plate of a single-star restaurant than in the dinky little trapdoor in a lunch box. It tastes like it, too.
It's a far cry from the ration packs Soldier: 76 had distributed to them this morning. He shudders to think of what is in them, swearing to secretly discard them somewhere on the ship before they land. One look at Satya says that they are of the same mind, especially with the way she holds the bland packages like it personally offended her.

Satya gives off the impression she’s very used to having things a certain way. For Hanzo, it’s both an irritation and a relief. She understands the need to have a routine, the need to have beautiful plans, and tolerate his insistence of sticking to a particular method even if she does not agree so long as he is able to prove that he is correct. Though, after working with her on few projects around the base and a mission or two, he finds himself deferring to her for certain things.

Her sense of visual balance and her ability to create things at her fingertips makes her a valuable ally. More than once, he had caught himself *staring* at her work that shifted from nothing to something structurally sound yet so delicate, a motion of Satya’s mechanical fingers would crush the creation in a second.

There really aren’t that many people Hanzo would say that he preferred working with, but Satya ranks high on the list (if only for the fact that she *makes* lists and mentally has every aspect of the mission organized like an itinerary).

After a lengthy discussion with her on the ship to review the mission details, he’s almost confident this mission will see no distractions.

Which was too much to hope for, apparently.

Everything within the first day had gone smoothly. They had made contact and were about to meet their informant at a determined location. Then nothing went well after. Truthfully, the challenge was not unwelcomed. (Satya would disagree.)

There was a close call while meeting with this informant with some unexpected 'guests’, and he had run out of arrows. In desperation, Satya crafted him a few out of hard light for him to at least do some sort of damage to their pursuers—likely Talon-affiliated, but neither of them are quite sure. Their informant got spooked after the attack and it took too long to find her again.

Between quick purchases of street food (guiltily enough, Hanzo did manage to sneak some alcohol into his purchases) and trying to find this informant again and running from pursuers, Hanzo really cannot wait to get back and get a proper meal into his stomach with some actual tea.

Taking Satya’s seemingly perpetual grimace since this mission went south, Hanzo is sure that she feels the same and then some.

The days on the base were quiet without some of the agents around, but no less busy. The time you would have used for serving the agents are easily replaced with other things; the kitchen needed its weekly deep-clean, contracts had to be renegotiated, menus had to be created, ledgers had to be edited, in-person conferences had to be attended, the agents’ health has to be managed, meetings, and so much more.

All this work makes running a restaurant look like a joke.

After putting out some boxed lunches and dinners onto the service sill for everyone, each marked with its respective agent’s name (barring the ones you know will not be returning soon), your communicator beeps, reminding you of your next appointment—another negotiations meeting, likely a shitty sales pitch from someone who doesn’t even know the industry all that well—and
you’re tempted to just ditch it so you can catch a moment of rest.

Instead, you force yourself to thumb through your pictures, your second greatest source of strength: a happy Agent Junkrat with his face stuffed full, tea time with the Amari family, lunchtime with Winston and Agent Tracer, and then there was Agent Hanzo, fork still in mouth and eyes closed with the faintest of smiles.

A warm, raw feeling entangles itself with the dull pang that seems to be ever persistent in your stomach. It travels up into your chest and squeezes hard.

“We chefs exist for them. We die for them.”

You pocket the communicator. With a final adjustment of your jacket—much more formal and well-fitted—you set off to depart the Watchpoint, chin held high.

They return on the Orca with the hard-won mission objective in their hands. Tracer greets both of them, too cheery for either agents, and hands them lunch boxes that must have travelled for hours to get to their hands. He only feels slightly bad that he does not have the appetite to eat it immediately, squirreling it away into his belongings for later so he can work with Satya on the mission report until their landing.

Their return is marked by the rise of the sun and jetlag.

Hanzo skips breakfast and lunch entirely in favor of a briefing with Winston and Satya and then a shower and some sleep. He finds himself waking up nearing midnight, but without the jittery feeling of suffocating and fear. Instead, it’s the untimely rumbling of his stomach. It reminds him of the terrible street food he’s endured on the mission, though Satya had more to endure than he—at least he ate meat.

Strangely enough, when he bumbles his way into the kitchen, the terminals read ‘Closed’ again. Hanzo regards them carefully—it’s far too soon for them to be closed. While he is not here all the time to qualify his theory, there’s something about the timing that feels too off.

A trap, perhaps?

To test his theory, he approaches the window, ignoring the stacked boxes—likely dirty dishes from another Overwatch agent’s trip. “Chef? I wish for tea.”

There’s no answer.

The kitchen lights are dimmed, but not shut, indicating that you are likely still around. How curious. He would turn away and leave you be, but his stomach grumbles once more, announcing its demands.

“Athena.”

The response is immediate and all around him, echoing in the vast cavern of the mess hall. “How may I assist you, Agent Hanzo?”

“Is the chef available at the moment?”

She pauses as if checking. “Affirmative. Would you like me to pass on a message?”

“No, that’s fine. I would like to contact the chef myself.”
“I’m afraid I cannot provide you the chef’s information for privacy reasons.”

Hanzo narrows his eyes and repeats slowly, “Privacy reasons?”

“The chef is considered a civilian and therefore Winston had requested that communications be kept at a minimum.”

The skepticism that’s been building these past few months again grows by leaps and bounds. What is that gorilla thinking? If he didn’t want a civilian involved in the first place, then why are you even here? “That’s ridiculous.”

“My apologies. These are the rules set in place.” Again with archaic rules. “The only way would be to have the chef personally provide contact information.”

Hanzo resists the urge to roll his eyes. “Very well. Let the chef know I am here.” And hungry.

“Understood.”

The AI leaves him alone and in silence. Hanzo takes the time to lean into the sill, poking his head into the kitchen area. Since you have the audacity to make him wait, he may as well scope the area. Though, there's very little to observe. Everything is immaculate as always, gleaming.

He can hear something slide open; it’s familiar and he soon recognizes it as the Cellar door accompanied by the hurried rustling of clothes.

“Agent Hanzo.” You sound slightly breathless, though that’s quickly tempered. “Welcome back from your mission.”

“Thank you.”

“I’m glad you've returned safely. How may I help you?”

There's the obvious stiff politeness that he is sure is nothing like how you are really like, but he’s not here to endure your posturing or to make friends anyway.

“I would like to order dinner.”

“Please use the terminals t—”

“They're closed.”

Confusion colors your voice when you repeat, “Closed? The terminals are closed?”

For a moment, you disappear from the window and all Hanzo hears is silence followed by some nonsensical grumbling before your torso returns.

“I apologize, I must have shut them down when I…” You trail off, leaving him to wonder what exactly you were doing before you arrived. “Let me turn them back on.”

“Anything is fine,” the archer snaps. “I just need dinner.”

“Oh, of—of course. We have three different entrees tonight, our offerings are a seafood fri—”

“I said, ‘anything is fine’.” he grounds out. If he has to repeat himself one more time…

“...I understand. Please give me a few minutes.”
He lets out a long suffering, but silent, sigh. He knows you’re doing your job, but this is too much. You shuffle into sight a small distance into the kitchen and toward the large freezers, shoulders hunched down and looking overly defeated, like a puppy that just got scolded or beat. He suppresses a grimace, knowing it’s his doing and maybe his words were brought on by hunger rather than reason. Genji had always complained of his behavior when he hasn’t had sufficient food.

He watches you pull out everything you need, or seem to need, and spread it out on an island counter that gives him a good view of everything you’re doing. You seem just as weary as the night he went into the kitchen, but the anger is not there. Just looking at you, he gets the sense of an overwhelming exhaustion that likely cannot be solved with just a night’s rest. Maybe...just maybe he should retract his order and eat the boxes food he didn’t eat during his return home.

But then, you take a breath and exhale, slow and methodical like a musician before a crowd right before a performance or a master before a fight.

And then it begins.

Cutting board and a knife are pulled onto the surface. Your hand shoots out and there goes the click-click-click of the stove and the slam of a metal skillet. In one hand, the knife comes up, and the other feeds ingredients onto the board. Thu-ka-thu-ka-thuka-thuka-thukathukah—whatever you’re chopping becomes minced in an instant, the knife rocking back and forth with relentless precision. A loud scraping sound signals the finish to that ingredient.

Without even glancing over, your free hand shoots out and grabs the next ingredient, a poor onion which is also reduced to nothing in a matter of seconds before you put down your knife and drizzle oil into the smoking pan beside you as you turn and reach for something else.

Hanzo can’t help but stare at your technique and the efficiency in which you use and know your space, he finds he barely breathes as you continue this storm with the same striking rhythm he finds himself counting to before he left for his mission.

Most strikingly of all, however, is probably the look of laser focus on your face. There’s none of the shamed timidity or false professionalism, just pure and unadulterated you. It reminds him a little of his archery teacher, whose wrinkled face would change from harsh lines to a sort of ethereal calm and cool tranquility, unwavering even under the most intense of pressures as she made her mark.

Is this how you make all their meals? With the same conviction as the master of any other craft?

Loud crackling and hissing breaks him from his reverie and the kitchen is flooded with the thick aromatics of onion that’s topped with a sweep of salt and sugar. His stomach growls fiercely and he swallows. Patience. You give the pan a quick toss, the ingredients arching up gracefully in the air and landing without a single piece lost.

He hardly notices himself uttering, “Impressive.”

There’s a pause in your rhythm that brings his hunger rushing back, and in that moment, he thinks that all that you’ve done has been ruined, but then you respond with a voice that sounds almost hopeful. “You think so?”

Hesitantly, he replies, “It is.”

He’s seen people cook before at fancy dinners where they make their food in front of you, but
those people always glanced at the audience, gauging their interest with a narcissistic greed in their eyes that always ruined his appetite. Even worse was the clapping and the cheering for a particularly flashy and cheap trick that contributes nothing to a mediocre meal. The best of the best would never look at their customers that way, keeping to themselves and turning all their focus on quality, lost in their own world where there is nothing except themselves and the ingredients they prepared.

Hanzo can’t see your face, not with the way you turn to open a fridge door right underneath your tabletop, but he can hear some blooming pride as you speak.

“That’s very kind of you to say, Agent Hanzo. I wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for all the others, however.”

“The others?”

“Oh, yes.” You seem fairly content, now deveining shrimp with a new knife, much smaller than the one you previously had, but with the same tempo you've been sporting. “I learned everything from the other chefs here in the old days, but especially from Head Chef.”

Again with this mysterious ‘Head Chef’.

"Did you learn how to...fight from this Head Chef as well?"

Not that you were particularly good at it, not enough to call it ‘fighting’ anyway; this is just 'friendly' conversation, admittedly not unlike the manipulation techniques he was taught so many years ago, though he never would have guessed he’d use it for something so mundane (if you could call a hidden treasure ‘mundane’).

Tossing the shrimp in some combination of spices, you give a thoughtful hum. "The Head Chef forced me to learn it."

“And what for?"

The bowl of shrimp is set aside as you give the pan another shake and a quick turn of a spatula. You scrape off something from the chopping board and dump it into the pan, the smell of roasting garlic bursting forth.

You seem hesitant to answer, not that Hanzo is surprised in the least. You rinse your hands and wipe them against a towel at your hip before picking up your knife again.

“Well, you see, Head Chef Richard was actually an Olympian fencer at one point.”—chop, chop, chop—“We all used to laugh at how stereotypical that was, but it was because his father was a previous champion. Head Chef gave it up for some reason and pursued cooking. No one really knows why." There's a brief pause in your chopping before it resumed again, steady, grounding. "But he didn't forget fencing. He taught it to me, I guess, because he couldn't let go of it."

“And you fought me because of what he taught you?"

There’s a stutter to your cutting and he knows he’s slowly cornering you, but holds off on savoring victory just yet.

Your voice is surprisingly weak. “You...surprised me that night.”

“I recall you mentioned a rule; agents are not allowed in the kitchen.” He leans forward onto the sill a bit more. “Is that not why you attacked me?”
He could practically hear the gears turning in your head as you desperately try not to reveal what he already knows (and doesn’t know). It’s almost...cute to watch you struggle.

“Well, sort of…”

“Why is that, Chef?”

The chopping stops and sizzling begins, a new mixture of aromas—herbs and vegetables that he can’t name—permeating through the window. Then the shrimp are thrown in as well and the pan hisses violently, but you do not answer. No matter what you throw into the fire, the sounds won’t be enough to cover the subpar deceit you’ve set up.

Somewhere in the back of his mind, though, Junkrat’s warning of, “Y’don’t mess with the bloke that feeds ya,” rings out above his ambitions. With his food (and his stomach) at your mercy, it’s best to heed that advice now, but a professional promise from you to ‘never tamper with his meals’ only serves to soften that blow.

Maybe he can leave you alone on the Cellar’s secrets. For now.

"Was fighting a necessary skill for a chef?” he asks instead.

The change of topic is clearly welcome and the tension in your shoulders visibly fades away as you consider his question in between stirring and throwing in some colored rice.

“I don’t know. There were many chefs here who knew how to fight, though. We had some ex-cons and some really amazing people.” You laugh to yourself but the sound bounces straight into his chest, a strange feeling of fullness filling him up.

“There was sous chef Mori, he knew jiu jitsu, I think. Our rôtisseur, Fuchs, was great at chopping stuff up and boxing. She was arrested for major fraud but ended up here somehow. Oh! And patissiere Woo, she taught me a lot about sweets from different countries, but I don’t really know her fighting style. People just...fall to the ground when they attack her.”

Again, you laugh, sadder this time. “I kind of wish they were still here.”

"Where are they now?”

At that, everything quiets down and even the sizzling seems to have taken a turn for the somber. The activity is no longer rhythmic, instead, each motion sounds forced and entirely out of sync. It’s as though Hanzo has just stepped on a conversational landmine, and not for the first time, he thinks there is too much he does not know about Overwatch and the secrets that they keep guarded from him.

"They’re...around,” you say carefully.

It seems like Hanzo has a knack for stumbling upon unpleasant topics, but that only feeds his curiosity. He then asks, quietly and slowly, "Then why did the other chefs not come?”

“We wouldn’t have been able to compensate them properly.”

At the mention of compensation, Hanzo knits his eyebrows. Winston and Athena have the money to compensate each agent, but not another chef? Surely an agent (though outlawed) is more expensive than that of a single cook.

You add, “They also all have their lives and a lot of them just got it back on track. So, to come
back to Overwatch would be...well, it'd be giving that life up.”

“And you?”

Bitter laughter floats above the sound of the food getting plated, and it just sounds all sorts of wrong. It sounds of deceit and history.

“I want to be here.” There’s a tone of finality to your voice as you begin to set up his tray, signaling an end to that discussion.

There is nothing he can say to that, but still, he stews on it. It’s difficult to describe, but he may have just stumbled upon the edge of something incredibly personal.

“Here you are.”

You slide the tray in front of him and he sees the moment you catch yourself about the ring the bell, likely out of instinct. He smothers a huff into his fist. He watches your hand twitch away from the bell and move toward the lunchboxes beside him, taking them away.

On the tray is a fried rice dish with seafood and medley of vegetables, arranged carefully in a done with a sprig of parsley on top, accompanied by a thick mug of tea rather than his usual teapot set. It smells good, even better now that it’s up close. Again, his stomach rumbles, so very eager to disregard all conversation and any further thoughts of distractions, demanding that he stay here and eat rather than go through the trouble of sitting down at a table.

Hanzo puts his hands together. 「Thank you for the meal.」

With gusto, he digs in. The shrimp is succulent and splits apart in his teeth with a bounce. The grains of rice are similar, chewy. The vegetables have a crunch to them that offsets the seafood. There's even the slightest hint of spiciness accompanying the mild flavor of herbs. He's shoveling more food than he can chew into his mouth just to feel the textures and keep the taste from dissipating at the haste in which he's eating. He drowns it with occasional sips of his drink—a more subdued barley tea.

Vaguely, he's aware you’ve returned, just out of sight and watching him, but it's not the uncomfortable type of gaze that he had received all his life up until now. His throat does not close up, his appetite did not diminish; he finds himself still relaxed. It's...comfortable, like he's being watched over—protected—rather than scrutinized. He clears off his plate and leaves it to you with a, “Thank you,” and receives a gentle, “You're welcome.”

While today yielded more questions than answers, Hanzo returns to sleep—he will have more time to interrogate you, patience is key—content with a belly full of food and, rarely enough, does not wake up until the next morning.

Chapter End Notes

When the slowburn is so slow, even the writer is yelling at them to get on with it.

1. Genji saying, "Serves you right, you monster," was originally intended to be 「ざまー見ろよ、兄者」, which is about the same (except monster --> brother), but the nuance is a bit different.
2. Taiwanese pineapple cakes...I love...
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The news tells a small audience of heat-exhausted agents that today is one of the hottest days of the summer. Zarya’s face tells of someone who wants to shut the newsomnic up, but can’t seem to muster the energy to stand. It’s a disconcerting sight to behold. The heat seems to even put out McCree, who normally relishes in it. The only person who seems unaffected is Ana, who still manages to walk outside fully covered, making fools and weaklings of everyone else.

Every remaining agent was forbidden from going outside for day and Mei could not resist contacting the base, reporting her observations with rapid-fire jargon and a heat in her voice that rivals the weather. Hanzo could not really put any effort into listening, busy tending to himself with a crudely made fan.

Athena sounds apologetic when she tells a group of sweaty, irritated agents that the thermostat cannot be adjusted any further without rerouting energy from vital functions on base. Hanzo suspects all the current efforts are being rerouted to cool down Winston whom he had seen neither hair—fur—nor hide of in the past few days, busy with 'meetings’. It's unfair especially when the common areas are barely cooled and their rooms are no better than if they were to open a window (provided that the rooms had windows), and those agents who were relocated to cooler places for a mission were the momentary object of envy.

This heat doesn't quite rival Japan’s, but it is difficult to breathe, to move without wanting to shower or suddenly take a flight to the Arctic. Hana did not spare any words when pointing out the frizzy state of his hair, and he spared no mercy when pointing out her hair is artificially straightened.

(He learned two things after that: not to mention it in the future and that age has not been ridiculously kind to him in the ways he wants to believe.)

It's his first summer away from Japan, but despite the weather, it doesn’t feel like summer at all. Almost fondly, Hanzo thinks a proper summer should have watermelon. Or shaved ice. The air should be thick with the smell of grilled foods and bright with lanterns or fireworks and accompanied by windchimes or the song of cicadas. (Genji would used to try to catch as many as he could when they were younger, essentially eliminating the entire population near their estate at his peak.)

He doesn’t realize he misses all of that until you serve watermelon as a part of lunch.

They’re neat, thick pyramid shaped slices with actual seeds that betray the semi-professionally sculpted meals you make for them. He steals away into his ‘secret’ spot once he’s finished off the main course to enjoy the chilly summer treat. He takes in the harsh beat of the sun against his skin, the rare summer breeze and relative silence brought on by this thick, overbearing weather.

The only thing missing are the cicadas.

He takes his first bite with a loud 'hrmph' and regrets nothing. The cool contrast in his mouth against the heat on his skin is a delight of sensations. The salty air tossed around by the occasional breeze only adds to the experience—he briefly thinks that he should have asked for some salt, but there’s no helping it now. And the hunger —Hanzo is not shy about his eating, the bites audible
and vicious. Sweet juices trickle down his mouth and into his beard, trickling freely down his hands. It’s utterly disgusting and undignified, but there’s no graceful way to eat watermelon. Sure, they could be turned into cubes or little balls, but that just defeats the point of eating watermelon. Watermelon slices, no matter how undignified, is best. He’s glad you seem to agree.

Hanzo mindlessly spits a barrage of seeds off the ledge.

For a moment, the sun is not yellow, but white. The cry of gulls are cicadas. The sea before him is grass and the familiar landscape of Hanamura. Genji sits next to him, smaller, younger—_human_—a wide grin on his face right before he spits a line of seeds as well.

「See, brother? I’m better!」

And he hears himself saying, 「You’re too many years too early to think of besting me at anything.」

The younger Genji protests, taking another bite of his watermelon, chewing furiously through the meat of the fruit. He inhales deeply, puffing up his chest and stomach dramatically before the summer air is filled with panicked coughing, barely drowned out by the whining of cicadas and the pounding of a fist.

A ray of sun passes over his eyes and the scene is gone—the sweetness of the fruit turns his mouth numb and bitter, and he nearly throws the rind off the ledge too, only to remember Winston had long warned them against leaving evidence of their occupation behind, no matter how innocuous.

He sucks a shaky breath through his teeth instead and exhales, then wipes his mouth harshly on his arm, clutching the remains of the fruit tightly in his hand. The juice becomes tacky, sticking to him just as uncomfortable as his thoughts. The twisting in his gut threatening to squeeze out the food he’s just eaten and he clenches his teeth until it hurts.

Maybe he doesn’t miss the Japanese summer as much as he thought, after all.

Hanzo does not throw the rinds into the ocean below, barely mustering the maturity to take them back to the cafeteria to be discarded of properly. He finds himself there on reluctant legs anyway.

To his relief and surprise, he finds it relatively empty and significantly cooler than the rest of the base. Even Ana’s usual afternoon crowd is not around.

Hana’s here, her hair up in a ponytail, a tell-tale towel around her neck that indicates she’s just finished her training session for the day and deep in a heated conversation. Hanzo thinks she’s surprisingly chipper for such nasty weather, but figures she’s endured worse.

“Chef, why can’t we have shaved ice?”

“Agent D.Va, I cannot allow your health to be compromised. You just came from exercise. Ice will only cause muscle crampin—”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah.” She shoves her hands through the window, making grabby hands at you. “Shaved ice, please. Lots of condensed milk and mochi. Oh, and red bean.”

“I have no such thi—”

“Liar.”
The watermelon remains slip straight out of his hands and into the garbage disposal. He’s
dumbstruck by the speed at which Hana calls you out, and by the looks of it—hands frozen in
midair—so are you.

She begins to tick off her fingers. “You have ice. You have a mandolin”—she ignores your cries of
“It’s not the same!”—“you use condensed milk for Mei’s milk coffee sometimes and you just
started to make it for Zarya, and you have rice flour for Hanzo’s red bean cakes, so mochi and red
bean.”

The MEKA warhero gives you the slyest of grins and crosses her arms, leaning deep into the
window. “So. Shaved ice?”

You fiddle with your sleeve cuffs for a moment, debating. Instead of answering, however, you
deflect with, “How do you know all this?”

“McCree told me,” she says innocently and far too easily.

“No, He what?”

Hanzo almost laughs despite himself. No hesitation with throwing McCree under the proverbial
bus. But then, the thought of McCree knowing all of this expungs any and all mirth from his
being, the implications of it all casting a dark cloud over him.

“Chef. I require a wet towel,” Hanzo says suddenly from behind the young woman.

Naked relief floods your voice as you answer, “Oh, Agent Hanzo. Of course. Right away.”

You depart the window sill in a hurry, leaving both himself and Hana, who gives him an
appraising look that is not unlike Ana’s.

“You save,” she mutters sarcastically, “I’m sure the chef will now love to show you right into the
Cellar.”

He ignores the obvious bait, leaning down momentarily to gauge your distance. He can hear the
water running toward the side of the dish washing station; you won't be hearing their conversation
should the MEKA operator choose to continue this conversation.

Luckily, she waits in silence, instead just choosing to look at him expectantly as though waiting for
him to break down and spill out all his deepest, darkest secrets. He almost scoffs. That will not be
today and it most certainly will not be to her. (Hanzo has seen Hana be professional—reporting
back to a sudden call from some higher power from the army, the image sternly reminding
everyone that this woman is not a fool or a child and she is not unaffected or unawares of the
gravity of her situation—whatever the the totality of that may be—but even that will not make the
impossible happen.)

You return shortly, presenting a neatly folded towel. “Here you are, Agent Hanzo.”

“Thank you.” He takes it, a little pleasantly surprised to find it warm rather than ice cold. He wipes
his sticky hands and face with it, the heat cools quickly against his skin, the faintest hint of a sigh
escaping. Much better.

“Hey, Chef. Isn't hot in there?”

That shouldn't have surprised Hanzo as much as it did and for once, he realizes that he's never once
seen you wearing anything other than your uniform—standard Overwatch-issued chef’s jacket with
a high collar and sleeves with thick cuffs around your wrists.

Even if there was air conditioning inside the kitchen, the fact that you work with fire constantly probably nullifies any relief you may get.

“A little,” you confess, clearly reluctant. “I’m used to it. And”—you chuckle a bit, like it's an inside joke—“don't tell anyone, but I go into the walk-in to cool off sometimes.”

Sometimes Hanzo forgets how honest and earnest normal people can be. While he's used to the posturing, the facades, the measuring of people, this is different, refreshing, even. He hides the beginnings of a smile into the towel.

“Ooo, you’re so lucky. Can we come in at least?”

“No. Non-kitchen—”

“Stingy.”

“I cannot allow non-kitchen personnel to—”

“You let him in, didn’t you?” She jabs a thumb at Hanzo, and a chill spills into his stomach. How did she hear about that? Did you tell her?

“That was...not intentional,” you say slowly, carefully.

Hana shoots him a glance with an eyebrow raised, asking him silently whether you were serious. Then she has the audacity to smirk at him—she knows just like every other person in this base, but even she would not be so obtuse as to let it slip. He returns it with a frown and a warning behind it: do not say anything.

“Oh?” The MEKA driver’s voice sounds downright conspiratorial as she turns back to you. “Is that right? Hm.”

Hanzo does not like the look on her face or the tone of her voice—it reminds him too vividly of his brother right before he’s about to commit some heinous act against the family that Hanzo would inevitably have to clean up.

“Chef~” Her voice turns singsong and you shrink away a mere half-step. Hanzo thinks it’s because you’re trying to shield yourself; you may be obstinate against impromptu requests, but you might not be so strong against Hana. “Come on, it’s hot and we can’t go outside. Please?”

“No, Agent D.Va, I cannot allow tha—”

“If you won’t let us into the kitchen, then give us the shaved ice! It’s just ice, Chef. Don’t be so stingy. We’re melting out here and you have...a walk-in? Chef! Don’t you love us?”

You begin to stammer messy half-assurances and Hanzo and D.Va both know that she’s won. Hanzo huffs through his nose. If it’s this easy to fluster you and convince you to do something, then he has questions about why Winston chose you to be here, to defend the kitchen, to serve them when you’re such a pushover. (Though he remembers the multiple attempts to get Ana’s coveted cookies without success and wonders if it’s not because it’s Hana that you seem more accommodating or if it’s because you’re wary of him.)

Hanzo resists the urge to sigh. “If the chef does not want to, there is little point to force the matter.”
“Wow,” she says, utterly sarcastic. “Way to say that after you tried to break into the Cellar.”

“Hana!”—“Agent Hanzo!?”

“Oop-sies,” she says, already slinking away without a hint of apology. “I still want my shaved ice, Chef!” The young woman tactically retreats, leaving Hanzo to deal with the bombshell she so casually dropped.

He needs to give chase and probably put her training to the test for that, but his legs betray him, staying firmly planted to the ground, and all he can feel is bone-deep exhaustion that he wishes he can blame on the heat.

Almost instinctively, he steels himself for the inevitable loss, the towel wringing dry in his grip: his food will no longer be safe to eat despite your thin reassurances; the one sanctuary he thought he had found in this base that was free from judgment and the politics of his past is also decimated; he will have to start spending the meager salary Overwatch provides (or his own) and suffer not knowing if the restaurant he choose will be acceptable—it truly shouldn’t be so much of an issue considering just what he managed to make himself eat during his years on the run, but he may have unknowingly, unwittingly become conditioned by your cooking, by your devotion, by the quality he never thought he would ever come close to allowing himself to have ever again.

The broiling sorrow nearly bowls him over with its force, sapping him further of strength. Weak. He’s become weak. Luxuries like food should never have been afforded to him, and now you know and there’s little doubt in his mind that you wouldn’t retaliate with something more devastating than your shabby fencing skills.

Then you laugh, breathless and disbelieving, shattering him from his silence.

“She is really too…” You stop yourself, breaking off with another laugh. “It’s all right, Agent Hanzo. I already know. Someone else told me.”

Hanzo cannot help closing his eyes for a moment and tipping his head back, willing himself to not immediately leave and strangle someone. He knew the base was conspiring against him, he knew McCree could not keep his flapping mouth shut.

“McCree had insisted I try.” Since that man’s name is already tarnished by someone else, there’s no point in trying to mask his source anymore.

“Oh? So it was Jesse? That rascal.” Your voice sounds fond, and he does not miss how you refer to the cowboy by his first name and only that, cannot miss how you don't seem to bear a hint of anger at McCree when you easily directed your rage at him. He tries his best to ignore the unfounded and uncomfortable twist in his stomach.

“When Jesse used to do this, he was one of the few people to do it alone.”

You rest your hands a little more on the sill and he glances down. The cuff of your sleeves lie limp against your wrists, damp.

“I guess he's just done it so much that I'm not surprised anymore.” You chuckle to yourself. “His attempts were pretty bad, you know. Even back in the day, he was big—oh, you know.” You gesture exaggerated measurements in the air. “Big, tall, loud. No one could miss him. Thought he could blow off the door once. That almost screwed up the line for a day. Head Chef was so angry he fed him meatloaf for a week.

“People who did it in a team usually were more successful. Some of them broke the mechanism;
we had to load in food from the front for about a week while those guys were reprimanded and getting the door replaced. Others tried to go in from above, but that lead nowhere. There may have been a few who were smarter and tried the other side, but there was no shortage of people trying then. Even I had to fend off a few people—I was better back then, I think.”

He bites the inside of his lip, but can’t suppress the quirk of his lips. You? Better at fending off agents whose lives were dedicated to espionage and covert operations? Impossible.

“I’m a little shorthanded and busy because of it, but I welcome the challenge.” You laugh again. “Though, I’m not sure I’m a match against a ninja. I remember when Agen—ah, no.” You clear your throat and he has a feeling he knows what you’re about to say, but lets it go. He doesn’t want to tread that path either. “Well, I ask that you do not do it that often. I do have a job to do and customers to feed, so I ask you please respect that.”

In spite of himself and the situation, he finds himself smiling just a bit. “We shall see.”

To everyone’s joy, you do call them to the cafeteria for shaved ice a couple of hours before dinner. It turns out there was a machine from your cache of unused kitchen equipment. For people who have never had any, it was an interesting and welcome experience. For people like Hana, this was sweet, sweet victory.

You knew this was bad—indulging agents in their requests when does little to improve their health—but you reasoned against all reason that this was an exception, this was fine, and this was not getting in the way of anything even as your communicator rung incessantly. It makes everyone happy and a chef’s greatest joy is the happiness of their customers. What was it your mentor used to say?

“*Love them with all our being. We live for them. We die for them.*”

By the time the last of the agents got their little bowl of shaved ice, it was already time to prep for dinner service. You have to swallow back the rising burn and pressure in your stomach as you shove an ice cube into your mouth—it won’t work, you’ll need medicine to handle this, but it’s just so troublesome—and get to responding to your missed messages and calls as you changed out of your sweat drenched chef’s jacket.

Dinner rolls around and it’s then Hanzo realizes that the game has now changed when he receives his tray. He can tell you’re watching him carefully, mischievously despite your face being hidden by the wall. That single piece of pepper—harmless, really—sits at the top of his dish where he could easily pick it out and throw it away if it truly bothers him.

But Hanzo Shimada is no coward.

He picks up his chopsticks right at the service window and takes great pleasure at the stuttering gasp you make when he snaps up the sliver and eats it.

“Thank you for the meal,” he says haughtily before taking his tray and walking away.

His only regret is that he could not look you in the eyes as he did so.

Hanzo holes himself into his room, ignoring the damp humidity that clings to him incessantly even after a shower, his belly full enough to put him to an easy lull. However, after tonight’s slight against him, it means that it’s time for him to take it a little more seriously. He doesn’t truly hate
the pepper as much as he thought—lightly grilled and seasoned, less bitter than he expected, but it’s the intent behind it that counted. You will regret your transgressions and challenging Hanzo Shimada to a fight.

“Athena. I need the floorplans of this Watchpoint,” he says, sitting in the single chair in his room and picking up his makeshift fan and cooling himself with it.

The AI is silent and Hanzo waits with bated breath for answer. Will she provide them or is she alerting someone that he’s trying to look into something that he may not be authorized for?

“One moment, please.”

Hanzo spends the first few minutes in suspense, almost ready to tell Athena off for wasting his time when his communicator beeps with the arrival of a file. It’s a large file, one that takes a little too long to open and takes up a ridiculous amount of space when it does.

However, what results is a pleasing document of neat lines and even neater notes. (Some part of him says that if he did not take the path of an assassin and lived a normal life, he may have become an architect.) There are areas he recognizes and areas he knows are no longer there, having either been damaged in some manner unknown to him or long replaced by something newer. He doesn’t linger on them, however, quickly seeking out his prize.

Hanzo zooms in on the kitchen area and can almost recall every detail of the area from the plan. If he thinks about it hard enough, he can probably even map out the exact path he took in the little scuffle. To his amusement, nothing’s changed, it seems. Not the counters, not the measurements, nothing seems out of place except...

Hanzo scrolls through several more files, searching and finding nothing. He leans back in his chair with a steady hand over his eyes.

“Athena. Is this all? Is there a floorplan of anything beneath or beyond the kitchen area?”

“Unfortunately, that data is unavailable.”

“What do you mean...’unavailable’? Does it not exist or…” His eyes narrow. “Am I not authorized to see it?”

She pauses. “I cannot answer that, Agent Hanzo.”

Hanzo raises an eyebrow, a slow smirk curling on his lips. Is that the game they're playing? “And who has the authority to see this information?”

Athena sounds just a touch amused as she answers, likely having caught onto his line of thought, “Unfortunately, you do not have the authority to know that either.”

“How can I gain such clearance?”

“The information is distributed on an as-needed basis. Currently, Agent Hanzo, your duties do not require access to this knowledge.”

Maybe a different tactic then. He supposes finding out who can see such information can come later.

“What can you tell me about the Cellar?”
If a voice could do the equivalent of an eyebrow raise, he's sure that Athena would be doing it. “Unfortunately, I do not have access to any information regarding the Cellar.”

“But you do not deny its existence.”

“...no, I cannot.” The relenting tone in her voice makes his stomach clench with some thrill. “However, I cannot condone spaces that I am unaware of. The safety of all agents and staff within the Gibraltar Watchpoint are my prerogative and data of this nature should be centrally managed.”

Hanzo’s mouth drops open slightly, the implications of Athena’s plea only semi-clear.

Is it possible that not even Athena herself has access to the floor plans then?

“Thank you, Athena,” Hanzo says slowly, trying to piece together the hints he’s been given, “you’ve been very helpful.”

“I am glad to be of assistance.”

Her voice fades, leaving Hanzo in silence to ponder and scheme.

The plans do not hint at a Cellar. Does it mean it was built after these plans were created?

He leans deeper into the chair, a little bit of a smile playing on his face. It should be laughable, the amount of thought and effort he’s putting into this operation. He tells himself it’s all in good fun, it’s a harmless brain-teaser where lives are not in danger and he stands to have a little something to gain from this. There is no reason to stop yet.

He thinks back.

You seem to come out of that door frequently. The boxes you brought seemed to hold produce and ingredients for an empty kitchen. When Athena summoned you, he heard the Cellar door open before you arrived even though you had nothing.

So it is a storage space, then? For more than just alcohol, it seems.

“...and there have always been reports of people filching food ...”

Stolen food. Perhaps that’s why the Cellar exists? To defend it? Then what is the point of having a kitchen?

Though, it’s implied that the other chefs were far more capable than you at defending it. Why need the Cellar at all? Is it because the previous Head Chef knew one day it would end up like this, with a single lone chef to defend the treasure that is the food?

“I kind of wish they were here.”

If so, then why aren’t they here? You had mentioned that they were around, but you are here alone, catering to a base of criminals and defectors. Hanzo supposes they cannot be blamed. No innocent civilian would want to be embroiled into the political mess that is Overwatch and risk their lives just to cook. Though, you did mention an ex-convict.

Hanzo scoffs. Even he knows that a person’s past cannot dictate their future.

“We wouldn’t have been able to compensate them properly.”

Surely Winston could afford hire at least a single bot to guard the door or just one more chef off
the streets (even if air conditioning wasn’t affordable). Is it because of the dangers of the job that the compensation is not comparable? But what dangers could you possibly be in? You do not risk your life like the agents do. You do not travel far. You do not put yourself out there to be recognized. You have no bounty on your head. You’re in a base staffed by at least two capable agents at all times. You should have very little to fear other than boredom.

Hanzo furrows his brows, musing idly on the cost it would require to get a civilian to agree to such a dangerous job when strangeness of those words—‘we’—strikes him, forcing him to sit straight up.

What would a mere chef know about Overwatch’s finances?

“We lost contact with two more agents heading here,” Winston says solemnly. “I suspect more and more Talon agents are converging on Gibraltar.”

“They probably never left,” Soldier: 76 growls, tightening his fist. “Just lying low, waiting for us to split ourselves up and take us down one by one.”

Winston sighs, a wisp of frosty breath fogging his glasses momentarily. “I believe it may only be a matter of time until they decide to rally their forces for a targeted attack. Should we go in for a preemptive attack or wait?”

The former Strike Commander remains silent.

Athena’s icon lights up the monitor. “May I interrupt?”

Winston waves. “Go ahead, Athena.”

“Chef has forwarded an urgent message. Would you like to view it now?”

The two narrow their eyes at the AI’s screen. Urgent? From the chef? The two briefly exchange a glance with each other.

“Yes, please.”

It takes a few moments for the message to appear, too long to have been simply decrypting itself, but even so, it’s ridiculously short.

'SENDER: OFFICE OF WILL B. PETRAS
RCPT: CŒUR D’ARTICHAUT
AMT: 30,000,000 CREDITS
ACH: XXXXXXXXX0987
RCV: XXXXXXXXX6750
BIC: UNCUUSNY024

MSG: TO YOUR CLIENTS, MY SUPPORT'

An air of sickening silence strangles the two, and Soldier: 76 could feel the words rocking him to his core. He reads it over and over, the implication of the messages turning over new waves of anxiety in his gut.
Winston turns his head to Soldier, looking pallid. “Is...is this the Petras?”

“Affirmative,” Athena answers instead, pulling up an image of the man who Soldier: 76 recognized as the reason for Overwatch’s persecution. It stares impassively into the room, that heavy-set scowl is too familiar to forget. “The chef would like to know how to proceed with this.”

Winston turns to the older man, voice quiet as though the image would hear them. “Do you think...he knows? By all accounts, he should be the last person to have found out—”

“I can't put it past him. That man has eyes and ears in places most people can’t touch.” Soldier crosses his arms, breathing out heavily through his nose. “‘Clients,’ huh?” He laughs derisively to himself. “Is that what they’re calling it now?”

“I thought...I had believed he hated Overwatch. Athena, are you sure this is meant for us?”

“Affirmative.”

“But why...?”

Soldier: 76 rubs his forehead, a deep sigh rumbling in his chest. There can only be two reasons. One, as a trap, and the other—

“Sometimes, what a person represents and what they personally stand for don’t fit.”

He’s seen it in his time: people who claim one thing for the vote or the money, but secretly do the opposite because that’s what they truly believe in. But Petras was another story. He was so sure, so certain, that Petras truly believed in the drivel he spewed about Overwatch: it was becoming too powerful, too autonomous, that Overwatch is not necessary in times of peace. History has shown what happens to organizations created for war; they either get dismantled or live long enough to take over the country.

Perhaps Petras believed it at one point and is now of a different mind. Or maybe he, too, was forced to play the role designated to him. If he was, he had played it well.

With another rumbling sigh, Soldier straightens up. “This is getting out of hand. We need to pull out of this before this blows up and takes us all with it.”

Winston gasps. “You can’t be suggesting to cut ties and leave the chef to deal with it, are you, sir?”

He shakes his head. “No.” He knows firsthand how that feels. “But this place is no longer safe. Chef is no longer safe. This has gone too far. We must end it. Now.”

“But without Chef’s help, we would’ve never been able to keep the current Overwatch running. We can't just—”

“This is for everyone’s protection.”

Winston was always a bleeding heart who cared more about the people than the mission. He made for a great comrade, but (in his opinion) made for a terrible leader. Leaders need to make difficult decisions all the time and often in opposing interest of the very people it will affect. Winston just doesn’t have the heart to do such a thing, and it’s a miracle that Overwatch has been operating for as long as it did under his instruction.

This only solidifies his concerns that recalling Overwatch was very much a mistake and there’s no telling how many people or lives it may take with it this time. Soldier: 76 knew what he was
getting himself into when he begrudgingly answered, but not you. You are just here out of a foolish obligation that should’ve—everything should have—died with the old Overwatch. Continuing this any further can lead to the demise of an otherwise bright future where you could continue doing good without them. Time and again, your presence and involvement has been the point of several heated discussions between himself, Winston, and Ana. Nothing good happens when civilians get involved. While you seemed determined to make a place for yourself here—and doing a damn good job of it, winning everyone over by appealing to the most basic of human desires—he wanted you gone.

“Isn’t it safer here? I mean, just last week we received reports of two more former agents—”

“And they’re only targeting agents. Chefs are not an considered agents and not considered relevant. Before that happens, we have to end this because Chef as hell isn’t going to.”

Talon is dirty, but they should not be so dirty as to go after people who were not directly involved in the missions or other had limited information. Or so he hoped—it was a foolish hope, he knows. (He has never once forgotten Amélie, never once forgotten the promise he made to Gerard’s grave, never once forgot the arguments he had with Gabriel after what happened with Ana and Widowmaker.) Soldier: 76 can reluctantly imagine why they would go after you; you’d make a halfway decent hostage—helpless (compared to the current agents), well-liked, well-connected, and a vital part of Overwatch’s current survival. Your existence, no matter how well protected, cannot be ignored.

He looks to Petra’s impassive image and makes up his mind.

With stern determination, he says, “Athena. Call Chef up here. We have to talk.”

Winston looks lost for a moment, mouth agape and eyes searching the air for an answer as Athena answers, “One momen—”

“No.” Winston raises himself up to his full height, face set in steely determination. “I will not allow you to jeopardize our relationship with the chef like this. Athena, cancel the call.”

His voice drops to a growl when he asks, “What do you think you’re doing?”

“We will regroup and attempt to make contact with Petras and determine his intentions. If it goes well, it will be a huge leap in re-establishing the legitimacy of Overwatch. We will use this to our advantage and bring Overwatch back from the brink.”

Soldier: 76 sneers, a flare of annoyance offsetting the chill of the room, the naivety of Winston’s words sparking nostalgic bitterness from a younger Jack Morrison who had no direction or help.

“You’re making a mistake. We need to stop this operation. Now.”

“Unfortunately, Soldier, I do not recall you volunteering to be the leader.”

Those words lodge a stone in his jaw, preventing him from retaliating. They both stare each other down for a moment before Soldier spits, “Think you can do my job, can you?”

Winston frowns. “Someone has to.”

Chapter End Notes
Thank you for your patience, this chapter took a lot longer than I expected. I'm hoping things ramp up after this month—both in writing and in the story. Again, thanks for reading and still supporting me.

I almost forgot how SWIFT messages looked like and then decided it wasn't such a big deal since all of them usually have numbers as field names like 32A and 33B. I agonized over it for an unnecessarily long time.
Chapter 11

Hanzo is drunk—ridiculously so even by his own admittedly compromised standards.

Rain water soaks his clothes down to the very fibers and they cling to him like an ill-fitted second skin. The pounding in his head is only muted by the chill and the desperate writhing in his skin which bids him to get up, get up, get up, but that is hindered by the heaviness in his limbs. It's a good thing he cannot move—the sloshing in his stomach is relentless and revolt if he were to do so much as breathe too hard.

He closes his swollen eyes.

Where had he—where had it all gone wrong?

The past few weeks had been going relatively well. He had finally, finally grasped something resembling normalcy (if avoiding Genji and gorging himself was considered 'normal').

A shuddery breath leaves him slowly in a plume of mist that's pierced by the still-falling rain. It's not coming down as hard as before, luckily: relentless sheets that threatened to wash away the summer and his foolish self—too busy chasing after the blinding warmth of alcohol to care—off this rooftop and straight off the cliff and into the raging sea below. Now, it's nothing more than light pitter-patters against his face, gentle reminding him not to succumbed to the siren's call of a dark oblivion, and willed him to face reality.

Yes. Reality.

He had involved himself too much, ran away too much, dallied too much, so when reality caught up to him, he found himself cornered and woefully unequipped to handle it all. Even with all he's learnt in life, he found himself lacking in things such as reconciliation and courage—courage; when half his life could be summarized in daring acts that would make most cower just upon hearing of them.

He became too caught up in a pace that he thought he was in control of.

The beginning of summer's end was marked by Mei's timely return, and with her, souvenirs. Tiny, wrapped pieces of jerky was well-received by everyone and devoured in an instant. (It was worth noting that you had seemed particularly upset about it all despite being offered your own package, making short work of small talk, and their portions just a fraction smaller—Ana laughed it off quickly, claiming you to be 'cute' and pouting about everyone ruining their appetites.) There were sweets (white rabbit candies, gummies, and other unfamiliar items that were all delicious), imported teas, snacks, and lost daring of all, copious amounts of alcohol that, if Mei had been flying a commercial flight instead of 'Air Orca', would never had been allowed aboard. Just that alone removes the bits of disappointment at the lack of pineapple cakes that he didn't ask for.

Even better, Winston had begun to dole out missions. Though it was not yet Hanzo's turn, the anticipation keeps his spirits up. In the meantime, Hanzo was able to convince an eager Winston to give him access to detailed plans of the entire base and surrounding area under the guise of fortifying the base's defenses. (Apparently Fareeha was on charge of doing a risk assessment of the base and upgrading the security systems, but did not yet have the chance to complete it.)
The maps he received are incredibly dense, both in size and information, and he has to chunk it out in more manageable sections to study. He learns of the surrounding areas first—they were the first files and he is in no particular rush, the kitchen nor the treasure was going anywhere—such as the Moorish Castle and the Siege Tunnels of Gibraltar, both which have been partially restored and reconstructed for the Watchpoint's use once upon a time. The maps become his nighttime study and bedtime stories, but they don't keep him asleep for long; they are nothing against the insistent tittering in his veins that jolts him awake at night.

Originally, Hanzo avoided going to the kitchen in the middle of these spells as frequently as he used to, but there is only so much he can bear alone without sufficient distraction, and the kitchen was as good as any where he’s not left alone to this thoughts. So, one night, he caves.

It’s difficult to feel bad about it, too, when the kitchen lights are still on and you greet him with the same sort of welcome you would during any other time of the day, and tell him to draw up a stool to sit at the long, empty service window. He does so and sits, folding his hands at the counter, and then he’s reminded of Japan in that way: people who stayed alone at the bar-style tables of izakayas and ramen shops and twenty-four hour fast food chains, refusing to go home to their families after a vicious night of drinking just to return to work in a few scant hours. He supposed he’s no different from them now.

You ask no questions other than the usual: “What would you like, Agent Hanzo?” for which he is grateful for.

“All right.”

If he sounded weaker than usual, you didn’t say anything, and for once, you don’t tell him to enter his order into the terminal. Instead, you turn around and get straight to work, letting the steady sounds of your bustle speak for you. The stove clicks, porcelain clinks, water falls, and the consistent whisking and chopping give him something to focus on despite having nothing to do but wait. Each sound is a chant, a verse of a spell that sinks into his skin, skittering up his skull, filling in the crevices and forcing out something else darker bit by bit.

It’s not until you slide him his tea and snack that he realizes that the feelings that chased him away from his bed did not follow him here, or if it did, they did not remain for long. Your quiet presence on the other side of the counter remains casually vigilant, as if daring the sludge to return.

It’s strange. He never really liked having anyone observe his eating habits—it made him far too human, too vulnerable—but he found he didn’t particularly mind. Maybe he’s even a little grateful—not that he would ever voice it—that you’re willing to sacrifice your sleep for him and tend to his childish nightmares without so much as a complaint. He should probably feel guilty, but it’s hard to when you’re so accommodating. And if you ever feel angry, he’ll at least know, that the most mean-spirited thing you’ll do is merely la a slice of pepper in his food. He has nothing to fear.

Though, he has to constantly remind himself that even a mouse will bite a cat when cornered, and not to make light of you or take complete advantage of your hospitality.

But even so, he conveniently forgets, ignoring the possibility of that danger and stretching out this sense of comfort for as long as you would give it. More often than not, after that, he’s up before dawn breaks, sneaking in a quiet, secret moment before the base comes to life.

Luckily, you don’t seem to mind at all and it’s hard to feel guilty when you greet him just as brightly as you would any other time of the day, adjusting to his company with a prepared pot of tea and a small snack of your choice. Eventually, you even share jovial stories of the ‘good, old days’ among the sounds of your knife or stirring. The sounds were steady in their rhythm to the
point of hypnotic, sending shivers up his spine and sinking into parts of him that he didn’t know existed, chasing away any lingering doubts. It’s not unpleasant; he enjoyed it—it was relaxing in ways that he didn’t think possible.

In return, he shares the less gruesome stories of his time on the run. There were undoubtedly parts that he could not share in polite company, and the amount of censoring he has to do puts into sharp perspective that he hasn’t been a particularly ‘good’ person—not that he’s ever claimed such a thing. But the number of ‘safe’ stories he could share with you is embarrassingly small.

Despite all that, he still returns, slowly learning more and more about all that you do.

It should frighten him to say that it’s become a habit, and the excuse that it’s for the treasure feels like a feeble afterthought.

Though, it’s hard to worry of those things when you ask him, “Would you like another serving of bread pudding?”

Immediately, he replies, “Please.”

His empty plate is immediately cleared off the counter and replaced with another bubbling piece of indulgence that he does not hesitate digging into even as you’re saying, “Be careful, it’s hot.”

As always, it’s mouth-wateringly soft, not quite as hot as you proclaim it to be, but still enough to make everything else feel cool by comparison, filling his belly with a comforting weight. There’s no raisins in it this time, no added textures to the bread pieces that have now melded into one. Cinnamon permeates his senses and the rich, silken taste of eggs wrap everything up into a neat package. The sweetness almost makes his toes curl and the corner of his mouth lift.

“How’s the sweetness?”

“A little too much.”

“Understood, thank you.”

Amidst his eating, Hanzo almost misses you scribbling these notes down in a notepad before it’s shoved away into the pocket of your apron.

“You keep notes?”

“Yes, there are times I must adjust recipes or remember things for later, so I keep a notepad around.”

“How old-fashioned.” Though, he cannot say that he does not do the same.

You shrug, unperturbed. “Pen and paper is preferable in the kitchen. Too much technology tends to complicate things.”

“You keep notes?”

“Is that so?”

You hum, a little inquisitive and you turn just slightly to give him a better view of the kitchen, gesturing vaguely inside. “Head Chef used to think that having complicated machinery in the kitchen makes your skill dull and takes away that...human element. Though, ‘human’ is kind of...
subjective. But even now, we don’t have very fancy equipment.”

The archer understands the concept well. Despite Japan’s technological advancements, the residents of Shimada castle insisted on doing things the ‘old fashioned way’. Even his father was of the same mind: reliance on technology undermines one’s foundations. Yes, one could use guns or poisons to kill or have GPS track a person’s coordinates, but when you don’t have access to such conveniences, you have no choice but to rely on your own skill and knowledge—the basics.

He just didn’t think it also bled into the realm of cooking.

Bitterly amused, he thinks that if your Head Chef ever met his father, they’d probably get along. Though, he can’t remember his father partaking in many Western foods.

“So your Head Chef valued skill then.”

Haltingly, you say, “Well, yes, but…” He looks up when he hears you huff, his curiosity is immediately piqued. “Head Chef always went on and on about what makes good food.” You tick off each on a finger. “Good ingredients, good skill, and…lots of love.”

He almost balks.

Love?

As if sensing his skepticism, you wave a hand around. “I know, I didn’t believe him at first. But over time, I think I get it.” Your voice turns soft, twisting his stomach in an agonizingly sweet and painful way. “And I think I have to agree.”

He raises his cup to his lips to hide his sneer, and douses that bitterness with a large gulp of tea. 「What nonsense.」

But he was no chef. What could he ever know of what ‘love’ was in cooking? What does he even know of the concept itself?

Was it a tool? A feeling? Something lost and buried by the sands of time?

Unwittingly, he searches for an answer inside himself, but comes up empty. The word just does not lend itself to any experiences he can remember, none which he can attribute to it.

Slowly, he lowers his cup and stares down aimlessly at the sill.

What is ‘love’?

What meaning, what experiences can be attached to such a vague and general word?

The experiences he could potentially attach to such a word fall quite short. For Hanzo, the word is inadequate and far too simple. How could a single word ever express the varying weights of the different types out there? Loving a food is different from loving a person, and similarly, loving a parent is different from loving a lover; the severity of their meaning is so far apart, and yet, they’re still expressed with the same word.

English is a far too strange and distant language.

So what sort of love do you put in your cooking?

What sort of ‘love’ has he consumed?
And the twisting in his stomach becomes larger, threatening to consume him instead, in a feeling that he cannot name. It is not dark, but it has the potential to be more terrifying than those that haunt his dreams. It makes his skin feel too tight and releases a jitter in his veins not unlike the moments before he steadies himself to fire an arrow. That tension almost makes him want to leave.

“Is that the secret of the Cellar?” he asks sarcastically.

“Oh, that again?”

You lean against your side of the sill, arms crossed, but not angry. Contemplative, maybe.

The relief is instantaneous, flushing the tightness right out of him, when you take to the change of subject easily. That relief nearly overshadows the fact that he may have just gotten you to speak about something forbidden.

“Love...is not something that you can just put in a jar and leave it down in the Cellar. So, no, that’s not it. But, I guess you can say that it has something to do with it. Maybe?”

“Maybe?”

“...what do you think the the treasure is, Agent Hanzo?”

He tries to call the exact words that McCree gave him. “It is something that sustains the Watchpoint.”

He watches your reactions carefully—a thoughtful raise of your hand to your chin, a slight tension in your posture that borders between leaping at some truth and holding back to feign ignorance.

“What do you think can sustain this place, then?”

A question for an answer, is it? Fine, he’ll play this game—if only to get away from the uncomfortable and unfamiliar discussion of ‘love’.

There is a million different answers to your question. Alcohol, for one—it’s the answer that McCree gave. Money, is the next obvious one. Considering that you have hinted at the fact that you are more involved in Overwatch’s finances than strictly necessary—really, how do you know if the Watchpoint is capable of hiring another chef or not—it is likely that there is a vault beneath the kitchen, the last place anyone would look (other than the unused bathrooms scattered around the base that, despite the cleaning bots best efforts, look like they were imported straight from a horror game). Then there’s equipment, power generators, bots, and a number of other things.

However, the question sparks a memory. This very question has been posed to him long ago in his youth, confronted with the reality of being the clan’s scion and eventually, master. Replace ‘Watchpoint’ with ‘clan’ and his answer is simple.

“Its people.”

You falter, hand from your chin dropping as you consider his answer. A jolt of excitement makes him straighten in his chair. Is he correct?

“That’s a...very good answer,” you say slowly. The excitement in his gut quickly wanes at the tone of your voice. It sounds as though you’re not quite sure yourself.

“But is it correct?”
You seem to meander between thoughts. Quietly, you confess, “I don’t really know anymore.”

“What do you mean?”

Your arms come down and fold neatly on the counter between you both. If he lean forward just a bit, he could grab hold of them and not let go until you give up the answer. But he watches and waits for your answer.

“You see, Agent Hanzo, I am very used to the Cellar. I’m sure some of it is very valuable, but to be very honest, I’m not...very sure which is the true ‘treasure’. I know what I consider to be a treasure, but I don’t exactly know what the Head Chef meant.”

Slack-jawed, he stares.

If you are lying, then you’re doing a very good job.

Very slowly, he asks, “So you chefs risk your lives to protect something that you don’t even know of?”

“No!” Your hands immediately balls into fists against the counter. “No, that’s not the case. There is—” You choke on the words and then Hanzo glimpsed it with an out-of-place glee: victory. So you do know.

He leans in deeper into the window, and you step back. He can barely glimpse your face, but tactics like this is most effective when you’re level with the other person, but he’ll have to make do. He needs a bigger push, big enough to make you spill. You’re almost there, riled up, and likely to spill.

“Chef.” It’s in his grasp. “I understand this item is of utmost importance to you.” It’s so close. “And it would be wiser to have all the agents protect it.” If he can just break you—“But without knowing what it is, it could be destroyed in passing. It would be in your best interest to...”

What is he doing?

“...to continue doing as you have.”

The relief from you is palpable as he draws back, slow and controlled. His heart is hammering in his chest, turning his nerves numb. The tantalizing answer was so close and all he had to do was just...

He forces himself to take a sip of his tea, wincing at the cool temperature.

“Chef, more tea.”

“Yes, of course.”

The teapot and teacup is cleared, and he watches you waltzing around the kitchen to fulfill his order. Folding his hands in front of his face, he wonders if he had just let something precious slip out of his grasp, if he had failed to make the mark, if he’ll ever get a second chance.

Though, when he finds himself with another serving of tea and another snack, he finds it hard to regret the decision too much. He’ll get to the answer soon, there’s no rush.

And he didn’t rush.

While he’s tempted to rub this into McCree’s face, he has to keep this quiet for now—if the
gunslinger knew that you had begun to loosen up, he might dive in and attempt something himself, ruining his plans. No, Hanzo keeps these conversations close to him and your time even closer, lingering just up until the time the sky begins to lighten and the hints of dawn splashes into the cafeteria.

The conversations following do not encroach upon the treasure, but they do touch upon something more personal, giving him a better view of the person behind the dividing wall.

“And because of Patissier Woo, I don’t like handling chocolates. She’ll make you eat the chocolate if you mess it up, which sounds great, but when you have tons of it, it’s disgusting.”

“If it was such a waste, why did she not eat it herself?”

“She was an omnic.”

He nearly chokes on his tea. So there were omnics in the kitchen. Just as he had thought in the beginning.

Insensitive as it may be, he asks, “How did she make anything if she could not eat?”

“She took precise measurements and always took notes. She was one of the people who taught me about looking at people’s dishes to find out their likes and dislikes. Actually, a lot of the other chefs had that habit, too. We even compiled a database with everyone’s preferences.”

“Oh? Is it still being used now?”

“Of course!” You sound awfully proud. “It contains years of data from the Strike Commander down to the gardeners with allergies and everything. It’s really useful.”

“Is this data accessible by everyone?”

You take a moment to think. “It shouldn’t. It’s kept here, and I don’t think even Athena has access to it.”

“Ah, is that so? How reassuring.”

Occasionally, among the stories, you dole out gems like this and it makes piecing the puzzle together all the more satisfying.

But not all of these meetings are so carefree.

It’s slowly becoming more apparent that you’re getting distracted, troubled. It’s small things at first that he chalks up to fatigue: letting the kettle whistle for too long, missing a spot when you’re wiping down the counter. However, it becomes apparent that a lack of sleep is not the only thing on your mind.

Hanzo enters the kitchen at your unspoken meeting time as usual, but to his surprise, Winston is already there. The sight of the gorilla at the service window shocks all the sleep from his system and he unconsciously suppresses his breath—hiding himself and listening.

“I promise, we will do everything in our powe—”

“You don’t have to do anything, Winston.” Even from this distance, Hanzo could hear the uncharacteristic iciness in your voice. “Everyone risks their lives. I don’t. This is the least I can do.”
Winston leans forward, hands on the edge of the sill, seemingly exasperated and frustrated. “We are worried for you, and I’m sure your colleagues are as well.”

“They’re fine! I c— we chose to do this, and I don’t want to take it back.”

“At least take some time off, you’ve been—”

“I’m fine!”

Winston, and even Hanzo, is taken aback by the volume of your voice. It echoes fiercely into the mess hall, the high, domed ceilings trapping the sound and twists it into something more haunting and lasting.

You huff angrily. “If you do not want have anything to order, Winston, please...just go.”

“Chef…”

“Please.” Hanzo watches as you grab Winston’s massive hand on the counter and give it a squeeze—a motion he could feel inside himself despite not being anywhere near. “I’m fine. Everything will be fine. I promise.”

Every bit of Winston’s stance projected reluctance and doubt even as he pulled away, seeming to hold onto your hand as long as he could. He looks like he wants to say more, but then shakes his massive head and makes his way out of the lonely cafeteria on his fists, completely bypassing Hanzo who took to the shadows. Up close, he could see the frustration on the scientist’s face. Whatever you both were talking about, Winston seems ridiculously worked up about it, and Hanzo wonders if he shouldn’t try to find out.

The door slides shut, casting everything back into silence, but Hanzo could still hear the echoes of your voice—angry and so reminiscent of the time you tried to force him to leave the kitchens.

Even a mouse will bite a cat if cornered.

Is it safe to approach? Should he draw back for today and leave you alone to process your thoughts and cool off? It would be the smartest idea, the safest for him.

But what about you?

You said so yourself, you’re fine.

And Hanzo knows it’s a damn lie.

Against his better judgment, he approaches the service window. It shouldn’t matter, it shouldn’t bother him at all—months ago, he wouldn’t have cared. Now, it’s a little different. These past few weeks meant something. You mean something a little more than an estranged cook now.

Silently, he watches for a few moments when he gets to the window where Winston stood.

You’re roaming around the kitchen some distance away, a stormy expression set on your face and a tightness to your jaw. Ingredients for something gathered in your arms as you begin chopping away, a little harder and a lot messier. The sound is jarring rather than comforting, violent rather than relaxed. He’s almost wary of calling out to you in case you’re startled into taking out your own hand. The archer waits until you’ve set down your knife to reach over and take some leaves and shove them into your mouth.
“Chef.”

And he almost feels guilty when you whirl around, hand just inches away from knocking your knife over. It was good then that he did not call to you while you were still working. You wipe your hands quickly on your apron—a little dirtier than usual—and make your way to him. Before your face disappears entirely behind the upper part of the window, he sees the weariness in your eyes, in your face, the tension in your jaw and shoulders.

“Good morning, Agent Hanzo. What can I get you?”

No matter how well you try to hide it, the exhaustion is apparent in your voice. His answer never leaves his mouth despite it being open. Lately, he has let you decide for him, but in your current state, it may not be a wise idea. He must have reached some quota of bad decisions already, anymore may prove disastrous.

Eventually, he waves his hand. “I’ll leave it up to you.”

“Certainly. One moment.”

You don’t even get very far before he watches you slam your hip into a counter, too shaky on your feet to get very far before hunching over a counter.

“Chef!?”

“Hrughk—I’m fin, I’m fine, Agent Hanzo. Just...give me a minute.”

He waits a moment, but observes no change, no intervention from Athena, and against all good judgment, he goes around the bend to open the doors to the kitchen because you are decidedly not fine and likely haven’t been for a very, very long time.

At the sound of them opening, you struggle to raise your head. At distance, he can tell that you’re ridiculously unwell even through the thinly-veiled anger you’re directing at him.

“No, you can’t be in here. Get out.” Another timely lurch renders your warning ineffective.

He resists the urge to roll his eyes. He’s not so much of a monster as to leave you and watch you struggle. That’s tasteless and highly unnecessary. Even his kills were swift, leaving the least amount of suffering and regret. Though, he cannot say the same for Genji, not with the way his brother had humiliated him and made him suff—Hanzo shoves that thought of his mind. He cautiously makes his way toward you, carefully eyeing the items in your vicinity for anything you could throw at him (though he doubts you’d hit him even if you were completely well).

“I will call Dr. Zieg—”

“No!” Then quietly, “No, she’s sleeping. This is...normal.”

You would have to forgive him if he didn’t believe you. You look nothing short of unhealthy and it’s likely no one else notices with the way you conveniently hide your face behind the overhand of the service window. Whoever designed it clearly did not want the chefs to be seen or wanted to discourage interactions between the two worlds that it separates.

Here, there is no such barrier and your suffering is laid bare for him to see.

A prickle of panic rises in the back of his neck. The fact that you have abandoned your duty of protecting this place only shows how severe the situation is. A hand closes in on your shoulder and
pushes you more upright and he does it with more ease than he would have expected.

“Chef. Focus. What do you need?” he asks gravely.

Listlessly, you wave at some vague direction. Hanzo’s not even sure if you know what you’re gesturing at, not with your eyes closed and brows knitted together in a tight and pained expression.

“I need to…get my medicine.”

“Where?”

For a moment, you don’t answer and Hanzo thinks you may have passed out, but you raise your head, eyes narrowed and face scrunched up, and trying to wave him away. If he didn’t know you were in pain, he would think you were incredibly annoyed. Perhaps you were. Perhaps this is not a state many have seen you in.

Two deep breaths later, you push yourself up and start batting away at his helping hand. You don’t seem keen on relying on his help and he’s not one to impose it on someone who does not want it (not that the opportunity has come up often).

As you pass, however, the sounds of a rumbling catches his attention. It takes him a moment to realize it was your stomach.

You don’t even seem to have the energy to be embarrassed about it.

“Don’t follow me,” you warn darkly, boding no compromise.

He’s tempted to do so just to spite you—it’s not as though you could even attempt to resist in your condition—but stays where he is to watch you press a hand against the Cellar door (of all things), which beeps after a moment and slides open far swifter than should be possible for a door of such thickness and size.

The door reveals a hallway or a tunnel, dotted by flickering lights that slowly turn on in your presence as if welcoming you. There could be doors on the side, but it’s difficult to tell. Some posters, aging and peeling, are plastered inside. The floor is covered in a different tile than that of the kitchen, and every so often, the scruffy tile is replaced by a strip of something grainy. It’s notably dirtier than the floor in the kitchen, well-used and a little ill-maintained.

And you stand there, gathering your breath, haloed by the doorway as its only defender and current refugee.

It would not be hard to attack you from behind, knock you out, and find out the truth of what lies beyond. But the thought of doing it this way—too easy, too cowardly—makes his lip curl and something vile curl up inside. Assassin as he may have been, this is not a mission of that sort, and you are not a target.

The door closes the instant you pass the threshold, bringing an end to his brief moment of contemplation, firmly keeping him out and leaving him alone in the desolate kitchen.

He never guessed he’d be allowed to stand here without the threat of you chasing him out. This would normally be a very ideal situation, but he’s already passed up the easy chance to go into the Cellar, it hardly seems worth the effort.

Now that he’s not being attacked or waiting for an ambush, he can study the place more leisurely. It’s not much different than the last time he was here. He runs a hand over one silvery counter and
comes up with nothing. Everything is still meticulously clean, but evidences of having been used—
scratches, stains, the general feeling of worn-ness, if that makes any sense—is visible on every
centimeter of this place.

The walk-in freezers are lined with more items than before and previously empty containers are
now fulfilling their purposes. Darkly, he wonders what happens if these were to go empty. Maybe
it’s happened before and he just never noticed, or you never gave them the chance to notice.

He grabs a glass from a neatly lined shelf and fills it with water from one of several sinks and
waits, fiddling with his communicator in his pocket just in case he needs to call Dr. Ziegler. If you
require medicine, chances are your problem is not something his meager medical knowledge could
help with.

There’s also the other possibility of you collapsing on the other side with no way of calling for
help. In which case, you’d likely die without anyone having known. Unless…?

“Athena.”

He almost jumps when he feels rather than hears the AI’s voice coming from the communicator he
has in his hand. “Yes, Agent Hanzo?”

“Are you in contact with the chef at the moment?”

She pauses for a bit before answering. “Affirmative. The chef currently has a communicator and as
such, I am able to establish contact if required.”

Hanzo stares at the Cellar door; now you’ve become a part of its secrets. If you truly perish behind
that door, the secret of its bowels will likely go down with you provided that no other chef returns
here. Even worse, no one except for himself would know what happened. Would you even have
the strength to call out for help? Would you have the presence of mind to call Athena? Would he
be able to open that door himself without preparations?

With those thoughts plaguing his mind, he grips the glass tightly in his hand and the communicator
in the other, eyes intently on the door, waiting for it to open.

A minute becomes two, then five, then ten.

The panic at his neck, previously muted, becomes an insistent pressure that churns his nerves. He’s
waited long enough. “Athena. Establish contact wi—”

The door slides open in that instant and you walk out, a little steadier, but no better beyond that.
You tilt your head as though confused.

“Ah, you’re still here?”

He does not grace you with an answer, a little indignant, and instead hands you the glass he’s been
holding. It’s lukewarm now, but it’s better than nothing. You blink at his gesture, a little unsure,
and staring at his offering like you’ve never seen it before, but he has no time for this and thrusts
the glass in your direction again. “Drink.”

Your hands tremble as you take the glass from him, and Hanzo is all too aware of your touch—a
little too warm, your grip a little too weak—and the feeling of it lingers even as you move away.
His own fingers tingle and he flexes them to get rid of it.

“Thank you.”
You drain the cup, refill it—nearly tipping onto him as you try to do so, and he has hold you by your upper arm to keep you from falling over—and finish it off again.

“You took your medicine then?”

You nod.

“Do you need anything else?”

You shake your head and tug your arm away with a lot less force than he knows you can exert. He lets you go, but keeps a watchful eye as you make your way back to the Cellar door and press your back against it, sliding down until you’re sitting on the floor, the glass gripped loosely in your trembling hands.

The quiet is disconcerting, made even more so by this situation.

Here he is, a grown assassin, babysitting a cook. This situation feels far too close to memories he wants gone and buried lest they imposed themselves here, dredging up the same emotions that led up to his willing participation in a tragedy.

Without prompting, you begin to speak. “I should be the one asking you if you need anything. I’m sorry you have to see me like this, but please, don’t tell anyone.”

Though your remorse different sharply from those distant memories. He crosses his arms, looking down at you sternly, but not unconcerned. “If you are unwell, why are you working?”

“I’m not sick or anything. It’s not contagious.”

“Then what is it?”

You fidget with the glass in your hands, and more than once, Hanzo thought it would slip from your hands. You keep your eyes down, shoulders hunched in, guilty and ashamed. It seems that the sympathy that he had long thought evaporated in his youth still exists somewhere and he bends down until he’s squatting on the floor.

“I have…stomach ulcers and…acid reflux,” you murmur. Regardless of how quiet you try to be, your words echo clearly in this space. Hanzo’s eyebrows rise in surprise. He wasn’t aware—not that he had any reason to be. “I can’t—I mean, I can, but…eating is difficult and sometimes I just…forget.”

You fall silent and don’t offer any explanation as to how this came to be. There’s no reason to pry, especially if you’re not feeling particularly forthcoming with it. And somehow, he gets the sense that this was meant to be kept under wraps. Another secret of yours that you have seemed him worthy enough to share with.

Somehow, it feels like a very precious responsibility. Far too precious for him to be holding.

He wonders just how many other people know. Dr. Ziegler and maybe Winston.

“You do not seem to be in the habit of forgetting things.”

You laugh, but it rings hollow.

“Madame Ziegler said it would be handled if I were diligent about it, but…I’ve just been...busy.”

He supposes he understands and has no premise to lecture you on—he himself has been subjected
to something similar about his liver and other issues that he had pointedly ignored throughout the years. While there are a good number of underground doctors in Japan and even more outside of it, he hadn’t taken the time to undergo a general physical, only visiting them for immediate emergencies and nothing more. Though, most of the time, his avoidance is on purpose and may or may not be stemming from his desire to feel something other than the zombie-like fog he’s been encased in during the past ten years. But what distracts you so? Surely it can’t be your duty that keeps you from your health. Is cooking for a base of under twenty people really so strenuous that you can neglect your health?

...or are you also running from something? Punishing yourself for something?

The thought makes his mouth go dry.

No. Not everyone is like him. You, least of all.

Derailing himself from the intrusive line of thought, he grasps upon something else. “Why do you call her Madame…?”

You look up, a little surprised and then you raise the glass to your lips, a poor attempt to smother the smile that takes over your face. It’s a softer look, a better one, one that knocks something loose inside his chest and makes breathing simultaneously easier and harder. “It was something the Head Chef used to do. I guess I just picked it up. That and maybe a few other habits.”

“Such as?”

Slyly, you grin. “That’s a secret.”

“Hmph. Aren’t you full of them,” he says dryly, but with none of the barb.

It just sounds like another challenge to him.

That night felt like the beginning of something less distant, like some wall between the both of you have thinned. (Even more so now that he had your contact information to remind you to take your medicine—Hanzo really does not want to find out what happens when a chef is unavailable.) It's difficult to not want to throw this encounter into McCree’s face as well—he had seen the inside of the Cellar whereas the rest of Overwatch could not so much as get near it. It’s an accomplishment that keeps his mood up.

That is, until you decided to be a meddling nuisance.

Hanzo can’t help the grimace that takes over his face at the memory that landed him up here in the first place.

He had been called down from his room for dinner—a little unusual as it was well before the time where the word ‘dinner’ no longer applied to whatever meal he was eating, however, he dismissed it even though something in the back of his mind tingled with suspicion. But it’s you, he had reasoned. What harm could you do? Give him more bell peppers?

He huffs a laugh to himself. You wouldn’t be so cruel as to waste food unnecessarily and feed any of them something you know would be ill-received.

However, the reason he was called down would have been far worse, far crueler than he would have imagined.

The sight that greets him is not unlike a party; everyone on base is there, drink bottles decorate the
table and there's a carefree chatter that fills up the incredibly large space with more ease than expected.

But what surprises him most is the fact that you're standing there out in the open, waiting, and he has to take a moment to process it. You wear an expectant smile on your face, a bowl and ladle (too short to hit him if he kept his distance properly) in your hands.

“Bout time you got here,” grouses Torbjörn.

“Have a seat, Agent Hanzo. Everyone’s been waiting for you.” You gesture at the table, but he instead keeps his eyes on you, stricken a little by the contrasting imposition of a memory and the reality before him.

You look a lot less angry than he remembers. It's difficult to see you when you're working in the kitchen even if he is leaning into the window. It's different. You stand a little straighter, perhaps to be more presentable, and your posture is awkwardly formal like a newly hired maitre d'.

A snarky comment comes to the surface, but he holds his tongue. It’s the first time he’s ever seen you out here and it would probably not end at just one single pepper this time if he were to say anything about it, so he just nods his thanks.

He takes a step forward to do so, but he stops short, the reality of the situation slamming into him with knee-buckling speed as soon as he sees the table in its entirety.

There’s only one seat available at the table and it’s right at the edge of one of the long, long tables, right beside Genji.

Hanzo’s jaw tenses to the point of pain, his breathing slows and gains a weight that steadily crushes his insides.

He can feel everyone’s expectant gazes on him.

“Come on, come on, we’ve been waiting!” shouts Junkrat. He’s shushed by those surrounding him, but Torbjörn is already drinking something and mumbles, “Come on, prince. Ya going to let your problems keep us from eating? Peh.”

“We’re having jjigae! Come on!”

“Join us!”

“Reinhardt, don’t move so much, you’ll hurt your back again.”

His stomach twists violently, and for the second time ever, the acute sense of betrayal stabs at him —of everyone here whom he had expected to stay out of his personal business, of everyone here whom he trusted.

His thoughts trail off and he doesn't even know why he ever assumed any of that at all.

Anger, still slow, but soon to be broiling in his gut, makes him discard the possibility that it may not have been a scheme of your own volition or because some other meddling fool asked for it. It does not matter; this is for him to solve and his private life is not a circus to be put on display for everyone else to gawk at and attempt to fix. He is an adult. He is a Shimada. And while he will regret a chance to eat, he bites out, “I am not hungry.”

The mixed chorus of his name only fuels his desire to make himself scarce that much quicker.
“Wait, Agent Hanz—!”

“He swings behind him half-heartedly, not really thinking, but he feels something against the back of his hand and then his stomach falls into the ground when he hears it: a sharp crash and the splash of liquids.

The tension in the room is as oppressive as the silence, but he does not bother turning around, doesn’t look anyone in the face, doesn’t look you in the face.

“Hanzo. Brother, yo—”

“You have no right to call me that!” And then, 「 What ‘brother’?! What ‘Hanzo’?! Neither of those things do not belong in your mouth. 」

「 You—! 」

He powers straight out of the kitchen, doesn't even listen to the clamoring behind him, and into his room where he fishes out the alcohol Mei had so graciously bought him from her trip. He hid himself away on the rooftops of the Watchpoint where he was sure no one would look or dare reach before he drinks himself into a stupor. The result of it is himself, here, waking up to the splash of rain trying to choke him, with nothing but the darkened heavens blanketing the skies, and the pull of a hangover, reminiscing on the past few days.

He clenches his teeth and exhales.

Foolish.

All because of your needless meddling, because of this stupid group’s interference, all his plans have gone up in flames.

He had lowered his guard, had tricked himself into believing something that was not reality.

There was no one to blame but himself. It was his fault he did not handle business faster, that he was such a coward, that he had let a false sense of sentimentality get the better of him.

In the end, he really didn't come to terms with anything.

He didn’t gain anything from coming here—to Overwatch.

He just ran away from it all.

‘Coward.’

Being called “brother” by someone he didn’t truly acknowledge as his brother was unsettling and painful. Being called plain “Hanzo” by someone who could have been (may actually be) his brother is even worse.

But who could he blame?

It was himself who decided to use his first name as an alias—he hadn't thought he cared, didn’t think it would matter here, so far away from Japan and away from traditions and—

—he thought he could have a new start here.
That he could begin moving toward a future again.

But he didn’t account for just how horrifying it would be, how terrifying it is to face your past or own up to it. Why is it so hard?

—“Hanzo! Brother!”

“You have no right to call me that!”—

Genji always knew how to ruin things with too many careless words—the clan, his position, his own relationships. But maybe in that same vein, Hanzo may have also ruined things with too few words.

Despite the cold, his body and eyes burned.

Is the coward’s way the way of Shimada, Hanzo?

A shaky sigh escapes him.

He’s so very tired.

He should return inside.

Carelessly, he raises an arm and flops it over across his torso to use as leverage to turn himself over. He gets about partway, leaning heavily on his other elbow with his vision swimming, before he notices a movement.

Hanzo watches with a moment’s of drunken indifference as the bottle that Mei had brought him, partially empty, begins to roll away.

He stares and stares until it gets about halfway away before he’s stricken by a panic and lunges for the bottle. His entire body slips against the rain-slicked roof. His arm and shoulder sweeps off the sloped edge. the bottle rolling right off away from him and falling into the dark depths below. He could only hang precariously on the edge in muted horror—both at his actions (for a mere bottle, for heaven’s sake) and the loss of the remainder of his drink. The fear colder than the rain seeps into his bones and the ground simultaneously rushes and runs from his vision.

He thinks he hears the crash, but then he’s absolutely certain he hears shouting after. Hanzo lets his arm and head fall, teeth clenched tight as his stomach contents writhe for freedom.

If this world had any mercy, it would not be you who witnesses him breaking yet another thing. But at this point, he’s not even sure he deserves it.

“Agent Hanzo?!?”

He withdraws his arm from the edge of the roof and struggles to slide himself deeper toward the center.

He’s not a coward.

He’s just has a sense of self-preservation.

A metal bowl rolls some short distance from the table it fell from until it knocks into the foot of a fallen omnic, still sparking at the neck and chest. The bowl clatters, almost an impromptu drumroll that heralds the shadow which drops over the fallen man, who curses just as rapidly as he blinks,
trying to get his vision free of shimmering spots.

"Overwatch Operational Department, field logistics division ex-agent, Tanuja Singh Deshmukh?"

The chef’s head snaps up, eyes flashing, teeth bared.

“My name is Asim.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for your patience with the release of this chapter; we’re slowly getting to the parts that I am excited to write about--give or take two chapters. (If you find any mistakes in this, please do let me know so I can correct them. Thank you.)
Chapter 12

Hanzo, despite his less-than-stellar display of maturity, was surprisingly granted a mission, and he had taken it with such speed, there was no time for anyone to protest (or for you to have made an appropriate lunchbox). It was merely surveillance around Gibraltar, but that must have been more appealing than remaining in the incredible awkwardness at the base.

His absence, however, did little to alleviate the oppressive air in the sparsely occupied Watchpoint. Genji had made himself scarce, and when he was available, was noticeably more distant. Zenyatta’s presence probably did a lot to ease the uncertainty that weighs on the cyborg.

Though, McCree did not know who he felt worse for: Genji or you.

The others had a lot of say about the matter, but McCree cannot consider himself so morally superior that he allowed himself to gripe. The feelings of the Shimada brothers’ are sticky in ways that even those on moral high ground should not comment on—the deed was done and over with, the main thing now is how they feel now and how they’re going to go about handling it. It’s one thing if it’s between themselves, it’s another if they’re going to drag innocent people in their cautious yet reckless game of feelings and painful memories.

You, especially.

After that fiasco, you confined yourself to the kitchens, making quick work of small talk and any attempts to coax you to come out.

McCree tsk’s to himself. You had made such good progress, too. Ana, if she hadn't been away on a mission, would’ve been proud.

It’d be a lie to say the kitchen is the most welcoming place on base. Head Chef Richard was quite generous and lavish in his own way, feeding people just the right amount (neither left wanting nor bursting) with just the right foods—but despite his creed for serving and loving his customers, his priority would always fall on the chefs he kept under his wing. Through his numerous escapades, McCree had long suspected the kitchens were built in such a way that the entire place was both a fortress and a prison, keeping out intruders and holding them in to be dealt with when the time came even without chefs inside. In some ways, this place was better safeguarded than other places in the Watchpoint.

If you really wanted to lock yourself in there, you could and no one would be able to get you out. Similarly, if you truly wanted to keep people out, the kitchen could be on lockdown faster than most would be able to react. The reason for it was assumed to be because of the ‘treasure’, but McCree isn’t so sure.

“Ain’t like you t’ be standin’ still, Chef,” McCree says as he walks into the darkened mess hall and toward the service window where you stood. If he wasn’t expecting it, it would be a creepy sight to behold: a single, unmoving figure in the middle of the brightest light in the entire cafeteria, finer features obscured by shadows. “Head Chef would throw a fit if he saw you doin' nothin’.”

Instead of the flustered outburst he expects, you remain quiet, hands folded neatly on the counter as though waiting for something. He could fathom a guess for what—or whom.

He drags a stool to the window and sits. From this spot, he can almost see the washing station and a shocking amount of dishes stacked. They don’t seem dirty, but it just looks like they were left
there after being cleaned. A troubling sign.

Gently, he tries again. “Hour’s late, Chef. Whatcha doin’ up?”

“...I’m just thinking,” you reply slowly, voice lacking in any energy or enthusiasm.

He makes a noise in his throat. “That so?”

“...yeah.”

The silence settles uncomfortably between you both. He sighs internally and decides to cut to—what he believes to be—the chase. “He doesn’t hate you.”

Your fingers twitch and your hands curl into fists before unfurling and curling again. “...how are you so sure?”

Because you’re obvious and Hanzo is not as unreadable as he believes himself to be.

“Callin’ me a liar now? Mighty bold of ya.”

Jesse expects a laugh or some sort of reaction, not the deafening silence that sounds of guilt and something all too familiar.

“It’s between him and Genji. It ain’t your fault you got caught up in it.”

“If I didn’t decide to make a group meal then...”

“It wasn’t about your cookin’ or how you did it.” It was a fine set-up and wonderfully alive. If it weren’t for the Shimadas’ issues, it would have been an excellent affair that was reminiscent of the old, old Overwatch. The stew was spicy and if McCree was being honest, he’d really rather eat that combination that reminds him of his time on the road rather than the neatly arranged meals you normally make. (Not that they’re not delicious, but there’s just something charming about eating food that is more...appropriate for his person.)

“But he didn’t even take a lunchbox when he left.” Despite how distressed you sound, he couldn’t help a smile.

“Bet you cried yourself to sleep over that.”

“Did not.”

He raises an eyebrow and the silence, a little more bearable, seems to unnerve you and eventually you concede with a huff, “I didn’t cry.”

“...but you’re still feelin’ responsible.”

You throw up your hands and begin to pace as though you’ve meant to do it for a long time. “I should have known! I—”

“Known what? That everyone was goin’ to leave that seat open? That Hanzo would react like that? That we’d have to practically tackle Genji to the ground? You almost got clocked in th’ head with a flyin’ bottle and you still feel like it’s your fault?” He scoffs. “You ain’t psychic and it ain’t your responsibility to keep track of all that.”

“But it is,” you insist. “It’s the least I can do.”
He wants to groan and slap his face and barely manages to resist doing either. “Not this again.”

“It’s true!” You stop right in front of him, slamming your hands somewhere above the partition.

“I’m not a hero like you!”

“Ain’t never claimed t’be one neither.”

“But you’re out there”—and you gesture wide toward some unseen horizon or an imagined place that McCree is sure does not exist—“fighting and risking yourselves and I’m…”

Your hands and your whole body just slumps.

“And I’m in here.”

The silence that follows is almost damning.

There’s always been some sense of self-imposed responsibility from the support-type staff. Well, he can’t say that he was innocent in the matter—long ago, he loathed the easy-going pace of the desk-job people and paper-pushers and those who work with Overwatch but never ever see battle. Why did they get to complain when he’s out risking his hide? Why should people get to live because they’ve got money? Why do those people get to boss them around? (It’s one of the reasons why he liked Reyes so much more than Jack. The former got his hands dirty with the rest of his crew, the latter locked himself up in his offices and meetings. Jesse didn’t care about the heroic stories he was told, he just knows what he saw and what he saw was Jack being a damn sellout.)

But meeting people like you, who are too attached to the idea of ‘responsibility’, he can’t bring himself to be upset. Everyone has their own role to fill, their own troubles, and McCree learned after several years here that people like you probably take it harder than them. He can lose himself in the adrenaline and the missions, but you can only do your best, cooking for agents who are too strung out to appreciate the power of a decent meal and fling it back in your face. It’s too easy to think of the agents’ problems as your fault when it’s their fault for not managing themselves properly.

“It ain’t like you t’ get so worked up over one person. Other people lost their minds over the food before and you didn’t act like this.”

“But that was…”

That was long ago, when you weren’t alone to bear the burden of a discarded meal, when you did not feel so directly responsible, when you had the Head Chef to buffer you. Or is it because of something else?

He knows, vaguely, what you had been doing before you came back to Overwatch. He would have guessed that your skin would’ve been thicker after your ordeals. But for a single person to rattle your cage—

“If it’ll make y’feel better, I’ll hunt him down for you, make ‘im apologize,” he offers.

You snort like you don’t think he is serious—oh, but he’s very serious, no matter how nonchalant he had tried to make the offer seem. It’d be interesting to get Hanzo speaking heartfelt apologies with Peacekeeper against his temple. It wouldn’t have been the first time he’s contemplated it (but for different reasons). Jesse wonders if Genji would help, but banishes the idea quick. That might just make things more grisly than it had to.

“I think you should be the one apologizing, too.”
He starts and tries to look at you through the wall. “Me? What’d I ever do?”

“You told Agent Hanzo about the Cellar!”

“And who told you I told him?”

“Agent Genji, of course.”

That son of a—

Jesse smacks himself in the back of the neck and rubs it twice. Well, it wasn’t that much of a secret anyway. He supposes it’s his just deserts—or in this case, just desserts?

“Guess I have two Shimadas to go after,” he says wryly, leaning against his palm, directing a smile up at you that he forgets that you cannot see. “Gotta get justice for the both of us.”

“I don’t think it’s really getting ‘justice’, Jesse.”

He shrugs. “Someone wronged you, so it’s only proper t’get even, ain’t it?”

“I don’t—That’s not right.”

“It ain’t like it’s the first time you’ve got into a tiff with somebody. ‘Member the first time you ‘nd I fought? You kicked me and threw the whole tray at me.”

“You slapped it out of my hands!”

“And we both got a helluva lecture from your boss for wastin’ food.”

He gets something like a cross between a choked laugh and a noise of anguish. It’s not what he’s aiming for, but the night’s young.

“You don’t know it, but Reyes chewed my ass out after.”

“And Head Chef put me on cleaning duty for a week since the extra food was unauthorized.”

“Hey, I put it in the terminal all good and proper. It was one of you messin’ with me that caused all of that.”

“That’s because you tried to disguise yourself as a chef!”

The cowboy pulls out his pack of cigarillos and lights one, much to your horror. He grins to himself. Good.

“Good times.”

“Don’t smoke,” you chide with no real malice. “You’ll ruin your tastebuds.”

“Ain’t nothin’ that can ruin how I taste your cookin’, it’s just that good,” he quips, taking a loud and overly obnoxious drag just to hear you groan in frustration and embarrassment. He smirks to himself. That’s a better reaction.

You wave your hand at the smoke, trying to push it back in his direction to very little avail. For good measure, he even blows a stream in your direction, delighting in the way you swat at it. “Stop that. It’ll get into the kitchen.”
“I’ll help you clean it.”

“Oh? That’s very generous.”

“What can I say?” He shrugs and tips his hat with a grin. “I’m a gentleman.”

Grumbling, you ask to yourself, “What sort of gentleman smokes in a kitchen?” You cross your arms and he can swear you are looking down at him. “I remember when you used to use that trick to try to get in here.”

“Did I now? Can’t remember. Old age must be gettin’ to me.” Even though he clearly recalls having offered his help just so he could get one step closer to the phantasmal treasure that the members of Blackwatch kept conspiring about. It did not succeed, of course.

You make some noise of disbelief and pull out an ashtray from somewhere below the window, slipping it onto the table with a loud ‘clack’. Your message is clear, but he just waits.

And waits, and waits.

Until you cave. “I’m going to make Meatloaf Surprise,” you warn sternly. “And I’ll have Gen—Captain Amari help me.”

He can’t contain his grimace. “Please don’t.” The meatloaf is enough of a threat, but throwing Ana into the mix was just unfair even if she isn’t on base. Taking in one last delicious pull, he snuffs out the end. (Though he can’t say he’s completely displeased with the results—you are coming back out of your imposed silence.)

Seemingly satisfied with his actions, you say, “Thank you.”

He stares forlornly at his snuffed-out cigarillo, itching to put it back between his lips now that he’s had a taste. He’s sure you would actually serve him meatloaf if he did. And he would eat it.

“Chef, can I get some coffee then?”

“Use the terminal, please.” But even as you say that, you’re already moving around inside the kitchen. He grumbles a bit as he leans over the length of the counter to punch in his order. “Let me guess, a red-eye for this late hour?”

Beep. “’s a dead-eye kind of night.”

You choke on a laugh, and already, the kitchen seems a little brighter with the echo of it. “Did you just—”

“E-yep.”

Then the laughter pours out as though it’s been waiting to come out this whole time.

As long as you were feeling better, he could honestly say he’s done his good deed for the day. (The day’s still early, too.)

The days pass by in a haze. Jesse drops by often, insisting on talking with you and being a general nuisance. (Though, you can’t say you’re upset about it. The former Blackwatch agent always had a way of making you talk.)

Jesse was right, regardless. You have other priorities to worry about—you’ve never worried so
much about another agent before.

But it’s also the first time—second time after a younger Jesse—you were able to be so close with your customers. Back in the day, you would be taking the orders and making them without truly knowing the faces of the people you served. You’d see their name, look them up in the kitchen’s database if you did not know their habits, and cook. There was still that gap that never truly allowed you to connect with them.

Now, it’s different. You could actually ask them, talk to them, see their reactions, share their joy.

It’s not something you really ever thought of before, but it’s truly a truly precious feeling to have someone’s eyes and face light up when they take that very first bite. Even more so when they finish everything and ask for seconds.

—“We chefs exist for them.”—

It always sounded a little asinine, but with each day here, you think you’re getting closer to what the Head Chef once meant. You’re sure that if you never saw their expressions or received their thanks, you’d still think of food and cooking more shallowly.

Seeing Agent Junkrat lose his mind over something simple like fruit salad—or any fruit in general—was beyond endearing. You couldn’t help but indulge him if only just to see him happy (even if it did eat at your limited inventory). Agent Roadhog, as silent as he was, always seemed to take special care to eat everything clean, thanking you. Mock arguing with Agent Reinhardt about his diet was also fun. He always insisted on bratwurst and fatty substances for his physique only to concede and laugh the exchange off after a few words, leaving with less than you would’ve expected.

Agent Hanzo, though unexpected, definitely caught your attention the most. His sharp features softening into something warmer, younger when eating sweets. It was comforting to watch, strange as it sounds, to see him enjoy himself especially when he always seemed to hold the world at arm’s length.

The nights where Agent Hanzo comes down to drink tea or to eat really puts into perspective the Head Chef’s words. Just by serving him and seeing him eat so earnestly really makes you think that perhaps being a chef was a worthy cause in life if only to help these heroes through the day.

Long ago, the Head Chef would lecture about the agents. How the food you (and every other chef makes) becomes a part of them and that their bodies are made from the food you made. As such, all that they eat must be filled with love. For these agents—these heroes—miles away from home and fighting a war that most people only see through a holoscreen, can easily lose faith and forget the feeling of humanity, and therefore must be loved and nurtured lest they become nothing more than beasts.

—“Love them with all our being.”—

Though, you couldn’t say that you loved every agent.

Deadpan, you stare at the tray Agent Soldier: 76 dropped off. Even from this distance, you can see the food piled up on it, scarcely touched as always. You scrub at your face with your sleeve.

He likes nothing. Indian, Mediterranean, Chinese, French, German, Italian—none of those cuisines have ever caught his fancy, none of those foods have ever received anything more than a nibble despite having one of the highest calorie requirements among all of the agents here. How can you
give anyone love if they refuse to have it? What use was pouring in effort if it’s rebuffed?

What does he even eat?

You bite back a groan of frustration even as it claws at you, begging you to voice you discontent and perhaps find Agent Soldier: 76 and give him a good shake or a whack with a ladle or maybe (as unlikely as it is) knock him out and shove food down his throat.

The thought is waved away just as quickly as it comes. No, it's likely not any fault of his own. Maybe he just doesn't like your cooking.

It’s a painful reality to admit, but it’s a humbling one.

It'd be wonderful if he could give a critique or just let you know what he likes—you can't take requests immediately, but the next shipment can be tailored to accommodate him—yet the radio silence he gives you is woefully inadequate in helping you move forward. Each week produces different types of food, but each time produces nothing but a barely touched tray. It’s past the point of being a challenge and stepping dangerously into the realm of making you throw down your apron and leaving the Watchpoint for good.

It was a dangerous balancing act where even the greatest thanks from all agents could be negated simply by Agent Soldier: 76’s apparent refusal to eat anything you make. You cannot give up just because of one person. Your mission is more than just cooking for one person, more than just cooking for a group of agents, and so you remind yourself that you must remain strong.

Resigning yourself to life’s occasional hiccups, you pick up the tray when you pause.

Curiously enough, one plate remained among the different dishes. It’s rectangular, a little smaller and half-hidden among the others, but even more striking is that it’s the only empty plate among other partially eaten dishes.

Hastily, you pick up it up, looking it over, turning it in your hands.

Just what did you…?

Apple pie. There was apple pie on this plate. A few crumbs of flaky crust left behind, but the pie itself is nowhere to be found, a clearing through a dollop of sauce that looks suspiciously like someone wiped a finger through it.

Finally.

A happiness you haven’t felt in a while bubbles up rapidly inside you, pressing up against your chest, blooming, warming everything in its path until it reaches your face.

“Are you kidding me?” you ask no one, half-hysterical.

He ate something you made. Completely.

You press a hand to your mouth, choking on emotion and a victory hard won, breath stuttering and your eyes entirely too warm.

He ate the pie.

You should make more.

Abandoning cleaning duty, you rush across the kitchen and tear into the walk-in freezer, the crisp
and chilly air does nothing to dampen your newfound spirits. How many more pies can you make? Should you adjust the recipe? Oh, but you don’t know his preferences, what about the pie did he like? The flakiness? The way the apples were sliced? The types of apples that were used?

Just what did he like so much about the pie?

The fruit make their way into your arms as your mind furiously burns through the options.

If even Agent Soldier: 76 liked these, then this would surely please Agent Hanzo—

The thought of the archer makes you stop in your tracks.

Agent Hanzo would have enjoyed this, would have taken a bite that’s almost too big for his mouth and maybe smiled that secretive smile when he tastes something he enjoys, may have even closed his eyes and breathed in and sighed a little. A bitter smile crosses your face. If only he were here. You’re sure he would’ve loved this.

You shake your head. No, you have other customers to focus on.

What expression did Agent Soldier: 76 make when he ate this? Was it just as soft? Did he smile? Would he have taken a pause to savor it after the first bite?

You couldn’t help but smile wide, shouldering your way back into the kitchen with ingredients nearly spilling out of your arms. It wouldn’t hurt to make more or to go astray from your menu. Just once.

Just this once.

Nothing could bring down your mood as you began to measure your ingredients, all else forgotten.

You’re in the middle of putting the rolled out crusts into the freezer when your communicator rings. It takes a moment until your hands are free, but you light up when you see who’s calling.

“...boss?”

“Asim, good to hear from—”

“Boss.” His tone, cold and curt, makes you stop in your tracks. “We need you back here.”

“Wh—”

“Auditors.”

Your breath comes up short and the dread seeps into your bones, freezing them with full-bodied fear, and your previous elation comes crashing down.

Auditors? From what organization? And why now? The fiscal year isn’t even over yet and you’re sure that last year’s documents were submitted properly—

“They’re asking for all our documents, our ledgers, our—” He takes a shuddering breath. “Boss, you have to come back.”

Without even thinking, you utter, “Asim, don’t—don’t let them take more than they already have. Tell Argus—hold them off while I...”

You brain struggles to form words as plans and concerns flying through them at rapid-fire speed.
You need to go to them—what about your data—how long have they been there—no, you need to let Winston know—but it could be too late—you need to—but Overwatch—but the auditors—how did—

Your feet sway and you cannot decide what you need to do first.

Asim hisses, loud and insistent in your ear, “Boss! We don’t have time! We need you. Now!”

But—

You suck a hard breath through your teeth.

“I’ll be right over.”

And the communications cut off.

The freezer door rattles loudly as you slam it shut, and you almost jam your wrist trying to get the Cellar door open. The door opens then closes after you, lights flickering on automatically after you have already ran past them.

It’s irresponsible to leave Overwatch hanging, but this took precedence. You must see the extent of what the auditors have seen, what they have. If they find out about your operations, Overwatch would be in terrible danger and everything you would have done—all your sacrifices—would have been for nothing.

You could only hope that you’re not too late.
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

「Talon. Five grunts. Have not emerged since 03:40. Civilians potentially involved.」

He marks down their locations on pen and paper and in a shorthand near extinct in the age of handheld devices and advanced recording technology. Despite what some people say, traditional methods have their place in the current world.

(Long ago, he nor Genji had a love for stenography, but their father insisted and their mother encouraged it. He had wanted to please them both and worked hard at it, earning his mother’s gracious praise even though she was so much better: writing without skipping a beat or pause, fluid against paper like breathing. She awed him.

It’s fair to say his mother was proficient at anything resembling the arts or dealt with grace—martial arts, even, was a dance to her and dance, a martial art—overly attentive and focused just so, exceedingly deliberate at everything from the tilt of her face to the inch of her step; the very model Yamato Nadeshiko with a gentle and endearing Kyoto accent that disguised a raging river and a passion. Warm and still at times, cold and unstoppable at others. A force to be feared by the clan, and a person to be respected and loved by her family. Distant as her memory is, he remembers the songs she used to sing with their father—he doubts Genji would remember; he was too young, too flippant to sit still and listen to their mother’s rich voice, too young to miss it. Too young to have missed her like Hanzo does.)

With a pensive sigh though his nose and a single rub at his aching eyes, he continues his notes until they are detailed to his satisfaction, briefly interrupted by his raising binoculars to his eyes.

Winston wants to know Talon’s movements and who they’re working with, but specifically ordered him not to engage them. Hanzo has seen people who could resemble the dramatic organization around, catching glimpses of them among the sea of people in the narrow streets of Gibraltar, trying too hard to blend in and looking just a bit too dangerous to pass off as innocent. He does not know why they’re here, but it is likely because they know Overwatch plans on returning.

The objective of the mission itself is simple, but it’s difficult to do in such a small community. Gibraltar was miniscule even when compared to his Hanamura. The community here is tight-knit, prone to the same sights and the same people and the same habits. He would, undoubtedly, stand out and be remembered if he were to conduct his observations any more openly. That bodes the same for Talon, however.

So he resigns himself to staying to the shadows as much as possible.

But even that is difficult.

He doesn’t know how he did not realize it before, but chalks it up to having been flown into Gibraltar in the dead of night and never truly leaving the base since his arrival to explore, but there are a ton of monkeys around that seem all too aware of his presence, their eyes fixated on him no matter where he goes or how he tries to hide. It’s all the more unnerving when at any moment they may open their mouths and alert Talon—or some unsuspecting local—to his whereabouts.

It’s no wonder no one else could do this job.
He tries not to think of Genji being thrown better candidate—he is, but he wasn’t. Perhaps the Genji now. Not the Genji he knew.

A stab of pain, imagined but no less real, wreaks havoc in his chest. And reluctantly, he lets it.

Coward.

Hanzo revels in the sting for just a brief moment. It keeps him awake in a way that the still tepid night cannot.

He shakes his head, bites the inside of his lip hard.

Focus.

Somewhere below him, the bustle of street vendors and a market sluggishly stirs to life like clockwork.

As soon as he can smell bread from the nearby bakery and sees the fisherman come in with their hauls and laying out their catches of the day, it would already be time for the rest of Gibraltar to catch up.

And time for Talon to make their move.

Hanzo brings binoculars to his eyes again to observe the number of trucks leaving the warehouses that line the opposite shore of the Rock of Gibraltar.

Most of them are fairly routine; he's long memorized their routes throughout the week. There are trucks from all over and ships coming in at all times. There's been suspicious movements among them, however, that do not follow any logic: from the docks down a path that's never the same as any of the previous ones to a single warehouse where nothing ever comes out of, but several cars go into. It's certainly possible that this is paranoia, but to him, it looks like the beginnings of a deal or the transactions of one.

He watches the weavings of different trucks for some time and marks down their destinations, ignoring the growing aches in his joints and muscles, and acutely aware of the sun slowly creeping up.

It seems that Talon is not feeling very active this morning, but it does not mean they will not move later.

Vigilance and patience will always yield rewards. It’s as his teachers once told him: “If you wait by the river long enough, eventually the bodies of your enemies will float by.” Yes, it is not efficient, but time claims all and there is a lot to be said about patience and perseverance as long as one does not tire. Though, Talon is being particularly patient, discreet in ways that does not quite suit their normal style.

It’s peculiar in a way that makes him wonder if he’s not misreading the signs.

He leans back a little into the nook he’s hidden himself in, carefully rolling his stiffened shoulders and shuffles away from the sun’s peeping rays and warmth. The last few days have been exhausting in ways he didn’t really think about before he joined Overwatch.

Maybe he’s losing his touch or maybe he’s just gotten too stiff from being cooped up at the base while Winston attempts to navigate the minefield that is Overwatch’s international and local legal status. It’s a little strange to say that there feels like something missing from his missions—or
rather, there is no opportunity to say anything; there’s no one to speak to.

Would it really be so shameful to say that he...misses the company?

Even when he spoke to no one at the base, there was at least you. You didn’t judge him—or at least, not that he knew since the last time you were both on ‘good’ terms.

He didn’t need friends, but perhaps there was some benefit to not having any enemies on base. Least of all, the hand that feeds him.

Junkrat’s reminder rings mockingly in his head. “*Don't mess with the one who makes your tucker!*

The corners of his mouth turn downward sharply and he takes in a slow breath through gritted teeth. The world must be going mad if he’s taking advice from someone who is as likely to drink a molotov cocktail as he is to throw it.

He really couldn’t get out of the base fast enough after that little incident. He doesn’t know how you feel or how you reacted, just that Athena had pestered him about his meals while he doggedly tore into some MRE’s that he had squirreled away when he first arrived at the base, ignoring persistent calls to go down to the cafeteria to eat and the growing darkness inside that threatened to tear him down.

Not for the first time since he’s left for this mission, he wonders if he shouldn’t make up for it somehow.

It’s not as though he had done anything wrong, but he had been a little rude to you. Maybe. You likely didn’t know anything that was going through his mind at the time. It wasn’t your fault that he overreacted to a stupid seat. It wasn’t your fault that he was too cowardly to take the first step toward...whatever the rest of the meddling team was trying to accomplish. (Not that they should've. He would've done it in due time.)

For the umpteenth time, he sighs, the growing bustle of the market below drawing his attention. A little unfocused, he watches the few people meandering the stalls. Some of whom have aprons on beneath their light jackets.

And he has to do a double-take, rapidly scanning the sparse crowd for any sign of a familiar face, and once more just in case.

He breathes a small sigh. Luckily (or unluckily), there were none.

This is normally the time when you both held your...meetings? Rendezvous? He doesn’t quite know what those late-night-early-mornings are. Indulgences, maybe. Moments of peace. At the very least, seeing as how you're not down there, he can take some small comfort in knowing that with his absence, you’re probably sleeping instead of staying up to serve him tea or whatever small treat you’ve cooked up.

Hanzo grimaces.

Just how much time has he stolen from you? Would you, if you had the choice, be down here in the morning? If he wasn’t there, would you be freer?

A particularly loud fisherman begins to advertise his catches for the day, his voice garbled at this distance, but has the intended effect and pulls in a tiny crowd. He finds himself watching the processions of haggling and seemingly satisfied customers coming up and leaving with their prizes.
If he goes down there, would he be able to identify something you could cook with? Maybe bring you back something? Not as an apology, of course, but maybe a gesture of good will?

Unlikely.

Even during his life as a vagrant, he’s never had to cook for himself or pick out produce that’s not already pre-packaged and prepared for him. (And even then, he’s not sure he can tell the difference in quality or that he won’t be cheated if he were to ask the shopkeep.) Japan having spoiled him with its conveniences: a discreet oden cart, a 24-hour convenience store, a small ramen shop; food was always readily available to him. When it wasn’t, he just went hungry, accepting it as the whims of life. However, those times were few and far in between.

Even fewer under your care. You always kept him fed until bursting, pacifying his appetite with seconds and thirds and no complaints.

And what did he ever do to deserve such indulgence? Simple rice would do—it should do for someone like him.

But you insist on flavorful, fatty, fancy (but not too fancy) meals that remind him of a time he thought was long outside his grasp (not that he didn't sometimes dream of it, waking up with a hand grasping at the lingering tail of a more bountiful, powerful—meaningful—past). You insist on treating him like he’s human, like he’s worthy of anyone’s time, like—

Like you cared.

He shakes himself free of the thought. No, you treat everyone the same way. You’re a professional chef in the same manner he’s a professional assassin. It was appreciated before, but your good intentions—your professionalism—does nothing but hinder him nowadays.

Nothing he eats now tastes quite the same.

No matter how much he consumes, it’s not enough to fill the void inside, not enough to satisfy a hunger deeper than his appetite, not enough to reach every empty crevice of his being. He would, even on the mission, wake up at the time of your usual meetings, craving something sweet or some warm drink to begin the day, only to realize he has nothing but a past that he didn’t realize he did not want to go back to.

Trained like some pavlovian dog to wake up and hunger for something that he himself thought himself above and willfully rejected.

You’ve infected him with something.

Slowly ruining his good judgment.

On cue, his stomach rumbles quietly, but not quietly enough that his skin does not prickle with the paranoia of being found.

He grinds a curse between his teeth. Fine.

Perhaps just once he can treat himself so he can stop being distracted by the lack of (good) food in his system. The past few days, he has only been subsisting on store bought sandwiches and easily consumable items. His position may be compromised now anyway and he cannot exactly continue if his stomach insists on being a hinderance. Once that’s done, he can return to his work.
Besides, he reasons with himself, today is the last intended day of the mission anyway. He can orientate himself while eating, get the rest of his mission and notes in order.

With that plan in mind, he abandons his perch and makes his way back down toward the more crowded part of town where he meanders, seeking sustenance while keeping an eye and an ear out for Talon.

It takes nearly an hour for him to find any restaurant open at this time of day and by then, he's ready to throw down his forsaken pride and for back to the Watchpoint and bluster his way through and get you to cook for him.

There's one restaurant that catches his eye. It sits at the end of a winding road, perhaps once a part of some castle, but now remodeled into something more polished and gleaming with bleached brick and wide windows dressed modestly with translucent curtains.

At the arch of the main door sits a logo, one that he swears he's seen before: a green heart with what seems to be dragon scales, blooming toward the tapered end. But where?

It's a distinguished establishment with a standing sign in cursive that he could barely make out, the lines thick at the ends with delicate, thin loops in the middle with a brief menu written underneath. He scrunches his nose a bit when he finds that he cannot read it and almost turns around to find someplace else to patronize when his stomach growls. Loudly.

He supposes he might as well and enters begrudgingly through the old-fashioned wooden doors.

The first thing he notices is the smell. Warm with the faint aroma of freshly-baked bread, lightened by something more citrius-y. There is the slightest bit of music playing—slow and jazzy—just enough to fill the silence but not enough to survive against prolonged conversation over a whisper.

At the entrance, an omnic greets him.

“Good morning, sir. Welcome to Cœur d’Artichaut. I am the manager of this humble restaurant; my name is Argus Twenty.”

She is immaculate. Her posture is straight and well poised with her hands folded and raised at waist level, her dress clothes—a well-fitted suit with bold stitches, the jacket open and revealing a tightly buttoned blouse—are without wrinkles, and her exterior shows little sign of wear. If he were still assuming the role of the Shimada clan’s young master, he would not have dined anywhere less. Now, it just seems like an excessive luxury.

“Is this your first time with us, Mr…”

“Tanaka. Tanaka, Ichirou.”

The omnic takes a moment to digest the information, likely searching her databases for someone of a familiar face. He doesn’t know whether it’ll be the last mistake he’ll ever make on this forsaken peninsula, but it’s far from the first (of which was coming here).

“Welcome, Mr. Tanaka,” she says pleasantly. If the face plate could allow her to smile, he’s sure she would. “Party of one?”

“Yes.”

“Right this way, please.” Seamlessly, she picks up a set of menus as she turns her heel and guides him.
He follows her through the mostly empty restaurant, mapping it out in his mind.

At one of the first few tables sits a much older man—skin even darker than his greying hair, mildly dressed with a stern look, unproportionately thick in the middle compared to his long limbs—looking down his nose at a newspaper, sipping what smells to be thick, bitter coffee.

Hanzo is sure, if something were to happen, he'd be able to defeat him. But then, he slowly uncrosses and recrosses his legs, firm lines of muscle casts shadows on his pants betraying the strength that lies beneath his aged look—it sends a slight thrill through him as he briefly imagines what it might be like to fight the unsuspecting man.

The windows they pass are wide enough to comfortably throw his body through without issue and the space between the tables scattered about would allow him to take someone down without disturbing the rest of the scenery.

She leads him to a table closer to the back, secluded with his own window where the light spills across the upper half of the creamy white sheet on the table. The tablecloth is good quality and, upon touching it, seems like it would not tear if he were to wrap it around someone's neck. It might even survive a knife fight depending on how it's utilized.

He sits down on the chair that Argus pulls out for him. It's very stable, unlikely to break after being slammed over someone's head. Excellent. He barely notices her propping up the menus on the table; he's too occupied thinking of the types of attacks this chair can withstand as he leans into it's cushion. Zarya could throw this and it may still come out with all its limbs intact.

"May I start you off with a beverage this morning, Mr. Tanaka?"

He grabs the menu and rifles through it.

"Hot tea. Green."

"Is there any specific type you would prefer, sir?"

"Moroccan mint."

"Would you like any sweeteners to accompany your drink?"

"Yes."

"Honey, sugar, gum syrup, or—"

"All of them."

To her credit, she doesn't even react to these unreasonable demands. "Understood. One moment, please."

She bows briefly and walks away to let him digest the place.

It's, in a word, quaint. Clearly high-class, but in a way that is meant to impress only those who know the true value of money.

The breakfast menu is short—in English and some sort of Spanish and splatterings of French—and he easily reads through it in under a minute, noting the distinct lack of price tags. It’s the usual faire, unexpected but not out of place: a basket selection of breads and small pastries, pancakes or crepes with compote, eggs described in unnecessarily fancy ways, and strangely enough, churros.
There are some savory options, but none that can prevent his eye from hovering around the thin cursive of pancakes.

There's no point to think too much of it. He knows what he likes.

The menu closes with a satisfying and heavy clap and he sets it back down only to pick up a small placard on his table just off to the side.

Having little else to do, he finds himself reading the brief history of this establishment.

*Cœur d'Artichaut is a for-profit charity-restaurant committed to providing those who have been displaced or in less fortunate circumstances a healthy, hearty meal. Proceeds from each customer and donation is used to support the chefs who volunteer their time, employees, local suppliers, and our mission.*

*The restaurant's namesake comes from the French idiom, “cœur d'artichaut, une feuille pour tout le monde,” meaning “the heart of an artichoke, a leaf for everyone.” The original idiom refers to a person who falls in love easily, handing out their heart to anyone and everyone. At Cœur d’Artichaut, we believe in giving more than just food; we believe in packing it with love. Each packaged meal is prepared—*

He almost throws the card away, unable to stomach the rest of the idealistic musings of a restaurant who—for profit—believes in handing out something so vague as love. Instead, he turns it downward and slides it away from him.

What is wrong with the world that they are tossing such a word around so easily?

It must be some bias, he concludes. One of those paradoxical or psychological things where, having heard it once, he’s now seeing it everywhere.

Not even a full minute later, Argus returns with a full platter and sets it down, feather-light, on his table. An assortment of sugars, sweeteners stand at attention behind a tall vessel and a delicate teacup.

“Moroccan mint green tea,” she explains as she begins to pour him a cup, “made from a blend of fresh spearmint, lemon verbena, and pennyroyal with equal parts formosa gunpowder green tea.”

She sits down the tea vessel and begins to gesture at each of the small bottles.

“From right to left, we have honey, gum syrup, agave, granulated white sugar, light brown sugar, dark brown sugar, cane sugar, white sugar cubes, and more traditionally used with moroccan mint tea, pieces of sugar cone. Please enjoy.”

Before she can walk away, he raises a hand to keep her attention. “I also wish to order.”

“Certainly, Mr. Tanaka.” The lights of her face plate flicker. “What would you have this morning?”

“The pancakes and...anything else you recommend.”

She pauses and tilts her head. “Do you have any allergies or dislikes you would like us to be aware of?”

He debates it for a moment, but returns with, “None.”
“Understood, Mr. Tanaka. I will have the chef prepare something fitting. I ask for your patience.”

The mere mention of a ‘chef’ makes his stomach tighten and simultaneously frightens and excites his appetite; Hanzo clenches the edge of his chair to keep himself from bolting off. Unaware of his predicament, Argus walks away again, picking up the menus from his table.

No. It cannot be you. You're at the Watchpoint, probably preparing breakfast for everyone else. Ludicrous of him to even think that it might be you preparing his food.

Hanzo takes a breath and reaches for the tea, feeling silly for having such a visceral reaction to merely a word. He breathes in the steam as though it’ll cleanse him.

It smells heavenly; the refreshing scent cuts through the sleepy quiet of the restaurant and the heavy feeling in his gut.

He holds the cup tightly yet carefully by its porcelain handle. He sips it gingerly and his mouth is flooded with the cooling sensation of mint and contrary warmth. It's not overpowering or bitter, but light and allows him to taste the green tea lying beneath in earnest.

He adds a dollop of honey from the little porcelain pot the manager provided. Tries it. And adds some cone sugar. Another sip, and he adds a dainty spoonful of sugar.

Perfection.

It’s almost too easy to enjoy this tea in this quiet atmosphere where the different tracks of jazz seem to meld into another, the only other sound in the restaurant being the turning of a newspaper. It’s almost too easy to forget who he is, what he’s doing here, the danger that lurks somewhere on this peninsula.

The doors to the restaurant opens again, and Hanzo watched as a man and an omnic in suits walk in. Despite the emptiness of the place, their conversation with Argus does not carry. They are led stiffly to another part of the restaurant out of Hanzo’s line of sight. There is the sound of people walking up stairs, a door closing, and little else before Argus reemerges to return to her station.

He sets down the cup with excruciating care.

As he's waiting, he pulls out his notebook and begins to organize his notes from the past few days. It is unlikely anyone here can read his shorthand. Even if they took pictures of it, it would take forever to find anyone familiar with it.

Notes are rewritten and summarized, all the better for him to present to Winston.

By the time his food arrives, he's halfway through with his task and starving.

“Your pancakes, Mr. Tanaka, with a mixed berry compote topped with a sweetened creme fraiche and salted brown sugar butter syrup on the side. Today, we have included, for your pleasure, a savory bread basket. Please enjoy.”

A modest stack of neat pancakes topped with a carefully scooped round of cream overlapping a palette of melting butter. A mint sprig and a small bed of berries tastefully lean against the side, drops of reddish sauce decorate the square plate that seems to be more for aesthetic effect that once upon a time, he would have judged harshly. On the side is a miniature pitcher of dark, brownish sauce.

It looks and smells acceptable. But what of the taste?
The first slice he makes reveals a slow river of dark compote in between each fluffy disk. He takes a skeptical bite and is rewarded with a multitude of flavors. Warm, buttery pancakes with an underlying milky taste by the sweet and almost overwhelming flavor of berries and berry bits with a cool and hearty dollop of cream on top that's just as sweet as it is pleasantly tart.

The next bite is accompanied by the sugar-butter sauce and he scarfs it down with less finesse than the establishment may have found acceptable. Each time, he finds a new flavor mixed in somewhere that he hadn't noticed before.

The tea proves to be too sweet and he takes the second cup without any sweetener, relishing in the repeated cycle of rich, sweet pancakes and the refreshing drink of mint.

He has to fight to not finish his breakfast too soon.

They remind him of yours. They're not the same, but there's a balance in them that is not unfamiliar to him. Surely even you would find this acceptable.

The bread basket, too, contains some familiar flavors. It's not so much a basket as it is just a small affair of a few small, fat disks surrounding a small ramekin of something mildly spicy. It's delicious and reminds him of something that Satya might enjoy.

Hanzo narrows his eyes. It's unlikely, but too much of a coincidence. He wipes his mouth on the linens and waves Argus over.

"Is there something the matter, sir?"

"I want to meet the chef who made this meal."

"Certainly." Without skipping a beat, she turns and leaves. It must be a common request or he still retains that authoritative edge from his old days.

Now that he's asked, he looks back at the demolished remainder of his meal. He truly hasn't had something so filling since he left the Watchpoint.

Dread crawls up his back and makes his stomach clench sharply.

What would he say if it really is you? What would you say? Would you provide a polite explanation or would you tell him to get out?

Suddenly, his hands feel stiff.

Maybe it wasn't wrong to have thought of all the uses of this furniture after all.

Somewhere else in the restaurant, he can briefly hear the creak of a door and from it escapes a bubble of a heated conversation that he can barely catch before it's quiet again, the door having shut.

Argus returns shortly with someone in tow. He squeezes his hands together before turning his head up, holding his breath just in case.

And breathes a sigh when he finds someone he doesn't recognize standing there—the man's face sports some lingering yellows and purples that almost blends in with his sun kissed skin like he's been in a fight, his chef's uniform creased this way and that as though it hadn't been ironed in some time.
He bows at the waist briefly, his choppy, wavy locks flopping forward before they’re shoved back.

“I am the Head Chef here, my name is Asim Singh.”

A laugh or the beginnings of a nervous chuckle almost makes its way out of his mouth, rattling somewhere in his stomach. Right. It was unlikely. Impossible, even. The young man extends a hand and Hanzo shakes it, holding a little tighter than cordially necessary if just to ground himself to the reality that this is not you and to make any transactions beyond this a touch easier. To his surprise, Asim gives it right back to him.

Something other than indifference must have shown on his face, because the chef—Asim—asks, withdrawing his hand, “Is something the matter, Mr. Tanaka?”

“No, not at all. I wanted to...compliment you on this meal.”

The man beams and his chest seems to puff out in a way that reminds Hanzo of you. “Yes, our menu was developed with a lot of care and consideration of the local culture and French techniques. The additional dish you’ve requested is not on the menu—”

The man goes on and on, gesturing at the various parts of each dish. Hanzo doesn’t pay such close attention to what he’s saying anymore, relieved and perhaps a little disappointed that it wasn’t you.

“Where did you...find the inspiration for these dish?”

For a second, something strange flickers over the man’s features, but it’s quickly replaced by that fake pleasantry that sends prickles up his ribs and spine. “The *idli* is a staple in my home country, and the pancakes are a recipe developed by the previous esteemed Head Chef who has now moved onto more managerial duties and is now working as the CEO.”

Again with the previous head chefs. Does every cook on this planet have a head chef that they look up to and seem to be shackled by?

“I see. A pity. I would have liked to meet this Head Chef-turned-CEO,” he says somewhat sarcastically.

“If you’re interested, Mr. Tanaka, we could set up a meeting. Though the CEO is rather busy at the moment.”

Hanzo waves a hand, silently wondering just how terribly he’s lost his edge if his sarcasm is so lost on a stranger. Maybe he’s gone soft. Or maybe authority is just lost on this man. “Another time then.”

“My pleasure. If you change your mind about the meeting, you can speak to Argus. She’ll set you up.” He points to the omnic who is too busy attending to the other gentleman in the restaurant to notice. Asim looks like he’s about to take the towel hanging off his apron and throw it at her unsuspecting self, barely restraining a mischievous twinkle in his eye.

“I will keep that in mind. Thank you.”

Asim returns his attention back to Hanzo and smiles pleasantly—an edge of playfulness that wasn't there before just shadowing his lips. “Anytime. Enjoy the remainder of your meal.”

Quiet again, Hanzo takes the time to finish up his notes and his tea, trying out each type of sweetener he’s been provided until he has no more tea to try them with, relishing in the delicate bubble of peace this restaurant, away from troubles or dangers, provides.
It wouldn't hurt to stay here longer or return to this place at a later date. It's not overly stuffy like other high-class restaurants nor is it too casual that anyone would come in here to cause a ruckus. The food was acceptable and could even give you a run for your money.

Speaking of which...

He motions for the manager who is at his table within seconds.

“The bill.”

“Certainly, Mr. Tanaka.”

She produces a small holotablet from her inner pocket—he couldn’t help but notice some stippling that presses up against the silk of her dress shirt, like her chassis was heavily damaged—but that’s quickly covered up by her presenting the bill on the screen and placing it on the table along with a mint and card bearing the name of the restaurant.

“Please take your time, and if you have enjoyed your experience, I ask you to consider becoming a donor to our charity which strives to pro—”

“I am aware.” Awkwardly, he adds, “Thank you.”

“My pleasure, sir.”

She leaves him to debate just how much he would like to pay on top of his bill and just how anonymous Winston has made his chip card. Winston would not risk exposing Overwatch before it’s ready, but the gorilla is a scientist, not a financial expert or an accounts expert. Athena, maybe.

(Then again, Athena may as well be the expert on everything, be it finance or fashion.)

In the end, he pays the bill in full and leaves a sizable donation. It’s not as though the money he’s earning from Overwatch is of any use to him anyway.

By the time he leaves, several other customers have come in. Dignitaries, from the looks of their bodyguards who Hanzo is certain he’ll be able to take on no problem.

But he’s not here to cause any issues or take lives for no reason. He leaves it be, but mentally stores their faces in his memory for later.

The meal sits pleasantly heavy in his stomach but it’s missing something. Something Hanzo does not really have the luxury to think about. He has a mission to return to.

The day continues with a little more ground-level observations. Visits to places he knew Talon to have stopped by previously takes up most of his day and he decides to end things when the sun has begun to set.

His return to the base is quiet, weighed down by thoughts and intrusive regrets that grow heavier and heavier with the shortening distance. There’s no one to greet him—not unusual, it’s late at night and no one would take time out of their routine to give him so much as a greeting. Especially not since he left on such uncomfortable terms. If anything, he’s actual grateful for the solitude.

Hanzo pauses briefly as he passes by the cafeteria doors. He should go inside, he knows, but a heavy stone sits inside his stomach and in his limbs, refusing to let him budge. It’s unlikely his company would be appreciated especially after his rudeness. Even worse, what could he say that wouldn’t make himself cringe or want to potentially throw himself out a window?
(There’s tiny—so, very miniscule that it may as well be non-existent—part of him that hopes your mood would change if he just ate something of yours. You always seem to be in a better mood when others have eaten and—while he’s not seeking your forgiveness—he would not appreciate having the person responsible for his meals to be cross with him.)

Again, his wavering pride makes him a coward and he reasons that he can do it after he gives his report. It’ll be better for the both of you.

Hanzo drops by the briefing room only to catch Soldier hastily clicking his mask back on and Winston looking a little more than frustrated.

“Welcome back, Agent Hanzo,” Winston grounds out, trying his best to wipe away any previous aggressions his stance may have shown, his fur slowly falling from their raised position. Soldier crosses his arms and turns away, but seems unwilling to leave.

“If this is not a good time, I can return later.” Not that he’s eager to do that either since it would mean he’d be running out of excuses to give you space.

“No, no!” Winston waves his large hands. “Never a bad time. Please, come in and relax.”

“Thank you.”

He pulls out the nearest seat for himself, but his eyes fall on something. Familiar brown wrappers, all identical and crumbled, is littered across the table in front of Soldier: 76. It takes Hanzo a moment to realize they’re the mauling remains of those vile rations. Why does he eat those when you’re here? Unless you’re mad at Soldier, too.

The gaze does not seem to go unnoticed by the man. “What’re you looking at?”

Hanzo suppresses the urge to attempt to assert his authority and only answers, “I was only considering if those are recyclable.”

Soldier grumbles something underneath his breath that sounds very much like “punk” and sweeps the scraps of paper off the table and into a waiting wastebasket below his seat.

Winston clears his throat, trying to look more stern and take on the role he clearly was not meant to be in. “Thank you for taking your time to come here, I know you’ve had a long mission. Now then, Agent Hanzo. Your debrief.”

Over the course of the next half-hour, he gives an attentive Winston and a half-listening Soldier a rundown of everything he’s observed in the past few days. The two others prod for details, interjecting with theories and occasional images of maps. But none of them get any closer to the what could be the heart of Talon’s objectives.

Winston regards his words seriously, a frown on his features as he listens, occasionally stroking his furry chin. “Thank you, Agent Hanzo. Your report is excellent. They know we are active, but they do not know if this is still our main base of operations. Without coming in here, they cannot confirm such a thing.” Winston shines a grin on him and Soldier. “Not that any of our agents would let them.”

The gorilla’s optimism is nice, even ego-boosting, but the reality of the matter is much grimmer.

“We should look into strengthening the defenses on base. We cannot rule out the possibility of Talon returning.”
“Fareeha and Torbjorn are in the midst of conducting a security assessment and security upgrades respectively. Unless there are some blind spots that we are unaware of, I have absolute faith in our defenses.”

Begrudgingly, Hanzo supposes that there’s no one better to do such a thing than a member of Helix Securities. Even in Japan, they’re well-known experts in the field.

“Anyway, Agent Hanzo, it's late and you must be hungry. Sorry for keeping you.”

Hanzo nearly winces, but manages to keep his features neutral. “No, not at all. I’ve already eaten.” In truth, he had only given himself a little bit of food to make up for the most decadent meal he's had in days.

“Shame. We have take-out and hate to let it go to waste.”

Blinking, he looks back down at the table where the scraps of MREs are.

Takeout?

“Different agents and at different restaurants, of course,” Winston quips, ticking them off his fingers. “Yesterday was Indian, the day before was Chinese, then before that was——”

But Hanzo has stopped listening. He's frozen to the spot, staring and feeling as though he’s slipped into some strange universe.

This isn’t right. Why are the members of the organization eating take-out of all things when they have you? You’re here to cook for them, that’s all you’re here for. You’d never stop feeding anyone if you could help it. So why?

Unless...

His mouth is dry and he winces at the crack in his voice when he asks, “Where is the chef?”

Winston doesn’t look at him, but his fur does something strange. His blood runs a touch colder, a touch quicker. Soldier looks at the gorilla-scientist expectantly and if his mask were off, Hanzo was sure the man’s expression would be more than a little smug.

Again, he asks, a little more insistent, “What happened to the chef?”

A few moments of silence pass. Winston’s huge shoulders rise and slump with the force of his sighs. There’s a grimace on his face that looks a little more than just a bit guilty.

“I regret to inform you that...the chef isn’t here. On base, anyway. We’re not quite sure where either, unfortunately. Chef refuses to answer any communications recently and——”

“How long?”

“Since a week ago.”

A week.

That’s how long you’ve abandoned your duties?

A brief moment of faintness passes Hanzo by.

Nothing is more important to you than providing for Overwatch. You’ve never really hid that fact,
risking your own health to ensure that. So what in the world could force you away from such a thing? Especially with Talon—as quiet as they are—roaming around, potentially ready to pounce on any unsuspecting agent.

Resolutely, he stands and declares, “I will go to look for the chef.”

“Don’t.” Solider: 76 stands up, rolling his shoulders back. “It's better this way.”

Hanzo whirls around, mouth open and ready to demand what Soldier means by that—you’re a necessary existence at the Watchpoint, you belong here, you work hard and sacrifice sleep and health just so that each and every single one of them may be more ready for the day and Soldier thinks it’s better than you're gone?—but he shuts it because he, too, had once thought the same. “Got something to say, Shimada?”

Hanzo realizes his thoughts must be showing on his face and tries to school it into something more neutral.

“What do you mean by that?”

The red of the visor bites into him, makes him squint, but he tries to level it look all the same. Slowly, Soldier rises from his seat and tilts his chin.

“Civilians shouldn’t get involved in our line of work. Chef made the right decision and left; we should keep it that way.”

But why did you leave? What forced you to go? You were happy—or were you?

Something sinister whispers in his ear that it’s likely his fault and something ugly curls around his insides in response, squeezing out every good sense and reasonable thought from him, replacing it with something darker.

He rejected your goodwill. He’s broken more of your drinkware than he remembers. He pushed you over the edge and forced you to abandon your own principles and left.

Well, if it were so easily broken by a single person, it mustn’t have mattered as much as you always made it sound. Just pretty lip service for a weary customer who keeps you up way past a healthy bedtime (not that he’s had such a wonderful luxury, but what right did he have to rob you of yours?).

“How are you sure that the chef has not been compromised?”

Soldier huffs like it’s ridiculous. “Intel shows that Chef is still alive and kickin’. That’s good enough for us.”

“What intel?”

“Above your paygrade. Any more questions?”

Hanzo gnashes his teeth at that. It’s not as though he was paid very much in the first place. What he has on his chip card is even less now that he’s given a sizable donation to that restaurant he’s already forgotten the name of.

A scowl makes it onto his face and reluctantly, he mutters, “No.”

“Good. Conversation over. Dismissed,” the man says, hand coming up and then down,
suspiciously more out of habit than anything else. Hanzo did not dwell on that for long, however. The doors behind him opens and the sound of spurs give away the exact person who walks in.

“Don’t be like that, Soldier,” McCree quips, shoving extra emphasis and dragging out the title. For what reason, Hanzo is unsure, but it seems to get a slight rise out of the old man. Like there’s a secret in the word that he was purposefully left out of the loop from.

Overwatch and its damned secrets.

“Come on, archer. Gon’ show you where the grub is. Got too much t’ finish by my lonesome.”

Without much else, McCree turns his back and attempts to walk Hanzo out of the room. Behind them, Hanzo watches as Soldier: 76 stares, a deep furrow in his balding brow before the old man turns away and goes back to whatever he was doing.

It’s not until the doors shut behind them and they're a good distance away does Hanzo begin his uneasy interrogation.

“Where is the chef, McCree?”

“Still on Gibraltar, I reckon. Didn't say a word to nobody,” McCree explains bitterly. “Upped in the middle of the night without so much as a goodbye. Gave everyone a good scare.”

“And the chef is safe?”


He bristles but doesn’t dignify that with an appropriate answer and so he just says, “I’m hungry.”

McCree, mercifully latches onto the new change in topics. “In that case, got some grub in the common room. The Junkers got it, so no guarantees it’s legal—”

Hanzo doesn’t know whether to laugh or to shout. The Junkers? Loose in Gibraltar? And how did he not notice? He had been keeping a close eye on the going-ons of Gibraltar.

—but though they came back without any of the cops on their tail. ‘S a good sign. That or Zenyatta’s chucked e’ry witness into that Iris of his.”

A mix of a snort and a noise of disbelief gets caught in his throat and Hanzo has to cough into his fist.

McCree doesn’t seem to be perturbed, even smirking at the idea. “He's gettin’ them tamed. Miracle, if y’ask me.”

Silently, Hanzo agrees.

McCree steers them to the common room where the table in the middle of the room contains a heap of takeout bags and utensils. The spurs of McCree’s boots jingle obnoxiously as he flops onto a couch. Hanzo, however, takes a much more careful approach, sitting himself down on another couch.

“Hope y’like steak,” McCree says as he passes Hanzo a container from one of the bags.

Hanzo takes the package and uncovers it, scrutinizing the contents of steak, vegetables, and potatoes. It does not smell particular bad, but it does little to stimulate an appetite.
“Why do you not use the kitchen?”

McCree gives him a funny look like Hanzo’s said something ridiculous before he starts picking at his own meal.

“We all thought ’bout it and figured it’d best be used when there are more people ’round. S’only Winston, Soldier, the Junkers, Mei, you an’ me here now. Everyone else got sent off.” As an afterthought, he adds, “Lúcio’s supposed to be here soon, though. Tracer’s gone t’ pick him up.”

“I see.” He wants to press the matter and ask if it isn’t because you will return and get angry at them or if it’s not because they respect you, but he didn’t want to tread that road.

Instead, he saws apart a piece of steak for himself—the insides a bit greyish and barely pink—stabs a few soggy string beans and shoves it into his mouth. He nearly gags.

It’s lukewarm and overcooked. The meat is chewy and dry and he finds himself searching the discarded paper bags for anything that could make it more palatable and fishes out pats of butter which he slatters onto the crappy steak.

McCree asks with a laugh in his voice, “What? Too shitty for ya?”

He tries to swallow down his newly slathered piece of steak and finds it marginally more acceptable. “How can you even eat this?”

McCree shrugs one shoulder, and as if to prove a point, shovels a forkful into his mouth and eats it like it’s actually palatable. Hanzo has to repress a shudder, but not to be outdone, he does the same as McCree speaks.

“Well, when you been on the run, you know how it is.” He waves his fork around, gesturing at some unseen knowledge. “Don’t get much of a choice, an’ it’s better than starvin’. Trust me.”

The archer makes a face of disgust as he chews through another soggy string bean. “I’d rather starve,” he mutters to himself.

“Helps if y’ killed your taste buds years ago.” He pauses and then gives Hanzo an unnecessary wink. “Don’t tell our dear old Chef, though. Don’t want t’ be breakin’ no one’s heart, hear?”

The air goes still, the confession striking a delicate chord inside him.

And out of some childish spite, he almost wants to. He has your contact information, he could easily send a message telling you that McCree’s love of your food, for all the praises he sings and the gusto which he eats it, is a damn lie—

But that would crush you, he’s sure.

The anger surges anew as he strikes another thought. If he did not truly appreciate your cooking, then why would he even want you back? Maybe he doesn't and that's why he's sitting here as though Overwatch isn't missing a valuable asset. Maybe he even wants you gone, too, just like Soldier.

“If you can't taste anything, then why even bother with the chef?”

“Cause,” he drawls, “it ain't gentlemanly t’ turn down someone's kindness. ‘Sides, man’s gotta eat.”
“You never deserved that kindness!” he shouts, slamming a hand onto the table. The plate and fork clatters. McCree only looks up at him, a strangely smug expression on his face that only enrages him even more. Hanzo almost wants to sink his teeth into the bridge of his nose, rip it off, and just make the cowboy regret ever being born.

“And you do?”

Hanzo takes a staggering step back. The words struck him so hard that the world tilts momentarily, the edges falling away and his vision turns blurry.

No.

No, he never did.

So why is he here, lecturing someone over something like he's any better? McCree lies and pretends like he gives a damn about your food, but because he cares to preserve your feelings.

And he?

Nothing comes to mind except the things he’s never wanted to face, things he thought himself to be above, to be superior to, but are constantly plaguing him and nipping at his heels.

“Excuse me.”

“Hey, wai—”

He ignores McCree and uses up every bit of willpower to not sprint to his room like a child scolded. He returns to bed, orders Athena to a little hungrier than he would've liked, head buzzing with implications and unanswered questions and the irritating knowledge that he has learned absolutely nothing from his previous experience and just keeps repeating his mistakes.

Sleep comes and goes for several hours until it becomes unbearable.

Hanzo throws himself off the bed, ignoring the time that so clearly indicates why he is awake and stalks down the familiar path that leads him to the mess hall. He’s not sure if it’s his imagination, but the Watchpoint seems quieter and colder somehow. It feels like a stranger.

Again, he pauses before the doors, less restricted but hesitant nonetheless.

You’re not there. You’re most likely not in there. But he wants to—needs to—confirm this with his own eyes to quiet the incessant whispers of ‘what if’. With a deep breath, he steels himself and steps forward, allowing the sliding doors to reveal what he had hoped is not true.

The cafeteria is cold.

Almost unnaturally so.

No milky-silver moon hanging over the large glass windows above, no artificial lights from the service window, no sound, no movement; just himself and a terrifyingly familiar sensation of having, being, knowing nothing.

There's nothing but an all-consuming darkness and strange sense of despair at the empty partition.

Where are you?
The Tanaka, Ichirou thing doesn't have any particular reference. I just needed a very, very generic name, hence "Tanaka" and since he's the first son, "Ichirou".
Tracer’s and Lúcio’s arrival brings in the morning sun and an amount of supplies that could only be bought on a superstar’s salary. Well, that’s an exaggeration, but Winston treated it as such, calling down every awake and able member on base to come down and help unload them and the overwhelming mountain of gifts from Lúcio’s adoring fans. (When Hanzo first set eyes on it, he was sure it'd topple over him and that would be his death—buried by the overwhelming show of affection for another.)

Sourly, Hanzo notes the disproportionate number of bodies present to those he knows is on base. Soldier and Tracer spend their time bickering near the pilot’s seat instead of helping—something about bringing the gifts back to Brazil immediately—and he wants nothing to do with that, spending as little time away from the ramp and ship as possible in case Soldier’s argument wins out and the Orca suddenly flies off on a ten-plus hour flight across the equator with him in it.

“Your timing couldn’t be more impeccable,” Winston says cheerfully to a passing Lúcio as he loads one of many heavy crates onto a trolley. “We just finished doing an inventory check and found that we were very short on supplies and our monetary support is temporarily unavailable and suspended indefinitely, so all of this couldn't have come at a better time.”

Lúcio gives him a curious look. “How were you guys surviving before I got here? Don’t tell me you were just starving and selling scrap.”

“No, of course not! We had funds coming in but...circumstances got in the way and, well…” Winston trails off with a heavy sigh and recovers in the next inhale with the fakest smile Hanzo has ever seen any gorilla make—not that he’s had a wealth of experience with such a thing. “Murphy’s law, wouldn’t you say?”

Lúcio spins on his heel mid-step and begins to walk backward to keep talking to Winston. “Can’t imagine what sort of circumstance could stop you, big guy. Whoops—!” He almost slams into a too-sleepy Mei. “Sorry!”

She mumbles something, dragging her fuzzy yeti-clad feet across the floor toward the ramp to the Orca. Hanzo feels just a little bad for her.

“The situation is very complicated,” Winston admits. “And the circumstances are less than ideal. Very complicated.”

“Oh come on, something you can’t solve? Phh-shaw. Now you’re just underselling yourself. You gotta have more confidence.”

“Well—”

“Who brought back Overwatch?”

“I did.”

“And who recalled everyone?”

With more confidence, Winston answers with his chest more inflated, “I did.”
And who—"

"Less talking, more lifting." Soldier: 76 barks as he emerges from cockpit, clearly annoyed.

And Soldier: 76 has just earned himself a higher spot on Hanzo’s shit list.

"Oh, come on, dad!" Tracer yells behind him, voice echoing too loudly for this hour. "Lighten up, just a bit o’ curiosity, is all!"

"Yeah, dad. We can work and talk." Then, Lúcio nudges Winston, ignoring Soldier’s irritated huff. "You brought this operation together, you brought us together because no one can do it on their own. What is it you always say?" The man puffs out his chest and fixes a pair of imaginary glasses on his face. "‘Together, we can solve any problem.’"

And Lúcio is quickly surpassing everyone else on Hanzo’s...other list. Or rather, he’s just joining you and several few people on a list that he never knew he was putting together.

It's plain to see the gears turning in Winston's head and the spark in his eyes as those words inspire a newfound hope.

"That’s right, together, we can solve any problem."

"That’s the spirit!"

Soldier grumbles something disagreeable beneath his mask about being a father, walking away with three boxes, hefting two over one arm and the last tucked beneath his other. With the old man out of the way, Lúcio's good mood is nothing short of infectious.

Story after story is doled out in rapid-fire succession. The world tour. The fans. His home. The orphaned children he sometimes looks after. The man so desperately wants to tell everyone he's joined Overwatch, barely restraining himself until he gets the green light from Winston interspersed with anecdotes from his days before he reached international fame, chasing after his young dreams and led forward by his frustration and powerlessness, keeping everyone in the docking area long after they've finished loading their supplies.

Lúcio, Hanzo concludes, is an excellent storyteller.

But even better at making other people talk.

"We're facing a bit of a financial crisis," Winston finally admits.

"Financial crisis? Wasn't Overwatch loaded? Where'd all that go?" Despite the heavy-handed questions, none of them sounded particularly accusing in Lúcio's voice. Hanzo isn't sure how he does it, but mentally notes that he is still not above learning something new from someone ten years his junior.

"Well, all the accounts related to Overwatch got frozen following its disbandment. So, when we initiated the Recall, we were essentially penniless."

"But Recall was months ago, so you had to be running somehow. How were you all getting money anyway? Second jobs? Selling scrap?"

"No, no. None of that. We had...an arrangement with someone who funneled money to us. As you know, Overwatch is currently outlawed—not that it should be—so we couldn't bluntly accept money from just anyone."
“So did you get yourselves a sugar daddy or…?”

Winston chokes, dark skin going crimson. “N-n-no! No!” He clears his throat, attempting to compose himself. “No, absolutel—no. No.”

Hanzo thinks the gorilla protests too much, but he stays quiet as Lúcio continues his line of easy-going (but effective) questioning. If he recalled correctly, there were ‘donors’ who gave Overwatch the funds they needed. Did the situation change somehow?

“We initially received a large amount of funding, but we seem to have...misbudgeted many things.”

“Like...?”

“The cost of maintaining the base, the Orca, jet fuel; we try to recycle as much as we can, but it's not possible in certain cases. We also had to pay the agents for their efforts and supplies, too. Dr. Ziegler's nanomachines technology is not cheap to reproduce by any means, and Tracer's chronal accelerator requires unique components that can be very costly.”

“Sorry about that!” Tracer sounds just as sincere as she does guilty.

“But! Dr. Zhou and Ms. Vaswani are a great help.”

Mei blushes, waving away the praise. “Oh, don't mention it. Anything for Overwatch.”

“Dr. Zhou is very innovative in ways I've never considered, and Ms. Vaswani's hard light technology makes many of our endeavors possible and cut down some costs.”

“Glad to hear that,” Lúcio says sourly, corner of his mouth twitching into a frown.

“Though getting cut off so suddenly from our funding and losing the chef made me realize just how costly even our basic necessities are.” The gorilla sighs. “Takeout every day is very expensive and really adds up.”

A prickle of apprehension stabs at Hanzo's stomach, mentally willing Lúcio to dig into that topic as well.

“Rice and beans, Winston. Rice and beans.” Lúcio gives Winston a few pats on the back that are supposed to be comforting, but only receives confused looks instead.

“What happened to the chef, Winston?” Tracer's asks, worry evident in her voice.

The scientist stands up straight, looks around a few times, and then collapses back in on himself, fists on the ground and head dipped low. Everyone, even Hanzo, leans in.

“You see, Chef left us a little over a week ago without notice. We were concerned, of course, but there's a tracker on the chef's communicator which indicated Chef is still on Gibraltar.”

“And how are you so sure it wasn't compromised?” Hanzo spits out faster than his brain could tell him to stop showing that he was invested.

Winston, taken aback by the question, stumbles through his next words. “We-well, we. We thought of the—of the possibility. And so, we sent an agent to track down the chef's current whereabouts.”

“‘And?’”—”Who did you send?” Lena, Mei, and Hanzo look at each other in surprised unison.
Winston strokes his chin. “I sent McCree, of course. Everyone else was on a mission or preparing to be sent off, so he was the only logical option.”

Hanzo is dumbstruck. He had been on a mission at the time, watching the happenings in Gibraltar with a ridiculously close eye. There was no way he would not have noticed if someone as (visually and audibly) loud as McCree was walking around. Either his skills were getting rusty or McCree's ability to hide in plain sight was commendable. Neither sat well with Hanzo's pride, and neither did the knowledge that McCree knew exactly where you were and didn't tell him. Not that he should've expected him to.

“He confirmed that there is no immediate danger, so we're leaving the situation as is for now. We can only wait until the chef decides to return or...informs us otherwise.”

Cold unease settles upon them all along with the implications. They can survive without you, of course, but it was not a future that Hanzo had truly ever considered until the other night. Somehow, he had always thought you'd be there behind that window, cooking for everyone. You had become such a steadfast fixture on base that it feels wrong to think that you would dare abandon your station for something else.

“So long as my customers still require me, I will be here.”

And yet...

“Hey, guys. Cheer up,” says Lúcio, likely noting the sudden shift in moods. “People come, people go. We can't force anyone to stay if they don't want to. And I'm sure that this chef wouldn't want you guys to be all mopey, right?”

Anger sparks through Hanzo's chest. How dare he say that when he doesn't even know you, but that feeling is quickly extinguished. There's no reason to be angry when he is logically correct.

“You're right,” Mei mumbles. “I just hope that Chef is okay.”

“Don't worry, if there's any trouble, we'll be there in a jif’,;” Tracer assures her with her signature poster smile.

Lúcio claps his hands once. “Great! Now who's hungry?”

Breakfast was a flop.

Among some of Lúcio's gifts—not the ones from his fans—were portable stovetops. Pots, pans, ladles, and other equipment were not among his possessions, so he attempted to go into the kitchen. Lúcio didn't have any of the same reservation the other agents do or any of the memories associated with attempting to enter them.

Unsurprisingly, the swinging double doors remained stubbornly shut.

Athena, when asked to open them, remained cordially (and frustratingly) loyal to you. “The kitchen is off-limits to non-kitchen personnel, Agent Lúcio.”

Hanzo unconsciously breathed a private sigh of relief as Athena continued to persist even against Lúcio's pleading and Winston's requests. At least he is not being discriminated against.

They gave up eventually, leaving your sanctuary intact. Lúcio swear up and down he'll get permission to enter, and Hanzo nearly chokes on his own spit. Preposterous.
Actual breakfast came in the form of McCree dressed down in normal civilian clothing (for once) with takeout from some local restaurant on the other side of Gibraltar. It explains his absence this morning.

Hanzo keeps his distance, the memory of the other night still burning a hole in his brain.

Winston asks between a mouthful of bread, “Where are the Junkers?”

“They seem to have found something interesting and wanted to check it out.”

“They wh—hrk!”

McCree has to clap his prosthetic hand hard against Winston's back to keep him from choking.

“Re-lax. Zenyatta is with them.”

Hanzo tries not to flinch at both the mention of the omnic or the sort of mischief those three might get into. He's heard enough stories to know that having them anywhere without sufficient supervision can only spell disaster.

Tracer leaves not too long after breakfast, citing that she had to pick up a few ‘chaps’. The rest of the day is spent getting Lúcio up to speed about the current missions and happenings in Gibraltar. With suspicions of Talon watching them still high, they have to keep their operations small and discreet. It's likely the Orca hasn't gone unnoticed and they're plotting their moves already. Winston assured them that Soldier: 76 was on the case, thanks to the information Hanzo has gathered.

Meanwhile, there was also the matter of Overwatch's current state of financial affairs which Hanzo gave his objective input on, much to Winston's apparent surprise. After a few questions and back and forth, Hanzo was reluctantly tasked with designing something akin to a business plan. It's clear to see Winston wasn't comfortable with the idea, but even he had to admit that they needed money to function (or at least a backup plan until their situation is sorted out). Overwatch cannot operate on goodwill alone.

The day flies by as Hanzo works on drafting different plans and assaults Winston with sharp questions about current risks and exact numbers. Not once would the scientist give him a straight answer as to where the money is—or was—coming from, only defaulting to his vague explanation of ‘donors’. Reluctantly, Winston asks Athena to give Hanzo access to the invoices, budget spreadsheets, and other financial documents the AI kept under lock and key. As much as Hanzo poured over the documents, he couldn't see beyond the numbers and vague transaction codes given. There's no indication of where this money came from, all deposits carefully redacted, leaving behind transfers and payments. (Funny enough, Hanzo knew everyone's salary, unsure if he should be surprised, offended, or respect the attempt to keep everyone's pay equal.)

Even so, money has trails, transactions that can be traced. If he really tried, he's sure he could find out exactly who and where this money was coming from. It would certainly help in creating countermeasures when the judge's hammer came down on them. The legal angle had to be carefully and constantly considered and contingency plans had to be drafted out depending on what sort of crimes a decent team of prosecutors could peg Overwatch with and under what jurisdiction. Surely the UN would turn this into an international scandal, but Gibraltar may claim legal jurisdiction and decide to try them here and refuse to extradite anyone. It would definitely buy them some time.

Legislation and laws had to be pulled up every other minute and Athena was very helpful with
providing the names of attorneys and law firms who were once under Overwatch's employ.

There are ways to operate within the current legal constraints; it's just a matter of being creative between now and when the UN decides to come down upon them. (In truth, it's near impossible to find a way to legitimize the actions being taken now when Overwatch is supposed to represent the 'good' in the world, but Hanzo has never been deterred by a challenge.)

It was nothing short of exciting, mentally stimulating in the ways that the past few missions weren't.

The planning carried him through the day and dinner which was once again some unknown takeout. Even some home cooking would be preferable to the already-drying noodles clinging tightly to his fork.

When asked if pots and pans couldn't be created from hard light, Lúcio gave Hanzo a bug-eyed look.

"You kidding me? Hard light can't stand up to that sort of heat."

Hanzo was treated to a surprisingly detailed lecture on the composition of hard light technology on a level that only Satya might be able to understand (or appreciate). Though, it's strange to think they don't get along when they both seem to share a similar interest. Wisdom had him keep those thoughts to himself.

In between listening to the temperature threshold that hard light can withstand or the delicate balance of its composition, Hanzo's thoughts drift as he mindlessly shoves the bland, lukewarm pasta into his mouth. The clumps of sauce do little to improve the flavors.

He wants saucy pasta with enough garlic to kill a vampire and onions that are still not cooked all the way through with too much butter to be healthy.

He wants meatballs that just hold their shape and give way when exposed to teeth.

He wants the clean, greasy crunch of pork cutlets, the juices and fat gushing over his tongue.

Even the dense, tangy European bread with the chewy crusts.

The sticky sweetness of a bread pudding that makes his teeth sing.

Perfectly brewed tea where the flavors of the leaf are present and clear, soothing his soul.

He wants so many things that he can't settle on what he actually desires.

But he can't complain. As long as his stomach no longer grumbles, it's enough.

It has to be.

He drinks away the grease with some tea that's been steeped too long, and talks his way through the toiling in his stomach.

The Junkers return toward the tail end of dinner with Zenyatta trailing behind them, all three dirty in a way that Hanzo has never seen even for the normally pristine Shambali monk: hands and feet caked in muddy dirt, faces and clothes full of soot.

The strange look that crosses McCree's face does not go unnoticed. It's the look of someone on the cusp of realization, separated by one missing piece. But that look is replaced by a tight smile that
Hanzo loses sight of when McCree walks up to the trio.

“Hey now, y'all trackin’ mud in here. What sort of mischief did ya get into?”

Roadhog pointedly ignores him with a grunt and Junkrat blurts out a, “Best pull your head in, mate!” that doesn’t seem to phase the cowboy in the least.

If they didn’t want to tell, Hanzo didn’t particular feel like sticking around to watch the ensuing fallout. They probably fell down somewhere and are too embarrassed to admit it.

Returning to his room, he makes a small attempt to flesh out the proposals and plans before he gives up and heads to bed. There's only so much that can be done with this much uncertainty. Their priorities are all over the place, unable to decide if keeping the peace as vigilantes or re-legitimizing themselves or earning a grassroots type of support or legislative support is the way to go. Winston's answers to those questions were sincere, but woefully lacking. It didn't help that Overwatch is an expensive operation running on the feelings and good will of others. Such things have limits.

Hanzo stares into the glimmering darkness of his eyelids, inhaling and exhaling in slow, even measures. He needs to stop thinking. That is for tomorrow.

Time slips away as he repeats this process. Even his body begins to swim in the mindless ocean, all solid objects becoming abstract and loose. The only thing that remains painfully intact and sharp is his mind.

Sleep, however much he wills it, does not come.

His brain buzzes with too much data and too many possibilities. Each time sleep twirls into his grasp, the sudden memory or the ever-dreaded 'what if' would snatch it away, leaving him wondering and in desperate need of his holotablet.

Damn overactive brain.

Tossing and turning a few more times, he gives up and gets out of bed like delayed clockwork, making his silent rounds through the base until he stands in front of the cafeteria again.

A private sigh makes its way out of his lips, rattling his chest.

There’s no point in being here. It’s far too early for your normal meeting time, and he already knows you’ve been gone—the reason is still lost on him, but it’s not really any of his business what the residents of this place does with themselves. You’re all adults.

Regardless, he steps forward, activating the sensors that allow the doors to rush open.

Where he expects darkness, there’s a light. For a foolish moment, he thinks you may have returned and he could feel his whole body lighten.

But all of that dissipates: the lights do not come from inside the kitchen. Instead, the lights right over the counter are on, shining down on one of the last people he would have expected to see at this time of night.

“Miss Mei?”

Disappointment bleeds into surprise. The scientist turns, scrunching her face at him before shifting her glasses from her head to her eyes; they brighten, sparkle even, for a reason that he cannot fathom.
“Oh, Hanzo. Good evening—or, oops, sorry, good morning, I guess?” She gives him a sheepish smile that he can’t be at all annoyed with.

“What are you doing here?”

She shrugs one shoulder good-naturedly, gesturing at a stool on the far side of the wall.

“Join me.” She holds up a bottle by the neck and waves it as though it’ll entice him. "I have Chinese wine and beer."

Haltingly, he looks between her, the barely illuminated darkness beyond the window, and the bottle in her hand before he decides he has nothing to lose. It’s late enough that it’s still acceptable to drink somewhere in the world.

Briefly, he has to do a double-take at that. Now he sounds just like McCree.

Hanzo brings the stool over and sits down beside her, careful to keep some distance between them in case she may be one of those people who cannot hold their liquor well. Now that he’s closer, he can see dishes laid out on the counter which Mei repositions to better serve two.

"I think you might enjoy. Help yourself."

“Where did you get all this?”

She brings a finger up to her lips. “Shhh,” she says too loudly.

It’s probably Lúcio. He hasn’t really talked to the man much, but it doesn’t mean the others haven’t. They likely made requests of their own ahead of time. Hanzo eyes the dishes Mei has prepared for this impromptu drinking session: dried squid, some jerky, rice crackers—the salty ones with that sweet icing drizzled on top—and some edamame. Almost all of them delectable and proper accompaniments to alcohol. Strange, considering China’s drinking culture and even stranger when he looks at the bubbly scientist. It’s appreciated, regardless.

"You don't seem like the drinking type," he muses, but not unkindly.

She gives him a mischievous grin, one that speaks of a person who has often gotten in trouble under the guise of being a model child. "My university days after examinations were good practice," she says casually, popping off a lid of a beer and offering to Hanzo.

Hanzo laughs despite himself, taking the drink in hand. "You sound like Hana."

Despite the MEKA pilot’s appearance, she can put away a lot of alcohol. Though it's only hearsay. Hanzo has never witnessed it himself, but according to the source, she can polish off beer after beer and bottles of soju on top of that. Incidentally, she revealed rather cheekily that her favorite is grapefruit flavored—what Hanzo is supposed to do with that knowledge, he'll never know.

“Thanks, I’ll take that as a compliment.”

“It is.”

She smiles and gestures at the food with a gentle sweep of the hand. “You should help me eat some. I have too much.”

“...thank you. I shall.”

He goes for the dried shredded squid first, taking his time with chewing and savoring the changing
flavors of spicy, umami, sweet, and back to umami. If his jaw didn’t get such a workout from eating this, he’d have no problems eating it forever.

The bitter taste of beer, cooling the slight spice of the squid brings out a sweetness that’s so simple yet delightful, he can’t help but sigh in content. The alcohol is not strong, but it’s pleasantly hoppy.

If only he had something fatty to accompany this like a soy-sauce karaage or some meat skewer with seared green onions in between or lightly battered—proper—asparagus tempura or burdock root. Or—his mouth gushes with the thought—chicken skin with ponzu. He gulps down another mouthful of chilling beer, washing away the phantom tastes of his desires.

In another life, perhaps.

If it were you offering, what sort of food would you prepare? How far would you go? Would you change the dishes depending on their drink? Or would you just give everything you have to offer? Maybe, just maybe, you’d drink, too.

He scoffs into his drink.

Ridiculous. That would never happen, not so long as you refuse everyone alcohol.

The rice crackers go next and he can’t help but devour the disk in two bites, chasing it with a nice drink of beer. The bubbles fill the cavities of the crackers, adding a sort of texture play on his tongue.

He goes around, shameless sampling the different nibbles offered, almost forgetting his company who sits quietly, her cheek resting on her hands folded over the bottle she covets.

“It’s not sake, but I’m glad to see you’re still enjoying yourself.”

Enjoying himself?

He blinks slowly at Mei, chewing through the edamame he’s popped into his mouth. Then he furrows his eyebrows. Is he enjoying himself? Quieter, in the back of his heart, he wonders: is he allowed to?

“I hope you are as well, Miss Mei.”

She sighs into her drink, the beginnings of a drunken smile on her face. “Oh please, Hanzo, we’re about the same age. Call me Mei. We’ve been over this.”

He bites his cheek to prevent himself from mentioning that she is technically two years his senior and then he has to do a mental doubletake at the stunning realization that yes she is two years his senior and he should be the one offering her a drink, not the other way around.

“I was worried because you seemed down these few days,” she admits quietly, pulling up her glass to her lips.

He’s tempted to make some backhanded remark, but barely manages something less. “Your worries are wasted on someone like me.”

“Don't be like that. We're teammates. Of course I'd worry.”

He shakes his head, stewing in the sudden bitter disappointment and the sharp sting of guilt. Another unnecessary person dragged into his affairs. They all just want to get involved some way
“What are you doing up so late, Miss Mei? With alcohol and snacks, no less,” he asks instead.

She turns a secretive smile into her glass. “I just felt like it, you know?”

“Is that so?”

Mei hums, a bit of distance in her eyes as she continues to stare into her drink, seemingly contemplative.

After a long, long moment, she quietly admits, “No.”

“No?”

She shakes her head, the lion’s mane of hair fanning out even further across her shoulders, shielding her eyes and face from view. “If Chef saw us, we’d probably be scolded, right?”

Startled by the change in topic, he stares, slowly letting his beer hit the counter, mouth dry.

“Alcohol isn’t allowed, but… I don’t know.” Mei sighs, a little more defeated than Hanzo has ever seen her. “I sort of thought… if I brought this out maybe, sorry, this sounds silly, but I thought that Chef might just come running out here.” Quietly, she adds, “I’m worried.”

“…about the chef, you mean?”

“Aren’t you?”

Mei turns and looks up at him, her gaze piercing through him like she sees something he cannot. He has to look away.

“The chef is not a child,” he manages to say. “There is no reason to be concerned.”

“Oh. I thought you’d be the most concerned beside McCree and them. You get along so well with the chef that I thought…”

“We do not get along. We are merely… merely…” The words and bubbles fizzle out on his tongue.

Proprietor and customer.

Colleagues?

Friends? He mentally cringes at the word.

There’s nothing he can say that wouldn’t make him a liar. Not that anyone else would know, but it doesn’t feel right saying any of the options that run through his mind.

“…if it seems we are close, it is only because of circumstance,” he finishes. It’s the best he could do for now, and if it sounds the slightest bit off, he could blame it on the beer in his hand no matter how weak it may be.

“I see.” Mei drains the remainder of her drink, sighing heavily before she laughs sheepishly behind a hand. “I guess I just worry too much. Thank you, Hanzo. Chef should be fine, after all, we’re always the ones getting taken care of, right?”

Even though as she says that, he knows it’s far from the truth. She’s probably never seen you
collapsed from overwork or know that you’re a fool who would gladly disregard your own health on a whim. Did they even know you’re on medication? Were you taking them properly wherever you are? Did you get tired of watching over them?

Gibraltar is not a large place. Surely you could find some time to return.

But maybe you left for personal reasons.

Health reasons? Family? A lover?

And that thought twists something inside him, and for a moment, he thinks he may have gotten food poisoning and chugs the last bit of the beer to extinguish the ache.

“Thank you, Miss Mei. For the drinks and snacks.”

“Don't mention it. It's nice to have a drinking buddy,” She gives him a heartfelt smile with more teeth than she'd normally show that stood out against the deep flush of her skin.

“Should I help you clean and accompany you back to your room?”

Just as the words left his mouth, his brain screeches to a halt as another inconspicuous realization sideswipes him.

Where did you sleep?

Never once had he seen anything that could have been your room. Sure, there were plenty of rooms that could be yours, but Athena had made it clear that power was limited on the base and all agents were kept on a single floor to consolidate resources.

If you had ever slept or had a room to return to, he should have seen it by now.

Unless….

It is horrifying to think of it, but what if you slept in the kitchen? He spared the darkness another look, searching for what could hint at having been a makeshift cot or sleeping area, but sees nothing but the beginnings of imaginary lights in his vision.

No, that's not possible.

But if it were, it could explain why you left.

Or could it be…

Searching rapidly through his memories, he tries to recount the pages and pages of numbers he saw this morning, trying to put a name, a price, anything that could indicate that you were getting paid or somehow compensated for your time here.

Dread seeps into his skin as he tries and tries but comes up short.

Nothing.

You don't get paid.

And suddenly, everything makes sense.

His stomach twists violently and a cold chill cascades down his back, eliciting a shiver that makes
his hair stand on end.

It doesn't go out even after he's helped Mei gather all her things and escorted her back to her room, his head buzzing with the implications. He tries to return to sleep after brushing his teeth, swearing to return to this newfound revelation in the morning, drifting in and out between a fitful rest and a steadily growing angry wakefulness.

Hanzo wakes to an inexplicable feeling, but he feigns sleep just as he’s always been taught—there is no killing intent, no presence beside him, just a feeling. He's acutely aware of the quiet hum of electricity, the eerie and unnatural hush he’s long associated with the remoteness of the base. He knows he mustn’t have been asleep long, so there’s a chance it could be just some other resident making their restless rounds.

The longer he listens, however, the more his doubts begin to pile.

Nothing seems out of place—and that might be precisely what’s wrong—but there is a rolling tension beneath the surface of his skin that hints at the glaring possibility that something is wrong, something that his five senses can’t perceive. There’s a tugging inside not unlike the dragons, urging him to do something.

Bow and quiver jump into his hands and he slinks out of his bed to find refuge in the deep shadows of his room. He presses his ear against the wall, seeking out any hidden sounds past the machinery and wires and shaking metals. Several tense moments pass by, but there is nothing unusual or alarming—no one else breathing outside, no unknown footsteps—just the sounds of the night.

By all accounts, he should return to bed; there is nothing wrong.

But his intuition says otherwise and it has saved him more times than his foolhardy reasoning ever has, and so he pulls away, unsatisfied. Quietly and quickly, he slips in the earpiece to his communicator in his ear, unlatches his window and slips outside. (If an enemy is inside the base, Athena would’ve already alerted everyone, and no one wants to deal with some of the residents when they’re sleep deprived.)

The night has gotten noticeably colder since months past, the wind tugging at his hair and clothes, willing him to fall into the abyss. However, he is not so easily distracted by such mundane things. He scales the walls of the Watchpoint, mindful of the volume of his steps against the cold metal.

The sun is not yet up, but the sluggish fade from black to a midnight blue at the edge of the horizon and the quiet fade of the stars tell him that will soon change. He must not have slept long.

Beneath his ribs, the feeling of panic swells until his chest can’t contain it, spreading and numbing his fingers as he continues his sweep of the compound. In his ear, the communicator remains silent.

‘It’s paranoia,’ he tells himself even as he leaps from ledge to ledge, looking and searching for anything in the darkness that could have even been deemed the slightest bit suspicious, almost slamming straight into a well-hidden turret that swivels its head, the red charge of it nearly opening fire on him before it recognizes him as an ally and turns away.

He nearly misses a landing trying to avoid it.

It takes a few moments for the newfound terror in his heart to settle before he continues his investigation, more annoyed than before and even more unsettled.
Damn Torbjörn.

(It’s smart to hide these turrets, but damn him for it anyway, and damn himself for being spooked by such a little thing. How did he even get them up here? The man is missing a functional hand and eye. His climbing skill can’t be that good.)

His heart pounds with the adrenaline of a fight and without any release, it toes the border toward panic.

Twice he circles the base grounds, jumping down from a height most would consider dangerous just to feel that swooping fear in his stomach, hoping it would drown out the inescapable buzz in his skin.

Nothing.

His teeth ring from the weight of his jaw’s grinding. Around him, half the sky has started to regain its color, the birds are calling to each other and giving their greetings.

It has to be nothing.

His instincts, no matter how much he wants to trust them, have to be wrong.

Just this once.

[ INTRUDER ALERT, INTRUDER ALERT ]

Hanzo almost slips off the roof.

The base comes alive: light thrown up, and the sounds of movement, and doors shuttering to trap whomever it is in Athena's clutches. Shutters slam down in front of the windows themselves, effectively locking him out of the base.

So this must be what the feeling is about. Annoying, but he's relieved his instincts did not fail him.

“Athena, status.”

The earpiece clicks. “Four armed Talon agents confirmed. Three others have been incapacitated. Soldier: 76 and Winston are on the scene and actively engaged. Agent Mei and Zenyatta are en route. The others’ whereabouts are unknown.”

He jumps down, lands right outside shuttered glass. “Location?”

“They have been stopped in the kitchen.”

His chest is seized with fright for a second before it loosens again when he remembers you're not there. You should thank whatever deity is watching over you or thank your sound judgement for leaving before this happened.

He huffs and shakes his head. Foolish. There's no need to be concerned.

A little more composed, he brings a hand back up to his ear. “Athena, shortest path from here?”

“Head west 27 meters, then proceed south 10 meters. There will be an emergency exit accessible to you on your right that overlooks the cafeteria used for maintenance.” He's moving even before she finishes talking.
It doesn't take him long to reach the location. There's no visibility into the cafeteria—he recognizes
the shuttered windows as the ones that normally overlook the mess hall, but he's never noticed this
door before. He presses his ear against it.

Clashing and muted rapid fire barely permeate the heavy metal. If he focused, he could almost see
it in his mind's eye: Soldier: 76 trying to maintain close combat and reduce damage to a minimum;
Winston providing backup. There's other sounds mixed in there as well that he can't easily discern,
but it doesn't sound like a losing battle.

Hanzo breathes in deep and exhales slowly, the adrenaline and unease forced to settle at the bottom
of his veins. He repeats this twice more, mentally checking off his equipment and condition.

‘Clear your mind.’

He notches his bow, back to the door. “Athena, the door.”

“Understood.”

With a beep and a quiet hiss, the door grants him entrance and he's in before it can fully open and
let in the beginnings of a more colorful sky. Running across the thin catwalk that circles the
cafeteria, he quickly surveys the scene: an ice wall covering the service window with Mei and
‘Snowball’ right outside. He has no visual on Zenyatta, Winston, or Soldier: 76 and can only
assume they are inside the kitchen. All else looks just as it did several hours ago when he was here.
The sounds of combat are muted behind the ice, the occasional blast testing the very limits of its
strength.

The kitchen is not small, but it’s not so big that a prolonged fight is possible.

He clenches his jaw to avoid clicking his tongue lest someone notices him.

He tries to get to the furthest edge of the catwalk just to see the double doors that Lúcio and
Winston weren’t able to enter this morning without much luck.

If only he had his contacts, he’d be able to use his sonic arrows and actually see behind those walls.
As it is, he has no choice but to get close. He debates it for a moment: if he breaks position, he
might lose any chances at getting any stragglers.

“Athena. Change to main communications channel. What is the current status?”

“Switching communications channel. Soldier: 76, status report.”

Immediately, his ear is assaulted with harsh breathing and the sounds of metal on metal. “—ey
don’t know how to stay down, do they? Yarrgh!!”

“Hanzo reporting. I am above the cafeteria. No visual on the team.”

“Hanzo?” He finds himself nodding despite no one being able to see him. There’s more scuffling.
“Stay your ground. Keep an eye on the door.”

“Acknowledged.”

Winston’s roar can be heard even without the earpiece, crashing and banging and shouts following
soon after. Two loud cracks echo, and from the way Mei has her modified ice-gun out, aimed
carefully at the ice, he can only assume it's about to hit its limit.
He keeps his arrow aimed at the door, listening and watching.

Seconds go by at a snail’s pace, each noise and movement never going unnoticed. Hanzo keeps his breathing slow, blinks deliberate. There’s a cacophony of sensations in his stomach, across his skin, itching the back of his mind, that he steadfastly ignores until he finally hears nothing, sees nothing move.

And then: “...all clear.”

Hanzo doesn’t relax even a fraction.

Lúcio skates onto the scene just at that moment. “Someone call for an audio medic?”

“Get in here, punk. Hanzo, you too. Mei, stay outside.” There’s a bite of frustration and perhaps even panic in his voice, but Hanzo couldn’t be sure through the hoarseness of his voice and the wind rushing through his ears as he jumps straight down from his position, landing right beside Lúcio. Mei gives him a nod from where she stands, still at attention despite the weariness in her eyes, and he barely returns it.

The buzzing unease coils low in Hanzo's belly now that he has a moment, the beginnings of which make his hair stand on end. The danger isn't over.

Unconsciously, he takes a breath and both he and Lúcio push the double doors aside with their shoulders. They give without resistance.

The sight of the kitchen stuns Hanzo and even Lúcio has to take a moment to take in the scene and mutter, “Holy shit.” The scent of blood slaps them both in the face—there’s not too much, but enough that it couldn't be ignored.

The normally neat rows of containers, plates, and glasses are mostly askew, their shattered remains all over the rubber-matted floor. The metal work surfaces are pitted with deep dents and dings even Torbjörn would have a hard time fixing. One of the sinks spew water, the faucet ripped clean off. The glass doors of the walk-in freezers are smashed in, shards of glass still coming loose and falling to the ground like glittering snow.

The thought of you returning and finding the kitchen in this state brings a bitter smile to his face.

In the corner, seven Talon agents lay in various states of consciousness and distress. Winston is in the middle of tying them up with some rope, likely something you kept in the kitchen for whatever reason.

How did they get trapped in the kitchen of all places? It’s nearly impossible to enter it without trigger some alert or Athena and there’s nothing of value here. Unless they’re after the Cellar…?

Soldier: 76 hovers over the Cellar door with Zenyatta just behind him. Neither of their faces—covered as they are—give anything away. Soldier tears off his glove and slams his bare hand against the panel which is smeared with a paint of rust.

There’s a beep.

The door rushes open, the suction of air yanks and tears at an immovable Soldier whose red, red gaze seems to cut through the darkness before it drops down to something inside. Zenyatta gasps softly, an “oh my” escaping him just as one of his orbs fly past Soldier. Hanzo doesn’t even have the time to contemplate why the door opens for the man before he dips inside, the door shutting immediately behind him.
Dense silence fills the air as everyone waits with bated breath for him to return.

When the door opens again and Soldier: 76 emerges, Hanzo’s blood runs ice cold and his breath is knocked out of his lungs, his grip over his bow and arrow go slack.

Lúcio lets out something like a curse in his native tongue as he rushes over, but Hanzo barely hears it over the ringing in his ears, his stomach dropping to his feet as he registers the scene. The feeling of dread and panic rises up in his throat, solid and realized.

Lying limp in Soldier’s arms, pale and bloody, held close to his chest like a treasure, is you.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you everyone for your patience and waiting so long for this chapter. We're starting to see the consequences of what is built crumble and that is pretty much my jam. I am excited to write the next chapter and I hope you are too.

Thank you all again for your constant support.
It is not something Hanzo would have or could have known beforehand, but the sheer number of things that come to light after the failed attack is earth-shattering, and not even half would be covered by day’s end.

It starts with Lúcio and Soldier rushing you out of the kitchen and toward the medical bay with Zenyatta floating behind, who gives him a painfully meaningful look without being able to change his expression at all.

The look keeps his feet glued to the ground, stops him from chasing after them.

Not that he had any good reason to do so. There was nothing he can do. Assassin as he is, he cannot help a dyi—an injured person except to end their suffering. That fact and the memory of Zenyatta’s silent request keeps his feet stuck in place.

Soldier barks an order to Mei who comes rushing in, looking grimly resolute and with her homemade gun in hand, taking aim and sealing the Cellar door with a well-placed ice wall before pointing it at their new found prisoners.

Never before had Hanzo seen such a look on the bubbly scientist—it is so alien on her, but so eerily familiar; Hanzo sees it in the mirror and on the veterans who turn away when their faces are cast in the dark. He grits his teeth and turns away, lamenting his inadequacies.

If only he were faster. If only he had known. If only he dug deeper, pried harder, tried harder, then none of this would need to happen.

It’s not until this moment that he needs to know what is in that Cellar more than ever and what occurred here.

But that need is quickly forgone (but not forgotten) when McCree arrives on the scene, a little winded and more than willing to be put to work, helping Hanzo and Winston ‘escort’ the Talon agents they have in their grasp down to the few holding cells the base has, leaving Mei and Snowball to fend for themselves.

“I’ll be fine. Go on ahead,” she manages through a forced smile before turning her attention toward the sealed door.

The cells are not well-fortified or separated enough from the rest of the infrastructure, but they’ll have to do. It will at least keep any more blood from being spilled if he so chooses to beat their faces in.

McCree calls the shots here, instructing Winston who clumsily tries to follow with the hands of someone who has never had to restrain or frisk another living being before.

Questions upon questions crowd in his head which he has to stuff away into the very recesses of his mind where an avalanche of other, older questions reside, threatening to spill over and out of his mouth in an endless stream. He clamps down on that urge, focusing on his current task, methodically checking the belongings their prisoners, divesting them of all weapons, communicators, or anything remotely useful.
This, at least, he is familiar with and good at (and if he had a choice, he’s just strip the people naked and yank out the circuits of the Omnicos and leave them—though he knows that would not stop the best of assassins like himself).

It’s a good distraction.

He even has the presence of mind to search the inside of their mouths and common areas where small implements could be held (not that he believes any of them have that sort of resolve, but it’s always best to be thorough—he cannot fail his responsibilities).

One or two of them put up a token resistance, but they’re no match for Hanzo, McCree, or Winston. It’s cute, if irritating.

Looking through their belongings yields nothing. It's the standard fare of guns, ammunition, night vision goggles, and the like. The communicators are encrypted with more than just the standard fingerprint scanner.

The end result is a pile of junk that is left for Athena to process later.

“All right, boss, how d’you want to do this?” McCree asks after he’s inspected Hanzo’s and Winston’s work. The cowboy is a lot more thorough in looking at them, nearly getting spit in his eye for it. Strangely enough, it didn’t seem to bother him; he just moves on like he was used to it.

Winston looks confused, a little unsure. It’s hardly the look of a leader. “Pardon me, but do...what?”

McCree jerks his chin at the three cells Talon occupies, who watch them all with defiant trepidation. (It's hard to take them seriously when they've been relieved of everything but their underthings.) “What’re we gon’ do with ‘em. Turn ‘em over to the Gibraltar authorities or hang on to ‘em?”

“We interrogate them, of course,” Hanzo snaps without hesitation, pulling his shoulders back and glaring at each Talon agent with a look that makes nearly every one of them flinch.

Winston looks taken aback. “Interrogate—?”

"Hang on jus' a sec."

McCree walks over to a control panel nearby and does something that makes hard light walls appear in between the empty spaces of the bars.

"It's so that they can't hear us but we can hear them," he explains as he returns, his back to the cells. "And s'much as I’d like t’ agree, I can’t condone that, partner. Or if we do, we gotta do it lawfully."

“Since when did you care about the law?” Hanzo sneers, more biting than he had intended.

The cowboy just throws him a shrug that looks like it took more effort than it should've to seem nonchalant and then looks at the cell where Talon is being kept.

“Since we became ‘Overwatch’, I guess.”

He bites back a snappy remark to that, because as much as it stings Hanzo to admit it, McCree had a very good point.
This isn’t Hanamura or the right political climate to do the stuff that Hanzo would have liked. Hanzo's brand of interrogation ranges from literal heavy-handedness to threats that are often followed through. He had the luxury of doing so because his Shimada clan was the law. This is different. Trying to rebuild Overwatch and establish its legitimacy is already a herculean effort; adding further criminal activities to the fray would only hinder their efforts now and in the future.

"I say we hold off until we have a better grasp of the situation," Winston suggests. "It's unclear if this is the only attack or if this is just a scouting force. We should try to regroup and solve this together."

McCree scratches the side of his face thoughtfully before he shrugs.

"You're the boss."

"...understood."

So he has no choice but to (figuratively) sit on his hands while Winston tries to gather his thoughts and the statuses of every reachable agent.

The questions come back again along with a new sort of unease that slithers beneath his skin, the why’s and how’s chipping away at his concentration.

This unease is not brought on by instinct—that has long faded away—but by the familiar makings of his own mind.

Each recollection of you brings about a different detail for him to focus on. It replays for him over and over in an all too familiar way.

The paleness of your face. The shallow, shuddering breaths that shook your body. The amount of blood, too much and already coagulating, and what seemed like it could have been viscera peeking out from the bullet torn portions of your shirt—regular civilian shirt.

You weren't even wearing your uniform.

It's such an innocuous and negligible fact, yet the thought of it is shocking.

You never intended to return, did you?

Talon may have very well forced you here in the middle of whatever you were doing.

If so, what is Talon after? Is it supposed to be a message? To whom? What’s the message? And why did it involve you?

The simmering anxiety rises, twists in his stomach with a mix of cold, dripping horror and perverse intrigue.

What is your involvement with this? Or is it because they know you’re involved with Overwatch and they wanted to make an example out of you just to show they’re not above such means? But if that were the case, then they would’ve been more flashy about it, not sneaking around like thieves.

Maybe you yourself were involved in Talon’s operations and you had been double-crossed by them?

He shakes his head violently and runs both hands through his hair, which he thinks he can feel grow even more grey with each unanswered question that ailed him.
No. It’s not possible. You’re just a chef. Like the many times he’s told himself before, you’re not capable of something that would get you in trouble with people so dangerous as Talon. It's illogical—what would Talon have to offer you that Winston couldn't get for you? Money? Fame? Threatened your friends and family?

His head snaps up with a potential realization, startling McCree whom he pays no mind to.

Is that why there are no other chefs? Were they captured and used as hostages?

But then wouldn’t Winston have known about it? Underneath the roof and protection of the once-mighty Overwatch, a few chefs shouldn’t be a problem for Winston to send protection for. (Though Hanzo knows the reality wouldn’t be so simple given Talon’s underhanded tactics and Overwatch’s current reputation.)

But even if the other chefs were captured, there should be no reason for you to risk health and hunger. There would be no reason for you to be kind to anyone or work so hard in the middle of the night.

The more cynical side of him rears its head: unless it’s a ploy for you to get closer to everyone. Listening in on conversations, stealing plans and passing along information while pretending to care about them.

“Y’mind thinkin’ any louder? I can almost see the steam risin’ from your head.”

Hanzo shoots McCree a glare, but he doesn’t seem the least bit cowed by the look. Instead, he seems amused.

“I guarantee whatever you’re thinkin’, it’s probably not what it looks like.”

The audacity. What would McCree know about what he's thinking? He bites back a scathing comeback that he so desperately wants to make. Instead, he settles with an "Is that so?" through clenched teeth.

"Yep." He looks fairly confident, flashing Hanzo a grim grin that looks a touch menacing behind the shadow of his hat. "Either you're assumin' Chef sold out or we're gettin' played like a deck o' cards."

Hanzo says nothing, sour. It's irksome to know that McCree is already several steps ahead of him in something that he should be good at.

"Bold assumption."

"It's only logical."

"Even if those were my thoughts, how are you certain it is neither of those options?"

McCree chuckles but it's bereft of any actual amusement. It's bitter and sticks to him fiercely like there's a story that needs to be told and is begging to be heard.

"Let's just say I got my sources."

"Either provide answers or do not bring it up all," he snaps. With the situation being as blackboxed as it is, he has no time to be playing idiot mind games. Those days of political tiptoeing and nasty implications are over and Hanzo prefers to keep it that way.
McCree seems to consider that for a minute before reaching into a pocket and pulling out a silver case, popping it open to get an unlit cigar to mull on.

The urge to smack it out of his mouth is tempting, but he crosses his arms, hands firmly tucked beneath his armpits hard enough to at least numb them a little so McCree would have a bit of a fighting chance should it come down to it.

"Since you asked so nicely," he starts sarcastically, casting a glance at the Talon members in their cells. "Been checkin' up on the chef since it ain't usual to go AWOL so long. Chef ain't too good at keepin' secrets or duckin' under the radar like the rest of us. So I did some trailin' and found out a few things."

He pauses, looking briefly to the ceiling. More solemnly, he says, "Whatever happened last night wasn't supposed t' have happened. Chef bit off way more than I think even any of us can chew. Heart's in the right place, but…"

McCree hums around his unlit smoke. "Sometimes when you're too single-minded tryin’ to do something for people, y’ end up hurtin’ everyone around you."

Something dark wells up from the bottom of Hanzo’s stomach, muting the unease throughout his body.

He utters coldly, “Are you implying something?”

“Nope.”

Hanzo squints at McCree, trying to ascertain the truth behind his words. McCree raises his hands, palms up in clueless surrender. It’s vexing that he would know so much and give so little. It’s not an unfamiliar game with him but usually he had the power to end it.

“And what is it that Chef did?”

The cowboy takes the cigarillo out of his mouth, rolls it between his fingers, and holds it. He takes a pensive breath, and leans forward.

"To help—"

“Agents, your presence is requested over Channel 6. Please check-in,” chirps Athena from out of nowhere.

Hanzo stares at the ceiling in disbelief. This sort of thing could not have been accidental.

He sends McCree a look that he hopes conveys very clearly that this conversation is not yet over. He only gets a shrugs in return before they both tune into the 'official team conversation' on their communicators.

The screen is split into parts and the only ones who look like they're in the same place are Winston and Soldier, who surprisingly, is missing his signature jacket. Winston clears his throat loudly, shuffling some papers that look like they're more for show than any actually notes. There is the noted absence of several people—the most notable being Genji—and he can't be sure if he's grateful or resentful of the fact.

“Thank you everyone for being available on such short notice.”

A chorus of echoed sentiments sound off.
"For those who are unable to make it or have become unreachable, we will update them as soon as possible." There is also the distinct lack of Junkers though Hanzo isn't sure if that's intentional or not. "But since this matter is most pressing, allow me start.

"At 0451 today, seven Talon members entered Watchpoint: Gibraltar proper. The exact method of entry has not yet been confirmed. The chef was injured as a result and is currently undergoing treatment. The connection between Talon and the chef is not known at this time."

Morbidly, Hanzo thinks that Winston has gotten a bit better at speaking to crowds and probably took some time to actually pull himself together.

"Unfortunately, we are unable to confirm this. It seems all cameras inside the kitchen were turned off some time ago—"

"Wait. The cameras? In the kitchen? They were turned off?"

Winston fumbles, stuttering at the sudden outburst from Fareeha, ruining any semblance of confidence or authority he had at the beginning.

Athena explains, “Several months ago, the chef had asked for them to be turned off for privacy reasons."

Security agent that she is, the dumbstruck look on her face is almost expected. Winston seems to know this, shrinking just slightly. “How could you let that happen? A chef does not get to override basic security protocols! Who even authorized this?” she shouts, fist raised and ready to strike, but she unfurls it and presses her fingers to her head, muttering, “What were you thinking?"

Suddenly Hanzo is reminded very vividly that she is Ana’s daughter. It seems that he’s not the only one with that thought as Soldier looks away from the screen for a moment to cough away something that sounds suspiciously like a laugh.

“As the kitchen currently belongs to the chef, the request for privacy was granted after some consideration.”

“The kitchen is Watchpoint property and is a public space. There is no expectation of privacy in a public space,” she stresses, irritated and grumbling beneath her breath. “Are they turned on now?”

“Affirmative, though leaving them on 24/7 will expend a large amount of power that the Watchpoint cannot sustain, I recommend setting up motion sensors in the kitchens using the remaining inventory.”

“We’ll do that then." Clearly, the Helix agent had a lot more to say, but her lips are pulled tight and the glare she has aimed at Winston does not alleviate any of the tension in the room. “Continue.”

Winston clears his throat, takes a breath, and raises three fingers. “Right. So here's the plan. We regroup. We secure the base. And we get answers. Tracer, will pick up as many agents as possible in the next two hours. After that, Tracer's group will meet up with Ms. Vaswani who will then use her teleporter to bring everyone to the Watchpoint."

A globe appears on the table in front of Winston, the blue light illuminating the shadows and weary lines on his face. Red dots appear with a bubble of several agent's faces, a line mapping the course for Tracer connecting each of them.

"Agents Pharah, Reinhardt, Symmetra, and Torbjörn are projected to be in your path for pickup. The second round will likely have Mercy and several others. As several agents are still not
responding with their locations, we will do an availability check when the first group returns."

"Hey! What about me?" A new voice chirps from what seemed to be Reinhardt's screen. From the back of the giant of a man, a ponytail peeks out before the curious face of a young woman appears.

"Oh! Brigitte!"

"Of course you can."—"Of course you can't!"

Reinhardt and Torbjörn stare each other down from their respective screens. The effect is diminished when they're looking in different directions on Hanzo’s screen.

"No civilians," Soldier stresses.

"But Dr. Zhou is a civilian."

At the mention of her name, Mei jumps to attention, the slightest bit of a blush on her face, hands up defensively.

Soldier: 76 looks like he's holding back a sigh; the weight of it can even be felt through the screen. "Dr. Zhou was formerly Overwatch. A different branch, but still Overwatch."

"Then what ab—"

"No, Brigitte. I told you not to get involved."

"But Papa!"

Winston holds up a hand and pinches his head with the other. "Please. Save your bickering for later."

"Coming anyway!"

"Brigitte!"

Winston clears his throat loudly, picking up and tapping his stack of papers against the table. The map disappears at his silent command, as does the family argument.

"You all have your assignments. Details for pickup and transportation will be sent through a series of secure messages. Time is of the essence if we don't want another surprise attack. Is everyone clear?"

"Clear!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Crystal!"

"Understood."

"Right, then meeti—"

“Wait, Winston?”

“Yes, Mei?”

Mei puts down the hand she raised, concern etched all over her face. “How...is the chef's
"condition?"

The conference falls silent, all eyes on Winston who sags just a little bit as though the weight of everyone’s gazes are pinning him down. Hanzo unconsciously leans forward into his screen, pressing the volume up button twice.

"We're waiting for a full diagnosis from Dr. Zielger. Until then, we can't say." After a pause, Winston adds, "However, based on the information I received from Zenyatta, the chef’s condition may be...precarious."

Hanzo sucks in a sharp breath.

“Bu-but not to worry! Dr. Zielger is currently working remotely and is overseeing the treatment along with Zenyatta and Lúcio.”

“Why did Talon hurt Chef?” Zarya asks from her panel. “Chef does not fight, does not leave, has no business with Talon.”

Winston shakes his head. “We’re still trying to find the answers. We have to wait until Chef is better or until Talon decides to talk.”

“Oh, we’ll make them talk, all right…” mutters Torbjörn beneath his breath, his metal claw clinking menacingly. No one else seems to disapprove of the idea, and it is the slightest bit relieving.

They wouldn't let you die. If there was one redeeming quality about this mess of a ragtag peace-keeping organization, it's that they would never abandon one of their own (for better or for worse). At least they all seem to trust in you, believing in your innocence even if Hanzo is still skeptical.

"Winston, a moment.” Satya looks as prim as ever, eyes narrowed in suspicion. “I recall Watchpoint: Gibraltar and it's perimeter was fully equipped with turrets prior to this incident. From which point did Talon manage to enter the premises?"

"That's, ah, still being investigated." 

"Give us a break, Winston!" Torbjörn shouts so loud that even his screen shakes. “It's the Cellar, isn't it? Always knew that'd be trouble."

Again, it’s Fareeha with the hard hitting questions and demands. “Winston, I think it’s about time you tell us what’s in the Cellar. If Chef was attacked in the kitchen, there is no way Talon got in through the front doors. So talk. What’s in the Cellar?"

The tension becomes palpable even through the screen as everyone’s attention is focused on Winston. His eyes dart around, seeking answers before they settle on Soldier, after which he closes them and takes a deep breath.

“To tell you the truth,” he says ever so slowly, “I don’t know.”

"What do you mean 'you don't know'? You're the commander—"

“That information is classified.” Soldier uncrosses his arms and leans heavily into the table before him. It’s strange to see it now, but he really is much more well built than his silhouette implies, scars running up and down his shoulders and arms. Hardly the look of someone who calls himself ‘old’.
Several people have the decency, including Hanzo, to look affronted.

"Classi—"

"—he just said he didn't kno—"

"Stop playing dumb—"

Winston holds up his hands. "Please. Soldier. I think it's time you told us. I admit, I, too, am curious about the Cellar."

From above, Athena warns them, "It is not a wise idea to do so without the chef's expressed permission. I have assure—"

"We should not need permission from the chef," Fareeha states, voice full of the authority she likely uses with her team at Helix. "This is a matter of security. Life and death. We can prevent this from happening again and putting everyone’s lives on the line because of a promise or privacy is foolish."

She raises a hand. "Vote: everyone who wants to know what's in the Cellar, hands up."

First, it’s Torbjörn, though from the way he speaks, he already knows. Then it’s Zarya. Satya. The girl behind Reinhardt. Ever reluctant and with a wary eye on Soldier, Winston.

Hanzo hesitates. He wants to know, but not likely this: given to him on a silver platter instead of his own prowess and investigative skills.

But knowing would be for the greater good.

He does not raise his hand. Neither does McCree.

"There. Majority."

So quietly that Hanzo thinks he imagined it, he could swear she grumbles, "Shouldn't have to do that in the first place."

Soldier looks like he feels the same way but in a different context. He rubs the skin above his mask and gives Winston one final look that—if the mask weren’t there—might have been pleading or exasperated. The scientist returns it, lips drawn in grim determination.

Voice weary, Soldier begins his story.

“The Siege Tunnels of Gibraltar. When Watchpoint: Gibraltar was built, the architects incorporated some of it into the design plans. After the Watchpoint was built, the Head Chef at the time decided to expand the kitchen and incorporate an abandoned section of the tunnel. That expansion was the creation of the cellar.”

“How come we didn’t know about that until now?” Fareeha asks.

“It was omitted from all blueprints. The chefs kept it secret and never let anyone else near it long enough to have it mapped.”

McCree snorts from his holovideo. “‘Secret’, sure.”

“Secret enough to keep anyone from actually finding it until now,” Soldier snaps back. “Everyone knew the Cellar existed, but no one's been in there beside those cooks. If you want someone to spill
their guts about it, check the operating room.”

“Listen Jack”—an icy hush falls over the room—“you knew the tunnels were down there. You knew it was a weak point. You knew Chef was there and what it’s being used for. So if you knew so much, why didn’t ya stop it?”

There is something in his voice that implies the question is far deeper and far more than what is being asked.

Though is that Soldier's true name? Jack?

“I tried.”

“Tried doin’ what? Not eatin’ the chef’s food?” McCree snorts, voice increasingly accusatory and taking on an edge of outright defiance and authority that Hanzo has not yet heard before from him. "You know each ‘n every single one of ‘em are stubborn as a mule. You don't eat, you get it forced down your throat. You knew, Jack. You knew this would happen.”

Winston speaks up, hesitant and meek. “I—I suppose I'm partly to blame. Soldier: 76 did want to get rid of the chef because of this exact reason. I stopped it. I just didn't realize just how accessible the kitchens were. By all accounts, it is actually one of the most secure areas on base—”

“Ain't askin' for excuses, Winston. No 'ffense, but this wasn't a decision you should've made. 'Sorry's can't fix what landed Chef upstairs.”

“Agreed,” says Fareeha. “Security detail is not your expertise. Jack is at fault for withholding crucial information, and you made a bad call based on it. That's called...what was it again, Jack? Misconduct?”

Hanzo has long given up on keeping track of these secrets.

“So you all knew,” Soldier mutters.

“My friend,” Reinhardt says solemnly, quieter yet more powerful than Hanzo has ever heard him, “we never thought any less of you.”

There’s a moment of silent agreement among all members on the call until Fareeha mutters, “I did.”

“Fareeha!”

She rushes onward, McCree’s momentum seemingly too infectious not to take advantage of. "Even if Winston is in charge, you had a responsibility as a part of Overwatch to disclose this weak point.”

"We never had the chance,” Soldier shoots back. “Chef was always there up until the past two weeks. We would ha—”

“—when Chef was gone, you could have at least taken the time to patch up your holes! What if Chef wasn’t there last night? Would you have waited until everyone got shot in their sleep?”

“That isn't the point. We needed a plan and—"

“Oh, please! You know that’s not the case! Everyone could have died—""We had countermeasures!”
"What countermeasures? Your stup—"

“If Ana were here—”

“She’s not! You’re a fuc—”

“Everyone, enough!”

The yell pierces through Hanzo’s earpiece and everyone flinches away from the sound and the image of Winston, halfway through a transformation of primal rage. An oppressive silence descends upon them all until bit by bit, the standing fur on the scientist flattens once more.

Steely, Winston announces with unwavering authority finally befitting of a leader: “I believe we have extracted enough information as of now to determine next steps. Standby and await your instructions. Meeting adjourned.”

The feed cuts off.

The tense silence from the call carries over between himself and McCree. The meeting definitely did not turn out the way either of them anticipated, but what's done is done and nobody can take back the secrets that have been spilled.

“He’s Jack,” McCree says bitterly. “Jack Morrison.”

Where has he heard the name before? It’s so…

Hanzo balks. “Jack Morrison? The Strike Commander of Overwatch?”

“Former Strike Commander.” McCree turns away, practically rending the cigarillo in half with his teeth. “Former.”

“...and you all knew.”

He grunts, taking a moment to compose himself. “Sorta. Had a huge inklin’, but I wasn’t gon’ bust some secret in case he had some reason for it.” Underneath his breath, he mutters, “’s a fuckin’ coward, is what he is.”

He doesn’t know what to say to that, doesn’t know the history behind it to even try, but what he does know is that this may be the first time he’s clearly seen the darker side of McCree that he has been constantly hinting at.

To think...the legendary Jack Morrison was among them. He thought the man had perished, having heard nothing about them since the incident in Switzerland. By then, Hanzo had been on the run already, seeking his next kill rather than political angles he could abuse.

His father had kept a wary eye on Overwatch, smiling wryly whenever the then-Strike Commander came on the news to speak, silently dissecting his words and judging him. When he was feeling indulgent, his father would point out the missteps and hidden meanings in Jack Morrison's televised appearances. Other times, he would ask Hanzo to give him his thoughts, and he—not knowing Morrison personally or expecting to ever meet him at any point in his life— spoke harshly and loosely.

It was silly posturing at the time.

He could not have guessed the silver-haired man with the abrasive tongue could be the man once
cloaked in gold—fool's gold.

If that's the case, truly, then why is Winston leading this operation? Why not allow the former leader to take his place? Is there infighting already? Or did Morrison not want the position, already scorned and disillusioned by his previous tenure?

Hanzo supposed he'll have to ask the man himself, but it's not important who the leader is or what Jack Morrison's reasons are. He is supposed to just follow orders.

He raises his head and squints at McCree, who seems to be in no mood to continue speaking. While he wants to know, he's not so tactless as to ask about you now. Or about Morrison.

The awkward silence stretches out between them until Athena takes mercy on him and breaks it.

“Agent Hanzo, your presence is required in the kitchen.”

For a foolish iota of a second, his mind switches immediately to the thought of food—that you're calling because he's late for lunch, and his stomach responds accordingly, stirring awake and hungry.

But no, the reality of that is crushed far too swiftly when Mei comes down through the stairs, still armed. She smiles at them both, clearly strained but trying to maintain a brave face.

"Hey there."

McCree nods at her and Hanzo does the same, dumbfounded that she would be the one to take his place.

“I’ll be here to help until Torbjörn and the rest get here.”

It's uncharacteristic for him to hesitate, even for a moment, but he does and asks, “Are you certain?”

“Oh, don’t worry about me! I’m not as good as you, but I’m going to do my best.”

Internally, he cringes at that. Once upon a time, he may have wanted to hear those words from all of his peers, but hearing them from Mei just feels criminal.

McCree just waves at him. "Jus' git, we'll take it from 'ere."

They both nod at him, urging him to go.

It should unnerve him to leave Mei with a bunch of criminals, but she has McCree there. McCree seems like the type who would rather die than to let a friend get taken. He resolves not to think on it, making his way to his destination.

The mess hall lives up to its namesake a little more than usual: dirty, dragging boot prints from Talon draw a clear map from the kitchen to the door where Hanzo stands; the kitchen counter still covered by a block of ice, near white from the number of bullets it had to take and probably two more hits from shattering, a puddle of water already pooling around the base. The floors will warp, no doubt.

He could see you now, getting angry over the blockage of your counter. You'll probably bash at it with the back of a ladle by yourself, not ask anyone for help. Maybe you'll make everyone's least favorite foods for them or give them a lecture.
It's be preferable to whatever is happening to you now.

He almost dreads going through the double doors again. It feels like every time he goes through them, the scene behind them only get worse.

They stand impassively, waiting for him to make his move, betraying nothing of what happened several hours ago. Like they always do.

With a deep breath, he places his hands on either door. Even at his gentle touch, they begin to part.

Another push and they swing open completely.

There, he is greeted with the still fresh carnage in its entirety and Soldier: 76—Jack Morrison, former Overwatch strike commander—who has his jacket back on. Chillingly, the front of it is covered in a brownish stain that reminds Hanzo far too vividly of what has transpired this morning even more so than the destruction around him, and he has to look away.

"Took you long enough," Soldier says gruffly.

"I apologize; I was not aware I was being timed."

"You weren't, but you sure stood outside long enough. Thought Talon might've gotten you."

Despite his mortification and offense, Hanzo schools his face into something neutral. "Unlikely."

"Hmph. We're still waiting on Fareeha, but I want to make sure you have the right equipment on you."

At that, Hanzo jumps to attention. "What is it you require?"

"Your Sonic arrows, for one. The path is straightforward, but there are rooms in there that need to be inspected for any agents in hiding. Close range weapons, and this."

From one of his many pockets, Soldier produces an earpiece with a short microphone which Hanzo takes, giving it a quick inspection. It looks like an older radio wave receiver. He doesn't recognize the model but it bears the well-worn symbol of Overwatch on it.

"We'll be using those for communication. The signal in the Cellar is bad, and we likely won't be able to contact each other without it. It's already set to the right channel."

Hanzo closes a hand around it. "Is it secured?"

Soldier snorts. "Nothing is 100% secured. Talk loud enough, it won't mean anything."

It's hard to overlap the image of the bright-faced Jack Morrison with this cynical old man. Though, a few years a leadership position and a building falling on top of you amidst a blazing explosion could help in changing a person.

"Understood. What is our mission?"

"We'll get to that when Fareeha gets here. Any minute now." The last part is muttered so low that Hanzo's not sure he should have heard it.

She does not magically appear, unfortunately. Hanzo wants to say something about it, just to give the older man a hard time, but the appeal is not high when there is so much else happening.

"Was the kitchen inspected?"
"Already did. But you're welcome to do a once-over." Soldier jerks a thumb behind him. Even his gloves are colored with the brownish stains. "Couldn't hurt to get a Shimada to give it a seal of approval."

The comment strikes a strange chord inside him: pride and a touch of shame and irritation. He can't be sure the true intent behind Soldier's words and says nothing. Instead, he puts on the counterpart contact lenses for his sonic arrows, the earpiece which he gives a successful test before he surveys the area under Soldier's watchful eyes—he can pretend he's not watching all he wants, but there's no mistaking the tingling on his back where his red gaze lands.

Hanzo ignores it. There's more pressing matters at hand than Soldier's perverse curiosity.

Looking around, the kitchen is a complete mess. Strangely enough, this mess makes it feel more homely and personable than the pristine condition you had kept it in, almost like you were trying to preserve it.

After all the excitement of hours ago having long faded from his ears, the kitchen is also eerily quiet. There are mechanisms running still, but there is a distinct lack of sound and rhythm and calm that Hanzo had long begun to associate with this place. It's not the first time he's thought this, but being in the kitchen is by one's self is a very isolating and lonely experience—and not in the comfortable way either.

Even on the run, Hanzo still had interactions with people (some food, some bad), but you don't even get to see anyone's face. Objectively, your customers may as well not exist.

And if you were truly a traitor, it would make your job that much easier to never know the faces of the people whom you would eventually betray.

He shakes his head. No. That still hasn't been confirmed yet. More evidence is required, and most of it should be in this room and the Cellar beyond. He just has to find it among all the rubble.

As he walks around, he makes mental notes of everything out of place. The normally well-organized drinkware and container racks were all smashed. There's a sink or two that have their faucets knocked off, the water still gushing from it quietly. Bullet holes riddle the walls and every available surface. Even the ceiling wasn’t spared.

The glass doors to the walk-in freezers haven’t been fixed or replaced, chilly air leaking out in waves, the faint scent of rot lightly entwined in it and curling at his shins and ankles.

Stepping gingerly inside the cooler through the outline of what could've once been the shape of a person, the smell becomes more pronounced and the chill makes even the hot-blooded Hanzo shiver, the wind blowing straight through his clothes and hair. Glass and spilt vegetables at his feet become an obstacle course to navigate around; a deathtrap for anyone who wants to navigate through this space.

Food and raw ingredients sit in their boxes, some wilted, other visibly rotting and off-colored. There's a hefty amount of food here lining the wire racks from floor to ceiling where an industrial fan continues to spin loudly.

Looking around and tapping his feet against the floor for any sounds or signs of trap doors, he could find nothing out of the ordinary among the steely walls and tiles.

The other walk-in freezers are similar. Nothing of interest or suspicious (beside the floating tuna fish whose dead eye stares at him from beyond it's cryogenic prison).
In the last freezer, just as he is about to leave, something catches his eye in the corner of the freezer and Hanzo does a double-take, nearly stepping straight into an unfortunate pile of some reddish, chunky sauce which has long lost its aroma in his haste.

Miso.

...there's miso in here. Not just one type, but several small containers of it, the name and brand labelled in Japanese: white miso, red miso, yellow miso, and more from different regions in Japan like Yamanashi and Nagoya.

What are they doing here?

The contents of the transparent containers seem untouched. Were you planning on cooking with them?

What would that be for other than Japanese food? Why so much if you were going to make anything at all? Surely you didn't know how to use them all.

Maybe, he thinks, maybe you bought them long ago and left them to rot—ferment—like miso does.

The expiration dates stamped onto each container says otherwise, too far out in the future to have been an old purchase. You were planning on using this.

He dares not let himself hope it could've been for him. It had to be for the team. There’s just too much of it., yet each container is small. You must have just been waiting to experiment.

It could be for Genji.

A sinister voice in the back of his head reminds him harshly that Genji cannot eat. Another whispers that awful reminder: it’s all Hanzo's fault.

He shakes his head, backing out of the freezer with less finesse than before. He can't afford to speculate on something so silly. It's just miso. There could be hundreds of foods that use miso and many reasons that does not involve himself or Genji. There had to be.

But somehow, it didn’t feel as convincing as he would like it to be.

Ignoring that thought, he searches the rest of the kitchen with Soldier dallying in the background. Maybe having been at the top of the food chain puts these sorts of activities beneath the great ex-Strike Commander.

However, no matter how he looks, there doesn't seem to be anyone else around. The rubber mats on the ground hide the footprints Hanzo would've needed to determine the exact number of people in this room (except Zenyatta). He mentally maps out the markings on each counter, the dents, the skid marks, discarded equipment—everything he can to piece together a moving picture of each strike and attack that had taken place until he can determine that yes, it seems that everyone in this room had been accounted for.

The final piece of the puzzle is the Cellar door.

It seems as sturdy and unyielding as when he first encountered it that fateful night he discovered you were—are—so painfully human and learned the hard way that you did not allow trespassing without a semblance of a fight.

The only clues he has are the obvious dried blood on the hand scanner and the faint dents of the
ammunition fired against the door. He runs a hand over the ones near head-height, the divots smooth and dusty except for one which is singed with something dark. He rubs his fingers together.

Just how much firepower could this door withstand? What is it made of? What could be so important that this door was made to withstand even a barrage of bullets and pulse munitions?

The smear of a handprint, fingers pointed downward.

At the bottom of the door, blood pools in a thin line as though trying to get in. Hanzo crouches down to get a better look. There is a trail beneath the holes of the rubber mats, but nothing substantial enough to indicate it was swept down from the floor itself. It had to have come from directly above.

"This blood is…?"

"The chef's," Soldier says matter-of-factly. "As you probably guessed, the door has a hydrophobic coating. The scanner is the only thing that doesn't. Must've worn off over the years."

The scene in his mind becomes clearer.

Talon likely injured you and you stumbled back, leaving behind a trail that seeped in through the floor mats. Your clutched at the wound, and then held your hand out to activate the scanner. Talon continued to shoot. There are gouges near where your head might be. Someone had tried to get you in the head for an instant death, but clearly did not succeed. They may have gotten you once or twice before the door opened.

It is not likely any of them managed to come after you. You were still alive when he saw you, after all.

A now familiar grip on his stomach gives him pause.

You’re definitely still alive.

"I see."

“So, what’s your analysis?”

Hanzo glances over at Soldier: 76.

“...based on the facts, there does not seem to be more enemies. Though, given the number of Talon agents in our custody, I’m afraid that...they will not be handled adequately."

Soldier gives a sharp nod. It’s very likely he was just as uncomfortable sending Mei down to watch over Talon. “When Torbjörn and Symmetra arrive, we’ll have turrets available to monitor Talon. I also want Genji to get here and stay with Lúcio and Zenyatta just in case the chef is far more involved than we thought.”

Hanzo raises a thick eyebrow. “You have proof of Chef's involvement in this?”

“Talon came through the Cellar without a doubt. Who else has access to them?”

“The chefs.” Hanzo narrows his eyes dangerously at Soldier. “And you.”

“Nice try, Shimada,” Soldier says, not sounding the slightest bit amused but not overly angry either. “We're going down there to change that. It's for the chef's own good. And ours.”
"You've already done the chef harm based on the conversation before."

"...it wasn't intentional."

"Hard to believe anything you do is not intentional, Jack." Fareeha steps in through the doors, quietly holding them back from making noise. She's not in her usual gear—no hover jets or rocket launchers. Instead, she's in fatigues and a sturdy vest, a stern look decorating her face.

The thickest part of Soldier's neck quakes like he wants to turn away, but forced himself to be still and face Fareeha.

"Good, you've made it. We can finally get started."

He tosses her an earpiece and she snatches it out of the air with ease, giving it a similar check before putting it on. "So, what's the plan?" she asks, unconcerned with the fact Soldier blew off her sarcasm.

"Tunnels need to be checked for Talon soldiers and any other surprises they might have left in there for us. I conducted a sweep before but I didn't find anything at the time."

"When did you get the chance to do a sweep?" Hanzo asks.

"Before tonight."

Fareeha waves him off. "So that information is useless then. Let's get in there and do a thorough check; leave no rock unturned. Has this kitchen been checked?"

Hanzo nods. "Thoroughly."

"Great." He could see her eye the kitchen as though itching to do it herself. The assassin and ex-clan head inside him is offended that his work would be doubted, but Hanzo understands the feeling of needing to check the work of others just to be sure. There have been cases where his subordinates have made very human mistakes that cost someone a finger here and there, and in other cases, a head. Cases like these should be handled like any other security incident: with several fine toothed combs.

"Fareeha, you'll be doing a security assessment while we're down there. Hanzo, you'll be the lookout."

"Obviously." Hanzo glances over at Fareeha. He doesn't remember her being so irritable before. It reminds him of McCree a little.

"Understood."

Briefly, they all go over the hand signs they plan on using and what to expect in the Cellar. Apparently the place is outdated with low ceilings and stone walls. Fareeha will likely be documenting any issues she finds and Hanzo will be constantly checking for traps and taking care of any enemies. Soldier will be supporting them both. Once everything was agreed upon, they all came face to face with the Cellar door.

"Good. Let's go."

Soldier places his hand on the scanner, right over the dried blood. Hanzo can't help but wince internally, breath running short as the image collides with a memory where the panel is replaced by tatami.
As usual, the door beeps and slides open immediately, inviting everyone inside with a rush of air. Finally, the chance to see what is inside, but…

Hanzo says nothing as the three of them take their first steps inside. Hanzo's heart thuds loudly in his chest, picking up speed with every single step.

The tunnel goes straight down, sloping slightly. Long lights flicker above them. Wires cling tightly to the half-heartedly fortified walls at the very top corners, some sagging and hanging down, low enough for Hanzo to touch. The tunnel lacks the distinct cold, musty smell that most stone tunnels have. The air is not stale or overly humid either. He deduces there’s an air filtration and environmental control system somewhere, and if Athena isn't the one maintaining it, it has to be manual or done by some other AI.

Their pace is slow, careful.

However, not even a few meters in, Hanzo lingers, something on the ground catching his eye and his stomach plummets as he recognizes it for what it is.

Blood spatter.

"You don't look very enthusiastic, Shimada. Remembering the time Chef threw a tantrum at you?" Fareeha teases softly.

Hanzo’s head snaps up and he scowls. To her credit, she doesn't flinch or seem intimidated.

"..."

"Thought you would've wanted to look inside here. The bet with Jesse and all."

Unconsciously, his lip curls. "That is between us."

"Well, you better get moving if you're going to win. Doubt the cowboy made it this far. Ever."

"Less talking, more moving."

Fareeha and Hanzo simultaneously make a face at the man's back. He whips around as though in tune with their thoughts. Hanzo barely manages to return to a neutral expression in time and wonders if Soldier's reaction isn't due to extensive experience.

Still, he is begrudgingly grateful for his intervention. The bet is tertiary at best, the mission is first and foremost. To that end, his eyes drag across the ground while his ears listens for anything out of the ordinary.

The trailing blood spatter continues your story: you were stumbling backward, shoes stepping into the puddles you left behind, bumping against the wall a few times, the bleeding growing worse or bleeding through whatever was being used to stem it. Your hand, maybe. There are two sets of prints, one leading into the tunnel and a different set leading out. His first conclusion is Talon, but then it doesn't explain why they didn't finish you off or take you hostage.

You fell down, hand prints where you tried to catch yourself clear. Rested a while and let yourself bleed. Then you tried to drag yourself up with the wall, stumbling but determined until you fell again, dragging your hands down.

The story ends with an oddly shaped puddle, too large for the stay to have been short. It's here that Hanzo finds it hard to breathe, his heart having leapt into his throat and blocking all air and words.
This is also where the second set of footprints begin. Whoever it was came from the opposite end of the tunnel.

"This where Chef was found?" Fareeha asks solemnly, kneeling beside the dried puddle.

Soldier nods, arms crossed. "Yeah."

There are things that Hanzo wished he never knew—Genji’s first sexual encounter for one—and being able to deduce you were on the verge of shock based on the size of the stain is another. Perhaps you had already begun to slip into it when Soldier had retrieved you. You couldn't have been doing well and knowing just how close you were to the other side makes his stomach sink lower and lower. Were you still conscious then, gasping and fearing your mortality? Did you regret being involved as you felt your life drain away into the ground?

Beside the puddle is a glimmer of hope—a discarded biotic emitter, and he doesn't dare voice it but the weight that lifts off his chest upon seeing it is liberating.

Did you carry one on you and use it when you realized your life was draining away?

Before Hanzo gets a chance to take a closer look, Soldier snatches it up from the ground and stuffs it into his pocket.

"We'll get Mercy to recycle these."

Faint boot marks that look like they stopped to face you. Someone knelt down beside the blood. Maybe it was from when Soldier came to fetch you. It only made sense.

Either way, you were still breathing when you were found. You were receiving treatment. You…

You had already lost too much blood.

And the blood stain on stone then overlaps again with tatami.

He pulls in a sharp breath, shakes his head, teeth clenched tight to stem the churning in his stomach. You’re with Zenyatta and Lúcio. Two of the most soft-hearted people—beings—on the base. They won’t let you die even if you were on the very verge of death.

He forces himself to exhale. Guilty or not, they won’t let that happen.

Soldier turns his back to them. "We should get going."

Eventually the tunnel walls are no longer fortified by steel; instead they’re back to stone and doors are carved into them. Old fashioned wooden ones with the knobs, barely able to withstand a kick. Soldier signals both Fareeha and Hanzo who press themselves against the walls.

All nearly identical and some marked with number signs, nothing to indicate what could be inside. At Soldier’s signal, Hanzo fires off a sonic arrow which lodges itself into a door frame.

There’s no sign of life or a reaction from any of the rooms the sonic waves can reach, and he gestures back such.

They’ll have to look into them one by one, just in case.

Soldier takes the nearest door on the left, Hanzo takes the door on the right while Fareeha keeps watch on the tunnels, ready to provide backup and noting any security issues.
Hanzo’s room looks like a storage room. Tall racks on wheels and spare kitchen equipment, all caked in a sheet of dust. Nothing interesting here or anything to indicate someone ever entered this room recently.

“All clear,” grumbles Soldier through the earpiece.

“No intruders found,” Hanzo responds back.

They both leave their respective rooms and continue down the hall just like that, one by one, going through doors.

Eventually, Hanzo finds himself in what seems to be an office or document room too small and jam-packed with stuff to harbor any actual criminals. The humming of an air vent is loud here. On a wall of glass were words, unintelligible and, when Hanzo runs a finger through them, they do not smear or budge. He can barely make out words like ‘glace’ and ‘framboise’.

Old fashioned books that had withstood the test of time lined the uneven shelves drilled into the stone walls and were strewn about the room. Some were even opened, enticing Hanzo to read their contents.

To his disappointment, they are just cookbooks. Recipes written in a language that looked like it could be French. The other books have are similar but in different languages and with varying amounts of now faded, but still delectable-looking pictures caked in dust.

In the side of the room, behind a tall shelf, there is a computer, however.

As he approaches, two things stand out:

One: the area around it was used more recently than the rest of the room.

Two: the computer is still on.

Hanzo raises a hand to his ear, never taking his eyes off the power button, breath coming up short.

“Pharah. I have found a computer. It's still on.”

“Great. That might be just what we're looking for. Standby.”

He waits, not paying any attention to the banter that started between Fareeha and Soldier in his ear.

Was it you? Sitting alone in this room and tunnel, facing a computer doing whatever it is you were doing? Or was it Talon who sat here, stealing data from a machine that looks like it is ten years out of date?

Slowly, he approaches the desk, eyeing all the scattered papers that added to the mess. They were small rectangular papers, the top edges torn and the lines filled with near illegible scribbles.

It seems that whoever wanted to protect this terminal forgot the number one rule of security: never write your passwords anywhere. Instead, there’s a little note with the words “username” and “password” clearly written. For a place with such a sophisticated door guarding it, everything else in here is ridiculously shabby. Whatever fool designed this place must have assumed the Cellar door would solve all their security problems.

Hanzo rolls his eyes. Not that it would’ve stopped him regardless, but this was just sloppy.

Before he can do anything with the information, the door swings open and Fareeha comes in,
signalling for him to switch with her.

He debates asking to stay but knows when to concede; computers just aren’t his expertise. Besides, everyone has their role, so he stands guard outside, watching as Soldier walks into another room on the opposite side of the hall.

It takes some time, but Fareeha is back, a scowl on her face as she turns around and marks an inconspicuous place on the door frame with a sticker of sorts, probably for later identification.

“What did you find?”

“It looks like this controls a few places here like the HVAC system, but not everything. Judging by the traffic, there’s a few more endpoints on the same network, different VLANs.”

“Meaning?”

“We got ourselves a lot of work to do.” She shakes her head and pulls out her communicator.

"Athena.”

“Yes, ho—may I a—ist?” She frowns, raising it up for better signal.

"Athena."

"...

“We’re in too deep, I think.” Fareeha waves a hand at the walls surrounding them. “The rock and whatever else is here is messing with the signals. We’ll have to run a line here after we secure the area.”

From across the hall, Soldier comes out from the room he was inspecting and shakes his head. Nothing.

Hanzo can’t say he's disappointed with the results, but it is underwhelming. There are only two more rooms, bathrooms with multiple stalls and showers and lockers. Nothing exciting.

If Soldier has found anything more interesting, he says nothing of it.

Further along, the path splits into another few parts, but even after investigating, they still came up empty-handed. Dead-ends and more storage rooms. There was even something that looked like a common area, equipped with well-worn couches and tables and even a water cooler.

It feels strangely voyeuristic as they move from room to room, like he’s peering into your personal life and history.

But if you used these facilities, it would be no surprise he never saw you leave the kitchen; you have all you need here.

Seeing all this, however, deep in a tunnel away from anyone’s knowledge and prying eyes, your existence seems even lonelier than before. He can’t say why, but knowing all this brings an ache to his chest.

He takes back what he says about the cafeteria and kitchen being a sanctuary.

It’s a prison.
Your prison.

With yourself and the past as the guards.

Prisons are meant to keep people in, but in your case, perhaps it was to keep everyone else out?

The realization nearly bowls him over.

Maybe he has been misinterpreting your isolation. What if he sees this from a different angle?
What if you were trying to keep your contact with the other agents as scarce as possible, put up a literal and figurative wall between you and them, kept the kitchen as pristine as it is in the hopes that when your other fellow chefs returned, they’d be returning to something familiar?

That would explain so many things. It would explain your discomfort in asserting your own rules even in a space that you would be considered the master of. It would explain why you never ate with them despite your excuses. Your isolation, self-imposed, is all preparation for when you are no longer needed.

You’re hoping to fade back into the background when the Head Chef—if he’s even alive—returns.

The realization settles heavily in his stomach, holding back his pace and his mind scatters, plunged into a white noise.

What would the Watchpoint do without you?

Sure, he's always thought of a chef as dispensable and a luxury that the current Overwatch cannot afford, but after suffering through takeout and MREs, he doesn't know if he wants that anymore.

Having a taste of that luxury, of homemade meals and warm drink whenever he wants, has spoiled him once more.

Hanzo barely manages to catch himself, nearly crashes into Soldier: 76 when he stops abruptly.

He's almost about to demand an explanation when he hears it: voices.

His stomach clenches, the anticipation of an ambush strums in his veins. Finally.

All of them take their positions seamlessly, directed by Soldier's silent orders. Creeping toward the source of the echoing voices, they find themselves at another crossroads. Hanzo grabs at another sonic arrow and moves in front of Soldier, slipping just slightly past the mouth of the room to take aim at anything other than rocks or metal.

But then, he catches a glimpse of their mystery guests.

Releasing the pull of his bow and his breath, he lowers his weapon, annoyed.

"Junkers."

Junkrat jumps into the air, clearly startled and not expecting anyone but themselves. Roadhog doesn't even react.

“Heya! What's you lot doin’ here?” He points at them accusingly as everyone files out from their hiding spots.

“What are you doing here?”
Fareeha grunts in what seems to be disgust, waving a hand in some vague direction. “You blew a hole somewhere in the Siege Tunnels, didn't you?”

Junkrat can only laugh nervously, poking his index fingers together, looking the most sheepish he's ever been, bare shoulders the slightest bit pink (though that could just be the lighting of the place).

Soldier looks like he's barely holding himself back from decking the Junker across the face.

"What are you doing here?"

"Ehehe, well, mate. We—ah, what's it again, Roadie?—oh yeah, makin' ourselves a home!"

"...at home."

"Right you are! At home!"

In unison, Soldier's, Fareeha's, and Hanzo's face fall into a skeptical deadpan.

"In the tunnels?"

"Is just like the Outback."

"Hiding what you're doing?"

"Just like home."

"Trespassing and blowing things up?"

"Whad' I tell ya?" Junkrat stretches out his arms, presenting the gate behind them. “Home sweet home."

Behind the Junkers is certainly a room protected by a large man-made wall. It's dome-shaped and white, the stark contrast so strange, Hanzo wonders why he never saw it before.

At the base is a segmented gate, large enough for a vehicle to go through. On the very edge are doors, probably for people. The door itself looks like it’s seen better days, flowers of black marring the white paint all around its edges and barely hanging onto its hinges, propped closed by a shovel, of all things.

Is this where they've been hiding this whole time?

Annoyed that they were able to go into the Cellars before him, he grinds his teeth together.

They are likely covering up the treasure, coveted it for themselves. Probably already sold it off for a shiny credit. If there was alcohol in there, Hanzo has no doubt that they probably drank it all, leaving nothing for them.

There goes his bet with McCree. (A small voice in the back of his head wonders if he can't just buy some and pretend it was found in the Cellar; it's not like the cowboy had ever made it down here. He would hardly know the difference. But the deal was to split the alcohol—hardly worth it if Hanzo had to pay for it all.)

Soldier takes a few steps forward as does Fareeha, but Roadhog is quick to move in their way, using his bulk to protect most of the choke point between room and tunnel.

"Do you mind?" Fareeha asks.
Ever the silent wall, Roadhog only stares down at her, daring her to do something.

Soldier opts for a different tactic. “We’re here to check for Talon. The Watchpoint got attacked. Seen any of them?”

Junkrat vehemently shakes his head, waving his arms, but that does not assure any of them in the slightest.

“Nope, just us!”

“You’re sure about that?”

“Ey! Have I ever lied t—”

“Just us,” Roadhog insists. To punctuate this point, he taps on his shotgun, gripping it by the handle.

It seems that no one would be able to pass so long as they were there.

Soldier, Fareeha, and Hanzo look at each other, a silent conversation held between them.

Fareeha straightens herself up, refusing to be dwarfed by either Junker. "Fine. We'll be going. But if there's anyone—"

"Just. Us."

Roadhog stands just a little taller to lord his height over everyone else and Junkrat scrambles to follow suit, not quite managing to pull himself out of the near permanent hunch he's gotten himself into, but he tries nonetheless to look intimidating.

The standoff drags on for several moments, neither side budging.

They silently agree they'll come back when neither of the Junkers are here.

They can hear the echoes of the Junker’s conversation—

"'s a close one, right, Roadie?"

“Hrmph. Work.”—and the sound of a door opening and closing.

The journey through the remaining of the tunnel is short; there isn’t much left and Hanzo's beginning to think they'd never find any signs of Talon or evidence that they came through here.

Fareeha glances backward, past Hanzo’s shoulder and the bend. "Are you sure it’s okay to leave them alone, Jack?"

He shrugs one tense shoulder. “I doubt Talon would be with them. Or have anywhere to hide in there.”

“So you know what’s inside?”

It takes a moment for him to answer but he only replies, “Never been.”

The answer grates on Hanzo’s nerves harder than expected. Knowing now who Soldier: 76 really is, the space in between his lines only seem wider. But he holds his tongue, deciding there’s no point in stirring a pot that he doesn’t know the depth of.
Eventually, the tunnel leads to a room with mismatching stone walls that look like parts of it has been excavated and modified, tables, chairs, metal shelves, and hand trucks stacked up against the side of the room, bright lights hanging from the ceiling where a ring of metal is embedded, creating a gateway into a room above. Directly below the ring is a truck with a familiar logo on its side: a heart with green scales, each one fading from a darker to a lighter green.

Hanzo squints at it, sifting through his memory. He knows he's seen this more than once. Soldier stops them before they all make it into the room, gesturing for Hanzo to make a move.

It takes only a few moments for him to fire off another arrow, confirming there is nothing resembling a person or omnic lying in wait.

Fareeha wastes no time, already taking pictures, documenting it and everything else around the vehicle. Hanzo doesn't even manage to take a step before Soldier's arm shoots out, stopping him in his tracks.

"Stay back. Let her do her assessment," Soldier orders. The two of them hang back, the itch of inactivity settling into Hanzo's skin almost immediately. Each of Fareeha's movements seem to have slowed to an unbearable crawl, her inspections too slow and too thorough.

Patience. He needs patience.

There's a tense moment when Fareeha gets to the back of the truck. Her hand rests on the handle and she gives Soldier a very hard and meaningful look, one that conveyed a message Hanzo couldn't hope to decipher before the sound of a lock echoed in the chamber and the rhythmic clacking of the door sliding up counts down the potential bite of a deadly trap.

Clack, clack, clack, click.

The door rises up fully and silence reigns over them. Shining a light into the interior of the truck, Fareeha disappears for a moment, the truck visibly sagging beneath the added weight before springing back up.

Relief comes when Fareeha gives the all-clear signal, allowing the two men to approach and do their own investigation.

Hanzo checks the front seats, immediately noticing the pile of clothes on the passenger's seat, almost thrown there haphazardly along with a courier's cap. The color is familiar, too, and cautiously, he opens the door, a watchful eye for hidden wires or other traps.

There are none, luckily. Instead, he ends up holding up the shirt that's been discarded haphazardly onto the seat like whoever took it off was in a rush. On the arm of the shirt is the exact same logo as the side of the truck. Was it yours? The size seems just about right, and you definitely wore a similar uniform when he first saw you in person—as a person—maneuvering through the kitchen and challenging him with those angry, unerring eyes.

What is your connection to this logo?

“Do you think this belongs to Chef?”

“Most likely. I can't imagine Chef being able to leave Gibraltar wearing the Overwatch uniform.”

Fareeha's joke falls a little flat, but it still elicits an amusing image of yourself strutting around Gibraltar, advertising Overwatch's return with your apparel.
The possibilities run through his brain, each nearly landing on identical solutions: you're a traitor. And McCree is not as clever or in-the-know as he may think.

"Found something."

Both Fareeha and Hanzo rush over. In between Soldier's fingers is a small device barely larger than a fingernail.

Inhaling a sharp breath, Hanzo hisses, "Tracker."

It's a sobering piece of evidence that perhaps you were only a victim and used for your connection to Overwatch. Chances are you never told Talon about this tunnel or they didn't trust you and planted the tracker without your knowing.

"Under this truck. This type of adhesive meant it was temporary. Whoever put this here just needed to track this vehicle long enough to get the general path."

"Talon?"

"Likely. But this looks too commercial." Soldier flips it over, holding it up to the dim lights. "Not a lot of dust. Either it's newly installed or..."

"The truck hasn't been driven much," Fareeha finishes, crouched by the vehicle in question, doing her own checks. "Hard to tell since this dust and dirt is old. If we get this truck into the base, Athena can analyze its data and maybe find out from its inbuilt GPS what it's used for. But..."

Hanzo shakes his head. "It's too risky."

"Right. If the tracker really is Talon's work, who knows what other presents they could have added."

They all unanimously agree to leave the truck alone for now lest they find out the hard way the entire thing is rigged to explode. The tracker itself gets stuffed into a special pouch Fareeha has brought and placed carefully on her person.

The room itself yields nothing else out of the ordinary or interesting other than the work bench where tools of different sorts are mounted and a closet so chock full of equipment, Fareeha barely managed to close the doors before it all came toppling down on her. (They were more careful about what they touched from then on.)

Finally, they turn their attention to the lift, slightly out of date with a round hoverpad on the ground and a single terminal. All three of them look at each other and nod wordlessly.

They all board, pressing themselves as close to the edge as possible. There's only two levels: up and down. Down does not produce anything, so up it is. As soon as the button is pressed, blue hard light comes up around them, stopping just past waist level, and the lift begins to move.

Hanzo breathes slowly, arrow nocked and ready. The gate above them slowly opens up and immediately, Hanzo's arrow flies out into an arch, hitting the floor immediately above.

There's mere seconds left.

The signals from the sonic arrow flood the area.

To his surprise and relief, Hanzo signals there's nothing, but nocks the next arrow just in case.
Slowly, the lift comes to a halt. A gentle 'ding' lets them know they’ve reached their destination, the force field around the elevator sinks back down into the ground.

Nothing.

It's the darkness of the night, the quiet of nature that greets them. Hanzo’s heart knocks against his ears. Cautiously, they all step off the lift and Hanzo retrieves his arrow.

It's a garage of sorts. Small enough to house two trucks, but little else. Even more baffling is the lack of anything in this place. Soldier: 76 braves shining a dim light around. Everything looks ordinary by all accounts. Except for two muted glints.

Hanzo signals to the others. "Cameras. By the doors."

They were hard to see in this darkness, but even without it, they were well hidden in the architecture of the beams that crossed right above them.

If there were cameras, that means they had to have footage of what occurred last night.

Fareeha signals them both, crouching by the only door leading out of this place, peeking out from a sliver.

"All clear...there's no sign of omnics or humans around us," she says after a few moments, glancing at the device around her wrist. “GPS tells us we're close to the border to Spain.”

“We’re close to the Watchpoint then.”

“Is this all then?”

“There weren’t any other paths we could’ve taken except the one where the Junkers were.”

While Soldier and Fareeha speculate, Hanzo slips into his own thoughts for a moment. Is that all there is to it? You risked everything to protect a tunnel not even a five minute drive from the Watchpoint? A stupid tunnel?

He inhales sharply and breathes out as slow as he can, trying to stem the rising heat inside. Briefly, he pinches the bridge of his nose.

No. There’s still the possibility of the Junkers hiding what you’ve been protecting. There’s a possibility that you were angry that your cooperation with Talon would be discovered.

Even with all the clues at hand, he can’t piece together the entire picture. Are you guilty or are you an innocent victim?

All of that remains unanswered.

“Hanzo, get into position, we’re opening the door.”

That snaps him out of his thoughts easily enough. Right, he still had a mission to do.

Bravely, Fareeha presses a button on the side of the door. Groaning and creaking, the sheet of metal slowly rolls up, allowing the three Overwatch agents to take their first steps outside where the city lights of Gibraltar glitter at them and the sun wavers out of sight.

The air is crisp for once and wraps around Hanzo, caressing his face. Hanzo breathes in deeply, drinking in the sight of the city and the horizon where the dusk skies pull in the night and its stars.
It’s beautiful, relaxing in a way that makes the last few hours feel surreal; a stark reminder that life goes on and cares very little about the minute details of anyone's life. It makes him and his troubles feel so infinitesimally small.

Their return is even less exciting than their departure. They go back the same way they came, finding nothing new or of interest while Fareeha locks up doors and gates behind them with some of the gear on her person. Briefly, they debate going back to check on the Junkers—maybe they’re not there and can actually determine for themselves if there truly are any enemies around—but they decide against it in the end. It’s a foolish move, but it would be even more so to incur the wrath of the two biggest wildcards in their team.

Though, the biggest surprise when they return at the number of turrets that immediately swivel at them from the very edge of the Cellar door when they step out.

“Vaswani’s been busy, I see.”

They don't have a lot of time to admire the handiwork; Athena calls them all for another meeting. Despite the attendance, there is still no sign of Genji or Mercy.

Winston, looking a little like he is about to fall asleep on his feet, announces, "Thank you everyone for all your work today. Now that we are together, we can now share what we have discovered. McCree, I’d like to begin with you, if you would."

“Y’ got it," McCree says from his holovideo, still apparently down with their prisoners. Though strangely enough, the number of Talon agents seem to have diminished.

“Here’s what we know.

“Talon’s been planning this attack for a while. No idea who gave the orders or what they were really after, but we do know they’ve been skulkin’ ’round these parts for weeks.

“They finally went after someone named ‘Tanuja Singh Deshmukh’, former Overwatch.”

Winston tests the name in his mouth quietly as do some of the other agents, but McCree presses on.

“Singh gave up intel that Chef’s been heading between here ‘n’ there in exchange for immunity.” Something bitter tinges McCree’s voice, but it’s overshadowed by his grave professionalism. “Talon’s been tailin’ Chef and found out ‘bout the tunnels.

“Chef was just at the wrong place at the wrong time and walked in on ‘em right as they were strategizin’. ‘Cause surveillance in the kitchen was turned off, Athena didn’t know ‘til it was too late."

A flood of refreshing relief washes over Hanzo. You weren’t involved. It was an accident. You never tried to betray or take advantage of them. But the relief is short lived, engulfed by an undercurrent of guilt and disgust. This is Overwatch, where people trusted and believed in each other. Yet here he is, having doubted your intentions even as you lay injured upstairs, taking bullets and spilling blood meant for people like himself.

"Athena, who is Tanuja Deshmukh?" Winston asks, seemingly unable to come up with an answer.

A pause.

"Tanuja Singh Deshmukh. Former Overwatch Operational Department, Field Logistics division."
"The Field Logistics division?"

"They're in charge of making sure supplies get to the front lines and negotiating with vendors, land owners, and ensuring services and goods have been appropriately delivered."

"Glorified mailpeoples," Torbjörn mutters darkly.

"Right," says Winston slowly, pointedly ignoring the comment. "Now where is that communicator?"

"According to our records, it has been in Gibraltar for the past several years."

From her screen, Mei seems to be with McCree still. "I'm surprised there was someone so close to here and didn't answer Recall. What could this person have to do with Chef?"

"Their communicators seem to have been in close proximity. We can conclude both the chef and Tanuja know each other."

"They knew each other? Oh, I guess they must have if..."

Reinhardt butts in. "Ah, but all chefs knew everyone. Always greeted me by name and knew how I liked my eggs!"

"They knew you, big guy!" McCree retorts lightly.

Zarya crosses her massive arms, glaring down at the screen. "We should find this person, bring here, and ask questions. Convince this Tanuja to talk."

"Whoa, there, partner. S'much as I'd like to dispense some good ol' fashion justice, don't think that's the right approach this time."

Fareeha snorts. "That's rich coming from you, Jesse."

He holds up his hands. "All I'm sayin' is that there's different priorities right now. Chef's with us now and ain't goin' nowhere. 'sides, Chef probably don't want to see the face of the person who sold 'em out. So I vote we focus on securin' our blind spot t' keep Talon out and t' keep Chef from looking for revenge. How's that goin', 'reeha?"

She nods sharply. "There's a lot of work to be done, starting with connecting Athena's network with the standalone ones in the kitchen and back, but we should be done in four days given that we have the supplies."

"So the Cellar was controlled through a separate network," Winston muses. "We knew that was the case, but the extent of its scope is still not yet known to us."

"We're not 100% sure if everything it controls without getting a network topology, but that shouldn't be too difficult to figure out." She tilts her head toward the ceiling. "Athena? We will need you to visualize a topology once the connections have been made."

The AI takes a few moments to respond. "...while that is indeed possible, I would like to inform the chef of these proceedings."

"Are we still on that? Chefs are not equipped to decide on security matters! They cook! That's it! No further discussion."

A flash of irritation strikes Hanzo straight in the gut. How dare she.
"I understand. I merely wish to keep Chef informed."

It's strange to think that a faceless AI has more compassion and a desire to protect a promise to you than anyone else here does. But Fareeha isn't wrong either despite the irksome way she speaks of you as though this is entirely your fault even though he thought you both were friends—he supposes it's duty over friendship. You have been temporarily cleared of blame, but there are still many questions that require your cooperation to answer before anyone can make a judgement call.

"Fine. But Chef doesn't get to make decisions about it."

Reluctantly, Winston agrees. "Right. We will be...making an executive decision. All security matters will be handled by Pharah and approved by myself."

"Hmph. Can't wait to see this," Torbjörn mutters, a sly smile on his face.

"Back to the point. Once we have a topology, we can then begin to make the necessary changes to the network and protect it. The computer the chefs were using doesn't have the right security updates on it and needs to be locked down. Additionally, we found the other end of the Cellar. There was an abandoned truck and a lift to an abandoned garage. We'll need at least two people to guard it until we can put the right defenses there."

"Interesting. Please give the coordinates and we'll see if we can find who the building is registered to."

The Helix agent's face turns dark. "We also found the Junkers in a part of Cellar."

Winston groans. "What are they doing there?"

"They apparently found something interesting and didn't let us through. They insist Talon isn't there with them but we need to be sure."

"I see. I'll...have to have a word with them, it seems."

"Feh, you'll need a lot more than just words," Torbjörn grumbles. Hanzo is inclined to agree—they didn't seem like they wanted to leave for any reason; only a whole arsenal of Ana's tranquilizers would be able to put a dent in them. "Sounds like they found the Head Chef's project, though."

Torbjörn continues. "Loads of scrap went into that thing and I don't think the chefs ever really knew just what it could do. Chances are those Junkers'll do better. Who knows."

"What project?" Hanzo asks faster than he could stop himself.

Torbjörn waves him off. "Nothing you'll be interested in, that's for sure."

"That is for myself to decide."

"Yeah? And I decided it was none of your business."

Anger swoops down on Hanzo and he only manages to lean forward, a scorching retort at the ready before Winston steps in and demands that the meeting remain on topic and to take any bickering outside. They both grumble but acquiesce.

Beyond that, the meeting focused on securing their base of operations and next steps for handling Talon. (Someone even jokingly asked that the kitchen get fixed first so you wouldn't have a fit, but no one was particularly amused by the suggestion.) It's risky to keep Talon here, but they couldn't just give them back either. Shifts for watching over them was decided and next steps required.
Soldier—now openly referred to as Jack (and not in a particularly nice way by some), Ana, and Winston.

Winston told everyone to break for dinner; more instructions will come in the morning.

Among all the excitement, Hanzo had forgotten he was hungry at all. It only serves to remind him that the reason they're in this mess is because of you (and for you).

Hanzo pauses at the fork in the hall looking down the one to his right, the medical bay. No one had emerged from that area yet to disclose the news of your wellbeing to anyone.

He shouldn't go down that way, he has no right, especially not after considering even for a moment that you were complacent in Talon's schemes. You were just a pawn. An innocent victim.

The more he thinks of it, the more the hall seems to stretch, running away from him and expanding the distance. Further and further away.

Until the sound of heavy footsteps cut through his illusions and Lúcio appears, crossing the hall in absolutely no time, making a joke of the imagined distance Hanzo put between himself and you.

“Hey, Hanzo. What’s up with you?”

“How the chef?” he blurts out, a little mortified but unwilling to take it back.

Lúcio wipes his hands, a persistent grimace on his face that he can't hide even when he forces a smile.

"Chef's gonna do great. Mercy really came in with the clutch, handled the surgery remotely, going in and out and zap!" His smile fades a little and Hanzo's stomach plunges miles below his feet. "Though, it was a little rough. Some wounds were starting to heal over and we had to actually...make more cuts and redo the injuries and a bit of intestine had to get taken out. Won't be eating any of that for a while. Ugh."

Hanzo pointedly ignores the intestines comment.

"Is..." He swallows, suddenly nervous and tries to not blink too many times or breathe too deep. "Is Chef able to receive visitors?"

Lúcio's brief grimace lands heavily against his chest. "Sorry, Hanzo. Mercy says not yet. We should let Chef rest for a bit. Or a long bit. Long, long while. Some good old peace and quiet will go a long way..." There is something unspoken behind his words that sound suspiciously like 'I hope', and Hanzo hopes so too.

It’d be an insult if you died at the hands of the very enemies they’ve all been fighting against. Even with Talon in their custody, it would still feel like they won if they took away your life.

"Whoa, Hanzo, you—you okay there man?"

Blinking away his thoughts, he regains his focus on Lúcio who has taken a step back.

"You were...lookin' kinda...feral there."

"No, I'm fine. I just, had a thought."

Immediately, Lúcio perks up, clapping his hands together. Likely an attempt to change the solemn mood. “Yeah? I also got one! What’s for dinner? I’m starving!”
Even with Lúcio leading him down the hall, he could not help but look back at the long stretch of the medical ward where, in one of those lonely rooms, you were laying, and how he’s once again walking away from another person he does not and cannot help.

Though the food is spread out in front of him, he doesn’t have the appetite for it; the sauce transforming into the blood puddle in the tunnel, the taste drying up in his mouth. Hanzo polishes it off quickly, forcing himself not to think of how unsatisfying it is or just how odd the texture of the meat is.

No one talks to him and he likes that just fine. Everyone else seems to be locked in their own heads, most just taking their meals with them to do whatever work they were assigned, the air practically humming with tension.

There is much to process and even after a quick shower, he has not untangled the mess of information from today.

He sinks into his bed, the excitement and revelations finally descending upon him like a mudslide in his moments of solitude. The facts and opinions are difficult to sort. You’re innocent. The cynical side of him feels justified in accusing you—you’re always putting up a wall between yourself and the other agents, your behavior is too suspicious. But another part of him that he thought dead asks for rationality—you’re too softhearted and tied too deeply to your past.

It’s probably your softheartedness that got you into your current situation, and his gut clenches with a heat that could be anger and irritation. How could you get yourself so injured to let yourself get protected by the Cellar instead of protecting it?

Most of the mystery of the Cellar has already been solved. It’s not as exciting as Hanzo expected it to be, but it is definitely not what he expected. Though, the chances of a ‘treasure’ still had to exist in the white, dome shaped gate that the Junkers have made their home. That looked like it could be hiding something good, and he can’t even get a hint as to what it could be—the Junkers liked anything and everything.

Then there was McCree and his secrets, Soldier and his, you and yours.

A drink or eight would be the perfect distraction from this, but as much as he wants to, the memory of having made an absolute fool of himself adds to the weight of today, and he decides against it, letting all of his thoughts smother him into an uncomfortable sleep.

There is much to do.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for your patience again. A lot has happened in real life and this chapter has gone multiple revisions. We should be getting to the actual meat of what I have been dying to reveal soon.
“What is the purpose of this establishment?”

“We are a charity restaurant. Excess profit is used to purchase ingredients for delivered meals to underprivileged clients.”

“Define ‘clients’.”

“Clients are establishments and individuals we have made contracts with to provide packaged meals made in-house.”

“Examples of these clients?”

“Orphanages, elderly care centers, missions, and so on. The entirety of our purpose is written in our mission statement which is submitted every year to the necessary authorities to continue our operations.”

“Does this organization operate within the borders of Gibraltar?”

“Our headquarters is located in Gibraltar proper. Our operations extend into neighboring countries. A full list of our clients have been provided in the original documentation package.”

“Roughly how many employees does your organization employ?”

“Three full-time and at least fifteen contractor chefs. We also have volunteers and vendors we regularly engage with.”

The questioning only got harder from there, rapid fire and too specific.

“What regulations does your organization follow?”

“According to the document your organization has provided to the Charity Commission, there are some documents missing. Can you please explain the absence of numbers 24b to 31, and line 46?”

“Is any due diligence conducted on recipients of this charity and donors?”

“What is your familiarity with OFAC?”

“What is your experience with international and domestic fiscal reporting responsibilities?”

“Does your organization donate monetary funds to other organizations?”

“Please provide all files on this list. If you are unable to produce any, please submit a formal explanation.”

“Your financial records show regular payments to specific vendors. Would you please provide a full vendor list and any vendor assessments, contracts, MOUs, SLAs, and other relevant documentation?”

You were working, tucked away in your restaurant office, miles away from the happenings below
you, desperately trying to satisfy the auditors and close their case and get back to your normal life of cooking in Watchpoint Gibraltar’s kitchen where the agents would undoubtedly be waiting for you and maybe a little angry so you’d have to appease them with a feast of your best offerings and make them smile—

—So how did you end up like this, lying in a bed with a hazy Madam Ziegler fussing over you?

Maybe it's just your imagination, but there's a glow around her and a focus to her eyes like she's going into battle, knowing that she can and will crush anything in her way with an ease that's only natural from years of practice and confidence.

The look of an untouchable hero.

It should awe you and you should reach out just to get even a bit closer to that realm—at least then you'd understand and be able to support them better, but there is no strength in your arms or anywhere else. Not even a scrap of the endless stubbornness or resilience that had carried you through the past few years of life was anywhere to be found.

Instead, a bone-deep weariness settles in your very marrows, bleeding into every little part of you. It pulls at you from beneath the bed, willing you to just surrender and sink into its depths, and even worse, it has your mind in a sluggish mire.

“—untreatedforsolongbutweworryaboutyouespecially since you left so suddenly unfortunately we had to perform some surgery and replace portions of your liver intestines and stomach if zenyatta and lucio weren’t there you would likely have anyway I would like to keep you here for the next six days at the very least the injuries done to your body requires close monitoring to ensure they are hea ling appro priate ly it might be a li tt le w hil e be fore yo u ca n ha ve a ny so li ds—”

You blink slowly at Madam Ziegler, not quite able to tack any meaning to her words or comprehending the gravity of her tone. Her undoubtedly informative speech just rolls off your mind, and luckily, it doesn't seem to perturb her. Instead, she just smiles at you and gives you a gentle pat on the hand. It doesn't feel like anything at all, least of all, assuring.

What are you doing here?

“Ju st get some re st. Let the na no ma chine s do the ir wor k .”

You're not sure if you answer her, but she gives you a tight smile and a squeeze you see more than feel, blinking once, twice...

Then, you hear voices.

“—and we cannot leave the base right now.”

"—bummer that Chef's down, I'm really hungry."

The words jerk you out of your sleep—were you sleeping? You don't dwell on that for long as you remember the words that woke you.

Someone's hungry.

You have to get to work.

You fumble with the blanket and tear it off to swing your legs off the bed you were lying on—
Why are you lying on a bed?
—BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP—

There's a pressure somewhere around your arms and chest and stomach.

Wires pop into view. They're in the way. You yank them until they're gone.

Your footing is strange.

Why can't you feel your own feet?

There is a lot of noise ("Oh, shit!" "What are you doing?" “Someone get Mercy!”).

People flood the room—

You need to cook.

—their hands all over you, dragging you backward, away from the door that more people with faces that you think you should recognize are pouring in from and down, down. You’re lifted, you think, and there’s a set of warm brown eyes that look at you with the strangest look and you think you might know who, but you—

“A chef’s purpose iz to serve their customers. Without them, we are nothing.”

Your head jerks to the side, a full body jolt waking you, and you force your crusty eyes open.

It's blindingly dark.

You blink away the strange green and white lights, trying to get your bearings together. Your jaw is stiff. Your skin is tight. But it doesn’t feel like your skin. It’s like you’ve had everything taken out of you and replaced with wiry cotton.

Blinking slowly at the ceiling, you nearly give in to sleep once more, but a question, quiet as can be, nags at you.

What time is it?

The room is too dark to give you any indication of its time and nowhere do you see a clock.

You lift your hand to rub at your face, but a heavy weight resting on your wrist stops you.

A shackle or sorts?

You tug at it. It's tethered to the bed you're lying in.

Why is it there?

It takes longer than it rightfully should for you to piece it together: why are you locked to the bed?

Furrowing your brows at the mechanism, you try to focus on the answer—it should be so clear, but it escapes you. Twice more you tug your wrist, but you don’t get far.

“then...a?” The word come out thick, tongue swollen and barely functional. Your jaw hurts. Thirsty.

“How may I assist you, Chef?” she asks, voice water-cool as always. It brings some clarity back,
but you still struggle to piece a solid thought together.

“Why…?” You give your arm another clumsy, fruitless tug.

“Do you require medical assistance?”

Do you? Again, you scrunch up your face. It's hard to think when everything feels so vague and your body still feels so sluggish and not-yours.

“...no?” you say finally, unsure.

“You should rest.”

Rest? You never have time to rest. You need to work. This, you're certain of.

“time’s it?”

The AI is silent for a moment before she answers, “It's still late. You should rest.”

“Yes, but what time is it?” Your voice is raspy, lacking any of the authority you would've liked.

“Time for bed, Chef.”

A flare of irritation brings your consciousness back into sharper focus, your body feeling more like itself, a familiar strength in the form of heat slipping it's way into your marrows.

“What time is it, Athen—”

The question is swallowed up by a round of violent coughs that tear into your throat and stomach. It hurts—it hurts but it doesn't. Something is pulling and it feels like it should be painful, but the sharpness is not all there. There’s a beep somewhere in the room, but it’s lost amidst your suffering.

When you catch some semblance of your breath, you reluctantly lean back into your pillows, dizzy from the ordeal. The room swims and the bed rocks, jostling any questions out of your weary brain and sends you off into a stumbling sleep.

It's morning when you wake next. Angela—she refused to let you call her ‘Madame’ while you were under her care—is the first person you see. After a round of questions and a quick chance to freshen up from your bed—it's unbelievable how nice a hot, wet towel feels against your skin—she gives you her prognosis: another week of bed rest.

She doesn't go into detail about how you ended up here, instead she asks for your account.

“Do you feel comfortable with letting me know what happened?” Angela asks.

'What happened…?’ You scrunch your face as you try to recall the events between now and whatever your last memory is. Angela nods at you in earnest, and your eyes drift, sweeping past your blankets and to the wall.

“I...I was coming back…”

You were the last person to leave your restaurant after the auditors left. Asim tried to get you to stay over at his place but you told him that you were going to be staying longer. Somehow, he seemed a little antsy about the whole situation and asked Argus to watch over you. You took a
small nap on the office couch that you've made your bed for the past few weeks. When you woke up, you had decided to go home to Overwatch.

Though, you're not sure why or how but when you tried to leave, Argus wasn't reacting to you. It was like she was malfunctioning…?

You rub your forehead. What happened after?

“You don't have to force yourself if you can't remember. Please, take it easy.”

“No, I'm sure I can just…”

You decided to sneak back. You had been gone too long and it really bothered you. It was very late, but not early enough for the line cooks to begin their prep for the meals that are supposed to be delivered. Asim would likely be there, setting up the space. You can’t risk going there just to get some ingredients—you’ll have to make do with whatever you have in the Watchpoint’s kitchen. So you took your truck and rushed back. Yes, that was it.

“I opened the door,” you murmur. “I walked into the kitchen and then they were there.”

“Who are you? The ki—”

They opened fire. They didn't even say anything.

“I don't know who they were. But they had...they had guns. I think they shot me.”

There was blinding pain. It was really burning hot and electrifyingly numb. The next thing you know is that you were falling. And then there was nothing.

No, there was something else.

Someone came behind you a little while later.

You're not sure who, but there was a warm light. It still hurt. But it was warm and you remembered yellow and red.

“I think someone was with me? But I don't remember a lot after that.”

Madame Ziegler wears a tight expression as she listens. She forces a smile that feels a little wrong.

“That's all right.”

Confused, you ask, “But how? No one...has access to the Cellar.”

“…”

“Who gave the that person access?” The normal anger did not come, instead it is substituted with more exhaustion and mind-numbing confusion. There are only a small number of people with access to that door, and the outside entrance to the Cellar was particularly well hidden, and it was set up on a completely separate network than the one Athena controlled specifically to prevent access by non-kitchen personnel.

So how…?

The good doctor did not answer. Instead, the door behind her opens, revealing Soldier: 76 and an all too familiar red.
“I can answer that.”

“J—”

“Cat's outta the bag, anyway.”

Before you could become even more confused, Soldier: 76 brings his hands to his mask. There are two loud clicks and a quiet hiss of hydraulics. The red fades away and then all you see is a flawless blue that is as familiar as it is haunting.

The world falls away, plunging you into a floating dream.

Your voice comes out in a strangled whisper. “...strike...Commander?”

*Jack Morrison.*

He nods, seeming none too happy about admitting it. “Former.”

Your mouth hangs open as the ghost of rosy-memories past sits down beside you. He’s much older-looking now, the golden hair turned silver and eyes so weary. “How?”

“It’s a long story,” he grumbles. “But I’m more interested in hearing about yours.”

He holds up a familiar looking tablet—*your* tablet, buzzing away merrily in his hand, the name “Argus” flashing across the screen like an alarm.

Your heart seizes.

How long have you been out? Why is Argus calling?

“Can I...can I take this call?”

Soldier and Dr. Ziegler look at each other, a silent conversation held between them with the slightest of nods and shakes before the good doctor waves her hand at your tablet with a smile. “Please go ahead.”

You reach for it but once it’s in your lap—*361 calls missed, 677 messages, Argus Calling*—all breath leaves your body and the weight of the tablet multiplies a thousand-fold.

You don't see Soldier and Dr. Ziegler nod or gestures that are made.

Soldier: 76 stands. “We’ll be outside.”

"Call us if you need anything," Angela offers.

You don't hear either of them, the vibration of the call buzzing too loudly in your ears competing with the nervous racing of your heart. A cold sweat breaks across your skin and you can't stop the trembling of your hand.

The call stops. A momentary relief washes over you, drowning you back in the drowsy ease from before, and you let out a breath.

*362 missed calls.*

You jump when the tablet buzzes again.
Fear prickles your skin and bones. The shaking, the lump in your throat, the hitch in your breath returns with a vengeance. Nausea makes a home in your stomach, nestling deep against your ribs.

*Argus calling.*

Again.

You have to pick up. You have to. You have obligations. You have duties. You are her boss. You can't *not* answer it.

A hand wraps around yours and you turn your head to see it's Dr. Ziegler, a gentle smile shining on you.

"You don't have to answer if you don't want to," she assures you, hand warm and firm against your own. You look at her eyes, see the reflection of yourself, afraid and small and so very weak.

Is that what you've become?

What happened to you in the time you've been unconscious?

Is this really the look of someone who should be supporting the work of heroes?

You tighten your lips together and try to pull together a smile, tightening your lips to keep your churning emotions from spilling out.

"I'll be fine. Thank you, Madame Ziegler."

"It's Angela for you, Chef," she reminds you, teasing but still stern. "We'll both be right outside. You're safe here."

You nod, facing the tablet again, pressing the 'answer' button with enough force to make it shake and to keep yourself from backing away. It's done.

The call connects.

"Hello."

All Soldier: 76 and Angela could hear since leaving was the muffled speaking of whoever was on the other line. They both stand with their backs to the wall on either side of your door. It should concern them that you haven't spoken—or so they believe—but Athena assures them that you're fine.

After a while of this, Soldier suggests, "I'll take it from here. You should rest."

"And what are you planning, former Strike Commander?"

He grimaces. "Nothing that isn't for everyone's good."

She raises an eyebrow at him.

"It's important."

After a moment's deliberation, she says, "Very well."

Angela gives him a look, one he's long associated with something along the lines of: while I do not
want to do this and do not agree, I will go along with this, but if something happens, so help me, I'm never trusting you again.

Slowly, she retreats down the hall and back into the room she had made into her office.

Breathing a sigh, Soldier: 76 rolls his shoulders and presses his back harder against the door. In time, the conversation slowly escalates into a one-sided argument.

"—you forgot your obligations!"

"You sold me out to Talon!"

"We told them not to do anything to you—"

"And you trusted them?! How could you—"

"We were forced to make a choice: the information or Asim's life. We chose Asim’s life. What about you? Which do you value more? Overwatch or us?"

"I—don't, you can't—!" A noise of strangled frustration. "You can't just ask me that. I’m not—!"

“They came after us!” another voice, deeper, interjects. “Then there was a—a fucking reporter who knew—he knew! We had to talk!”

“A reporter!? Are you kidding me? What did you—”

He listens to you argue with your colleagues, choking on your conflicting interests and bleeding heart, and waits until a shout and the smashing of a tablet invites him back in to you with your face in your hands and tablet sparking pathetically on the ground across from your bed. You glare at him from behind your hand, but its effects are lost.

"Get out."

"I remember you had better manners than this. Don't tell me I'm getting old now." He takes up a seat beside you even as you refuse to look at him. "Athena."

"Yes, Soldier: 76? How may I be of assistance?"

"Initiate maximum privacy protocols. Whatever happens in this room, stays."

There are several beeps and then the distinct lack of humming that is more disconcerting than it is comforting. The disjointed crackling of a screen, the one you threw, and your heavy breathing, but little else can be heard, proof of the technology that blankets this room.

He watches you intently as the silence and his presence slowly unnerves you. Soldier’s patience pays off when you begin to fidget.

"I messed up," you choke out finally, quiet like a scolded child. “I'm sorry.”

Soldier looks down at his fists for a moment and sighs. One heavy hand rests between your shoulder blades, and you fold forward, clutching at your mouth with a gasp.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry—”

He pretends that those aren’t tears dripping down, allowing you to lean into his shoulder while he stares past your head at the empty wall, and waits for the sobbing to crescendo and slowly, surely,
start dying.

Just how many times in his life has he done this, and just when did he stop feeling anything? There’s only a dull ache in his chest, negligible in comparison to the first time he joined the army, having lost one of his battle buddies, one who just talked about how he was going to go and marry his girl when he returns and how he was saving just to make her parents happy and show he was responsible, to a lucky—a damn lucky—shot that ricocheted off of a steel panel. He didn’t go to the army psychologist until he was physically dragged there, indignant and yelling, by other members of his squad. Even then, he couldn’t let go of the dog tag, still blood stained, whose chain was still wrapped tight around his wrist or of the burning hot feeling that devoured all others.

Now, in the face of your breaking dreams, he can muster none of that.

“Start from the beginning. The very beginning. From what you did during the Fall and how you ended up back here. All of it. Can you do that?”

He watches you breathe, stuttering and shallow, voice breaking in gasps and sobs.

“Yes. I—it was when, when the Grand Mesa incident happened. Head Chef Richard fire—fired us. All twenty-seven of us without warning. I didn’t know what to do and Head Chef disappeared.”

You look up and straight ahead as though replaying the memory in your mind’s eye. He knows that look, seen it on too many soldiers as they rewatch and relive their lives on a reel.

“I kind of, went looking for him. No one knew where he went or what he was doing. But I got a referral to work at this place in Shenzhen by...by Pastissiere Woo where I took an apprenticeship for a little while. She said to train my skills while looking. Her family ran this really famous sweets place that she was supposed to take over before she ran off to Overwatch, so it was rough when she got back.

“Then I went around to Hong Kong, Macau, Laos, then I started going around to Europe because—because some of the other chefs still had lives and places to go and—I went, cooked and took short apprenticeships at different places to earn money. Then...then I met up with Argus Twenty to build up a charity restaurant.”

"Tell me about the restaurant."

"It was built in Gibraltar. Cœur d'Artichaut. It's still here. Rizy-looking, but we have a warehouse dedicated to cooking meals for people who didn't have any. We made it to attract wealthier people so they would give more money to the cause."

You then turn to Soldier, eyes wide.

“After Overwatch went down, I saw so many people who went hungry. And, and you know Head Chef’s mottos, right? Head Chef always, always made sure people ate.”

You take a loud breath and in your best imitation of the man Jack once knew as the very definition of ‘tough love’, you say, “‘It iz a chef’s responsibility to take care of their customers. Cook ze best food for them. Love them with all our being. We chefs exist for them. We die for them.’ So I did. I tried. We...Argus and I teamed up. She had the money, I sort of had the know-how. We always, always believed in Overwatch. Always.

“And then Asim came, helped us run our operations and our business really took off. I thought I was going to stay there forever if Overwatch didn’t come back—we had a bunch of contractor chefs we hire to make the meals we deliver and some truckers, and Asim was good at organizing
that stuff. Asim...didn’t really want anything to do with Overwatch like me or Argus, said he left it behind with an old life or something like that.”

"Who is Asim? What division?"

You go silent for a moment, and your voice drops to a tight whisper, like it's a secret you aren't supposed to tell. It probably is. "...Asim Singh is his name now. He...used to be Tanuja Deshmukh, in...I don’t remember which division, Operations, I think? Tanuja...ran away from his family. They wouldn't accept him for who he was. He finally got enough money around the time of the Fall to...become Asim. He said he didn't want anything to do with Overwatch, but I don't think he ever forgot or let go of it."

The pieces of a puzzle he didn’t know he was putting together click cleanly into place.

“And Argus?” he asks.

“Argus? She’s an Omnic with some money from playing around with stocks, and was a previous sponsor of Overwatch. She worked in finance. Regular compliance or something like that.”

“Regulatory compliance?”

“...yeah.” You fall silent for a moment, train of thought effectively broken. Jack looks up for a moment, past your head to ask himself when he’ll ever get over the habit of interjecting at inappropriate times or saying the wrong things at the wrong times. Probably never.

“And then…?”

“...Recall happened.” The air becomes heavier, more solemn and calmer than before. Your face falls downward, shoulders falling forward.

“Asim...Asim still had his communicator from Overwatch. He never—he probably never gave up on Overwatch either. He didn’t like talking about his time here. But I knew, I knew he still cared. So when I heard him listening to Winston’s message, I decided I was going to help—he wasn't going to come back, you know, he said so. Asim and Argus said it was a bad idea. I know that. I know, but I wanted—I wanted so badly to help you guys because I saw...I couldn’t forget what I saw, I can still hear them begging, some of them couldn’t even talk. They were just that hungry. And, and—”

Voice rising, you look to him again, eyes wild. “An army marches on its stomach, right? You are what you eat, so, so...so Head Chef would always say the agents needed good food made with love because of what you guys do. You’re fighting, you’re tired, you’re hungry, and, and—you need—”

“Breathe.”

Taking his orders and a few gulping breaths, you again look down to your shaking hands. “So I contacted Winston. Made him an offer. Told him I will stay and cook. He said it’s a great idea, but they don’t have money to pay me or run their operations. I told him...I told him I don’t need to be paid if I can just help. I told him...I will give him the money.”

You shake your head.

“Of course he said no. I didn’t give up. I—I told him that I could collect the money from the old Overwatch donors.”

Jack closes his eyes, squeezing them shut, knowing what’s about to come. It doesn’t make it any
easier to hear though. Automatically, pieces of contingency plans begin to formulate in his head—minimize the risk, mitigate the backlash, protect yourself—the most immediate ones to form are the ones where they throw you to the wolves and let you take the fall. He’s then reminded of Petras.

“He said no, that it would put them in danger. That’s why I told him I’ll make them donate to my restaurant—it’s a charity, so it’s not unusual for donations to come in. We’ll make our operations bigger, flashier so it will justify the sudden influx. Then I’ll redistribute the money to Overwatch secretly, pretending the agents are vendors or contractors. He can check the payments to make sure they’re right.

"I said I’d even bring the food here to pretend that I’m holding classes or something to justify the costs and extra food. Since Argus used to work in finance and Asim used to do operations, I was so sure this would work. The donors are not blamed, we hide the fact that Overwatch exists, and the agents get to eat. It was perfect. I told Winston it would work."

Solemnly, Jack finishes the story: “And he accepted.”

You nod.

Bone-deep weariness crashes down and envelops Jack like a mudslide. He knew Winston had blindly agreed to certain things that he should not have—not because of bad intentions on anyone’s part, but because of his inexperience, he failed to see the situation from a much higher level.

If Jack were in Winston's shoes, he would have refused and absolutely prevented you from contacting them. As it were, Winston had welcomed you so deeply into the fold, he refused to let anyone else tell him otherwise, and you, being so naïve in business and these sorts of transactions, have dug a far deeper grave for yourself than Overwatch has.

“Yes. So we did that. I stopped working at the restaurant, made Asim the head chef and Argus the general manager. By then, we were a little bit well-known, so I issued a public statement that I wanted to focus more on...management stuff, but in reality, I came here, lived in the old dorms in the Cellar, cooked for everyone, went back every once in a while to get supplies and food. No one knew except us three.”

Suddenly, your hands fist themselves into the sheets, jaw clenched and shoulders shaking.

“But then! Somehow Talon found out! They threatened Asim. They knew his old life and threatened him. They made him tell them what I was doing. They made—Argus fucking called them—the auditors on us. So that I couldn't be in the kitchen. So Talon can come in and, and!!”

“Breathe,” Jack says again, this time more firmly. He presses his hand onto your back once more, a solid reminder of where you are and who you were speaking with. “Tell me. What happened right before you came back.”

“I was dealing with auditors are my restaurant all the way up until that night. They wanted our documents and, I don’t know. They were definitely trying to figure out what we’re doing. Argus did a lot of the paperwork. I talked. Asim ran the restaurant. I, it was around 2AM when I left the restaurant. I tried to come back here. I took my truck and drove back. I went through the tunnels and came up and then, I guess it was Talon, they were just in the kitchen. They got me.”

You shake your head, teeth practically chattering from the pressure. “They came and tried to fuck with my staff, with my restaurant, with Overwatch—I, I—I can’t!”
An angry and strangled sound erupts from your throat and the bed trembles with the force of your fists slamming into them before you then crumple beneath Jack’s hands. Deep red pools through your bandages, staining the white sheets, promoting him to call for Angela.

Outside the door, Hanzo removes his ear from the sliver in the wall where the sound protection is at its weakest, takes his newfound knowledge and marches straight to Winston’s office, hellbent on answers.

Hanzo digests the information that he forced out of Winston with a modest accompaniment of alcohol, the very last of the bit that Mei got him, the rim of the sake bottle resting heavily against his lips.

*Money laundering.*

What a classic, textbook example of it: using a restaurant to obfuscate the true origins of dirty money. Normally, businesses like this are caught easily—you can easily determine the reasonable cash inflows and outflows by the number of customers, employees, the prices of dishes, rents, and loans.

But combine that with a charity and cryptocurrency? That complicates matters even more for those investigating. Hanzo is sure there are even stricter regulations regarding charities, but it’s not a topic he can say that he is well-versed in. Whatever you were doing with your restaurant, you seemed to have been doing it well.

The bottle tilts and he takes a slow, contemplative drag of sake.

What good is Overwatch when it runs on dirty money? Even if the money isn't gained by illegal means, on paper, it's still fraud. How is this organization supposed to regain its legitimacy if it resorts to such dirty means? How will it gain the trust of the people it’s trying to protect like this? This current Overwatch is digging itself deeper and deeper into a grave and will take everything with it at the rate it’s going.

If there was one thing that his father taught him, it was not to commit two crimes at the same time. And Overwatch broke that rule right off the bat.

What a mistake this was.

What a mistake Overwatch is.

Hanzo makes a half-hearted attempt to reach his Storm Bow, but thinks better of it. A weapon does not go well with drink, no matter his intentions. So he slumps down onto the corner of his bed until his elbows are on his knees, head hung loose, and his bottle hanging precariously between his fingers.

He knows about money-laundering and the type of operation it needs to be.

The Omnic Crisis had multiplied the Shimada Clan’s net worth in a snap. Hanzo’s father was still young then, forced to learn on the fly how to manage such a huge estate. The funds they gained from the illegal arms trade had to be hidden somehow. Although they controlled a good majority of Hanamura, they were not immune from the law.

Real estate was an obvious way to hide the money—have leases inflated with an insider real estate company who takes their cut and funnels the rest back to the Shimada clan. Even more elaborate was buying different shops and raising the rent and setting up assistance programs which
shopkeepers and homeowners could participate in and receive aid. To further this plot, the Shimada clan also collected 'taxes' in the name of this assistance program, where they 'donated' large amounts of money to.

It created its own self-sustainable economy where the Shimada clan's money kept getting mixed into the community and hid their trails from the woefully ineffective police force of Japan. As long as they paid their taxes and kept things neat on the surface, the Shimadas were untouchable.

If Hanzo were being honest, he didn't quite fully understand the extent and depth these illegal money-laundering schemes went. There were bookkeepers, civilians that were double agents, corrupt auditors, different ledgers and participants; he couldn't have understood it at anything other than a high-level, trusting the system to just do the job its been doing for so many decades before him. Even he, groomed to inherit this massive operation and educated well beyond a normal person’s means, could not grasp the full magnitude of these acts.

But you?

You're one person with nary an ally.

Your last ones sold you out to Talon for the sake of protecting your dream, and you've been denied your purpose, condemned to bed rest that you’ve been denying yourself for months on end.

Everything you've worked for fell apart and you probably have no one to blame except yourself.

He takes another long drink, tilting his head back as though the sake would go straight there instead of settling in his empty stomach.

You challenge the laws that be like it's your right, skirting the system and organizing a force all on your own that would potentially be the beginning of what could be considered the same difficulty as moving Heaven and Earth and bearing the burden of a fear and ever-crushing weight of enormous responsibility where not only lives, but an entire organization who also bears the weight of the world, rests on your weary shoulders. Such daring acts will make even the Heavens quiver at the mere thought, but you forge forward with your body and the fruits of your labor and friendships as the groundwork for what is yet to come (and at this rate might not even come, but you had believed and so you did it all).

Hanzo can only conclude one thing.

You’re a fool.

But you’re an earnest fool with a good heart. A fool who deserves to be rewarded handsomely for your futile, larger-than-life, and plain herculean efforts. A fool who deserves to be free of the constant weary look you wear and the weight of the ghosts of your responsibilities. A fool who deserves to be cared for, to be loved, and fed, and happy in the same manner that you try to ensure for them.

Outside Hanzo’s door, Mei jumps when she hears the sound of a slam.

Hanzo stares at the wall, eyes wide, his fist aching. His heart pounds fiercely in his chest with two heavy realizations.

One: your life may very well be a late parallel to his.

Two: he cares.
He slumps even lower against the wall, nearly flat against his bed, floored by the knowledge that he had not been ready to receive. His entire body goes numb, mind drunkenly ambling through his newfound thoughts, scarcely believing the conclusion he had led himself to.

No, no.

You're just a chef.

Just a normal, regular person.

An admirable person. A kind person. Stubborn and...strong.

What would his father say if he were still alive?

He would have likely wanted Hanzo's partner to be one of powerful standing. There were plenty of other rival clans in Japan, some that he was in good standing with and had enough power to influence the marriage arrangements so that anyone he chose would be more than happy to join hands with him.

But he had none of that now and nothing to offer anyone.

That was a huge thorn in his side; he had even less of a standing than a chef.

A chef who managed to run two businesses at once, tried to deceive the Gibraltar and British government by yourself, committed an impressive amount of fraud, and cooks absurdly acceptable meals, and…!

He breathes a heavy, heavy sigh and decides there is not enough alcohol on this base for him to continue this train of thought, and vows to bury everything including the little spark of potential disaster deep inside himself.

By morning, he will stop being impressed with your idiocy and return to figuring out a way to get Overwatch out of the six meter grave it has dug itself into.

Chapter End Notes

I wanted to get this chapter out before I started my new job next week. I don't know when I'll have a chance to write the next one, but I'm glad we finally managed to get Hanzo to a point where FEELINGS are now introduced into the mix. And he realized it beneath the 100k mark, bravo, Hanzo!

And now I can finally use the "white collar crime" tag that I've been dying to use since day one. Please don't quote me on any of the OFAC or regulatory compliance stuff, I am not 100% sure how this would work internationally.
Chapter 17

The night breeze comes rushing at you, salt and morning dew enveloping your senses the moment you throw open the warehouse door. Greedily, you breathe it all in, the chilly air waking you up, confirming that this is all real.

Taking the first few steps onto uneven earth, you gaze up into the night sky. Thousands of stars, vaster than your eyes can contain, wink, welcoming you back beneath their presence. You open your arms as though you could embrace the half moon that hangs in the air, unobstructed by wires or bed frames or the sticky guilt that suffocates you. Blood runs wild through your rusty veins, your muscles sing, and your weary joints pop at the stretch. The rush almost makes you lightheaded, but the air, the space, the freedom is just too delicious.

Slowly, you exhale, allowing the night settle on you.

You’re free.

“Thank you, Agent Hanzo.”

The man in question stands just a distance behind you, watching from the doorway of the warehouse that had hidden the entrance to the Cellar. He walks up beside you, unbound hair tossing in the wind.

“Did you forget the second condition, Chef?”

You smile sheepishly at him. “Right. Hanzo.”

He nods, a strange sort of half-smile on his face that you don't think you've ever seen before. "Just Hanzo," he reiterates.

The name still sounds empty in your mouth without the "agent" in front of it. It sounds too personal, too much like you're...equals. But it is a necessity for going out incognito. So no matter how uncomfortable you were with the prospect, it's still a deal. Besides, it and the other two conditions were nothing compared to what you gained. No matter the deal, anything was much better than being stuck in a bed, useless, while everyone else toiled.

Dr. Ziegler had prohibited you from leaving her care until she deemed you healthy enough to resume work. As of now, she still hasn’t given the all-clear, nor does she know you’ve disobeyed her orders. But you couldn’t abide by them. Not when Age—Hanzo offered to bring you outside where your help was still needed.

While you received an endless stream of visitors since your conversation with the former Strike Commander, all of them were evasive in answering your questions. You wanted to know what was happening with Cœur d’Artichaut. You wanted to know what you could help with. You wanted to know if the agents had the funds they needed, if they were eating properly, if—

No one answered.

All of them dismissed your concerns, telling you not to worry about it and to focus on your own recovery before returning to their previous point of conversation, their previous attempts at distracting you. Even the worst of liars did not reveal anything.

But how could you not worry when the idleness ate at your skin, burrowed into your sleep, kept
you awake? What is the purpose of your being there if you were not made to work? Why did you return then if they did not need you? Why do they let you stay when you serve no purpose except to eat up their resources and time?

Even in your sleep, you searched for answers.

It was a gut-wrenching mystery.

So gut-wrenching in fact that when Hanzo came to visit for the first time well after everyone else had already done so, you grabbed him by the arms, not letting him speak, forgetting for a moment that he was one of those heroes you had looked up to and deeply respected, and begged for answers. He was the only one you hadn’t spoken to, the only one who hadn’t had a chance to tell you no. He was your only hope.

To anyone else, it may have been very amusing to watch Hanzo Shimada attempting to console you, clearly unfamiliar and uncomfortable with the process. But for you, it was of utmost importance that you had at least someone who wouldn't lie to you. Question after question spilled from your mouth until Hanzo put down his foot (figuratively).

“Since you are so curious.”

You’re not sure if he’s unafraid of Dr. Ziegler or if he just didn’t care to keep it from you like all the others, but he told you more than anyone else was willing to.

Overwatch contacted the staff at Cœur d’Artichaut and worked out some deal to allow them to break cleanly from this business. Without your permission or knowledge, they essentially cut ties, unable to continue working as a conduit for an illegal Overwatch’s funds, and too afraid for their lives and the lives of their customers to openly defy Talon. You couldn't make a decision as to whose side you stood by, so they decided for you.

It made you laugh, bitter and so terribly sad. The charity restaurant you’ve spent years building up with the other two, taken, just like that. Without a word. With the very last things you’ve said to them, an argument.

What would Overwatch do without them as a cover? What happens to the funds? What about all the events they were preparing for? Who will be running the charity now? What about the results of the audit?

Hanzo seemed to hesitate before he leaned in to tell you, the words awkward in how delicately they were delivered, “They did not do so without thinking of you kindly. They said...they were leaving you in our care, and you are free to do as you liked.”

Sound, light, your breath—everything swept into a slow stop. The words echoed in your head, sinking in like falling snow just as it becomes water and seeps into the roots of your heart.

Those words should not have hurt as much as they did. You couldn't pinpoint what part of them made it feel like a knife landed in your chest and began to twist, but warm tears filled with several years of grief came pouring out and it was so hard to not make a sound, to keep your dignity, to not feel like something precious was taken away. There was definitely more that Hanzo did not, or could not, tell you.

Even when you're told you're free, why did it feel like you were more cornered than before?

Gushing sadness was quickly overrun by a dark, sticky anger—an anger born from time and tiny pebbles of resentment that would become an avalanche. A yell tore from the deepest recesses of
your being and you couldn't stay still, throwing your pillow across the room, clamoring to get out of this bed, get out of this room, get out of Gibraltar—

How dare they.

How could they decide for you? When you wanted both? When all you wanted to do was to help? How much did you sacrifice to make all of this happen? How could they take a whole company and half a decade's worth of work from you without your input, without a warning, without—

Those selfish thoughts made into words poured from your mouth. Words you couldn't take back. Words that, luckily, only had Hanzo and Athena as witnesses.

"Chef."

A solid hand landed squarely on top of your chest, shocking you back into reality and nearly knocking the breath out of you.

Heaving, bed made a mess by you tearing at it, you stopped and looked straight at the agent who had just seen you at your lowest, tear-soaked face and running nose, made all the more ugly by the black-hearted words that had laid dormant behind a facade of excellent customer service. He only looked back.

"I know."

It was all he said, it was all he had to say. The look on his face, undecipherable but undoubtedly haunted, quickly shut down your brief tirade.

The heat in your skin began to settle, evaporating, leaving nothing but the dregs of shame and exhaustion. His hand slowly lifted from your chest, letting it hover in the air for just a moment before he drew back completely, but the heavy phantom of it still lingered, holding you down. Where did it all go wrong?

Before you could even ask or apologize for being so unsightly in front of an agent, Dr. Ziegler put an end to it all, rushing in like a right mess.

Even as the doctor shooed him out, Hanzo turned back to tell you, "I will see you tomorrow."

"Not on my watch," Dr. Ziegler grumbled none too quietly. She rubbed her forehead, muttering unpleasantries underneath her breath before tending to the mess you've made of your bed.

You didn't really notice, the rest of the night passing in a daze. Questions that plagued you for so long, your inner monologues silenced when you remember that look Hanzo gave you.

—"I know."—

Somehow, those two words were more reassuring than any of the platitudes anyone else had offered so far.

No other visitors came that night, likely in no small part due to Dr. Ziegler.

Luckily, for the first time in a long, long time, you were able to have a deep, quiet sleep.

Hanzo returned the next day despite Dr. Ziegler's vague threats. It's impressive.

He asked, "Do you still want to know?"
The conversation the previous day was exhausting, but strangely, you feel a little lighter, a little less anxious. The walls no longer felt confining, nor did they seem to echo your worries back at you as loudly.

With resolve less manic and more rational than yesterday, you answered firmly, "Yes."

Everything else he told seemed tame by comparison. Even when you learned the agents were taking turns cooking. In the kitchen. Without permission from a chef. When there's a chef right here.

Strangely, the red-hot irritation that you had become accustomed to feeling boil up inside did not come. Instead, a small, barely there simmer aimed more at yourself than any of the agents burrowed into you.

What the hell are you doing? What the hell are you doing here? If neither the restaurant nor Overwatch needed you then why the fucking hell were you here?

He also told you about the state of the kitchen and how it fared during the attack. Due to Fareeha's insistence and out of sheer necessity, Overwatch had to make their way into the Cellar and connect those systems to Athena. They tried to respect as much of the space as they could, but the security concerns overshadowed any history or arbitrary rules that were created by a person who is no longer here.

There was also the matter of money. While Cœur d'Artichaut pulled their support, Hanzo assured you it wasn't an issue and there were other methods of acquiring the funding and supplies Overwatch needed to operate. The specifics were glossed over, but it sounded like they had a solid plan to get what they needed.

After some time, Hanzo concluded his report, asking, "I have told you all this. What will you do with this information?"

The question filled your head with static. Your mouth went dry. There was no clear path, no purpose, no answer.

"I don't know."

"What is it that you want to do?"

"I don't know."

Everything he told you invalidated everything you've ever done for them. It was cruel of him to tell you so and it was foolish of you to have thought otherwise. You had just wanted to help.

Head in your hands, you asked, "What would you do? If everything you worked for meant nothing? If your reason for being isn't there anymore?"

A strange look passed through his face, jaw going the slightest bit slack and eyes glassy but alarmed. Bewildered might be the best way to describe it, but as close as the word was, this wasn't it completely.

He stroked his beard a few times, a deep inhale and silent sigh flowing out of him.

"That is the past. What do you want to do now?"

"That doesn't—" You bite off the rest of your retort.
What do you want to do now? There's nothing for you here nor at the restaurant, which means there's no reason for you to be in Gibraltar anymore except for Dr. Ziegler's orders. Instead, you could probably do something else like begin your search for Head Chef Richard in earnest again and ask him to return. Once he does, you'll fall back into the shadows again, be useful with someone to be able to tell you what you should actually be doing.

"...I want to get out of here."

As if waiting for you to say that, Hanzo offered, "If that is so, I want you to come with me. I must go shopping for ingredients."

"Ingredients?"

He grumbled, "It's my turn to cook tomorrow. I have...no experience with cooking for crowds, so it may be best to have the assistance of an expert like yourself."

You don't know if it was to humor you or if the request was genuine, but you agreed anyway. Anything to get you out of here. Anything to be useful again.

It was agreed that Hanzo would meet you early in the morning to avoid the others and so he would be able to make it back in time to cook breakfast. While it would only be for a few scant hours, the promise of freedom was irresistible, even when he added three conditions to your freedom, it was a small price to pay.

Present day, Hanzo jerks his head. "We should not waste any more time. Let's go."

"Right."

Even though he said that, he did not seem to be in any particular rush, walking beside you as you got used to your legs again after being bedridden for so long. While Gibraltar was modernized, the residents preferred to keep the city as natural as possible even if it made walking up and down the Rock difficult. The paths are still uneven and only lightly paved. It's so minor, but you smile to yourself, knowing that he is at least considerate enough to match your pace.

He's not such a bad person.

But you knew that already. Anyone who enjoys food as genuinely as he does can't be a bad person.

The trip to the street market is filled with idle conversation.

"We threw away the leftovers."

"What a waste! This is why we don't do buffet-style for such a small group."

"Hah. You consider this group small?"

"Compared to the old days, yes. It's too unpredictable with so few agents. It's just not cost-effective."

"Who knew chefs thought about that cost effectiveness?"

"It's vital! I don't want to feed you all leftovers."

"I am sure some of us will eat anything that's placed in front of them."
The walk takes longer than you would have expected; all the best picks for today are likely already gone, but you find that you don't mind.

A steady stream of people pour in and out of the mouth of the market when you both arrive, the spoils of their haggling and eagle-eyed pickings carried out proudly in their hands and dollies. Vaguely, you wonder if you should've brought a hand truck for yourself, but the thought is quickly banished. It would just be too cumbersome to bring back without your truck.

"Where to first?" Hanzo asks, eyeing the map placed at the entrance.

"Follow me."

The tents are packed tightly together, merchandise flowing out of the white flaps. Lights hang off every tent, illuminating the way for you. The air is alive with shouts of the freshest catches and orders from trucks, it is made fuller with the smell of food and herbs.

It's a nostalgic sight—one you haven't seen since Overwatch formally existed. You were once a part of the crowd leaving this place at this time, rushing to get the ingredients back to the Watchpoint well before the morning shift began. It was almost a ritual: with the change of every season, a team would be sent out to buy samples from nearly every stall, enough for half the staff to experiment with and allow the Head Chef to sample and decide if it made it on that season's menu.

Your dishes were never chosen—never quite creative enough or nutritious enough or well-balanced enough—but it was fun seeing and sampling everyone's attempts. The Head Chef always had constructive comments, and the competitions fueled fierce knowledge transfers.

"Where are we going?" Hanzo is right at your elbow, carefully stepping through the crowd with a ridiculous amount of grace.

"There's a grain seller nearby."

"Grain?"

"We're short on rice, right?"

"I was told there was not much of anything," he answers, shrugging.

A frustrated groan rumbles in your chest. "I wish we had a chance to check the inventory."

"We were in a rush, and you had to change."

"You told me to!"

The two of you couldn't just go out the front door of the Watchpoint. It has never been an option since no one wanted to draw unnecessary attention while Overwatch attempted to reorganize themselves. Even if it were an option, you had to get a change of clothes. Going around in a hospital gown is the furthest thing from inconspicuous, and even though McCree gave you his serape sometime during your stay, it was still an unacceptable disguise, so Hanzo had to escort you to the Cellar where you kept your belongings.

You did not have the time to dawdle and see the damage the kitchen took in your absence, not with the way Hanzo ushered you straight through the Cellar door. It was kept open, a bundle of wires flowing out of it and down the halls while several of Agent Symmetra's turrets sat stop the doorway, watching. It should feel like a betrayal, that a place you knew inside and out was now
overflowing with so many unfamiliar things, touched by people that so many chefs have attempted to defend from, but with you as you are, there's nothing that could be said or done.

As you changed in your dorm room, you mentally apologized to the Head Chef, hoping that when he comes back your punishment won't be too harsh.

Though, you could argue that you've received your fair share of punishment. You ran your hand across the stippled skin of your stomach, still pink and a little tender. Thanks for Dr. Ziegler’s care, you no longer needed bandages and she said it was unlikely to leave any marks as long as everything goes well.

Flashes of that poorly timed night returned, and you shuddered to think what would have happened if the agents weren't there to help.

Would it even have mattered?

The agents would have figured their situation out. They were already cooking for themselves. It wouldn’t be long before they’re able to walk around, free, touting their status and lavished with more love and money than they could ever ask for.

What did they need you for?

In this dark room, alone with the memories of your colleagues and your job surrounding you, the doubt began to creep in again, seeking gaps in your wounds. Festering. Feeding.

A sharp knock at your door put a quick end to all those thoughts. “Chef. Are you finished?”

“Two seconds!”

Hastily, you yanked down your shirt and pulled on a stale jacket that likely haven't seen sunlight in a year. There hadn't been much of a reason to wear anything other than your work uniforms, and working in the kitchen, it's usually much too hot to wear a proper jacket.

"I'm ready,” you announced as you yanked open the door. You could see Hanzo's eyes drift past your shoulder and into the room. Curiously enough, he seemed struck by something not unlike a revelation that made him chuckle to himself.

"Is that what it is?" he muttered, leaving you very much in the dark. Again, he laughed, the sound bouncing off the stone walls of the tunnels. It felt like you were being left out of a very important joke, but you couldn't bring yourself to ask. Not when it seemed like the agent might go into hysterics.

It should have unnerved you. You had never seen him like this before, hand over mouth, head throw back, but he seemed to be enjoying himself. It was genuine laughter and you couldn't help but smile at the unabashed display of mirth. As long as the agents are happy, you're happy even if you didn't quite understand what was happening.

Eventually, Hanzo calmed down, still pink in the dim light, but his eyes seemed to be sparkling. "Excuse me. We've wasted enough time, let's go."

Quietly, you followed behind him as he navigated through the halls with the confidence of someone who has been here multiple times. He didn't even have any trouble with the forks in the tunnels or operating the lift.

What happened in the few days you were stuck in bed?
You didn't have time to think too hard about it when your destination come into sight.

“Here we are!”

Sacks of rice are piled up atop each other, an open bag in front of each different type for customers to scrutinize.

“Did you say one of your dishes was Japanese curry?”

“Yes.”

“In that case, we should probably go the traditional route and get the short-grain.”

“What’s the difference between all of these?” He points to the open sacks along a wall that seems to hold all the white rice.

"They're just different types of rice for different types of cuisines." Pointing to each one, you explain, "There's basmati, Jasmine, coconut, sticky; normally I'd keep at least four types of rice on hand and two other rotating types, but since we don't have a truck, I think we should just get the one you need for now."

It doesn't take you long to find the rice you're looking for: short-grain rice. Your hand sinks into the bag, a cooling cascade of rice calming your heart. Lifting a small handful, you bring it up to your face, drawing shapes in the rice.

“What are you doing?”

“Oh. Here, give me your hand.”

He complies, watching curiously as you pour the contents from your palm onto his.

Slowly, you drag a finger through the pile as you explain, ignoring the way his fingers twitch. “We’re checking for a few things. Firstly, we’re looking for anything that looks out of place. Like dark-colored grains or insects or mold.” You sift through the pile a few times, accidentally grazing the man's palm.

“There doesn’t seem to be any here, but you never know. We also look for any holes or insect bites.

“If it smells funny, it’s safe to say that it’s not good to eat." You both unconsciously lean in closer and for a second, your eyes flicker up at Hanzo's face, far closer than you've ever seen him before. His hair curtains most of his face. There's a notch in his brow, focused. But more superficially, his eyelashes are very long. Dark.

A jolt of shock rushes through you when his eyes raise and meet yours. Embarrassment warms your face. Your eyes dart down, heart thumping as you try to rush through the rest of your explanation.

“Oh an—and, if the rice isn’t hard, then that means it’s been exposed to water and shouldn’t be used. But looking at this rice, it seems to be pretty good quality. They usually are."

He drops it all back into the bag, attention clearly elsewhere.

That was a little improper. Taking a moment to catch yourself, you smack one of the rice sacks closest to you. Then again. And again.
With each strike, something feels like it is unwinding inside your chest. The sounds of the rustling grain and the feel of things sliding into place as you flatten the sack soothes and flushes out the grime that sticks to your veins.

"What are you doing?"

"Slapping the rice." You give the sack another light smack. "You should hit it once, too."

He crosses his arms, a puzzled look on his face. "Isn't this disrespecting the food?"

"I always slap the rice bags. It feels good."

**Slap, slap.**

"Are you going to buy or just abuse my rice all day?"

From behind the mountain of rice, an omnic shopkeeper appears, arms crossed and, despite the neutral faceplate, exuded irritation.

Heat crawls up your face and you can't help but laugh sheepishly, embarrassed, raising two fingers. "We'll take two."

The shopkeeper nods, uncrossing his arms. "Which will it be?"

Hanzo, ever so quick, grabs the bag you were hitting and the one beneath it, carrying them over one shoulder to bring to the table where the card system sat. You're rushing right behind him as he takes out his card.

"Wait, let me pay—"

"You don't have any money."

You splutter, patting at your clothes. "Of—of course I do, I'm…"

"The one who provided us with the necessary funds. I am aware. I am also aware you did not pay yourself while working with us," he counters coolly.

Your jaw drops. Even though you were CEO of Cœur d’Artichaut, your paychecks went to a dummy account to be used by Overwatch and for Winston to reallocate the funds as necessary. There should've been no one who knew about this except...

"How did you…?"

"Winston informed me of the financial situation." He smiles a little devilishly, handing the card to the shopkeeper. "In great detail."

Stunned speechless by his confession, you could only watch as he finishes up his transaction and hauls the sacks of rice onto his shoulder like they don't weigh anything.

"Oh." You pat at your clothes again, panic bolting through you as you realize they're all flat and devoid of any bank cards. "I think I left everything back home…"

"Hard to expect a chef to think of anything else but cooking."

"I don—wait, are you making fun of me?"
You barely see the grin on Hanzo's face before the wind blows his hair into his face.

Unable to control yourself, you burst out laughing.

As though contagious, he begins to laugh, too. It's a quiet laugh, a personal one meant for enjoying jokes. Even though it's directed at you, it makes you smile a bit as well despite the circumstances.

It's nice to see him so relaxed.

Adjusting the heavy sacks on his shoulder, Hanzo asks, "What's next?"

"Eggs."

"I believe there is still a carton from Dr. Ziegler's...attempt." You ignore the way Hanzo's voice trails off in disgust.

"We can never have too many eggs. You can make them soft-boiled, hard-boiled, sunny-side, poached, scrambled. You can make omelettes, huevos rancheros, egg tarts, egg custard, pancakes, waffles, cake..." You continue your list on your fingers as you walk with Hanzo, unaware of how he smiles as he patiently listens to you ramble about the different application of eggs.

"—duck eggs which are great for poaching because of how thick—ah, here we go!"

You make a sharp turn into a tent, nearly missing it and knocking your face into a sign that says in huge letters, “HUEVOS,” with some scrawling graffiti on it that looked like it said 'splash' or 'squash'. It seems that not everything remained the same. Hanzo sets down his purchase, eyeing the delicate products before shuffling the bags carefully around the tiny space.

Carefully, you check the contents of the cartons. Some are laid out in clamshell cartons, others are pillowed on hay in solid containers, allowing the different colors to show like a box of jewels.

Should you go for larges or the extra-larges?

Hanzo makes a face. "Chef. Why are these green?"

"Different breeds of chickens lay different eggs."

"Are they safe to eat?"

"Yes! The color itself is just an indicator of the genetics of the chicken. Depending on the breed, there's different properties like a richer yolk or a runnier white. But you can't just tell from the shell."

"I see." He picks up a particularly blue egg, inspecting it like he doesn't believe you. "And these are all natural?"

"As natural as selective breeding goes, I guess."

"Do they taste different?"

"Sort of. Different eggs taste different but it's not the color that decides the taste, it really depends on the type of feed and environment the chicken is in." Maybe you should just go with eggs that the other agents are familiar with.

You inspect a few more eggs until you come upon some gorgeous dark brown eggs, medium in size.
"Are you interested in our Penedesenca eggs?" The omnic tips his sunhat, a smile in his mechanic voice. "They're very good this season."

There's a momentary back and forth where you interrogate the omnic, asking about the conditions of their chickens, the specifics of the feed, the farm, the history of this business. The merchant was only too happy to reply, going into great detail that fueled more questions from you. It would've gone on forever had Hanzo not reminded you that you were both short on time.

"Fine. We'll take four dozen."

"Isn't that too many?"

"We want this to last. It's a lot of trouble for everyone to keep coming out, isn't it? And everyone eats a lot."

"There are other items we must purchase. We should be wiser in our selections."

"Fine." You acquiesce, waving at the merchant. "Excuse me, could we have three dozen instead?"

Noticing the judgemental look Hanzo is giving you, you throw your hands up. "It's less than four dozen!"

"Two dozen."

"That's too little!"

"And whose card is paying for this?"

You both know immediately that Hanzo has won this round, and you curse your own inattentiveness and haste. Having nothing else to say in response, you sulkingly turn back to the merchant and raise two fingers.

"Two dozen, please."

"Certainly."

The omnic hands you your purchase just as Hanzo gives his card, flashing you a smug look.

"If we find our final haul is lacking, we will return and get the other two dozen."

You grumble, holding your eggs close to your chest. You'll get him for this. "I thought you wanted me here for my 'expert' opinion."

"You are. I am making executive decisions."

You barely manage to stop yourself from rolling your eyes at him, choosing to continue tent-hopping for the ingredients. Hanzo doesn't seem too offended, following after you with the rice sacks back on his shoulder.

You take your time with the selections, explaining to Hanzo, who listens attentively to your endless stream of information. Hanzo eventually takes the initiative to look into other tents, asking for your opinion on different items. New products fill your arms with every tent you both visit and you begin to trail behind Hanzo, the weight of the growing bags dragging you down.

Despite that, it is the most fun you've had in a long time. The visits are filled with light-hearted bickering that makes you forget everything that had happened in the past few weeks.
Freedom is sweet.

It’s not until you’ve both explored most of the market that you decide it might be nice for Hanzo to pick something for himself. It gives you an opportunity to put down your bags for a moment while Hanzo browsed a mead store near the edge of the market.

You momentarily put down your bags just to give your arms a brief moment of respite.

Dizziness strikes you as you stretch, making you stagger in place. It takes you by surprise and you shake your head to clear it, but it only gets worse. There’s a dull ache all around your body that makes itself more known with each beat of your heart which feels like it has begun to pound with more force.

What’s happening to you?

A few steadying breaths do little to help.

Vaguely, you remember your promise. The third condition.

But you’re sure you can hold on. You’ve been through worse.

Besides, what would happen if you told him? He will just send you right back to the medical bay and then you would be confined again in the bed with no one telling you anything about things you should be involved in and then what?

But he did bring you out here in a show of goodwill. It would be unfair to take advantage of it and go against your word even if it meant cutting your trip short. Sighing and resigning yourself to the promise, you squint at the crowd in the tent, seeking out your chaperone.

You find him browsing the mead, talking with the store keeper in hushed but enthusiastic tones. You shouldn't interrupt him. He seems to be having a pretty good time, if you do say so yourself.

Another wave of nausea and pain nearly knocks you off your feet, the grounds sways once, violently. Your head throbs. It's hard to focus, the edges of your vision shimmering if you leave your eyes open for too long.

Forcing another two steps, your hand reaches out, but you hesitate—what are you doing?—before your hand drops, the feeling of pins and needles immediately swarming on the limb like vultures.

Taking in a few more breaths, you shake your hand to clear the feeling, but it wouldn’t leave. The ground beneath you feels wobbly, making any attempt at walking a challenge.

You falter in your steps, stumbling two steps back and nearly knocking the merchandise off the tables in an attempt to steady yourself. No. You’re a liability like this. As much as you didn't want to go back, you didn't want to cause any more trouble either.

With what little coordination you had left, you barely manage to grasp Hanzo by the edge of his sleeve.

"Hanzo."

"Chef?"

"...our last condition. To tell you...when I don't feel good." Taking a shuddering breath, gooseflesh rising everywhere, the feeling of needles pressing themselves deeper and deeper into your torso,
your lungs, you admit through grit teeth, "I feel really bad right now."

You can see his body language change from leisurely to tight to liquid. Whatever he saw, he must not have liked. You’re not even sure how you look at the moment. You know you feel weird, but it shouldn’t be so bad.

A hand grasps the bottom of your elbow, hoisting you up against him. You could feel the gush of breath as he carries all your purchases with the other arm.

Faintly, you think of his hands and how strong they are. They must be from using his bow and arrows. It’s...comforting.

Just how many times has he seen you in such a poor state? How must he think of you? The unease weaves itself into the nausea. The noise in between your ears just won't stop.

"Can you walk?"

"Think so."

His steps are hurried and you're stumbling over yourself trying to keep up.

He holds your hand tight, pulling you along a sloped path. This is objectively embarrassing. You're an adult doing some grocery shopping, it shouldn't exhaust you after an hour nor should you be breaking out into sweats. It feels like your body is burning up all the oxygen it has, reducing your steps to mere shuffles and your breath to small puffs.

Eyes half closed and disoriented, you aren't sure where you both end up.

"Watch your step."

The tips of your toes skim across steps and lifting your legs feel like a Herculean effort, but you force yourself to obey. You have had worse. You can do this. You have to do this.

There's noise all around, and you can feel the rumbling of Hanzo's voice against you.

At some point, the support disappears and you sink heavily onto a surface—a plush chair—that creaks beneath you. Shivers run up and down your skin without Hanzo's warmth. It's strange, you had only leaned on him for a short while, but already you're missing the heat he gave. It was comforting.

"Drink this."

Something is pushed into your hands. It feels like a cup. Your vision is still blurred by shine and colors that are slowly swimming away from the center of your vision, but not soon enough.

You hold tightly to the cup, carefully lifting it to your lips. The motion alone saps any energy you are able to muster, forcing them down onto your lap before you are able to take a single sip.

Taking in a few bracing breaths, you try again, successfully managing to swallow the tepid water until you drain it all. Almost immediately, the cup is taken from your hands and another replaces it just as fast.

This time, you just hold the water in your hands, waiting for the unsettling feelings and colors to pass. Maybe you were too hasty in leaving. Maybe you shouldn't have left without talking to Dr. Ziegler. You don’t know what was in the drips you were being provided or the medicine she was
giving you. Maybe you wouldn’t be in this situation if you weren’t so hellbent on proving something that you had no control over.

Beside you, the sound of a chair scraping and something bumping up against your knee. The jostle makes a mockery of your attempts to feel better and it sets off another wave of nausea that makes you clasp a hand over your mouth. Immediately, a hand is on your back, unmoving. The weight is hardly comfortable, but it gives you something to focus on in the midst of this imaginary swaying. Among everything, it’s the only steadying force that keeps you anchored.

It’s a slow process, but everything eventually settles into place, allowing you to sit up and finally look around the small space that you had been occupying. Hanzo’s hand slides off your back, the heat dissipating and making your body feel so much lighter. Beside you, Hanzo sits on a chair, a cup in his own hands with something that looks like coffee. The interior is that of a cafe, wooden walls and shelves, the gentle smell of freshly baked goods carried by the underlying aroma of espresso. The beginnings of daylight peek in through the window on the other side of the little shop, the employees nowhere to be seen.

"Where…?"

"A cafe. It was open. They’ve allowed us to remain here until you feel better.”

Absently, you look up at the clock hanging on the wall. You don’t know how long you’ve been sitting here, wasting time with all the trouble you’ve brought upon everyone. Now even unrelated people were involved. "The other agents should be having their breakfast by now."

"I do not believe you are in a position to be worrying about others."

"I'm sorry."

“Do not apologize. You were just doing your job.”

“No, I mean…”

Hanzo did not say anything, nodding for you to continue.

Heat creeps up your face and you can't look him in the eye. "For what happened just now and...when I had a temper tantrum in the room. I didn't mean for you to see any of that.”

"Is that so,” he says simply.

Silence blankets you both as he sips his coffee and you look down at your water. Embarrassment prickles at your skin and almost instantly, you regret having confided in him. But you're sure it would bother you more if you didn't at least apologize for it.

"I envy you."

Your head snaps up at the sudden exclamation. You must have heard wrong. Hanzo does not look at you, instead, he stares off to the side, past the windows, past the slowly brightening streets and everything they contain. He stares like he's watching something from long ago.

"That you could be like that."

"I don't usually—"

"I am aware. You are professional, and a professional. We are your customers. You attend to us
because it is your duty."

"...yes."

"It is easy to follow the rules dictated by your duty, especially rules that have always been there, established by others you’ve seen as superior."

“What would you know about that?” you hiss angrily. “I have to—”

“And what do you think I know?” he asks softly.

His words sound like a challenge, but a melancholy one, one that tells you that you are far less knowledgeable in your subject than you presume to be.

“How far would you go to please those you serve? How far will you go to complete your duties?” he continues, voice strong but so very distant.

"I…"

"If the Head Chef returned, would you take all his orders even if you disagreed with them? Even if his orders were not what your clients wanted?"

"What are you talking about?"

A short laugh makes it out of his mouth and he shakes his head. “Forget that."

“...I’m just trying to do my job,” you offer.

“You do more than your job, chef.” A rush of humiliation floods you when he spits your title back at you. “They are not so helpless that they need so much coddling. The money, the support—leave that to us. Those matters are not for a chef to concern themselves with."

You bite your lip several times, shrinking in on yourself. There was nothing he said that you could deny. “I’m sorry, I guess I only brought more trouble.”

“That’s—Do not—” Hanzo pinches his eyes shut, pressing his thumb and index fingers into the bridge of his nose, exhaling. “Do not presume that,” he says wearily. Hanzo makes a complicated face and clicks his tongue, the sound sending a sharp and cold shard of fear through you, pins sticking into you anew "...it is not a criticism of what you've done so far, Chef."

Perhaps seeing how you tensed, he sighs, pressing his lips together and parting them several times.

"...what I want to say is…” Hanzo suddenly looks slightly embarrassed, a hand curled into a fist in front of his mouth as though to muffle the world and hold them close to himself instead of letting you hear; curious look. "It would do you good to rely on others more often. You've done well so far. Thank you."

“Oh.”

You didn’t really know what else to say.

*Thank you.*

You've heard those words many times before from many different people. Somehow, this time feels different. It’s a little awkward and stilted like it comes from someone who isn’t used to saying it. It reminds you of when you first heard it from Hanzo on a lonely night before this whole mess
and before you two really knew each other.

Face now several degrees warmer than before for reasons you couldn't name, you ask, “Why are
you helping me so much?”

If anything, it should be you thanking him. One should never look a gift horse in the mouth, but
you couldn’t help wondering why Hanzo of all agents would help you. Not even the veteran agents
would fill you in on the current situation, and neither did the more outgoing, newer agents. No one
made the effort to even ask you what you wanted or get you involved when you knew that they
knew you were deeply entangled in the mess that is currently Overwatch. So why Hanzo alone?

He stares back blankly at you, lips parted like he was about to say something but he doesn't.

Maybe...you didn't dare hope, but…

Hesitantly, you ask, "Is it becaus—wait, no. Are we...friends?"

Almost immediately, he replies, "Are you and McCree friends?"

"I guess?" The answer just falls out of you without much thought. It's not a lie, not really. But
where did that question even come from?

"Then are we the same as that?"

You fall silent. You and McCree are, very loosely, friends. He gets you into mischief and you
retaliate. But were you and Hanzo the same thing? He didn’t treat you the same way McCree does.
It’s different, but you couldn’t articulate how.

"...something like it?"

"...then let it be so."

With a self-satisfied smile that seemed more lonely than anything, Hanzo closes his eyes for a
moment, allowing his words to settle the conversation. You don't know why, but you didn't want
this to end this way, and yet, you couldn't find the right words, so instead, you have to swallow
what is unsaid with the rest of your water.

"We should be getting back. Are you able to stand?" Hanzo asks after a few more moments.

"Of course, I rested long enough." The confidence is undue and did not come from any concrete
proof, but you're glad you were able to get up without falling on your face. You've embarrassed
yourself in front of Hanzo enough.

Truly a kinder hero than most people give him credit for.

Especially when he grabs all of today’s purchases in his hands before you’re able to even touch
them.

"I can carry something."

"It is training for me."

“That’s not fair. I can’t make you do this.”

“You’re not making me do anything. This is my choice. And what did I say about relying on
others?”
You couldn’t not come up with any excuse or argument against an agent who is hellbent on doing things his own way. This isn’t the kitchen, this is the outside where you have no control.

Sighing, you resign yourself to Hanzo’s whims and follow beside him as best you can. You supposed those two dozen eggs will have to take a rain check.

The trip back is quiet, but the streets become more and more occupied with people with every changing increment of color in the sky. Hanzo does spare a glance every once a while, and each time he does, guilt pricks at you, knowing that he's carrying everything. It takes you a little while, but you notice that you've been walking a little longer than usual.

"Aren't we going back to the warehouse?"

"We should not take the same path we came," he says simply as though that explains anything. It’s not very logical since it’s a much quicker path to go through the tunnels—that's what they were made for, but you don't have much of a choice but to follow him.

Along the way, you notice the macaques up and about, running around without a care in the world. If only you could do the same. Smiling bitterly to yourself, you wonder if you’d ever have the chance to come outside like this and enjoy your time with another agent. Even if you managed to successfully hold everything together at the Watchpoint, there's no guarantee that when the Head Chef returns that you'd have a place here. So many rules broken and so many people troubled. It would be a miracle if you were allowed to work anywhere ever again, let alone Overwatch.

But despite all of that, you gained a friend.

Despite all your shortcoming and all the trouble you caused, you were still thanked for everything you've done. And that makes something sublime stir in the depths of your heart—maybe it's gratitude, maybe it's humility, but it's something you cannot put a name to, much like many of the expressions Hanzo has shown you today.

It wouldn't be a day you'd forget anytime soon.

The path you both walk leads you up to the backside of the Watchpoint where the space opens up to the hangar. Upon seeing the familiar sight, you both slow down. Given the time to finally relax, everything in your body throbs, your stomach wounds most of all. But you couldn't care less about it.

"Thank you, Hanzo. I had a really great time today. I don't know when I'll be able to do this again, but I really appreciate—"

Hanzo turns on his heel, a fierce sort of look on his face that makes you freeze in place.

"Chef...I will ask you again." He stands tall, staring at you with piercing eyes. Imposing like a king. His voice is loud, declarative. The sun sits at your back, shining on him. "What do you want to do? Not what would your previous Head Chef do, but you as yourself."

"I…"

"Ach du liebe Güte! Are you finally back from your adventure?"

The voice, clear as a bell, rings out across the lightening land. Zenyatta's orb zooms right by, spinning in the air before settling near your shoulder, an instant ripple of calm rushing through you that only deepens with every moment that passes. Three figures emerge from one of the doors of the hangar, approaching you and Hanzo.
"Finally. We were about to send Genji after you." Dr. Ziegler points her thumb at the cyborg behind her who gives you all a two fingered salute. Barely perceptible, Hanzo flinches beside you.

"Now then, Chef, if you're done with your trip, please come with me. We have to do a check up and make sure your trip did not have any adverse effects on your body."

Before Dr. Ziegler could escort you away, you give Hanzo a heartfelt smile.

"Thank you, Hanzo. I had a really great time today."

Hanzo's reply and expression is lost in you when both Zenyatta and Dr. Ziegler usher you back into the base, leaving the two brothers to their own devices.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

With you being escorted back by Zenyatta and Dr. Ziegler and the last of your smile lingering at the edges of his memory, he’s left alone with Genji.

The sun warms everything despite the lateness of the year, but it could not even touch the frost that has settled in Hanzo’s bones. Two bracing breaths later and he forces himself to look at Genji and is stricken with a bout of nausea that makes his blood rush and mouth water. He desperately hopes his discomfort isn’t showing on his face.

Maybe he’s tired from his trip with you or from the stress of the past few days (weeks, months, he can’t be sure—he’s never been good at determining when he’s stressed anyway). He finds he’s unable to string together a coherent thought amidst the building chaos in his mind.

The seas, the sky, the ground all cracks and begins to fall apart piece by piece with each step Genji takes. It leaves him in a void, the direction he thought he may have found, lost. A small hysterical rise of panic presses up against his stomach.

Genji wears a confusing mix of casual clothes and armor that Hanzo can’t be sure isn’t a necessary part of him. It’s not something Genji has ever worn in their youth before. There were expectations from those around them to dress a certain way, and Genji toed those boundaries constantly, but never so blatantly. In that way, Hanzo could separate the Genji before him and the Genji of his memories.

But the way he walks—quiet and light, ready to flee (or jump straight into the fray)—and how he keeps a careful distance that’s barely outside of Hanzo’s own range makes that separation that much more difficult.

Genji stretches out his hand. It looks and feels too much like an olive branch, a beacon in the right direction as he free falls through the dark. Hanzo fixates on it until it twists and bends, becoming flesh and human and covered in blood. Alarm bells ring in Hanzo’s head, self-preservation instincts screaming until he can hear nothing else.

“Here, let me take some of those bags—”

“No.”

Even to Hanzo’s ears, the response is too quick and too sharp, barbed with fears that he is not yet ready to face.

The word ‘coward’ echoes loudly between his ears.

Even louder are the words unspoken in the curling of Genji’s fingers as he very slowly withdraws his hand. Hanzo does not look directly at Genji’s blinding green gaze, but feels it searing his skin, reaching deep and attempting to set the ice inside him on fire. He swallows the slick lump in his throat, feeling it stick in his chest where it wouldn’t budge.

His brain scrambles desperately, seeking out the words that could fix this. Despite having all his time at Overwatch to think and practice what he would like to say, and despite everyone’s
meddling insistence, he has nothing.

‘Say something.’

The silence drags on.

His brain digs and digs, finding nothing but dust until it reaches the wall around his heart which houses the memories of well-rehearsed words spoken to an empty grave and altar where no god or spirit sits.

Things were fine when he didn’t register the machine in front of him as the same boy who did as he pleased and left Hanzo dealing with the messy aftermath, who made Hanzo’s ascension so much harder by disobeying and rebelling against all that the clan stood for, who was untouched and unbothered by the scathing remarks from friends and clients alike.

Acknowledging now that they could be—*are*—the same person makes it hard to remember what he wanted to tell him.

He reluctantly hits upon ‘I’m sorry’; a phrase too simple and too flimsy to hold the weight of a lifetime’s worth of dues. But his mouth does not form the words.


It’s inane, but something cracks.

Everything Hanzo holds drops to the ground as ten years worth of resentment rises from the grave at the bottom of his heart. His brain, in searching for something worthwhile to say, found something else instead.

“And whose fault is it that I am this way?”

“What way do you mea—?”

“If you had just killed me, we would not be having this conversation.”

“And what would that have done? I am not like you.”

“Like me?” A hollow laugh escapes Hanzo’s throat. “No. Because if you were, you would have had the decency to do the proper thing.”

“I am trying—” Genji stops, realization dawning on him. Even with the visor in place, it is clear Genji is squinting at him. Anger creeps into his voice with each word. “This isn’t about now, is it? This is about the past.”

“What difference does it make? You have never done the right things then, I should not have expected you to do the right thing now.”

“And what about you? Look where ‘right’ and ‘proper’ led you.”

Hanzo snarls. “I had to! I was protecting the clan—”

“It was always about the clan’s reputation, wasn’t it? No, you only ever thought of yourself and your own reputation. You are only here for your own self-fulfillment.”

And then something breaks.
Hanzo roars, the force of his voice barely managing to drown the noise in his head. “What could you possibly understand!? You spent your whole life running away from your responsibilities!”

“And what do you want me to understand, brother?”

“You—” Hanzo chokes on the many grievances that fight for life in the form of words he won’t be able to take back.

They all well up rapidly to the forefront of his mouth, trapped together like a dam in their attempts to be given life first. The gaps where kinder, smaller words may escape are sealed with the dark, sticky emotions that have been suppressed these past ten-plus years. It undulates, twisting in on itself, gives itself shape and life and strength at an unyielding pace.

Hanzo clenches his fists so hard, they shake.

“You ungrateful brat. I paved a path of success and all you had to do was follow!”

Genji laughs, the sound harsh and tinny. “Success? You call this”—he gestures up and down at Hanzo with a hand—“success?”

“It would not have been this way if you just listened. We could have had an empire! We could have ruled over Japan.”

“And that was your dream, brother, not mine.”

“It should have been your dream! After we raised you so carefully, too—”

“You did not raise me. They tried to raise another puppet.”

“A puppet?!” Hanzo heaves, jaw aching from the tension. “If only you’d ever listen, you’d know what’s good for you.”

“‘Listen’? And be a ‘good little boy’ like you? Would they have given me my freedom then?”

“You could’ve had freedom if you only did what you were told! You don’t know the humiliation I went through because of you! You always did what you wanted without considering the consequences.”

“And you never gave a shit about me or what I wanted.”

“What could you have wanted? We had everything!”

“I wanted my own way. Away from outdated traditions and the roles the clan assigned us.”

Red hot anger forges Hanzo’s words into weapons. “And did you think trash like you had the right to defy the clan?”

All at once, Genji’s body tenses and sags as though exasperated. Circular vents on Genji pop out, steam hissing violently as it escapes. The brief lull allows Hanzo’s words to bite him full-force with the weight of his own sins.

“And did you think I enjoyed being called ‘trash’ and the embarrassment of the clan, Hanzo?”

The way he says it takes the wind entirely out of Hanzo’s sails. The anger and hate freezes over in an instant. Reason returns briefly. That he would have these feelings after so long just means that these years after leaving the clan have meant nothing.
He never changed.

“Look.” Genji’s tone turns placating, but still dry and weary. “I know what you wanted. I know what father wanted. I know our ‘face’ and our image was everything. But what does that mean now? You’re not a part of the clan anymore. You’re not in Japan anymore. You’re Overwatch, now. How long will you hold onto the past?”

“…”

“Think on it. Whatever ‘proper’ and ‘right’ is for you, what are you doing now?”

Hanzo says nothing, the floor taken out from under him as he realizes it’s almost the exact same words he imparted onto you.

Genji leaves him with those words and traces the path you and the others took, only taking a look back once. Nothing comes out of it and Hanzo’s left alone.

The entire argument was uncalled for and reminds Hanzo just how much of a brat Genji could be. If there was one thing he hasn’t outgrown and one thing that absolutely affirms the Genji here and the one from his memory are one and the same, it’s that audacious attitude that had made the younger man the target of the clan’s scorn—Hanzo’s especially.

He had no issues with the assassination order. He wholeheartedly welcomed it, in fact.

Elder siblings are supposed to guide their younger siblings. Those who saw Genji roaming around freely, disregarding the unspoken and spoken rules of conduct, framed it as an older brother’s incompetence. An accomplished role-model like himself watching over the shame of the clan with no results to show for it speaks volumes of Hanzo’s shortcomings. Regardless of his personal accomplishments—of which there were many—the fact that he could not clean up his family’s image was seen as pitiful.

And Shimada Hanzo, newly installed head of the Shimada clan, should not have to take such an insult.

The mockery, the poisonous whispers, the lofty attitudes of those around him were silenced the moment he killed Genji. It was peaceful.


The type of silence that kept him awake. While voices of the present did not speak to him, the voices of the past did. Just as his deeds granted him more power and more authority in the daytime, the voices gained it in spades behind closed doors.

Was it worth killing the last of his family?

No matter how much shit was thrown at his face, no matter what everyone said about him and his abilities, was it really enough to make himself the last of the Shimada bloodline?

At the time, yes.

After having done it, he didn’t have an answer and the doubt began to eat at him every night until it and the voices were too much. They chased after them for ten years. But never once did he think too deeply on what Genji may have wanted, only what Genji should have done to avoid being placed on the proverbial chopping block.
And after so long, did Hanzo really even know what Genji wanted back then and now? Does Hanzo even know what he himself wants?

Slowly gathering all the items, Hanzo makes his way back into the Watchpoint, weighed down by more than the bags he holds. Each step he takes echoes loudly in the empty hall like a death knell. What he wouldn’t give just to drop everything and run away from this awkwardness, from himself.

Athena’s voice is like cool water. “Welcome back, Agent Hanzo,” she says as she shoulders his way through the swinging doors of the kitchen. It’s strange to think that not too long ago, they would not budge for anyone other than you.

He drops everything off onto the nearest surface and unpacks. Miraculously, the eggs are intact and didn’t suffer any from having been unceremoniously dumped onto the ground during his outburst.

Everything you both bought covers half the length of the counter, and he can’t be sure if this is a lot or not enough. Every other item he pulls out is a mystery—ingredients that he’s sure he may have eaten before, but isn’t sure how to prepare. The sheer number of these unknown specimens is intimidating, a test for him, asking him if he knows how they should be kept.

The thought of asking you briefly crosses his mind, but he stamps that down hard. Instead, he separates the ingredients he needs, leaving yours in a neat deconstructed grid.

Heading to the nearest sink, Hanzo sets his mouth in a line, determined to throw his whole self into his new work. His own destructive thoughts and fight with Genji can take a backseat.

Breakfast is a disaster.

And it has nothing to do with his recent spat.

While the thoughts do not make a comeback, head buzzing with a droning static, he soon realizes he is woefully outside of his element and the kitchen is unkind to those unfamiliar with it.

No sooner had he finished washing his hands, the cafeteria comes to life with early risers who may as well be zombies. Very demanding and snappish zombies, some who can barely form a coherent sentence.

Hanzo can’t say he’s ever had to make coffee for anyone other than himself before, let alone use a commercial coffee machine. Under less pressing circumstances, it would be a novel experience to grind his own coffee beans and smell the aroma that comes out into his waiting bucket. Instead, he’s silently begging the machine to grind faster, leaving before it is completely finished and allowing leftover grinds to spill everywhere. (He promises himself to clean it once the coffee is made—he doesn’t.)

No one told him it takes about eight minutes—and those may as well be the longest eight minutes of his life—to make such an amount of coffee either.

It’s lucky that Torbjörn fixed the hot water dispenser, otherwise he might have had to make coffee by hand. Again, a novel experience he might’ve enjoyed under any other circumstance if the dispenser didn’t also spit boiling water at him. It’s also lucky that Fareeha did not barge into the kitchen herself to strangle him to death for making her wait for her caffeine (she does, however, abuse the service bell and manages to get it confiscated.)

The tilted screens sitting atop the service counter window blink incessantly at him, reminding him he’s dawdling. It’s there he learns of everyone’s beverage preferences.
(Half-caf coffee for Reinhardt—Athena tells him to give him full decaf because his stomach can’t handle it otherwise, and then he has to waste another few minutes making decaffeinated coffee—black coffee with four shots of espresso and one sugar for Fareeha, black coffee for Soldier: 76, etc. Hanzo grimaces and mentally apologizes to you for having criticized your commitment to their nutrition and for having to deal with them.)

With the agents briefly sedated, he moves into his next order of business. Actual breakfast. Food-wise, he had planned to make a less risky version of tamago kake gohan or just a soft-boiled egg over rice.

His first, unexpected hurdle is the lack of a rice cooker (or clay pots or microwaves—not that he planned on microwaving raw rice; it was an appliance he is more familiar with, at least more familiar with than this ‘pressure cooker’ that Athena suggests he use).

There are far too many things in this kitchen he doesn't know the uses for—differently shaped knives, pans of different materials and sizes, even the plates are oddly intimidating. Everything serves to remind him he should not be here.

Left with little choice (and a lot of choice words for the lack of a rice cooker), Hanzo settles on making rice in the largest pot he could find.

It’s filled with cup after cup of rice—a rough estimation of one cup of rice per person gives him sixteen cups—the sounds of cascading rice a small comfort, soothing in its rhythm. The grains seem to glitter and he pours it over his hand, the physical feel of it is as soothing as the sound.

For a moment, Hanzo thinks of you, thinks of the sparkle in your eyes as you impart your knowledge, the warmth of you so close, the feeling of your finger tracing shapes through the rice in his hand. The motion was tender. It may have been the gentlest touch he’s ever received from anyone in recent and not-so recent memory.

And it frightens him to think he would like more.

Violently, he shakes his head and hand. He doesn’t have time for this.

Hanzo rubs his hands vigorously to rid himself of the phantom touch that still sends molten syrup through his veins. Even running his hands through water doesn’t make the sensation fade. Instead, it just makes him all the more conscious of how warm his ears are.

Water goes into the pot, and Hanzo vaguely recalls the ratio of water to rice should be 2:1. It should be embarrassing that a man of his age doesn’t know how to prepare something he’s been eating all his life, but in his defense, Japan has no shortage of readymade foods and he’s never stayed anywhere long enough and far away from civilization to warrant learning how to cook rice from scratch.

While he lets that come to a boil, he prepares another pot of water and dumps in a dozen of the eggs you spent so long arguing with the shopkeep about.

Carefully, he keeps watch over both pots, leaving only to grab an overly large serving spoon to mix both with. The last thing he needs is burnt rice.

Genji used to like scorched rice, clamoring for a piece of it whenever they had the opportunity to eat rice from clay pots, often cutting the roof of his mouth on a particularly sharp piece of rice. He’d complain about it until it healed and then do it all over again the next time.

Briefly disgusted with his memories, he buries them along with the rice, willing himself to focus on
the outcome and not the unnecessary things associated with it. But no matter how much he mixes it, it doesn’t become the fluffy grains he expects.

He’s left with a white, mushy slop; a mixture of overcooked and undercooked rice whose integrity is so compromised, he cannot even in good faith call it rice porridge.

The rice serves as a fresh reminder that he is a failure. Even the eggs do not come out unscathed. Instead of the soft, jiggly whites and golden lava of yolk, the whites are tough and rubbery, and the yolks are ashen green and smell distinctly of death and sulfur.

All twelve eggs go into the furthest trash can and the rice follows painfully after.

You were right. Two dozen eggs would hardly be enough. At least a quarter of the rice you’ve bought is gone with nothing to show for it.

There’s no time to mourn or for self-flagellation. The other agents, no longer pacified with coffee or warm beverages, are irritatingly loud in their demand for food.

Hanzo hastily puts together charred, buttered toast with overdone slices of pork and watery miso soup sans tofu or seaweed topped with crudely chopped green onions. (He nearly slips while entering the walk-in freezer for his troubles.) It’s barely passable, but it seems other people feel otherwise.

“Would you like me to have a go at it?”

“Could you kindly get th’ hot sauce over there?”

“I regret to inform you that I do not eat meat.”

“So… this your first time cooking or…?”

The comments he gets range from superficial thanks to outright criticism. The worst, though, are those who say nothing. He can feel their pity radiating toward him, and he’s never been more glad the service window isn’t high enough to show his face or theirs.

Hanzo did not expect words of overflowing praise or for people to drop at his feet. Criticism and scorn is familiar to Hanzo. It is the building blocks of his foundation, it props him up and drives him to be better, to be stronger. This quiet sort of feedback where people just resignedly accept what is given strikes a sour chord in him.

He doesn’t have much time to dwell on it as the agents come in a continuous wave, some begrudgingly returning for more only because they need whatever calories they can get regardless of taste. Breakfast would have spilled into lunchtime had Athena not said anything to him.

Lunch is no better.

After his failed attempt at making rice, he scraps his plan for riceballs. There are very few things in his repertoire that would be universally accepted. He didn’t want to chance the issue with Satya again.

“Athena. What are the other agents allergic to or are unable to eat?”

She pauses and Hanzo could hear the reluctance that accompanies her answer. “Please turn your attention to the screens.”
On them, a flood of information takes over where the orders would be.

Disgust and a dose of paranoia crawls up Hanzo’s skin as he realizes he’s now privy to information that some of their enemies would pay an obscene amount for. A person’s likes or dislikes has always given Hanzo an edge in either negotiations or threats. Allergens even more so. It wouldn’t be difficult to use this to his advantage should he have been in any position to do so.

Not for the first time, he realizes the disturbing and tremendous power chefs have at their disposal. An incredible amount of trust is placed in your hands, money-laundering aside. One mistake or one slight from you could easily take out an agent or a whole Watchpoint. You played your part in keeping everyone healthy and fed. Everyone trusted you to do so.

It’s only a minor consolation that he does not find his name up there. Or Genji’s. Genji was known for eating anything. But now he’s not sure if his name was not there because he does not eat or simply because he has not developed any allergies in his later years.

“Would you like a list of preferences as well, Agent Hanzo?”

“...no. This is enough.” He tacks on a “thank you”.

Eventually, he settles on sandwiches for their versatility. Katsu sandos, egg sandwiches, croquettes, and succulent, sweet fruit sandwiches come to mind, but having not anticipated making any, he doesn’t have the ingredients or the know-how to improvise.

There were the ingredients you bought, but he doesn’t want to impose lest you need them. But when he looks at the ingredients he’s picked—all with specific purposes and none too forgiving with his menu change, he inevitably pilfers from your stash, a silent promise that he’ll replenish it when he has the time.

Shredded cabbage, tomato, and cucumber go between two pieces of chunky buttered bread. The least controversial meal he could think of while respecting everyone’s dietary restrictions.

The reception toward his new creation is only marginally better, and that’s not saying much. (Reinhardt in particular expresses his disappointment in a manner unbecoming of his stature.)

It only serves to remind him that he is out of his element. He is not Lúcio who makes home-style meals for crowds like it's second nature. He's not you who does this for a living (though how much you're actually living is debatable). He's Shimada Hanzo. An assassin, a brother-killer, and most definitely not someone who caters to others or seeks their approval. He has a job to do and he must do it well even if it is outside his expertise.

Luckily, there are markedly fewer people in the afternoon. Either because people are engrossed in their work and are forgetting to eat or they have decided to follow Soldier: 76’s original lead of eating only MREs. Even with fewer people to cater to, he still finds himself without any time.

It’s only when it gets too late for lunch but too early for dinner does he have a moment to himself.

In his mind, Hanzo heaves a heavy sigh that deflates everything holding him up, and he gradually drops himself to the ground. His skin buzzes with a strange mix of emotions he can’t put a name to, accompanied by a fog in his mind.

Gravity holds him down with little effort and he can’t remember the last time he was this tired. The lull makes him more aware of how much his ankles, knees, and lower back hurts. It’s a deep exhaustion, not only physically, but one that wears down his mind and soul.
He casts a weary eye around the kitchen.

At all angles, all he can see is a mess.

Coffee grounds on the floor near the drinks station; shreds of cabbage around him that he’s nearly slipped on; stacks of trays, plates, and utensils that have sneakily turned the dishwashing station into a garbage heap with the guts of half-eaten food spattered. He doesn't even have the energy to get angry at having his hard work wasted.

Where there isn’t clutter, there are the mismatched metals and surfaces that Torbjörn and Brigitte replaced and repaired, turning the once monochrome equipment into a strange jigsaw of colors and mismatched equipment that he’s glad you didn't have enough time to scrutinize this morning. Wires spill out of the Cellar, the once immovable door now nowhere to be seen. At the corner rests one of Satya’s turrets, respectfully gazing away from him. A gaping maw sits in the door’s place, somehow less inviting than when the door existed. Still, they are no closer to figuring out what the treasure is.

But Hanzo thinks he knows, whatever in the vault guarded by the Junkers be damned. If his answer is right, then he hates to think of the implication that has for you and your views on this kitchen. If he’s right, then everyone is a fool and a mess.

Not that he is admitting he is not a ‘mess’; there are just some things that are undeniable and useless to argue. Outwardly, he's covered in sweat and dirty water. Inwardly, there’s everything that makes him detestable and unworthy—but not worthless—compounded by the excavation of fossilized feelings and thoughts he thought were ten years buried.

Even the kitchen itself seems to be unkind toward him, trapping him as they echo his shortcomings.

He squeezes his eyes shut and drops his head back barely missing the edge of the counter.

What would you say if you saw your normally pristine kitchen in such a sorry state?

What would you say if you saw him now?

“Agent Hanzo?”

His head shoots up toward the door, and time stops as you both look at each other. A strange cocktail of hope, relief, shame, and fear spills inside his chest, floods his body.

"Chef." It’s almost embarrassing how breathless he sounds. "What are you doing here?" he demands as though he isn't the one trespassing.

“What are you doing on the floor? It’s unsanitary. Here—”

You reach out a hand.

Genji’s tentative olive branch from this morning overlaps with yours.

Hanzo instinctively slaps it away. The sound echoes loud and slow in his ears like a sonic boom, and time itself slows as he processes the shock on your face and then the flinch of pain before you take a step back. Time sucks itself forward. Guilt floods in, sour bile rushing up into his throat.

He scrambles to get up, already cursing himself.

“My apologies, I—”
“It’s okay.”

“No, it is not!”

The brief flash of anger is just that, brief. Against all sense, you still approach him with a gentle, but cautious look.

“Did you eat yet?”

He squints at you, trying to untangle the innocuous but unexpected question. When was the last time he ate? “No. No, not yet.”

You smile and then make a complicated face as you look around the kitchen, eyes bouncing from area to area. Eventually, everything about your body language changes. You hold yourself a little taller, a little more authoritative.

“Why don’t you grab a chair from the front and bring it in here?”

“A chair?”

“It’s a special exception.”

He doesn’t understand what is exceptional about bringing in a chair of all things, but he’s in no mood to argue. He’s had his fill this morning.

By the time he returns with one of the bar stools in the cafeteria, the kitchen has transformed.

In appearance, nothing much has changed except for your presence near a stove. However, the previously oppressive and stale air is banished and replaced with life and sound.

You’ve donned an apron and neatened yourself, making swift work of a fruit on a cutting board. Thack-a-thackathackathack. The sounds skitters up his neck, buzzing pleasantly around his head. Around you are the tools of your trade and several ingredients, some he recognizes as things you bought this morning.

“Put it over there and sit down for a bit. I’ll be done in about ten minutes.”

Hanzo sets down the chair and slowly drops himself onto the seat, hands fisted on his knees as he waits. It’s easy to lose himself in his observations when he does not have to entertain or do anything.

Finally being able to see you at work up close is different than sitting outside the service window. He can listen to the most minute sounds, smell new flavors before and after they get blended, but most importantly, he can feel and see performance.

Your hands don’t stop, one step connected to the next. From knife to pan to ingredient. There’s something cathartic about watching you slip back into your own world. It’s not until this moment he realizes how right it feels to see you like this: assured and confident in your next steps, how much he misses watching you cook. It’s a far cry from your bedridden self who could only lament the lack of power and control you had over your situation. It’s much more than he had when he was cooking, that’s for certain.

It’s over all too soon when the ring of a familiar bell rips through him; a strange feeling of calm drags the exhaustion out from the marrows of his bones.
You bring over a tray and set it down in front of him.

Slices of pear are fanned out on top of a bed of milky white something with a thin drizzle of honey on top of a long slice of bread cut up into little triangles. On the side, a steaming mug of what smells like milk tea.

“This is…?”

“You lunch,” you announce with a smile. “Ricotta and pear tartine with teh tarik. I thought something light would be good for your stomach right now.”

“I didn’t know pears were in season.” It’s not what he wants to say, but steering you into a conversation about why you’re doing this seems inappropriate for the time being.

“They’re not. The person I got these from runs a greenhouse for fruit trees.”

“You can grow trees in a greenhouse?”

“Sure. You can grow almost anything as long as the conditions are right. We actually hav—” You clear your throat. “We actually used to have a contract with some of these greenhouses. Back when, you know, we had more people.”

Hanzo raises an eyebrow at your suspiciously awkward smile but says nothing, the food in front of him too enticing to ignore.

He picks up one of the warm triangles, watching as a drop of honey drips tantalizingly slow onto the heated plate. An audible crunch resounds when he sinks his teeth into the open-faced sandwich, and a noise unconscious escapes his throat. The pear is refreshingly cool, and the cheese smooths over the combined sweetness of pear and honey. There’s an underlying tangy flavor he does not have a name for that occasionally cuts through the veil of cheese.

The drink is also warm, rich in direct contrast to the sandwich. It settles comfortably in his stomach, loosening every tense nerve in his body and softens every muscle, and he allows himself to sit heavier in his seat.

It takes him no time at all to finish, and he licks a droplet of honey from a thumb, wondering if there might be seconds.

“Why did you do this?”

His question seems to have caught you by surprise and you scramble for words, a reddish tint to your cheeks and neck. You hastily gesture at him with a wave of your hand. “Your hands were shaking.”

As if to confirm your observations, he looks down at them. They were indeed trembling ever so slightly, but it shouldn’t have been noticeable.

“When people are hungry, or low on blood sugar, their hands shake,” you explain as you take away his tray. “So when people are hungry, it’s my job to feed you.”

A job. Somehow those words sting a little more than they should given it's the truth. But there is some part of him that had begun hoping that it was more than just a job to you.

“Thank you for the meal, Chef. I should get back to...work.” It’s embarrassing to call what he’s been doing so far ‘work’ when he sees what you can do with only a few ingredients.
“Would you like some help?”

“You’ve already done too much.” He adds, “You’re supposed to be resting.”

It would be terrible if Dr. Ziegler came by and found you working when you shouldn’t be. She’s already a menace in the mornings—he swears she slipped a small bottle of whiskey into her coffee when he gave it to her, but he couldn’t be sure with McCree bumbling into her for his drink. He doesn’t think he can handle her when she’s angry.

“I feel fine.” As if to prove your point, you drop everything in the washing area and turn around, opening your arms for him to see.

Appearances is often deceiving, and the memory of you approaching him with your face screwed up in pain and the floor-pulling feeling of knowing that he is the reason you’re like this and if he didn’t agree to bring you outside, you wouldn’t be collapsed against him without your wits about you or suffering.

He scowls, stamping down the rise of concern that threatens to make him sick again. “Get out.”

The irony of those words could not have been lost on you when you take a defiant stance, crossing your arms.

“Make me.”

The sheer audacity should not be so amusing. Perhaps it’s because you’re so brave even though you both know he could carry you back to the medbay where the careful eye and quiet wrath of the good doctor will confine you. Or perhaps it’s simply because it’s you.

Pride and concern weigh themselves against the other, the common denominator of ‘responsibility’ sits firmly between them, screwing the scale tight and disallowing it from tipping toward either side. If he wanted dinner to be a success, having you here would be beneficial to him, but if you were to fall ill again, he doesn’t think he’ll be able to look you in the eye no matter how much you wanted this.

Hanzo makes the mistake of meeting your eyes—earnest and determined—and sighs internally, cursing himself for being soft.

“Our conditions from this morning still stand, and you must return to the medical ward as soon as the cooking is completed.”

The conditions have you beaming, and a little bit of Hanzo’s resistance crumbles in the face of it. “Thank you.” Almost immediately, you turn back around to spray down the dishes.

A noise of acknowledgement comes out of his throat but nothing more as he tries to silence the rise of elation that tries to make itself known on his face, tempering it with realistic expectations. If something happens to you, one of the greatest doctors in the world is just several halls away. He should get your help where he can so that if anything does happen, he would not be at a loss.

Gathering his courage, and bracing himself for the sting of ridicule, he calls out, “Chef. I require your assistance with making rice.”

“With the pressure cooker?”

“Yes.”
Rather than the mockery he half-expected for not knowing how to make rice despite having eaten for over thirty years, your face turns professionally authoritative.

“Use the electric one over there. Go for eleven cups of dry rice. Rinse it with cold water until it runs clear, and put it into the pressure cooker with eleven and a quarter cups of cold water. Add a few pinches of salt, if you want. Set it to ‘rice’ and it will take care of itself.”

He’s about to argue the amount of rice and water, but he stops himself. He has no right to be arguing with an expert who has been cooking for them long before he’s even set foot in the Watchpoint.

Obediently, he follows the steps you’ve laid out, measuring out the exact amounts of rice and water. With a container of salt in his hands, he has to stop and ask.

“How many pinches of salt?”

“A few.”

“That’s not an answer.”

“Four or five.”

“Four or five?” he asks impatiently.

“...four.”

He doesn’t understand why you can’t say that in the first place, tossing in the required amount.

Closing the lid, he presses the button and sets the lid with minor trouble, and waits, staring at the machine. As expected, it doesn’t do anything spectacular. It’s just a pot with extra knobs on its lid. Will it really make proper rice?

 Barely a minute passes before you ask, “What are you doing?”

“Waiting for the rice.”

Your eyebrow goes up. It’s funny to see your inquisitive look directed at the behemoth of a dishwashing machine instead of him.

“You’re not here to look pretty. What are the ingredients for your curry?”

The unexpected compliment sets his ears on fire and takes the floor out from beneath his feet. Something sensitively warm blossoms in his chest and he has to fight to keep a straight face. Hanzo had been called many things (and he had his preferences), but ‘pretty’ was not one he associates with himself. It’s equal parts embarrassing, flattering, and awkward.

He’s sure you don't mean it in any deep way, not with the ease in which those words leave your mouth, but it lingers in the back of his mind, and makes his fingers shake when he produces some folded papers from a hidden pocket in the depths of his clothes where he kept his recipes. They are few, but they’re the closest things he has to the tastes of his childhood. Hanamura does not change often, but he can’t say that he’s had much opportunity to stick around and eat his childhood dishes.

He clears his throat in a vain attempt to brush off your comment and pretends he doesn't feel a little lighter because of it.

“Pork curry; white pepper, garam masala...”
The list is long and full of spices that he has some minor issues translating. You seem to understand it well enough, making noises of acknowledgment above the sounds of splashing water where appropriate.

“The recipe calls for pork bone broth and actual pork, and some of the agents can’t have that,” you point out at the end.

“I am aware,” he says regretfully. “However, pork is essential to the recipe.”

Each spoonful of curry is supposed to have chunks of succulent cubes of pork that barely holds itself together when one presses a spoon against it. It makes the curry so much more hearty, and he’s sure the added meat only enhances the robust flavor of his childhood curry.

“You can create a version without pork.”

“And not compromise the integrity of the recipe?”

“No,” you admit as you shutter the walls of the machine closed. The dishwasher is jarringly loud when it gets to work, and you have to raise your voice over it. “We can make do, but we’re running out of time.”

“...if we must,” he grumbles. He didn’t truly expect to be able to taste his childhood here today, but something close would have been nice.

“How many does that recipe serve?”

“Serve?” This is the first time he’d be making it. There was never any time to leisurely experiment. He had always assumed it was a recipe for one person, but now he’s not so sure. “I do not know.”

“If you read out the whole recipe, I can make a rough guess.”

Slowly, he translates and reads out the instructions to you. Objectively, he understands the words, but none of the measurements or steps actually mean anything to him. Luckily for him, you’re not the same.

“That sounds like eight to ten servings,” you mutter to yourself, abandoning your work to check the pile of goods Hanzo had picked out. Bag after bag of spices pass through your hands before you return to your original task. “I think we have just enough to double the recipe.”

“You can tell from holding them?”

“Sort of? I weighed them with my hand. We should have a scale over there.” You point at a stack of plastic drawers off to the side. “Use that to measure everything out first, doubling everything. Sort out your mise first and then we can start cooking.”

“Meez?”

“Mise en place. Cooking is about preparation. Measure out your ingredients and have them ready. You can use the prep bowls over there. Measuring cups should be over there if you need them. Don’t forget to wash your hands.”

It makes sense. Those cooking shows he used to catch glimpses of would always have all the ingredients lined up in neat little bowls for the host to use. For some reason, Hanzo could never picture that happening in a real kitchen. Maybe it’s because he’s never actually seen anyone prepare the ingredients in such a way, hidden behind curtains and doors.
As Hanzo gets to work, you occasionally give out pointers even if you’re on the other side of the kitchen, reorganizing and cleaning.

“Turn down the heat and jiggle the spices, we just want them lightly toasted to bring out the aromas.”

“Speed up your stirring a little; the roux is starting to burn.”

“If you don’t want to use a knife, use the mandolin. Make sure the guard is on properly.”

“Make sure the grated apples are cleaned up, Jesse is allergic to uncooked apples.”

It’s an unnerving skill that makes him think that if you had chosen a different path in life, he may have met you sooner (and perhaps under better or worse circumstances).

Strangely enough, he finds he doesn’t mind your interjections. There was a time he did not take orders from anyone. No one dared give orders to the head of the Shimada clan, but he also remembered the brief feeling of being in freefall without anything to guide him other than a singular mission of ensuring the clan’s prosperity.

With this, he only has to focus on doing the job you’ve given. He doesn’t have the luxury of thinking of anything else, not when you give him direction after direction. Eventually, he eases into a vague rhythm of listening and letting his hands move clumsily. Occasionally, he poses questions to you that you answer in detail befitting of an expert.

Before he knows it, the kitchen feels less like hostile territory. Perhaps it’s because the master of the space is back, or perhaps because he has an instructor, or maybe it’s because he’s working in the capacity of a chef.

Eventually, the curry takes on its signature aromas and color. A quick taste test confirms that it is not the same thing—not enough body, not enough texture, just a little too watery, and not salty enough—but nonetheless tasty. It’s the best thing he’s made all day.

“Do you plan on having anything else with the curry?” you ask as you wipe down another counter nearby.

“**Tonkatsu.**” He’s quick to add, “It’s a fried pork. However, I was considering vegetable tempura instead.”

“Oh, that sounds good. Sous Chef Mori used to make really good tempura back in the day. He used to lecture people whenever they made tempura wrong.”

At that, an idea strikes him so hard, it makes him giddy. “Shall we compete?”

“Agent Hanzo—”

“—Hanzo.”

“Hanzo. We have limited time until dinner. Maybe another time.”

He crosses his arms. Now that the idea has entered his head, he does not have much intention of backing down, especially when the potential payout is great. “Are you afraid?”

A funny noise escapes from your lips, and a cascade of water hits the bucket as you wring your rag over it. “Afraid? In my own kitchen?” The words ‘my own’ are not lost on him. “I don’t approve of
wasting ingredients.”

It’s not a no.

“They’ll be used for dinner. It will not be a waste,” he reasons.

“Hm…” You pretend to think about it even as you wash your hands. “All right,” you answer reluctantly, but there’s a gleam in your eyes that tells him you don’t intend on losing. “You can be the judge.”

Hanzo huffs out a laugh. Victory of a different sort is already in sight. “Your confidence will be your undoing.”

“We’ll see about that.” Then you ask: “What sort of tempura do you like, Ag—Hanzo?”

A number of types come to mind. Poached egg tempura, pumpkin, a medley of vegetable slices—kakiage. He could appreciate a good fish tempura or perilla leaves, but nothing beats a proper shrimp tempura, succulent and juicy on the inside, crunchy on the outside with a sprinkle of salt.

Cheekily, he replies with a sly smile, “I thought you already knew all our preferences.”

You roll your eyes; a delightful new expression he hasn’t seen before. “We’re not mind readers. Should I make some pepper tempura then?”

“Your bluffs would be more effective if you actually had the means.” He gestures to the island counter where he left all your ingredients, not a single accursed pepper in sight.

You laugh lightly, making your way to the counter. “You got me. I didn’t have any plans to make anything with peppers.” Picking up a few ingredients, you are again serious. “We have sweet potatoes, green beans, asparagus, carrots…onions.”

“We will do whatever you deem fit.” He’s sure you wouldn’t serve anything he wouldn’t like anyway.

“Could you start the batter then? I’ll get these ready.”

You have all the ingredients prepared in half the time it takes him to make the batter, half of which he gives to you. An arrangement of vegetables, perfectly sliced and prepared, is ready for each of you. A pot of hot oil with a thermometer clipped to the side awaits you both.

“You can go first,” you offer as you put your ingredients and batter into the refrigerator below the counter.

”Hmph.”

You may have the experience, but he knows the recipe. He has no intention of losing without having put in some effort.

With the oil heated at a perfect 175 degrees celsius, he throws half of his ingredients into the batter and drops them into the pot. The effect is near immediate, bubbles angrily swarming the surface like a school of sharks. With his tongs, he shuffles them around the oil when they look like they’re beginning to stick together. At a respectable distance beside him, you work quietly with a gentle smile.

The feeling of cooking like this is different than before. Strangely enough, it could even be thought
of as enjoyable.

When the battered casing turns a tannish-color, he picks several pieces out. Immediately, you have a plate with a circular rack and a pair of chopsticks for him. It should surprise him, but at the same time, he didn’t expect anything less. Gratefully, he accepts it and lays out his finished products.

Disappointment does not even describe the feeling in his stomach when he looks at them. The ingredients are wrapped in the tempura like a person bundled in winter; the skins too puffy and obscuring the entirety of ingredients like it has something to hide.

The deciding factor for food, however, is always taste. He picks up a sweet potato slice, bites into it, and his mouth is filled with oil and instant regret. The tempura batter is simultaneously crunchy and soggy, coating his mouth in an oily sheen that feels like it’s trying to suffocate him. The next bite extracts the chewy potato entirely from its tempura shell, and he resists gagging.

As he mulls it over, you pass him a cup of tea. He doesn’t know when you could’ve found time to make this. “Have some pu-erh tea; it’ll help.”

“Thank you.”

The smile he gets in response is too disproportionate to his thanks. He gulps it down faster than appropriate and almost burns his throat in the process, but it’s worth it for the way it refreshes his taste buds. His empty cup is instantly refilled, and this time, he takes his time sipping the astringent tea. You probably knew it was going to turn out this way.

“I believe it is your turn.”

This is a good chance to see how differently a professional would handle it.

He is not disappointed when your shoulders drop and a shroud of calm envelops your expression.

There’s a pause and you take a breath before you begin. Hanzo follows the rhythmic bounce of your arm as you scoop out the stray tempura curds and discard them, then another bounce as you lean down to turn down the fire to the refrigerator below. The plates and bowls come out all at once, a quick whisk of the batter with your hands as your foot firmly shuts the door below. You jump from strainer to tongs to ingredient to powder to batter, and then the shining oil sings softly as you gently lay your ingredient—a slice of sweet potato—to rest.

There’s a split-second look of satisfaction in your eyes that Hanzo nearly misses before it’s hardened back into focus.

Even a chef has pride in their work, he realizes. As they should, but that pride is no different than him when he bests an opponent or accomplishes a difficult feat. Truly, he is watching a master at work. Even as you wipe down your counter, you’re no less attentive to the pot, fishing out your piece at just the right time.

And what comes out is very different from his. You lay your offering next to his own tempura as if to rub in the absolute differences in skill.

Crystalline batter encases the sweet potato slice sparingly, allowing the vibrant orange to show through. The quiet crackling sounds of oil on the surface hint at just how hot it still is. As cliche and stupid as it may sound, the tempura seems to sparkle.

You gesture toward the plate, face carefully neutral.
“Go ahead.”

Quietly muttering his thanks, he picks it up with his chopsticks.

When he takes a bite, it is soundly crisp. The delicate, lacy batter is clear and light on his tongue, bereft of excess oil and weight. Stream rises and swirls around him, saliva filling his mouth. It gives way easily like shattering glass to the dense, but soft interior. The sweet potato truly lives up to its name—it may not be the same white versions of the same name in Japan, but it is delicious, nonetheless, accented by a faint touch of salt.

Tempura is almost always synonymous with spring when he’d be able to get his fill of fresh vegetables, when everything starts anew, when the most serious argument he’d have with Genji is what condiments should go with tempura.

(Genji, for some reason, favored it with tonkatsu sauce—they’re not even for the same meals, damn it—which masks the taste of the ingredient and cheapens the experience. Hanzo was of the more sensible ‘salt’ camp.)

If only he had sake or a dry beer to pair with this, it would be bliss.

It’s not his intention to be shown up by you, but the way you take his ingredients and transform them into something else entirely is deeply impressive and makes him laugh a little at himself. He never stood a chance.

Losing like this doesn’t feel so bad.

Finishing off the rest and raising his hands in surrender, he declares, “I concede.”

Nothing could have prepared him for the triumphant grin that spreads across your face. It’s so bright and warm, his breath catches in his throat.

“What did you do differently?”

He quickly gathers his wits about him, hoping his voice is casual. “Do you have something in mind?”

Your grin turns mischievous. “I’ll think about it.”

A normally dangerous answer that’s rendered harmless by your flippant attitude. He’s sure you have no intention of cashing in on it. Even if you did, Hanzo highly doubts he’ll mind doing what you ask.

Despite the actual outcome, he was the true victor.

“What did you do differently?”

“I made some adjustments,” you admit excitedly like a child. “I added cornstarch to the batter and thinned it out with more water. For the vegetables, I salted them to draw out excess moisture, patted them down, and threw them into the fridge to get them ice cold. After that, I turned down the heat a little bit so nothing would burn, coated it in cornstarch, and then put it in the oil.”

He hums thoughtfully. “I’m afraid I don’t follow. Could you demonstrate again?”

The smile you give him is brilliant. “Of course.”

One demonstration turns into two, into three, and so on, Hanzo having snatched several more
pieces of tempura which disappear almost as soon as they hit the plate, the burning of his mouth be
dammed. If his behavior displeases you, you say nothing. As a matter of fact, that you haven’t
stopped him or scolded him shows you do not mind much.

All good things must come to an end when you decide there won’t be enough for the other agents
(but not before he sneaks in another carrot stick for himself behind your back).

“You should check in on your curry sauce,” you say as a way to get him to stop pilfering the
delectable treats. You even have the audacity to whack his hand, albeit lightly, with a ladle when
he attempts to grab another. He grabs your ladle instead—something he should have done the first
time you brandished it at his as a weapon, and tends to his curry.

The dark amber sauce is still bubbling at the sides, a skin having formed from being left alone for
so long. He gives it a few stirs and a taste.

Tempered by time and slow flames, the flavors have taken on a new form. The saltiness he thought
the curry lacked returned, pulling in other more subtle flavors to the forefront that is accented by a
hint of spiciness that lingered pleasantly on his tongue. It’s not as heavy as the curry from his
memories, lacking the meat component, but he can’t say this is bad either. It is likely leagues better
than what he might have been able to accomplish alone.

Determined to repay you for your patience and instruction, Hanzo grabs a small scoop of rice,
almost blasting himself in the face with steam when he depressurized the vessel. The aroma of rice
mingles with the spices in the air. Already, he can tell the rice is leagues better than his earlier
attempt. Sneaking a burning pinch to confirm his suspicions, he finds he’s correct—each grain
bounces as though to assert their presence against his teeth, rolling against his tongue with a subtle
sweetness only found in rice.

He quickly prepares a plate of rice, pouring a careful river of dark amber sauce onto it. It’s
unfortunate he’s eaten all of your tempura, but he takes your batter and instructions and makes a
new batch to add to your plate. They’re leagues better than his first attempt, but still nothing
compared to yours.

And that comparison holds him captive. You’re a chef who cooks better and has likely tasted far
superior foods than his meager attempt. Any compliments you give would only be superficial,
borne from politeness and a misplaced respect for the heroes you work for—work with.

Before he could allow his doubts to overcome him and chide him for such an audacious idea,
Hanzo calls out, “Chef, I have something for you.” There’s no time for him to regret or take back
his words.

“Two seconds.” You set aside the broom you’re using, wiping your hands on a rag hanging from
your apron, and approach him curiously. “Yes?”

“This is for you.”

Pushing down his unease, he forces himself to slide the plate in front of you.

“Oh.” You look between him and the plate. “That’s...a lot for a tasting. You didn’t have to give me
this much.”

“Tasting? No. This is for you to eat.”

“For me? To...eat?” The words come out haltingly like they’re foreign in your mouth. “Are you
sure?”
He doesn’t understand your hesitation. The presentation isn’t pristine or worthy of being in a Michelin Star restaurant, but you didn’t have to insult it in such a manner. He begins to draw the plate back. He should have never offered.

“If you prefer I throw it out…”

“No! Wait, I’ll eat it!”

The dish is snatched instantly and held close, partially shielded with your body as though it were something precious.

“It’s for me to eat, right?”

“...yes. It is yours.”

An expression of wonder falls on your face and you look at the curry rice like it’s the first meal you’ve ever seen in your life, a slow smile forming on your face, one fundamentally different than all the ones he’s seen thus far. If Hanzo was confused before, he's even more so now.

You take your first spoonful, carefully scooping up an even amount of rice and curry sauce.

Nervously, he awaits your verdict, his stomach dancing and rolling around. Perhaps this is how you feel whenever you serve someone, watching their face cycle through different emotions upon first bite. Unbidden, a much older memory of a younger Genji gagging and telling him his curry is ‘shitty’ presses incessantly against the back of his mind.

Slowly you raise a hand to your mouth, eyes wide. A jolt of fear runs through his body. You’re going to be sick. His cooking has poisoned you and he’ll need to call Dr. Ziegler and explain. He’ll be known as a failure who could not put together an edible dish even with the help of a professional. He’s going to—

“This is delicious.”

Your voice is watery, almost reverent. Hanzo can’t fathom why, breath caught in his throat, all of his damning thoughts grinding to an abrupt halt.

“You exaggerate.”

You wave your hands in denial. “I’m not exaggerating! It’s the best thing I’ve eaten in a long time.”

It still pleases him to hear you say it, empty flattery as it may be. His teachers never praised him for anything—every success was met with indifference (“The heir to the Shimada clan should be able to do at least this much.”) and every failure was reviled (“How do you expect to lead the clan with this level of skill?”).

“Your enthusiasm is appreciated, but if it’s not palatable—”

“No, it’s great. It’s—”

As if you prove him wrong, you proceed to clear the entire plate with a vicious gusto that could not be faked. He could only watch, frozen, as bite after bite disappears.

It can’t be as good as you’re saying it is. The recipe isn’t complete, lacking in the meat component and the proper stock, not to mention it doesn’t have the all-important pork katsu or any fukujinzuke
on the side. If it is any good, it would be because of your instruction. But he has to believe.

Not a speck of rice remains when you’re done.

You lick your lips slowly as if to savor what remains and Hanzo finds his eyes following the motion. He snaps his gaze away, mortified such a reaction was automatic.

“That was so good.”

The swell of pride expands so quickly in his chest, he has trouble breathing.

“That’s because of you.”

“Nothing I’ve ever made for myself tastes half as good as that.”

The revelation is so absurd, Hanzo blurts out, “Lies.”

“It’s true. Food never tastes as good when I make it for myself.”

There is no trace of dishonesty in your eyes. Earnest and pure, a trait he has seen so few times he would have forgotten it had he not come to Overwatch where people like Winston and Mei exude it in spades.

“I suppose if you find it so agreeable, I could cook for you again,” he mumbles casually. “If you do not mind, of course.”

“I’d love to have your cooking again.” Struck by a thought, you look up. “Oh! Agent Genji would like this, too. He used to complain about not having enough Japanese food.”

At the mention of Genji’s name, he stiffens, his good mood plummeting back to depths unknown to you.

“Sometimes Agent Genji is difficult to pin down especially if he’s somewhere Athena can’t see him.” Your voice drops to a whisper, edged with mock spite. “He used to turn off his communicator so no one could find him and then complain that no one told him dinner’s ready. Why don’t you go find him and let him know?”

His knee jerk reaction is to be defensive and suspicious of your intentions. Seeing your face, however, he knows it’s not the case. Sighing mentally, he tries to think of a way out. It’d be beyond embarrassing to let you know that he doesn’t want to because of a fight.

“He can eat this?”

Innocently, you reply, “Of course. He can’t eat a lot, but he eats sometimes. I’m sure he’ll love what you’ve made.”

“It’s not professional.”

“Professional or not, it’s the taste of home and no one can resist that. Besides, it’s great.”

“I still need to make the dishes for the others.”

“If it’s serving, I can do it since you’ve made most of it already.”

“I believe our deal is over the moment you finish cooking.”
“Cleaning is a part of the cooking process,” you answer, pointing to your dish and the dishwasher.

“I will handle it.”

“And serve at the same time?”

“I’ll manage.”

“It’ll be easier if you have someone who is used to doing both at the same time here.” It’s a very roundabout way of telling him that he was not able to manage such a thing, but he cannot argue such logic. His arguments are running thin, and he has to confront the possibility that he may have to meet with Genji, if briefly.

Doubt and the branching paths of an uncertain future weave a suffocating web around him. There’s little telling what would happen if Hanzo were to face Genji now. What if he’s with that master of his? What if he is with Dr. Ziegler? What if he wants to be alone and is waiting for an apology that Hanzo is not yet poised to give?

He’s saved when Lúcio appears at the service window.

“Hey, Chef, you in here?” he calls.

“Agent Lúcio?”

“There you are. The doc told me to get you.”

You pause, a pout slowly forming on your face. Hanzo has to clench his jaw tight to stop himself from smiling or laughing. “I’m still working, though.”

Lúcio’s voice goes stern. “And I don’t remember giving you the all clear to work.”

“Are you kiddi——” A garble of noises pour out of your mouth as you look for some rebuttal. Finding none, your whole body slumps down in defeat as you grab your empty dish and place it on a spiky grey rack before you shuffle your feet to the doors. You take one forlorn look at the kitchen and meet Hanzo’s eyes. A slight jolt goes through his stomach when your eyes connect.

“Take care of the kitchen, okay? I’ll be right back.”

You wait for him to nod and then you’re gone.

A few moments pass and Hanzo breathes a silent sigh of relief, believing himself the winner of what would be an uncomfortable task. He returns to his curry, but something is off. The kitchen feels colder and a little more foreboding as though it just remembered Hanzo is a stranger to this place and should not be here. In part, it may be because Lúcio remains at the service window, leaning a cheek against his palm as he stares right at him.

He can’t imagine Dr. Ziegler asking Lúcio of all people to find you when Athena has eyes on everyone. Hanzo can only deduce that he is here for a different reason.

“Can I help you?” Hanzo doesn’t really mean it, keeping busy and making sure he strikes the sides of the pot extra loud as he stirs, hoping the man would get the hint.

“I was just thinking the chef’s a real workaholic.” Lúcio’s grin and tone is fond.

Hanzo’s inclined to agree especially since Lúcio hasn’t known you for any notable length of time, but he says nothing, stirring just as loud as before. It doesn’t seem to bother Lúcio or deter him in
“You guys ever tell Chef it’s okay to take a break? Maybe let everyone else cook every once in a while?”

“The kitchen is normally off-limits to agents.” Even though it shouldn’t be. “This happens to be an exception due to the...current situation.”

“But every day at any hour? And while injured? Man, that’s gotta violate labor laws in every other country.”

It’s an issue that Hanzo himself is all too familiar with. “It is not uncommon in Japan. That is why there is an issue with karoshi.”

“‘Boyfriends’?”

Hanzo looks incredulously at Lúcio who only blinks at him, unaware of his blunder. “That’s kareshi. How did you even—no, karoshi. Death from overwork.”

“Oh, yikes. Well, that’s what I’m here for. At least until tomorrow’s mission. Gotta make sure Chef is taking it easy and not feel so responsible and learn how to enjoy freedom.”

“Freedom?” he echoes faintly.

There it is again. The idea of freedom. Since coming to Overwatch, he’s finding himself contemplating simple words and concepts. At first, love, and now freedom.

Hanzo half-expects some flippant answer from the DJ, something about free love or going on adventures or something grandiose yet unobtainable except in the imaginations of children. However, his lower lip purses, and he looks genuinely pensive.

“I guess freedom isn’t the right word. It’s...” He waves his other hand in the air as though an answer will materialize. “Liber—lib...ah *liberdade e responsabilidade*. Liberty and responsibility. That’s it.”

“Liberty.”

“The freedom to do what you want. Chase your dreams, having the ability to just choose instead of having someone tell you what you should do.”

The answer is unexpected, but he often forgets that Lúcio was a freedom fighter before becoming an international entertainer.

Hanzo could not truly relate to this idea of ‘liberty’. Genji would have. If Hanzo were still the leader of the Shimada clan he may have found Lúcio’s actions and ideology repulsive and disruptive to the status quo. His dreams and wants were determined the moment he was born. Sit above all others and lead the Shimada clan to prosperity. Expand and build upon the current empire. Be better than everyone so no one is able to look down upon you. Chasing after all that was all he ever wanted, and now he might never be able to have it.

And Genji, who chased after this vague idea of ‘freedom’—not knowing the word to express ‘liberty’—at reckless speeds, achieved nothing but a near-death experience.

He laughs bitterly under his breath. “Freedom is never so simple. Or desirable.”
Lúcio rolls his eyes. “Pfft. That’s why it’s *liberdade e responsabilidade*. You can’t have one without the other. Liberty without respecting your responsibilities and boundaries is chaos. It’s also disrespectful and asking for an ass-whooping. But having responsibilities without enjoying yourself isn’t liberty at all; that’s self-oppression.”

Yes. Genji yearned for this freedom, this sort of ‘liberty’, but never respected any of the responsibilities that came with it, doing things without regard for consequences or the people it would inconvenience. Maybe if Genji understood what Lúcio did at that age, Hanzo wouldn’t have had to cut him down.

But maybe he didn’t listen hard enough or understand well enough, this foreign concept of ‘liberty’. He had always framed it as Genji’s fault—Genji was the reason for his own demise, everything he had done was wrong—but never once had he ever thought that he himself might have faults that led to the incident.

He stops stirring the pot, no longer willing to keep up any pretenses.

Now, there is no collective named the Shimada clan that he or Genji is beholden to. Instead, they are both working for Overwatch. Whatever issues and differences they had—have—they must resolve them if they are able to work *together* here. Genji has already tried. Now it’s Hanzo’s turn. No matter how painful or embarrassing or awkward it may be, Hanzo must now make the next move.

“Did you come up with these ideas yourself?” Hanzo asks.

Lúcio raises his arms above his head, stretching. “Psh. Nah. I blame my mestra. She beat a lot of it into me. Literally.” He drops his voice to a whisper conspiratorially, making a show of looking around. “Might’ve been a little bad in the *roda*, so she taught the lesson early.”

Hanzo chuckles. “She must be a wise person.”

Lúcio grins proudly. “That’s ‘cause she carries the lineage of Palmares.” He says it like it means anything to Hanzo. He humors Lúcio anyway, nodding as though he understands.

“I’m back,” you announce breathlessly as you appear beside Lúcio.

“Did the doc let you out that quick?”

You put a finger to your lips, smiling sheepishly. “She was busy with Capt—Agent Ana, so I came back.”

Lúcio tsks. “You should’ve just waited. Or interrupted her.”

“I have to put away the dishes.” You point at the dishwashing machine which at some point had stopped running. Turning to him, you say with a purposeful edge to your voice, “I can handle it from here for a little while. You should go, Hanzo.”

Hanzo sighs deep through his nose, nerves rattling in his chest. He is not ready. He cannot do this. He shouldn’t have to do this. Sweat forms in his palms as his mind begins to again map out scenarios of a future that has not yet happened and how he may save face at every point.

No.

That’s what landed him in this problem in the first place. If he continues to think in the same way as his past self, he will only be repeating the same mistakes. He is not his past self. This should
have been taken care of ten years ago, and should not be delayed a moment longer. This would be
the ‘right’ thing to do.

Against all his misgivings and the wall of reluctance that has been protecting the status of ‘coward’
in his heart, Hanzo flicks off the fire and waits for you to enter the kitchen before he makes his
way out.

As you suspected, it does not take Hanzo long to find Genji sitting atop the highest point of the
Watchpoint. While they both developed the love for high places at a young age, Hanzo thinks his
reasons for enjoying the height may now be very different from the reasons Genji did.

His jaw is tight and throat dry. There’s a chilly strumming alongside his heartbeat, and his nerves
feel too raw. But this is necessary.

“Genji.” He swallows down whatever hesitations and pride he has, throat clicking. The buzzing in
his chest consumes his hands. His breaths come quicker, more shallow. “Dinner’s ready.”

It’s not anything. It’s not the right thing to say, but it’s something.

For a while, Genji does not move. Silence holds them both captive, daring one of them to break it
first. Hanzo flexes a hand. Then, the lights to his visor flicker on, the glare softer than before.
Genji turns his head, watching Hanzo from the corner of his vision.

“Thanks. What is it?”

“...curry rice. With tempura.”

“I’ll be there in a bit.”

Hanzo nods numbly and Genji turns back to look out across the city. Taking that as his cue, Hanzo
takes a step back, turns and jumps off the point, hoping the feeling of free-falling will let him
outrun the terrifying feeling of moving forward toward an unseen destination.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter contained a lot of things, so I thought I'd address a few of them. (I was
also told I should talk more here by a friend, so enjoy the word dumps I've been
holding back. So, uh, a little late, but nice to meet all of you and thank you for having
stuck with me so far and for your kind words of encouragement.)

1) After this, I believe there will be four chapters left.

2) To answer a question, I'm not a chef, but I've worked in a restaurant and very
closely with kitchen staff before.

3) I grappled with a lot of things in this chapter, and as a result, this chapter ended up
getting rewritten more times than previous ones. There was just a lot of things I
wanted to cover but the story didn't flow with them in it, so I had to mention them in
passing or omit them entirely. I might have a separate chapter with all my bloopers or
scenes that never made it into the final story, if people are interested in that sort of
thing.
4) Hanzo calling Genji "trash"; in the Japanese in-game dialogues between Genji and Hanzo, Hanzo literally calls Genji 「クズ」 which is "trash/garbage/waste". Hanzo tells Genji, 「クズはクズのままだな」("Trash will always be trash."), and when Zenyatta mentions the anger in Hanzo is the same as what was once in Genji, Hanzo responds with 「あのクズと一緒にするな！」("Don't lump me in with that trash!")

Most of my characterization of Hanzo comes from analyzing the Japanese dub and knowing the cultural significance behind his actions. It is extremely powerful and telling of their relationship which is extremely difficult to describe or convey properly. Their fight was probably one of the hardest things I had to write.

5) Shimada tempura; I have very specific feelings about the tempura pictured in the Overwatch cookbook. I'm also with Genji and enjoy tempura with either 'sauce' or tentsuyu.

6) Palmares; a shameless reference and plug to the wider Capoeira Angola Palmares 'family' formed by Grande Mestre Nô, but not in reference to any specific group/branch. I had a very long and ongoing debate about the specific branch and style of capoeira that Lúcio would be a part of, but I decided to go with something a little more meaningful. (Please refer to the history of Quilombo dos Palmares from which the Palmares group gets its namesake; the wikipedia article doesn't quite capture the significance of its history.)

7) I originally wrote this chapter just to gush about my favorite curry dish from this ramen restaurant in NYC on 56th street and 6th avenue, but I couldn't find any way to actually fit it in here to describe the full experience. Perhaps in a later chapter.

8) I have waited so long for Hanzo to cook for the chef. So very long. It was planned since before chapter 1.

9) I hope everyone is staying safe and relatively healthy in recent times. There's a lot I'd like to say, but for now:

- Wear your mask (they're to protect others in case you're carrying the virus somewhere on or in your person);
- Also maintain social distancing because defense in depth (yes, I'm aware it's an industry specific concept, but the point still applies);
- Covid is really painful and it's a really bad way to go (and if it doesn't kill you, the effects will bother you for months), and I almost set up a timed post explaining my absence in the case I wasn't able to recover;
- Black Lives Matter (and it does not mean they matter more than other lives);
- If you're protesting, protest safely and have backup plans and check-ins with friends and don't connect to public wi-fi if you can help it; blur faces of any photos or video you take during a protest; if you need to rest, rest; if you can't protest, that's okay there are a number of other things that can be done (spread awareness, sign petitions, write to leadership; donate, etc.);
- Remember this moment because we are bound to repeat history otherwise;
- It may feel like what you do is insignificant or doesn't matter (your vote, your voice, your donation, any moment of assistance), but think of it this way: one dollar is not a lot, but in time, you get another and another and another. It becomes a lot. That one dollar in the beginning was nothing, but combined with other singular dollars, it became something significant.
- This is an Overwatch fic whose entire premise is fighting for a better world and
redeeming yourself and doing what you can with what abilities you have so political discourse and discussion from me is a given.

Be good to yourself and excellent to each other.

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