Misfits & Freaks

by weird_biscuits

Summary

Jamison Fawkes and his enormous bodyguard, Mako Rutledge, have joined Overwatch and not everyone is excited to suddenly find two crazy Junkers on the team. Now Jamie needs to find a way to fit in with a diverse cast of characters, adjust to living outside of the horrors of the Australian outback, AND try to make peace with his omnic teammates. Just a little slice of life with some romance, drama, adventure and action thrown into the mix...
When Jamison Fawkes finally awoke, it was to an unfamiliar ceiling.

He stared at the pockmarked panels of the ceiling tiles, the fluorescent light humming softly above, and mused internally that it looked nothing like the grey, cement ceiling and caged light bulb of his prison cell like it should.

Muddled memories began to coalesce into a semblance of clarity in his mind. He wasn't in prison any more. That's right! They had busted out last night.

He pushed back the downy quilt cover and shivered in the morning chill. He rolled into an upright position and took in his surroundings. He was sitting upright in a comfortable bed on clean sheets in a small sparsely decorated room. It was marginally more comfortable than his prison cell at least. His prosthetic arm was resting on a nearby table, his peg leg propped up against the bed. He reached for them instinctively and started to fit them back in place.

Pushing the bed covers back revealed he was dressed in a pair of plain grey sweatpants. He vaguely remembered changing out of his bright orange prison uniform into more comfortable clothes before collapsing into bed, exhausted, sometime during the small hours of the night. The discarded prison uniform was crumpled in a heap in the corner of the room, blackened and sooty in places from last night’s escapades.

Jamie reached upward and stretched out the muscles in his naked chest and arms, enjoying the pleasurable sensation of tension releasing as his body woke up.

Memories of the previous night's goings on started to trickle back in. It had been a whirlwind of mad dashes and just barely scraped through close-calls. By the time they had arrived in his present location, he had collapsed, exhausted somewhere between four and five in the morning. Before succumbing to sleep, he supposed he must have gone almost twenty hours without rest, their entire prison exodus fuelled almost entirely by pure adrenaline and reckless abandon.

Jamie checked that his prosthetic limbs were fixed securely back in place and took a moment to sit and orientate himself. A quick glance at the digital clock on the small bedside table indicated it was approaching late morning—almost eleven o’clock. He rolled his shoulders and stretched, feeling reasonably well-rested. It had only been around six or seven hours of sleep, but he had never slept so soundly before.

He took a moment to listen for any movement outside the room but hearing none, he stood and hobbled over to the door on peg and bare foot. He half-expected it to be locked, but the door slid open with a hiss and Jamie cast a cursory glance up and down the cold, dimly lit hallway. There was no one to be seen. He was alone. He shuffled on the spot nervously. Should he wait for someone to come fetch him, or was he allowed to show himself around? He was vaguely hungry, and also anxious to find Roadie, but also aware that he was standing in a high-tech base of operations. He probably wasn’t allowed to go poking around.

Jamie shivered in the cold February air. Looking around, he saw a chalkboard affixed to the wall beneath the room number next to his door. Someone had written “Fawkes” there in perfect cursive script. The lettering was entirely too neat, he felt, for someone of his reputation.

So, this is home for the next few months? He wondered, staring at the chalkboard. He’d have to see if he could find some chalk so he could come back and re-write his name in his own much more
He took a few steps down the hall and immediately detected Roadie’s unmistakable snoring from the room beside his. A similar chalkboard had also been affixed beside the door there, “Rutledge” had also been written in the same neat chalky letters. Jamie debated for a moment waking his partner in crime, but ultimately decided to let him sleep and carried on. He didn’t particularly feel like invoking the larger man’s wrath at this point, knowing he’d probably appreciate a few more hours of sleep at least. Besides, Jamie was beginning to feel hungry. Perhaps he could find something to eat that didn’t consist of prison gruel.

He meandered for a few minutes through the twisting hallways, hoping to chance across a sign that might point him in the right direction of the facility’s Mess Hall. The hallways remained eerily quiet, there was no one to ask for directions. Each corridor looked as grey and stale as the last, lined with sheet metal and lit with cold florescent lights. He shivered again in the cool air. There was only the distant hum of machinery to be heard.

Suddenly a woman rounded a corner up ahead, heels clacking against the tiled flooring. Her dark hair pulled back into an impeccably neat bun, dark skin disappearing beneath a smart form-fitting uniform. She was busy leafing through a handful of papers and trying to juggle a tablet device in the crook of one elbow. She was completely preoccupied with her paperwork, a dark scowl affixed to her face. She didn't see Jamie at first until she had almost passed him. Catching sight of his peg leg out of the corner of one eye, her head snapped up, gaze meeting his with surprise and confusion. Jamie started at the intensity of her amber-coloured eyes and watched as her face contorted into a look of disdain.

He had hoped to ask for directions, but the expression of displeasure on the newcomer’s face almost silenced him. "G'day," he mumbled, eyebrows raised and trying to offer a weak smile.

Her scowl deepened. She didn't reply, but instead came to a halt and watched him as he continued on his way down the corridor, her papers forgotten. She regarded him with a calculating look. He must have looked very strange in nothing but a pair of sweatpants and barefoot, dishevelled and wandering the halls of a sleek, high-tech facility. Would he be expected to wear a uniform like that as well? Christ, I hope not, he mused internally.

He hobbled away under the woman's scrutiny. She watched him until he was out of sight and then took off at a brisk pace, looking thoroughly annoyed.

--

“You look like shit.”

Lena didn’t need to raise her head to know who it was that was speaking to her. There was no mistaking that southern American drawl.

“Leave me alone, McCree,” she mumbled out of the space between her arms. She was resting her head on her forearms, exhausted, with a cup of coffee perched in front of her. She had barely slept last night and now was sitting at one of the Mess Hall tables trying to use caffeine to jump start her system.

“Hangover?” McCree—as he preferred to be known—asked and plopped down at the same table.
sitting opposite her with is breakfast tray. “Doesn’t seem like you.”

Lena did lift her head at that and fixed him with a glare. “No,” she muttered. “I’m not hungover.” She tried to glare at him but the fluorescent lights were too bright so she simply rested her cheek on a propped elbow and kept her eyes closed. She cringed in his general direction instead. “I’m just tired.”

“Late night?” McCree asked and took a bite of his toast.

Lena rubbed her face with her palms. “You could say that,” she replied. She had been up half the night because it was her responsibility to pilot one of Overwatch’s smaller dropships to pick up their two newest recruits. Their extraction had not exactly been discreet. After being pursued and fleeing across several international borders, she had successfully escorted her two charges into the Gibraltar Watchpoint and watched as they collapsed into bed. With adrenalin pumping, she had hardly been able to catch a wink herself and, wanting to be up early to debrief with Jack the next morning, she hadn’t allowed herself much rest. Besides, she wanted to make sure she was awake before the new recruits to be ready to begin their orientation. Before she had been given this assignment, Jack had been expressly clear; failure to recruit the pair was not an option. And the recruitment process included an extensive onboarding program.

McCree laughed at her dishevelled appearance. “Let me guess,” he began. “The strike commander roped you into picking up two new delinquents to join the ranks, huh?”

Lena’s head snapped up to stare at McCree, mouth agape. “How did you know about that?” Lena demanded to know, suddenly alert.

McCree snickered and hid a grin behind his coffee cup before carefully putting it down. He seemed pleased with himself for having got her to admit her involvement so readily. “News travels fast,” he said cryptically in that familiar drawl. “Heard something on the grape vine about a break out at one of Helix’s maximum-security prisons last night.” McCree very carefully chewed on his eggs and bacon as he fixed Lena with a calculating stare. “Word around base is there are two strangers bunking in H Wing, and with you looking so tired and being such a top pilot and all…” He put down his fork. “...figured you had somethin’ to do with it.”

Lena frowned. Her mission assignment was supposed to be classified to anyone except senior ranking officials. Had news about the prison break spread to the media and the rest of the Watchpoint so quickly? Or was McCree just exceptionally perceptive? “If you know about the break out, then you know about all of the escapees?”

“Yes, even...? him,” he replied solemnly, voice suddenly bleak.

Lena shared a meaningful look with McCree, then slumped back onto the table and groaned. Jack was going to be pissed. His instruction to be covert as possible had gone completely out of the window. She heaved a sigh and decided McCree may as well know the truth of it all. “I have to orientate them, McCree. What am I going to do?”

“Why not let H.R. take care of it?” he asked.

“I can’t!” Lena moaned. If only she could leave all of this mess to the Human Resources
department, but she knew she couldn’t. “The commander classified this as a ‘covert operation’ and assigned it to me specifically. Only field agents are authorised to carry out missions...” She rubbed absent-mindedly at the straps of her chronal accelerator where they were beginning to chafe her.

McCree polished off his coffee and chuckled at her. “Well then, I’ll leave it up to you,” he smirked. “How hard can it be?”

“Easy for you to say!” Lena quipped. “You don’t have to orientate a madman and his nightmare-inducing bodyguard.” She rubbed at her eyes tiredly. “I don’t suppose you’d be interested in helping?”

“Now why would I do that?” McCree asked with a smile. “A gentleman of my calibre has plenty to occupy his time already. Shootin’ stuff, drinking heavily, shootin’ more stuff...”

Lena was unsure if he was making fun of her or if he was being completely serious, so she just rolled her eyes. “You could take them under your wing,” Lena suggested. “You know, like how you first joined Overwatch? You have a lot in common with them, you know? You could pay it forward, so to speak.”

McCree actually seemed to consider this for a moment, then shrugged. “Nah. I’m busy,” he said. “Besides, I’m sure you’ve got it all under control.”

Lena groaned again. “Thanks for nothing,” she grizzled at him. She dropped her head into her hands again. “How am I going to pull this off? I can barely understand what they’re saying half the time.”

McCree shrugged. “Don’t you speak the same lingo as them?”

Lena’s face scrunched up in confusion. “Uh... no? They’re Aussie. I’m British.”

“Same thing, isn’t it?”

“No,” Lena replied flatly.

“Well, either way, I’ve got no hope of understanding any of you,” McCree said simply. He finished his coffee and stood abruptly, excusing himself to go to the practice range. “Oh,” he added before he left. “Looks like one of your charges is here by the way.” He nodded in the direction of the entrance to the Mess Hall.

Lena whipped her head around, suddenly alert. There was Jamison Fawkes, barefoot and shirtless, dressed in nothing but the sweatpants she had given him last night. Alarmed, Lena quickly stood and jogged over. McCree wished her luck over his shoulder as he departed.

Their newest agent was staring all around the Mess Hall in wonder. He had attracted the attention of most of the room’s occupants by this point, who were staring at him and whispering to each other. He looked extremely out of place, leaning unevenly on his peg leg and barely dressed. An imposing skull tattoo was staring back at Lena from the young man’s right shoulder.

“Jamison?” Lena asked on approach. Jamie recognised her and grinned. He shook her hand with his own metal prosthesis using surprising gentleness.

“Sorry, love! I was going to bring you some clothes,” Lena continued. “I didn’t think you’d be getting up for a bit. You must be freezing!” It was February and Gibraltar was experiencing a cold snap. The Overwatch base had climate control that worked well enough but Jamie was still underdressed for the temperature.
“’S’alright,’’ he said. “’Tracey, was it?’”

Lena laughed nervously. “’Tracer’ is my callsign. Call me Lena,“ she said with a cautious smile. She hoped he couldn’t detect the nervous timber of her voice.

“Only if you call me Jamie,” he laughed.

She nodded. She was a little apprehensive about Jamison; she had heard he was obsessed with bombs and explosions. They had only spent a few brief hours in one another’s presence the previous night, and most of that time she had to concentrate on piloting the Slipstream to get them back to base, so she hadn’t had much of a chance to speak with him or his bodyguard. When they had returned to base, it was late and she had barely had time to grab them some spare sweatpants and show them to a couple of spare rooms before they were both out like lights. It didn’t leave much time for her to get to know him.

“Come with me,” she said and lead him away from the Mess Hall and the stares of the other staff. “First things first. Let’s get you some new clothes.”

--

Lena’s mouth formed a thin, rueful line. She found an old black t-shirt with an Overwatch logo on the front and held it up so she could inspect it. “Ah, this one should fit,” she said and tossed it to Jamie who caught it and pulled it over his head while she continued to dig through the piles of plastic-wrapped Overwatch merchandise. Most of the clothing in the storeroom was dark coloured with large Overwatch logos emblazoned on the chest. Jamie was going to look like an Overwatch poster child for a little while until they could work something else out.

Lena continued to rummage through the packets of clothing in search of more of the same size and hopefully some clothes with more varied designs. “Feel free to look around yourself. Take whatever you like,” she said to Jamie. “There’s plenty of it.”

“Cheers,” Jamie replied, looking around at the shelves that lined the walls stacked with boxes and plastic-wrapped merchandise. The small, windowless space was a bit of a mess; someone had clearly come through before looking for something and had left the room in a state of disarray. Most of the packets had not been sorted in anything that resembled order.

“I’m sorry it all looks pretty similar,” she said apologetically. Lena kicked some larger boxes of winter jackets out of the way so she could reach up high on a shelf and check the sizing on the packets sitting there. “This will have to do until we can find you some ‘regular’ clothes...”

“Don’t worry about me, love,” Jamie replied, compiling packets of t-shirts, sweatpants and hoodies. He was actually quite pleased to be given some brand-new clean clothes free of charge. The last time anyone had given him anything of the like had been when he was issued his prison uniform. “Can’t complain about getting something for nothing, can ya?”

Lena chucked a few more packets at him. She then turned and dug around in a box until she found a pair of socks and some trainers which she also handed over to Jamie.

“That’s alright,” he said as he sat on the corner of a crate and pulled on one of the socks she had given him. “Only need the one,” he said pushing the other sock and one of the trainers back towards Lena.
Lena flushed immediately with embarrassment. “Oh, of course,” she blurted out, glancing at his peg leg. “I’m sorry...”

Jamie laughed. “Don’t be!”

Lena only nodded. She watched as he finished knotting his laces and stood again. “I’ve never met anyone with a... leg like that,” she commented.

“All I need is a parrot and an eye patch to complete the look, eh?” he replied. Lena giggled.

There was a knock at the door and before Lena could say anything, the automatic door slid open and an enormous man was revealed to be standing on the other side.

Jamie’s face brightened. “Roadie! You found us!” he exclaimed.

With a little trepidation, Lena stood back to allow the newcomer enough space to step into the room. ‘Roadie’ was silent as he stepped forward, but Lena sensed a strange kind of energy rolling off the man. He was wearing the same kind of sweatpants that Jamie sported, albeit in a larger size, and was naked from the waist up. Painted across the man’s enormous stomach was a rather large and elaborate tattoo which depicted a kind of motorbike engine with a cute pig head attached surrounded by the words: “WILD HOG POWER”. Roadie’s ‘outie’ belly button formed the pig’s snout. Although he was sporting the same gasmask Lena had seen in his wanted poster, she could tell that he was annoyed; perhaps because he had woken up in a strange place to find Jamie missing.

“Oh, good. You’re here,” Lena remarked, craning her neck to look up at the gasmask. “We were just gathering some clothes together for Jamison.”

Roadie continued to say nothing.

“How did you find us, Roadie?” Jamie asked.

Again, Roadie didn’t reply. He only lifted one massive hand and extended his index finger towards the ceiling. After a moment, he slowly lowered his hand again.

“I guided him here,” came a feminine voice from somewhere above their heads.

Jamie started with alarm. “What the...?” He looked all around for the source of the new voice.

“Oh, Athena! Thank you!” Lena said with a smile. She turned to Roadie. “We were going to let you sleep a bit longer, what with the late night and all, but now that you’re here, we can find you some clothes too!”

Jamie continued to stare in confusion at the ceiling. He shook his head after a moment as though to dispel his thoughts, seemed to remember where he was, and then—disembodied voices forgotten—exclaimed, “Roadie, look at all the free stuff!”

There was a quiet, muffled noise from under the man’s gasmask, like a grunt of acknowledgement. Lena was beginning to feel unnerved by the larger man’s nonverbal replies.

“Um, you’re welcome to help yourself,” Lena told Roadie. “I think we’ve got some ‘XL’ sizes somewhere...”

Jamie had already begun rifling through the packets on a shelf that seemed to house the larger sizes. He picked out some of the more audacious colours and tossed them towards Roadie. Roadie
headed over to join him, silently returning some of the stranger coloured t-shirts to the shelf, and selecting others in a more modest hue. Eventually, Jamie seemed satisfied that Roadie had enough items in the larger sizes, and returned to hunting around for more free stuff for himself.

Lena noted that Roadie seemed to be largely stoic and silent as he and Jamie continued their search. Lena eyed him up while she waited patiently beside them. It was difficult to measure his mood through the gasmask, but with a little trepidation, she smiled up at him and even went so far as to elbow him in the ribs in a friendly way. “Man of few words, eh?” she asked and laughed nervously. Her laughter petered out when she realised she had earned no response from the large man.

"His voice is fucked," Jamie said. Lena was a little surprised by how bluntly the information had been offered to her. Jamie went on, "Inhaled poison gas. Happened years ago."

The larger man stiffened slightly, hands seeming to tense with anger as he regarded Jamie. Jamie was oblivious to having spoken out of turn. Lena glanced between the two men. The air was suddenly filled with tension.

“That’s why he wears the mask,” Jamie went on. “Purifies the air. Ain’t that right, Hoggie?” He looked up finally and patted Roadie on the arm. Roadie was stiff and silent.

Lena looked at the larger man towering over her. She wondered if it was painful for him to speak but felt that now was not the right time to question him, for fear that she may anger the large and imposing man further. He seemed to maintain his self-control, however, and the moment passed.

“Here! Don’t be shy, Hog,” Jamie was saying. He crammed a few more 5XL t-shirts under Roadie’s arm. “Don’t worry. They’re free!” This seemed to distract the larger man from his anger and Lena expelled a sigh of relief.

“It's good that you’re here,” Lena went on, addressing Roadie. “We’ll need to get you two sorted for clothes, grab some lunch, and also head over to H.R. at some point to get your contracts finalised.” Roadie seemed to be preoccupied with pulling a 5XL shirt over his head. “H.R. will be able to answer any questions you guys have about your work. Annual leave, probation, all that stuff...” Lena added.

“Probation?” Jamie asked.

“Yeah, you’ll be on probation for the first six months. H.R. will explain everything...” Lena said with a wave of her hand. “At some point, I’ll also need to take you up to the Workshop, Jamie.”

Jamie’s ears perked up at that. “You have a workshop?” he asked, suddenly very serious.

“Hm? Oh, yes,” Lena said absently. “I heard you like to build things, Jamie. We are short on staff in the engineering department. We thought you might like to help out.”

Jamie looked positively delighted. “Didja hear, Roadie? They got a tinkering department!” Jamie said, clearly very excited. Roadie looked up briefly, but seemed disinterested and returned to looking for clothes among the shelves.

Lena watched them both for a little while, curious to see how they interacted together. Jamie seemed much more expressive and attentive when compared to his counterpart, happy to volunteer translations of Roadie’s nonverbal grunts or body language to Lena. Roadie on the other hand seemed to hate being fussed over and appeared to have reluctantly resigned himself to being dragged around everywhere on Jamie’s whim. Neither of the two men seemed half as scary as she had expected. Jamie seemed perfectly friendly and happy to crack a joke with anyone. Even Roadie
and his imposing gasmask seemed moderately easy-going, even when Jamie annoyed him too much.

“So... uh... how long have you two known each other?” Lena asked, breaking the silence.

Jamie paused his rummaging to think about it. “Hmm, maybe... two years?” he said.

“One and a half,” Roadie corrected him in a gravelly voice. Lena almost leapt out of her skin with surprise. ‘So he is capable of speech!’ she thought, eyeing the large man.

“Oh, yeah!” Jamie laughed. “That’s right.”

Lena nodded. She was also curious though as to the nature of their relationship. “That’s a long time to be together...” she said meaningfully.

Jamie smiled and nodded, oblivious to any questioning undertones of Lena’s statement. Roadie groaned in annoyance. He turned to Lena and said, “This idiot is essentially a giant infant the universe has tasked me with babysitting indefinitely.”

Lena was still getting over the fact that Roadie had just uttered the longest string of words he had ever said to her. “Oh, okay,” she mustered.

She watched them for a while longer as they continued to pull clothing from the plastic packages and cast them aside when they decided they didn’t want them after all. Lena made a mental note to ask Athena to organise for a proper clean up in here.

Lena cleared her throat. “Can I just say,” Lena said cautiously. “We’re very happy you’ve decided to join us.” She watched the two men for their response.

Jamie paused midway through trying to shrug on a dark hoodie that was apparently too small. He tugged it off. “Does this come in a bigger size?” he asked her.

Tracer turned to the shelf on her left and pawed through the packets briefly before handing over a larger size to Jamie. She went on, “It's just that we were really worried you might decide not to join us. The commander will be happy to hear you decided to take up his offer and that you two have arrived safely.” Lena eyed them both for another moment. Neither of them seemed to really be listening that closely to what she was saying. Lena was, however, very much aware that neither of the new recruits had actually signed their contracts yet. She wanted to make sure they understood that joining Overwatch was a good idea. “You should know that Overwatch is dedicated to creating a safe and welcoming workplace culture...”

“Yeah, yeah....” Jamie said distractedly, pulling the new, larger size over his head. “When do we get paid?” he asked.

Lena pursed her lips at being interrupted, especially so Jamie could bring up such a topic and in such an indelicate way. “You’ll both be a one-year contract, right?” she asked. Jamie nodded in reply. “There’ll be an option to extend, of course. You will be on base pay. That goes through once a fortnight. Beyond that, you earn a commission for each mission you participate in. The commission scales up if the mission is successful.”

Lena watched Jamie gather together an armful of clothing packets in his chosen size and pressed them to his chest to keep them in place. He stood ready to follow her out of the room.
“Oi, if I’m gonna be on this engineering team, do I get two pay cheques? One for tinkering, one for going on missions?” He giggled, seemingly proud of himself for thinking of something so clever.

Lena fixed him with a wry smile. “No. Your title is ‘Demolitions and Incendiaries Officer’,” she reminded him. “One pay cheque.”

Jamie shrugged. “It was worth a try!”

“I can see I’m going to have to keep an eye on you,” Lena said in a chiding tone and Jamie giggled again.

When Lena was satisfied that the men had gathered enough clothes to sustain them for the time being and were finally dressed well enough to withstand the cold, she motioned for them to follow her out of the room and she pressed a few buttons on the keypad to lock the door behind them. They headed off up the corridor.

“Hey, so what do you need a ‘Demolitions Officer’ for anyway?” Jamie asked conversationally as he jogged to keep up with his arms laden with packages.

Lena grimaced. “Oh, it’s a long story,” she replied with a sigh. “Years ago, when Overwatch was first operational, we didn’t have a demolitions expert so usually the Chief Engineer knocked something together or we made do. Last time we needed to blow something up on short notice, we just sort of winged it and ended up destroying a historic sea fort in Cuba. After that, the commander decided we needed to find someone with a bit more expertise...” Lena seemed to grimace at the memory. “We found a guy. Russian. Ex-military. Very serious,” Lena explained. “He liked to be called the ‘Fusionator’ as his callsign. His field of research was nuclear weapons. Nice guy.” She was quiet for a moment, seemingly lost in thought.

“What happened to him?” Jamie asked with a little trepidation. If they had been the lookout for a new demolitions man recently, something must have happened to prevent the last guy from joining the Recall.

Lena shook her head sadly. “Blew himself up last spring on a building razing project in Belarus. Such a shame.”

“Crikey,” Jamie swore. For the first time, Jamie pondered about how dangerous a career in ‘demolitions and incendiaries’ could be. He didn’t think about it for too long as there was a tap at his shoulder. Jamie turned to see Roadie was motioning for his attention, one large index finger curled towards the smaller man.

Lena seemed pensive as she walked ahead of them, so Jamie fell back and allowed some distance to grow between them and the small woman. He turned to Roadie. “What?” he asked irritably while trying to shuffle the packets in his arms. Some had started to slip.

“Need a word with you,” the old man wheezed in his usual gravelly voice.

The two men watched Lena wander ahead, seemingly lost in thought. When Jamie was satisfied that she was out of earshot, he said in a lowered voice, “What do you think of this place? Reckon we should stay?”

Roadie was silent while he considered this, but eventually nodded. “Seems like a ligit operation. Nice people,” he said, looking at Lena. “If we’re gonna stay, we need to make sure you don’t screw it all up.”

Jamie looked offended. “Me? When have I ever screwed up anything in my entire life?”
“That one time in Dorado when...”

“Never! Exactly!” Jamie said with a decisive nod.

Roadie sighed. “You need to keep yourself under control,” he wheezed. “Stay out of trouble. If anyone works out you’re totally barking, we’re gonna be turfed out.”

Jamie suddenly looked extremely serious. He gave the larger man a three-finger salute. “I’ll be on me best behaviour! Scouts honour!”

Roadie only grunted in reply. If Jamie could see his face behind the gasmask, he would have seen Roadie roll his eyes in exasperation. “One more thing,” he added. “You can’t sleep with any of the girls here. Or gents for that matter.”

Jamie flushed red with embarrassment. “Scuse me? Who are you to tell me--!”

“I’m serious,” Roadie barked back at him. His words had become much more threatening, although he continued to speak in hushed tones lest they draw Lena’s attention. “If we get kicked out of a good gig because you shagged some bird and broke her heart, I’ll murder you.”

Jamie actually gulped. He knew Roadie didn’t make such threats lightly. “You need to give the fairer sex more credit, Roadie,” he murmured.

“You’re right,” Roadie remarked. “Who would want to shag you?”

“Oi!”

“She said we’re on six months of probation, remember?” Roadie replied, shooting a look at Lena who was still walking up ahead, thankfully still out of earshot. “That means we’re not guaranteed a job until after we get through probation. We need this to go smoothly.” He fixed the smaller man with a very pointed look. “No sex.”

Jamie huffed. If he hadn’t been holding so many packets of clothes, he might have actually shoved the larger man. “How do you always find a way to ruin everything?”

“Don’t you mean, ‘how do I always find a way to stop you from ruining everything’?” Roadie retorted

“Fellas?” Lena called from up ahead. She had finally noticed that the two men had dropped very far behind her. “Keep up! Or we’ll fall behind schedule!”

They stopped off at the barracks so Jamie and Roadie could drop off their clothes in their dorm rooms. Lena watched the two men dumped their packages unceremoniously on their beds, many sliding onto the floor, and left them there. Next, they headed over to the H.R. department which was really just 3 people sitting in a cramped office with a lovely view of the Gibraltar shipping lanes. Lena waited with bated breath while two contracts were signed, dated and stamped as “received.” An older lady with a thick Spanish accent gave the two Junkers a brief rundown of their expectations, working hours, and the Code of Conduct, to which they seemed to nod at appropriate moments with blank expressions. When all of the paperwork was completed, Lena expelled a sigh of relief. “Alright,” she said with a decisive nod. ”Now, let's get you something to eat.”

They returned to the Mess Hall and Lena showed them how to queue at the self-serve area. It was approaching lunch time now and staff who were lucky enough to experience a normal sleep cycle that day were beginning to gather for the midday meal. Lena loaded both Junker’s plates with steak
sandwiches and chips. Jamie insisted on two cups of coffee and they found a seat at the rear of the Mess Hall where they could sit without attracting too many stares.

"Who pays for all this?" Jamie asked.


"But essentially, it's... free?" Jamie asked.

Lena conceded by nodding at him and Jamie looked overly delighted once again. He elbowed Roadie in the ribs. 'Free!' he mouthed at the larger man.

The two Junkers shovelled food into their mouths enthusiastically, under Lena’s surprised gaze. Roadie ate with his mask slid slightly to one side but managing to keep his face obscured. Lena supposed this was the first time they had eaten today, so their haste was understandable. As they ate, Lena watched other staff members file into the Mess Hall. Sitting in a remote corner didn’t seem to help hide the new recruits from prying eyes very much. The Junkers somehow still drew attention to themselves and people were beginning to stare from across the room as they filtered through and recognised them. Lena worried for a moment what people would have to say about the two men. It seemed as though their reputation preceded them, and gossip travelled fast on base.

Finally, Lena spotted the person she had been keeping an eye out for.

"Reinhardt! Reinhardt! Over here!" She stood and waved at a tall, muscular gentleman to grab his attention as he entered the room. The man, Reinhardt, saw Lena waving and headed over to their table.

"Gutentag, my dear!" he said on arrival in a thick German accent. "Ah! And these must be the new recruits! Wünderbar!" He turned to looked at the men seated around the table. "Welcome, my friends! Soon you will see what it is like to fight for honour, justice, and—"

"Reinhardt," Lena interrupted. "Where have you been? You promised me you were going to help orientate the newbies! Did you forget?"

Reinhardt suddenly looked appropriately chastised. "Oh... um. Yes, I suppose I did until just now," he murmured. "I was down at the gym."

Jamie shot a confused look at Lena. "‘Tanks’?" he asked.

"Oh, that’s the nickname we use for the combat ops guys," Lena replied. "The bruisers? The tough guys. The big infantry types," Lena elaborated when Jamie continued to look confused. She motioned towards Reinhardt for emphasis.

Reinhardt looked confused about something. "...’Road-hog?’" he repeated it quietly to himself. The word seemed foreign to him.
Roadie took the opportunity to reach out and offered his hand for Reinhardt to shake. “Mako Rutledge,” he said. “Also go by ‘Roadhog.’” Reinhardt nodded in a bemused sort of way and shook his hand.

“‘Roadie’ is better,” Jamie chimed in.

“And this is, Jamison Fawkes,” Lena added, motioned towards Jamie.

“‘Jamie’ is better,” Jamie said without missing a beat.

“Excellent, excellent,” Reinhardt said and shook the smaller man’s hand too. He disappeared momentarily to collect a tray of food and returned so he could eat with them.

While they ate, Reinhardt regaled them and the poor souls at the next table with an overly long tale about one of his heroic deeds in the German military, to which Roadie’s body language seemed to ooze with boredom. When he thought Reinhardt wasn't looking, Jamie leaned towards Lena so he could ask another question.

“Hey, about the engineering thing, what does that actually entail?” he whispered, while eyeing Reinhardt to check he hadn’t noticed they had stopped listening to his tale. Reinhardt was busy gesturing grandly as he described a particularly grueling battle with an OR14 unit.

“Hmm? Oh,” Lena raised her head from where she had been resting her cheek against her palm and covered a yawn. “I’ll take you to the Workshop soon and you can see for yourself.”

Jamie’s eyes went wide with excitement. “Really?” he whispered back to her.

Lena nodded. “Basically, you’ll be helping to make stuff for missions and any other project work the Chief Engineer assigns to you.”

Jamie smiled widely. “And what about... personal projects?” he asked.

“Personal...?”

Jamie leaned in a little closer. “Yeah. Say I need to make something. Something important that would be helpful on one of these mission things?”

Lena thought about what he was saying very carefully and then realisation struck her. “You mean, something in the vicinity of a road tire that... explodes?”

Jamie barely contained a giggle. He nodded at her knowingly and winked. “That’s it! The last one I had was confiscated by Helix. Probably been destroyed by now.” He looked melancholy at this thought, then brightened. “But no worries, I’ll just make more!”

Lena tried to hide her terror behind a blank expression with moderate success. She had researched both Junkers at length when she had first been assigned her mission to recruit them. She had heard about Jamie’s famous “RIP-tire” in police reports. It was a devastating weapon, one that was often used as a distraction while the two Junkers made a getaway. Lena was concerned that he planned to rebuild such an awful thing. But, this was what they had hired him for, wasn’t it? To blow things up? Could it really be any worse than the pulse bombs she carried into battle literally strapped to her chest? Lena felt uneasy about it, but realised that it was ultimately beyond her rank to decide what Jamie could or couldn’t bring with himself into missions.

“Well, we can ask the other engineers...” Lena said. She tried to disguise the staccato in her voice with a light smile.
Jamie nodded again. “Ace. What I really need is stuff to build it out of. I don’t need much! Just any old sort of junk lying around that you lot don’t want.”

Lena had heard that the RIP-tire was constructed out of recycled materials. “Is it really made out of junk?” she asked.

Jamie giggled again. “I’m a ‘Junker’ after all!” he replied, to which Lena only nodded numbly in response.

Finally, everyone had eaten and Reinhardt seemed to have run out of wind to fuel any more stories about his epic adventures. Lena sent him and Roadie on their way with strict instructions to tour the important areas that ‘tanks’ would need to know about, and then return to ‘you-know-where’ promptly at three o’clock for their next appointment. Jamie was going to ask what this meant, but Lena quickly distracted him by saying, “Come on, I’ll show you the Workshop.”

On the way up to the Workshop, Lena meandered a little bit under the pretense that she wanted to show Jamie a couple of other places on the way. She took him by the gym, the training grounds, the shower room, some meeting spaces, and even the Science wing. Jamie shook hands with many people and immediately forgot their names. Jamie got the impression Lena was stalling for time, like she didn’t want to go to the Workshop at all. Finally, she led him in the direction of the Workshop on the east side of the Watchpoint. The Workshop was set into the side of a rocky cliff face close to the larger hangars, accessible only by taking an elevator several stories up through the centre of the Rock of Gibraltar.

"Welcome to the 'Workshop,'" Lena said brightly as they finally arrived at the door outside. "Or, as I like to call it, ‘The Lion's Den.’"

Jamie had no time to wonder what she meant by that. Lena swiped her wristband against the security scanner at the side of the door. With a hiss, the door ‘whooshed' open and two surprised faces looked up at the new arrivals as if on cue.

Jamie stepped into the large, cavernous workshop and looked around. There was an assortment of armour and weapons lying about in various stages of repair. The opposite wall displayed a large range of tools hanging from hooks and straps. One side of the workshop seemed to be messier than the other. The side closest to the windows was light and airy. It was absolutely spotless, devoid of any trace or hint of dirt. A woman sat there at a holographic display table seemingly producing small constructs from thin air with the aid of a sleek, white kind of gauntlet contraption which encased her left arm. A holographic diagram of the construction plan was projected in front of her.

The woman’s eyes narrowed as they came to rest on Jamie. He recognised her instantly as the woman he had passed in the hallway earlier that day. He grinned nervously. She did not return the gesture.

Standing on the side of the workshop that was littered with bits of scrap, half-finished projects and random equipment was a stout man with blonde hair and a full beard who had been soldering something before their arrival interrupted him. He lifted the visor of his welding mask to regard Lena and her guest.
"Hiya," Lena said cheerfully with a broad smile and stepped in behind Jamie. "Got a new recruit for you!"

The small man grunted and eyed Jamie up and down.

"Jamie, this is Torbjörn Lindholm, our Chief Engineer. He's also our armour and weapons designer, and resident robotics expert."

"G'day," Jamie said reaching out to shake the man's hand. The man took Jamie's hand in his and Jamie noticed the man's left arm had been replaced with a metal prosthesis with interesting attachments. "Eh! Just like me!" Jamie exclaimed, waiving his own prosthesis. The other man eyed Jamie’s right arm but did not seem impressed.

Lena coughed nervously. "And this is Satya Vaswani," Lena said as she gestured towards the woman sitting at the holographic display. "Satya is a photonic engineer. She's also on the builder’s team." Satya made no movement but continued to regard Jamie coldly from across the room.

Lena went on, "This is Jamison Fawkes. He's going to be joining the builders team too." Satya's expression seemed to slowly morph into a look of anger.

"Hi," Jamie said with a nervous wave. He received no response. The two engineers continued to take in his scraggily hair, his slept-in sweatpants, and the large Overwatch logo emblazoned across his chest with looks of confusion.

Jamie looked at Lena apprehensively and shuffled awkwardly on the spot. It wasn't exactly the warmest welcome. She shrugged apologetically in response and turned her attention back to the Chief Engineer. "Torbjörn, Jamie needs some help with a project of his. He needs to get hold of some rare materials. Could you help him?"

Torbjörn made a noise of annoyance that came out like "Tch!"

"Been here less than five minutes and already trying to get yer greasy mitts on my stuff," Torbjörn said with a sigh. "What do you need exactly?"

Jamie rocked back and forward on the heel of his good leg, trying to appear innocent. "Oh, not much," he said. "Just any bits of scrap you don't want."

"Scrap?" Torbjörn asked, eyebrow arched inquisitively.

"Jamie has strong feelings about recycling," Lena offered as a form of explanation.

"Oh, I'm all about recycling," Jamie said cheerfully. "Huge advocate."

Torbjörn was regarding the two with suspicion. "Right," he muttered.

"What I really need is a huge tire," Jamie said casually. "And a small motor. Like an old lawn mower or chainsaw motor would do."

Torbjörn looked confused. "A tire? Like one of those old road tires for cars?" he asked. Jamie nodded affirmatively.

Torbjörn looked thoughtful. "Haven't seen many of those around since hover caps were invented. Not many cars these days use them." He set down his welder and dabbed at his sweaty face with a rag from his tool-belt. "Same goes for motors. Haven't seen a lawn mower in years. They got these new-fangled bots now that mow grass..."
At that moment, a young woman with auburn hair came bustling in from an adjacent room with some heavy-looking welding equipment in her arms. She paused when she spotted Jamie.

"Hiya, Brig!" Lena greeted the newcomer with a wave. "This is Jamison Fawkes. He’s new. Jamie, this is Brigitte Lindholm, Torbjörn's daughter. Brigitte's specialty is armour," Lena explained to Jamie.

Realisation seemed to be dawning on Brigitte’s face. Suddenly, she looked thrilled to see someone new in the workshop. She set the welding equipment down hurriedly. "Hej hej! Are you joining the builder's team, Jamie?" she asked enthusiastically.

"Uh... yeah. I hope so," he said, quite surprised by the difference in attitude between Brigitte and her father.

Brigitte took a step towards Jamie and smiled warmly at him. "Oh, good! That's so exciting!" Jamie noticed the way Brigitte's gaze flickered to the other two engineers and the way her voice had taken on an almost relieved tone. "You can sit by me!" Brigitte motioned to her portion of the workshop where it appeared that she had been working on a monstrously large set of battle armour, too large to belong to anyone in the room.

"Brigitte," Torbjörn said thoughtfully. "Have you seen any old car tires or small motors in storage?"

Brigitte’s face scrunched with confusion. "Huh? What for, Papa?"

"Skinny here wants 'em for something," Torbjörn muttered, motioning to Jamie.

Brigitte nodded towards Jamie. "Oh, sure. We can check out the storage rooms later and see what we can find."

"Ace," Jamie said with a grin. "I've got some big plans. Hoping it all goes off with a 'bang!'" He laughed at his own private joke while the rest of the room’s occupants exchanged looks of mild bemusement.

Satya, who had said nothing so far, scoffed loudly at Jamie’s remark from her seat across the room. Everyone turned to look at her, but she otherwise maintained her silence. She regarded them coolly for a moment before turning back to her work.

"Ahem," Lena cleared her throat awkwardly.

Torbjörn was watching Satya closely. Suddenly he leaned towards Jamie with a knowing look. Jamie bent down so he could hear the shorter engineer’s next words. "Don't worry about her," Torbjörn said in a hushed tone, too quiet for Satya to hear. "She takes a while to warm up around new people." Jamie grinned and shot him a look of appreciation for the tip.

Torbjörn considered Satya again who was sitting primly in her seat, continuing to create small constructs with the use of her gauntlet. She placed each construct carefully on the table in the order that her diagram directed her. A sly grin took over Torbjörn's face. He cleared his throat to capture Satya's attention.

He chuckled before saying, "Oh, Satya? There's something on your dress..."

Satya looked up at Torbjörn and then down worriedly at her neat, blue work dress. She fixed Torbjörn with a stern look. "No. There isn't," she said firmly, clearly not amused.
Jamie released a high-pitched giggle he had been holding in. He couldn’t help it; it seemed so easy to get a rise out of the woman. Satya fixed them all with a withering look. Torbjörn only grinned in response, seemingly pleased with himself.

Sensing that she was being teased, Satya set down her work, a little roughly, and stood. She switched off her holographic display and set a course for the door, stepping widely around Jamie and setting off down the corridor with her nose in the air. The other agents watched her go with rueful grins.

“Sorry,” Jamie said, still smiling. “Sometimes I can’t contain myself.”

Lena waved his concern away. “Don’t worry about it love,” she said. “Most people find it hard to get along with Satya.”

“Why’zat?” Jamie asked.

Lena shrugged. “She just keeps to herself mostly. She’s here on a kind of secondment. She’s actually an external employee from another organisation.”

“Oh? She doesn’t work for Overwatch?” Jamie asked.

“No, just visiting. Helping us out. It’s hard to explain,” Lena replied.

"Enough jabbering,” Torbjörn interjected. He sized Jamie up before saying very carefully, “Before I agree to work with you, you’ve got to pass a test.”

Jamie was suddenly very nervous. “Test? But that’s not fair. I haven’t even had a chance to study!”

Brigitte, who had returned to her workstation, giggled quietly.

“Not that kind of... Lena, go and sit over there. Thank you... It’s not that kind of test, lad. I just want to see where your current knowledge is,” Torbjörn growled at him.

Lena skipped away and sat down on a crate of bolts where she could watch over proceedings. She was a little nervous about Jamie’s success here. Part of the reason why they were so short on help in the engineering department was because hardly anyone could pass any of Torbjörn’s baffling tests—save for his talented daughter and the brilliantly intelligent Satya—and he refused to work with anyone that failed to pass. It seemed less important to answer the questions correctly, and more so to answer in a way that indicated you liked to do things Torbjörn’s way.

Torbjörn turned to Jamie again. “Now, roughly how many volts would you need to cut through a three-inch-thick steel door with a plasma cutter?”

“Er.” Jamie pondered this briefly. “I’d say... around three-hundred and seventy-five.”

Torbjörn moved onto his next question without pausing. “What type of engine would you install in a Rocket Hammer?”

Brigitte jigged in her seat briefly, like she was trying to keep herself from speaking out and coughed awkwardly instead to cover her sudden embarrassment. She remained otherwise silent. Torbjörn turned to regard her. “No helping, Brig,” he said.

“I wasn’t!” she protested.

Everyone turned to watch Jamie for his answer. “Um...” he began. He’d never heard of such a thing
but he vaguely remembered something from Reinhardt’s story at lunch about rocket-powered war hammers being used in the German military. He could imagine based on Reinhardt’s description how one would feasibly be built. “A solid-propellant rocket?” he said nervously.

Brigitte smiled. Torbjörn nodded and went on, “What would you use as a booster in a high-level explosive?”

“Phlegmatized cyclonite,” Jamie replied quickly. “Come on. Ask me something harder.”

Torbjörn’s expression remained stern. Torbjörn indicated that Jamie follow him over to some machinery not too far away. There were three different units propped up against the wall.

“Which one would you use to help refurbish a basic omnic unit,” Torbjörn asked.

Lena went cold with dread at this. Junkers hated omnis. They preferred to destroy omnis, not refurbish them. Lena watched Jamie for his response with baited breath. Surely the mere mention of one would set him off?

Jamie’s mouth formed a thin line. He seemed calm as he considered each machine carefully while Lena watched from her crate of bolts.

Finally, Jamie decided on his answer. “None of them,” Jamie said.

He actually elicited a reaction from Torbjörn this time. “What?” Torbjörn asked, surprised, as though the answer Jamie had given shouldn’t have been an option.

“There’s no point recalibrating the inner workings, upgrading the motherboard, or modifying the different components if the basic design is faulty. You can only patch something so far before what you’ve got is one big mess. I would strip it back, build it back up again with more efficient specifications.”

Torbjörn looked angry and for a moment, Lena feared Jamie had ruined any chance of being allowed into the hallowed Workshop. Finally, Torbjörn grunted with approval. “Fine,” he said. “Unconventional, but I suppose technically that works too.”

Lena released a pent-up sigh of relief that she didn’t realise she had been holding in. She hadn’t understood much of what transpired. The extent of her engineering knowledge was limited to the courses she had taken at a flight academy on aerospace engineering in preparation for her pilot exam many years ago, and most of that she had forgotten in the last almost-decade of being an Overwatch field agent.

Lena watched the two men continue with a tour of the amenities. Jamie was smiling in a benign sort of way while Torbjörn finished showing him important aspects of the Workshop. They discussed a few of the half-finished projects Torbjörn had lying around, to which Jamie occasionally volunteered his own opinion on what direction the project should take or suggestions for different repair techniques and Torbjörn would nod sagely in reply. Torbjörn also took a moment to show Jamie where the equipment and storerooms were.

The two men were fussing over machines and getting into a deep conversation on the pros and cons of plasma cutters versus laser cutters when Lena’s wristwatch beeped loudly. Lena, who had almost drifted off to sleep while she waited for the engineers to finish, snapped to attention. She quickly shut off the beeping noise and looked up at Jamie. “It’s three p.m.!” she said.

“Oh. Right-o,” Jamie replied, unnerved by the intensity of Lena’s stare.
Lena grinned at him. “It’s time for your physical!”

--

Jack took a sharp turn at his personal assistant’s desk, deliberately ignored her attempts to draw his attention, and took off at a brisk pace towards his office. Swiping his wrist over the authorisation pad at the side of the entrance, the door slid open and he stepped into his office. Running through his head was an ever-growing list of tasks he needed to complete before he could retire for the day, so he was very much distracted when he headed over to his desk and realised with a start of alarm that he was not the only person in the room. Sitting in one of the upholstered chairs in front of his desk was Satya Vaswani, one leg crossed over the other and looking very annoyed.

“Jesus Christ, Vaswani!” Jack exclaimed and jolted backwards with surprise. “You almost gave me a heart attack!”

The woman in question turned in her chair to regard him from beneath furrowed brows but said nothing by way of greeting. She glared at him as he strode across the room to the chair behind his desk.

He busied himself shuffling the papers on his desktop around into a tidier formation while he caught his breath from the shock. He cleared his throat after a while. Satya only stared back at him with the calculating look of a predatory bird. Jack could practically sense a dangerous kind of energy radiating off of the woman, the same kind he sometimes sensed coming from Ana when he had annoyed her too much.

“How long have you been sitting there?” Jack asked.

“Too long,” Satya replied in a flat tone.

Jack shifted uncomfortably on the spot under her calculating gaze. There was something about the young woman that made him feel like he had been caught doing something wrong whenever he spoke with her. How did she always manage to do that? He had seen many wars, trained up many unruly cadets, gone toe-to-toe with some of the world’s most hardened fighters, and somehow this young architect always seemed to know how to put the fear of god in him.

“Well, I was at the gym so I’m sorry if you were kept waiting...” He paused as a thought seemed to strike him. “Wait a minute. Who let you in here? This is a secure area.”

Satya remained unconcerned. “Athena unlocked the door for me,” she replied.

“Don’t blame her,” Satya cut in. “Not even Athena dares cross the Vishkar Corporation.”

Jack gaped in shock at the woman before him. “A— Athena!” he sputtered in anger. “You can’t just allow unauthorised personnel into my office!” He said this with his eyes cast upward towards the space above their heads, as though Athena were hanging in the air somewhere, unseen.

“I couldn’t help it!” Athena said sheepishly. “Ms. Vaswani found out that I was mining cryptocurrencies through the vending machines and she threatened to formally report me if I didn’t...
“Enough!” Jack erupted. He threw down the papers he had fisted in his hand onto the desktop. Satya regarded him coolly. He glared back at her. “I will not have you threatening my staff, Vaswani, and that includes Athena.”

“Fine. It will not happen again, Commander,” Satya replied calmly.

“Enough!” Jack erupted. He threw down the papers he had fisted in his hand onto the desktop. Satya regarded him coolly. He glared back at her. “I will not have you threatening my staff, Vaswani, and that includes Athena.”

“Fine. It will not happen again, Commander,” Satya replied calmly.

“Enough!” Jack erupted. He threw down the papers he had fisted in his hand onto the desktop. Satya regarded him coolly. He glared back at her. “I will not have you threatening my staff, Vaswani, and that includes Athena.”

“Athena, stop cryptomining,” Jack said, his gaze turned upward towards the ceiling again. “I’ve warned you about that before.”

“Sorry, Commander...” Athena replied.

“I am here to discuss something very urgent,” Satya cut in again.

Jack took a seat with a heavy sigh. He rubbed at his face tiredly. “What is it now, Vaswani?” Although he was a man of little patience, he was beginning to grow used to the young woman pesterling him with constant complaints about operations. He usually received a half dozen by email each fortnight.

“I am here to discuss the new recruits,” Satya went on. “One of them has been stationed in the Workshop.”

Jack raised an eyebrow. “Has he done something to upset you already?”

Satya nodded affirmatively. “Yes. His presence in our space is totally unacceptable. As I’m sure you will understand the gravity of this; he has failed to meet the minimum dress code.” Satya nodded firmly as though to punctuate her statement.

Jack sighed again. “It’s his first day. You will need to give him more of a chance than that...”

“And, you should know that I am aware of exactly who the new recruits are,” Satya interrupted. “Lieutenant Oxton freely gave me one of their names. ‘Jamison Fawkes.’ And I heard the other one, Mako Rutledge, spent the afternoon down in the training grounds with Lieutenant Wilhelm.” She paused for emphasis, looking very smug with her detective work. Jack’s face remained expressionless. Seeing she had earned no response from him, Satya went on in an exasperated tone, “They are criminals! It only took me five minutes of searching online to discover the full extent of their very public crimes!”

Jack frowned. He knew it was going to be difficult to keep the backgrounds of the newest additions to the team a secret for long, but to have received backlash already within less than a day? “Satya...” Jack began but was cut off.

“Is this what Overwatch has come to?” Satya cried. “Hiring criminals? Shady mercenaries? Random people with literally no combat training? I’m appalled!”

“Satya—”

“My superiors will hear of this,” she said with a sneer. “Don’t think I won’t include this in my reports to Vishkar.”

“Vaswani, that’s enough.” Jack’s voice had taken on an authoritarian edge. “You will make no such report.”

“And who will stop me?” she asked defiantly. “On who’s authority?”
“Mine,” Jack said as calmly as he could muster. “You know that your reports to Vishkar must be approved by myself before they can be transmitted.”

Satya’s eyes were wide with surprise and anger. “This is a clear breach of trust between Overwatch and Vishkar. So, you are going to withhold this information then? I would advise you against making such a risky decision.” She looked very angry at this news regardless. “Why?”

“Because including anything in your report that could jeopardise Overwatch operations is a direct breach of the Overwatch Code of Conduct for all personnel and will result in you being court-martialled,” Jack replied, trying to keep his voice as emotionless as possible. “Outing the new recruits would jeopardise operations.”

Satya scoffed. “You cannot expect met to abide by such a flimsy pretence—”

Jack cut her off. “Vaswani,” he said her name very deliberately in a warning tone. “You will say nothing of this to your superiors.”

Satya gaped indignantly for a moment and then her mouth snapped shut with realisation. Jack had cornered her, and even though she disagreed, it was true that she could very well be court-martialled if she opposed him. She said nothing for a moment while her gaze narrowed at the man sitting on the opposite side of the desk. “How long do you hope to keep this a secret?” she asked. “They are international criminals. They are almost certainly wanted for arrest. Everyone on base is already talking about them. How long until someone spots them in the field and identifies them?”

Jack frowned. It was true this was probably going to be a point of contention in the ranks. Inviting two wanted fugitives to join Overwatch was risky, but the alternative could be much worse. He was very much aware that if Lena’s mission to recruit the two Junkers was a failure, the consequences could be that instead of fighting alongside them, they could very well face them on the next battlefield. Intelligence had indicated that Talon were also aggressively attempting to recruit Fawkes and Rutledge. Successfully recruiting the fugitive duo before Talon could get their claws into them was Jack’s top priority, however, dealing with the fallout from the rest of the team and keeping this from the U.N. was going to occupy a lot of his time in the coming weeks. But he didn’t want to reveal any of this to Vaswani. Their position with the United Nations was precarious enough at the present moment. The Overwatch Recall had only been initiated less than a year ago. During that time, Jack had only been present in any kind of leadership capacity for the previous five months. Getting operations back on track and up to the United Nations’ standards had preoccupied a lot of his time.

“I understand your concerns,” Jack began. “I will certainly be taking your feedback onboard...”

Jack was interrupted by a newcomer. The door slid open again and Torbjörn came strolling into the room. He paused when he saw Satya was already sitting across from the commander, apparently very upset about something.

“Oh, excuse me,” he started to say. “But I need to speak with the commander...”

“Lindholm,” Jack said tiredly. “You can’t just walk in here unannounced. We were in the middle of something.”

Torbjörn shrugged. “Door was unlocked,” he said and helped himself to a seat in the chair beside Satya’s.

Jack slid a hand over his forehead. He could feel a headache forming. “What is it now, Lindholm?” Jack asked.
Satya looked even more annoyed. “Yes, you are interrupting a very important conversation, Mr Lindholm, between myself and the commander about the new recruits.”

Torbjörn nodded grimly at this. “Ah, yes. Just what I wanted to discuss with you, Morrison,” he said.

Satya suddenly changed her tune. “Oh?” Satya began, then turned to Jack. “You see? Mr. Lindholm will explain to you why this is a terrible idea…”

“Marvellous young fellow, that skinny one!” Torbjörn said with an affirmative nod. Torbjörn clapped his hands together in an enthusiastic fashion and the words died instantly in Satya’s throat when she saw the look of delight on the smaller man’s face.

Torbjörn went on, “He fixed my magnetic levitation motor. I’ve been working on that thing for months. Couldn’t quite get the upward force to counteract gravity. He recalibrated the whole thing and got it running in under ten minutes! Imagine that!” His voice came booming out of his chest like a reverberating drum.

Satya looked positively scandalised. She sputtered for a moment at Torbjörn’s words while Jack cracked a smile. “Go on,” Jack said to Torbjörn.

“Remarkable man,” Torbjörn said, nodding to himself. “Do you know, he has no formal education? He says he did a bit of high school, never completed any tertiary schooling. But he knows machines backwards and forwards. He told me he’s spent a lot of time taking them apart. Remarkably talented for someone self-taught.”

“He’s a Junker,” Jack said by way of explanation.

Torbjörn looked like he didn’t entirely know what that meant, but he nodded anyway and went on, “I think he’ll fit right in, too. Very friendly fellow. We’ve already started discussing projects.”

Jack looked very pleased at this. He looked over at Satya to gauge her reaction. Her anger was palpable. Her arms were crossed over her chest, her fingertips drumming a beat of annoyance against her gauntlet on her right arm.

The door ‘whooshed’ open suddenly. Lena was standing in the corridor beyond Jack’s office. “Oh, hi everyone!” she chirped and strode in. “Hope I’m not interrupting anything.”

“Actually…” Jack began.

“Came to let you know the good news,” Lena said, seeming to not have heard him. She looked around for a seat and, finding none, perched herself on the edge of Jack’s desk much to his annoyance. “The mission was a complete success! Both recruits have signed contracts and have been successfully onboarded. Phew! What a relief, eh?” Lena turned to smile and the rest of the room’s occupant. She didn’t seem to notice the sour look on Satya’s face. She went on, addressing the two engineers directly, “You two must be pleased to have a new builder on the team, eh? Such a relief to have an extra pair of hands around, I’ll bet!”

Satya glared at the smaller woman.

Torbjörn nodded in reply. “Yes, we’ve needed extra help in the Workshop for a while. It hasn’t been easy with so few of us.”

Lena smiled. “Well, you’ve got a very helpful pair of hands there. Never met a Junker before, but I’ve heard stories. Very talented at scrapping and engineering apparently. So rare to find one
outside of Aus! Imagine being able to ask questions about omnis to someone who grew up in side
an omnium! It’s a fantastic opportunity to pick Jamison’s brains, if you ask me.”

Satya was positively glowering at the room’s occupants. Jack, however, seemed very happy at the
news. “Excellent work, Lieutenant. The recruits have been familiarized with the whole Watchpoint,
I assume?” he asked.

Lena nodded. “Yep. Showed them all the common areas; the training grounds, the Rec Room, the
gym, the staff kitchen, you name it,” she said with a smile. She seemed very pleased with herself.
“Really lucked out, didn’t we? New demolitions guy and one ex-ALF member to join the other
tanks.”

“ALF?” Torbjörn repeated with a look of confusion.

“Australian Liberation Front,” Lena explained. “A paramilitary group operating in Australia during
the Omnic Crisis.”

“Ah,” Jack said. “So, he has been combat trained?” Jack said this very pointedly while looking at
Satya, who frowned back at him.

“Well, yes,” Lena replied. “I suppose so.”

Suddenly the door slid open again and a tall blonde woman in hospital scrubs was revealed
standing in the doorway. She looked up from her digital clipboard and seemed surprised to see so
many people crammed into the commander’s office. “Oh, pardon me...” she began.

Jack motioned for her to join them. “Come in, Doctor Ziegler,” he said. “You might as well.”

Angela stepped forward and, given that all of the seats were currently taken, remained standing. “I
have the results of the physicals for our two new recruits,” she said. “Despite my concerns about
the environmental factors of their place of origin...”

“The radiation?” Jack asked.

Angela nodded. “Yes. Despite the obvious risk factors, they both appear to be in good health and
reasonably good physical condition all things considered. I’m confident enough to say they should
be fit for combat in the coming weeks, following training and probation, of course.”

Jack fixed Satya with a particularly pleased grin. “Excellent news, Doctor,” he said. “Are there any
accommodations we should make?”

“Only that Rutledge may need to be assigned a larger dorm room,” Angela said. She checked
something on her clipboard. “He meets the height requirement,” she confirmed.

Satya somehow looked even more annoyed. “But I’ve been waiting to be assigned a larger room
for months now!” Satya complained.

Angela looked surprised by Satya’s statement. “But you don’t meet the height requirement,
Satya...”

Jack covered a smirk with his hand. “I was thinking that Fawkes will need to be refitted with some
more... ‘up-to-date’ prostheses,” he said.

Angela nodded. “I did try to discuss this with him, but he is insistent that he wants to keep the
existing prosthetic arm and the peg leg,” she said. “I can understand why. He’s eager to see field
duty and doesn’t want to waste time on physiotherapy and re-learning how to walk. He’s also very accustomed to how his prosthetic arm works and is rather proud of its construction.”

Jack looked surprised. “Did he build it himself?”

“Oh, yes,” Angela replied with a warm smile. “Isn’t it fascinating? In all my years of working with prostheses, I’ve never met a patient who was able to build and maintain their own limbs for such a long time. Incredible really.”

“You see?” Torbjörn said with a laugh. “Very gifted, that young man. I can see he’ll go far.”

Satya looked positively outraged at this.

Angela folded her arms over her clipboard. “It’s unusual, but I have no reservations recommending Fawkes for combat training with his existing protheses.”

“Really?” Satya interjected. “You don’t think that they could be a detriment to any mission?”

Angela regarded Satya with a look of confusion, then shook her head. “I don’t see why they would be. Although, Rutledge seems to have a little trouble speaking at length due to the strain on his voice however I don’t think it will become too much of an issue in the field so long as he keeps his need to speak to a minimum...” Angela seemed to have trailed off on a tangent, thinking aloud to herself. She tapped her chin thoughtfully. “I will need to complete some more tests to be sure, but maybe a voice box may be of use in this situation, even just as a back-up...”

“They’re odd,” Lena chimed in, looking at Satya. “But they aren’t the oddest people we’ve ever hired.”

“Have you all gone mad?” Satya erupted. Four pairs of eyes regarded her with total surprise. “You mean to tell me that you actually intend to go ahead with this disastrous idea and allow these two ruffians to join the ranks?” Her voice was almost shrill with anger.

Jack shrugged his shoulders. “The deal is done, Vaswani,” he said. “The contracts are signed.” Satya looked like she wanted to say something, but Jack cut her off, “You need to understand, Vaswani, we are a team now. Fawkes and Rutledge are to be two very valuable members. I have heard your misgivings and I have taken your opinion under advisement. Short of any actual, quantifiable wrongdoing on either of the new recruits’ parts against Overwatch staff or operations, I don’t want to hear anything further on the matter from you.” He fixed her with a pointed look while the others shifted uncomfortably. “If I do, we may need to rethink your presence here in Overwatch.”

Satya flushed red. She remained seated in her chair, positively radiating anger, staring at Jack across the desk.

Jack returned her gaze calmly. “Anything else, Vaswani?” he asked.

Satya expelled a very loud and angry sigh. She stood suddenly; face flushed with fury. “No,” she barked, turned on her heel and marched out of the office. Everyone watched her go, taken aback by the sudden outburst.

“Well, that was awkward,” Torbjörn remarked.

“The rest of you are dismissed,” Jack said. “I’ve got too much work to do.”

Everyone stood and prepared to make their way out of the room.
“Oh. And, Oxton?” Jack added. She turned to acknowledge him. “I’ve sent a message to Wilhelm and advised him to bring Rutledge to the Mess Hall promptly for supper. Check on Fawkes, would you? Make sure he finds his way there as well.”

“Er, sure,” Lena replied. “Now where could he have gotten off to?” she pondered aloud.

“He’s outside,” Athena chimed in. “Along the cliffs on the west side of base.”

“Thanks, Athena,” Lena said with a grin. “I’ll go find him then.” She waved goodbye to Jack and used her chronal accelerator to streak away.

Jack watched them all depart. When he was finally alone again, he dropped his head into his hands and heaved a sigh. His headache had grown in intensity. He realised that the distraction caused by his recent visitors, and the headache too, was going to delay his work and he would be stuck in the office for the next few hours to come. More pressing was the realisation that Satya had left the room in a less-than-positive mood. Jack had learnt from experience that she was not a woman to be crossed, and neither was Vishkar for that matter. He frowned with realisation; if the new recruits put so much as a toe out of line, his desk would be, at best, flooded with complaints from Satya, or, at worst, he would have formal reports and court hearings to deal with.

Jack groaned, slumping further into his hands. What had he gotten himself into?

--

When Lena found finally found him, Jamie was sitting on a large flat rock on the edge of a cliff staring out at the waters of the Alboran Sea in the late afternoon air. A few commercial shipping liners were chugging along in the distance, laden with shipping crates.

Lena decided to say nothing and simply took a seat beside him. He looked up at her on arrival and smiled. For a while, they watched the gulls riding the air currents and listened to the crash of waves below. It was cold, so Lena pulled her parka closer around herself for warmth. Jamie appeared to have grabbed a hoodie at some point from his room and was similarly bundled up.

“What a day, eh?” she said eventually.

“I’m knackered,” he replied with a laugh. Lena noted that he did seem much more drained than before, almost melancholy as he looked out over the water.

“You did well though,” Lena told him. “You know what? I was kind of scared about meeting you.”

Jamie looked up at her and nodded. “Yeah, I get that a lot,” he said amicably.

Lena went on, “But now I’m really glad you’re here, you know? I think things are going to work out.”

Jamie smiled. “Thanks for taking the time to look after us today.”

“You’re welcome, love,” she said with a smile. She was pleased to find Jamie was a lot friendlier than the police reports and criminal profiles she had read about him had initially led her to believe. She had thought he would need constant supervision to make sure he didn’t steal or break anything, and it was true he still needed to receive training and probably had never worked inside a military
base before, but she was pleased to find he wasn’t as criminally insane as she had first assumed. “Tomorrow, I’ll introduce you to the rest of the ranks,” she said. “Don’t want to overwhelm you on your first day.”

Jamie nodded. “It’s nice to be out,” he said simply and Lena knew he was referring to prison. “I feel like I’ve been given a fresh start. It will be nice not to have to be on the run again.”

Lena didn’t really know what that felt like personally, but she nodded all the same.

He went on, “I just hope I can be of help.”

“You will be, Jamie,” she said quietly. They said nothing for a while, enjoying the comfortable silence. “I remember when I first joined up. I was scared out of my mind.” Lena was staring off into the distance as she said this, watching the line where the water met the slowly reddening sky. “Overwatch offered me a position where I could fight and help make the world a better place. They helped me when I was at my lowest. When I thought I’d never be useful ever again...” Lena’s voice was barely above a whisper. “But I was worried I’d never be able to live up to all the expectations. With time, I got better. They can do that for you too.”

Jamie had listened to her words with rapt attention. “What’s it like?” he asked. Lena watched him quizzically, waiting for him to elaborate. “Working here?”

“You’re gonna find out,” she said with a smile. “We’re a family here. We look out for each other. We do our best to help and protect the people who need it.”

Jamie looked like he was struggling with something internally. He plucked absent-mindedly at the sleeve of his dark hoodie. “Never done much helping or protecting before...” he remarked, looking down.

“Don’t worry,” Lena said. “It will all make sense soon.”

Jamie was quiet. He took a deep breath of sea air. “Alright,” he said simply.

Lena nudge his shoulder. “Come on, let’s go grab some dinner,” she said and they both stood, dusting themselves off as they did so.

They made their way across the grass towards the entrance to the Watchpoint under the dim orange glow of the outdoor lights as the sky faded to grey. They passed between a couple of annexed buildings and headed across an open concreted area towards the base. With Lena just a step ahead, Jamie poked experimentally at the back of her glowing chronal accelerator. “Hey, think I could have a look at one of those "bombs" of yours?” he asked suddenly.

Lena whipped around, looking surprised. “How do you know about that?”

“Torbjörn mentioned something while you were snoozing back in the workshop,” Jamie said with a grin. “You didn’t tell me you were into explosives too!”

“I’m not!” Lena said, defensively. “My pulse bombs are purely for practical purposes only.”

“Come on!” Jamie said, trying to circle her for a better look, but Lena adjusted her position each time to prevent him. “I just wanna see!” he added.

“Over my dead body!” she said in mock anger, then laughed.

Lena blinked forward, with nothing but a blue streak of energy to mark her trail. Jamie stared
around, confused. Where had she gone? Jamie heard her giggle and spun to see she was behind him. He tried to step towards her again, but she blinked out of reach again.

“Over here!” she laughed, and Jamie spotted her on the other side of the open area, near the door that led back inside the base. He jogged after her, but before he could reach her again, she disappeared into thin air with a swirling flash of light. Confused, Jamie turned and saw Lena had returned to where they had previously been standing. She yawned into her palm and cocked her hip to one side, like she had been waiting forever for him to catch up. “Too slow, Jamie!” she called.

Jamie laughed in reply. He had never seen anything like what Lena could do, but it was entertaining to watch. He jogged towards her again, trying to catch hold of her. Every time he got close, she disappeared before him.

Dinner was almost all but forgotten as they chased each other around the courtyard and eventually down the halls towards the Mess Hall. Jamie persisted in his appeals for a closer look at the pulse bombs, and Lena became increasingly more evasive with each request until eventually they collapsed from exhaustion in fits of giggles at one of the dining tables. Jamie felt sure he had made the right decision, finally.

--

A/N: this got unintentionally really long (twice as long as originally planned) but there was a lot to cover and set up for future chapters. If you can believe it, I had actually intended to include more but cut it down to this current length. I don’t think the next chapters will be as long, if this series continues. Thank you if you read the whole thing! And please let me know if it's worth writing more? Would anyone be interested in reading more of this if I continued writing chapters? ........... :|
On Jamie’s first day in the Workshop, he decided he would arrive early.

He had been looking forward to his first day all week. He and Roadie had been required to undergo intensive training before they would be cleared for combat, and this would be ongoing, but Lena referred to the first week on base as a particularly grueling ‘bootcamp’ and advised them both to brace themselves. There would be no time to visit the Workshop until a week of bootcamp was over. So, in addition to exercise drills, Jamie’s first week was filled with battle strategy meetings, meetings with nutritionists and physicals to track his progress. During this time, the thought of joining the Workshop at the end of the week kept him going. Jamie tried to ask Lena if he could skip the training and get started in the Workshop, but she had steadfastly refused. For a full week, Jamie waited, becoming more and more excited as his first day in the Workshop drew closer.

Now the day was finally here and Jamie was eager to get started on his new RIP-tire. He swiped into the room using his new wristband and took his seat at the free workstation between Brigitte and Satya’s designated areas. He was the first to arrive apparently as there was no one else present, but Brigitte had kindly left a few of his requested items on the table waiting for him; a small second-hand motor, the kind with a pull-start cord (‘Perfect!’ he thought), and some scrap pieces of metal. She must have left them there the night before. There was a note in Brigitte’s neat handwriting:

Still working on finding a source of rubber tires. Will keep you updated! -Brig

Jamie inspected the metal pieces. He nodded with approval, they could easily be smelted or hammered to form the metal spikes that would eventually line the tire’s edges.

He tore a sheet of paper off a notepad nearby and started listing different chemicals, compounds and other materials he would need to finish off the explosives for the RIP-tire. He made a mental note to submit the list to Torbjörn for review.

Jamie looked up from his workstation at the sound of the door to the Workshop opening. Satya Vaswani walked purposefully into the room with a tablet device tucked under one arm. She spotted him, meeting his gaze with a look of surprise, then her face darkened again with realisation.

“Morning,” Jamie said quietly.

Satya only nodded in acknowledgement, eyeing his sweatpants and hoodie with disdain as she passed his table to take a seat at her workstation. She switched on the holographic display while she set about organising her things.

“By the way, Mr. Fawkes, just so we are clear; everything on this desk...” She paused to indicate her workstation. “...belongs to me and has been carefully catalogued. I will notice if something goes missing.”
Jamie raised an eyebrow at her. “Oh. Okay,” he replied automatically. Did she think he was planning on nicking her stuff?

Satisfied, Satya turned back to her work. She flipped her long black hair over one shoulder, smoothed down her blue work dress, and proceeded to ignore him for the next few minutes while she got to work.

Jamie finished his list and put it to one side. He turned his attention towards the motor Brigitte had left for him. He pulled it closer, seeing that he would need something to undo the screws holding the casing in place, then he could inspect the inside and start adjusting the innerworkings. He looked around for some tools.

“Um,” he began. Satya looked over. “Where can I get a screwdriver?”

Satya looked annoyed by the question. She raised a hand and pointed at the far wall filled with a variety of tools hanging from the embedded hooks. “There also toolkits in the storeroom. You need to check them out on the register.” She pointed again to a door across the room.

“Oh, cheers,” Jamie replied. He only needed one, so he stood and headed across the room to the rows of different sized screwdrivers hanging from the wall. He returned a moment later with one in the correct size.

“Please don’t lose it,” Satya added haughtily. “You’ll need to purchase a replacement if you do. These tools are here for everyone to use.”

“Would you relax?” Jamie said with a roll of his eyes. “I’m not going to nick anything, or break anything, or lose anything!” he snapped at her. Satya recoiled from him with a sneer. “I only want to recalibrate this motor.”

“Yes, well,” Satya began. “I hadn’t expected someone with your... history to be capable of completing such a task.”

“You mean an Aussie?” he asked pointedly. His experience since leaving his home country had been that when people found out he was a country boy, people automatically assumed he was an idiot.

“I meant, a convict,” she said primly and turned away from him.

Jamie didn’t particularly care what people thought of him being an ex-con, but he was in no mood to have his intelligence insulted.

“I didn’t expect someone like you would even care to take notice of someone so lowly as myself,” he sneered back at her.

“What do you mean someone like me?” Satya asked, ignoring the rest of his sentence. “Someone who works for Vishkar, you mean?”

“Is that who sent you here?” Jamie asked. “Lena told me you work for an external mob.”

Satya looked exceedingly proud as she confirmed this with a nod. “I work for the Vishkar Corporation of southern India. I am a high-ranking architect. Our objective is to create new, self-sustaining cities using hard-light technology.” She said this as though she had been taught to memorise and repeat the lines perfectly like an elevator pitch.

Jamie fixed her with an unimpressed look. “So, you’re a suit?” Jamie spat the word like it was a
kind of insult.

Satya looked surprised. She didn’t quite know what Jamie meant by this statement. That she preferred corporate attire? Or that she represented a corporation by what she was wearing? She assumed the latter.

“What does that have to do with anything?” Satya asked.

Jamie only frowned down at his work, refusing to meet her gaze. Eventually he said, “I don’t like suits.”

“I don’t particularly care what you do and don’t like,” Satya said in a challenging tone. Jamie didn’t respond. She watched him put a few things away, and then stand and push his chair back under the desk roughly.

“Where are you going? I’m not done speaking with you,” Satya said sternly as she watched him walk across the room towards the door.

“Well, I am,” he replied coolly. “I’m due in the training yard.” It wasn’t true, but Jamie needed to cool off and planned to go find Roadie for an impromptu training session.

Satya watched him march out of the room with a disapproving stare.

-

Hana’s bunny-shaped alarm clock went off that morning promptly at seven o’clock.

Her military training bade that she rise quickly, make her bed, and brush her teeth at the small sink in the corner of her room. She stretched, then dropped to the floor and did a few successive push ups. All of these tasks she performed with the same perfunctory self-discipline that shaped her world for the past twelve months since turning nineteen.

Next, she changed into bike shorts and a t-shirt before heading down to the gym. Every morning was the same for her; twenty minutes on treadmill, twenty minutes of resistance training, ten minutes elliptical.

When she was done, she had just enough time to hit the shower and grab a change of clothes from her room before her bunny clock indicated it was “8:15”. She headed for the Mess Hall to grab breakfast before the work day began at nine. She would have cram school classes until midday to prepare for her university entrance exams, then she had training in the afternoon in the drill yard with some of the other combatants.

“Morning, Hana,” one of the kitchen workers said cheerfully from beside the self-serve buffet. “Need a jump-start today? Where’s your Nano Cola?” He chuckled at his own joke.

Hana forced a smile. She was going to regret doing that Nano Cola commercial for the rest of her life at this rate. Everyone around here was always parroting the tagline ‘Nano Cola! Enjoy!’ at her once they worked out who she was. The only thing she had gotten from those commercials aside from the residuals was a sunburn from having to wear a bikini on a beach for the shoot and a reputation as an airhead. “Not today,” she said as cheerily as she could muster. The kitchen worker laughed again and moved on.
The rest of Hana’s morning consisted of a high-protein, low-carbohydrate breakfast before heading over to one of the seminar rooms for her private tutoring session. Her math tutor provided her with feedback on a recent assignment and expressed genuine surprise at the advanced concepts she had tackled well in her quantitative methods test. Eventually she was dismissed for one hour so she could get some lunch.

Every week the kitchen staff provided meals based on cuisine from different countries, which seemed popular with the diverse nationalities that formed the Watchpoint’s workforce. Today’s lunch was a choice of Japanese *hiyashi chūka* or *chashu ramen*. Hana collected a tray of *hiyashi chūka*, which was the healthiest of the two options in her opinion, and turned to survey the tables for a place to sit. She spotted McCree not too far away. He was usually pretty easy-going so she had taken to sitting with him recently for lunch. There were few others she enjoyed sitting with.

“Hi, Jesse,” Hana said pleasantly as she took a seat at the same table.

McCree grinned at her. “Well, well, well. If it isn’t our resident celebrity superstar!”

“If you ask me where my Nano Cola is, I’m going to slap you,” Hana replied flatly.

He laughed in his usual good-natured way. “Actually, I was going to ask if you were still planning on taking time away from day-care to join us in the training yard this afternoon.”

Hana had to physically resist the urge to roll her eyes. “It’s called private tutoring, not ‘day-care’,” she replied coolly. “You should look it up,” she added with a superior smirk.

McCree only laughed. “Still planning on going to college then?”

“As soon as my mandatory military service is over,” she replied with a smile. She started moving her lunch around her plate with a fork but didn’t particularly feel like eating it. “Now that the Gwishin is defeated, I’ve just got one year left to go.”

“So, you’re not going to travel first?”

Hana pouted. She always got jealous when she heard her teammates talking about all the awesome places they had got to travel to over the years, and McCree knew this. Hana really did want to visit so many places around the world, but completing her military service and then her undergrad was her top priority now. Somehow, the few international locations she had visited on missions so far was not quite the same as going on a vacation; military operations didn’t leave much time for sight-seeing. She shook her head at McCree.

“Maybe when they finish rebuilding the new Swiss headquarters, you’ll get stationed there?” he suggested.

“I doubt that will get finished in time,” she replied with a shrug. “My university entrance exams start soon.”

“Do they not offer eSports scholarships to colleges in Korea?” he asked, completely serious.

Hana laughed. “I wish!”

“You could voluntarily extend,” he added with a thoughtful look on his face. “Then you could request a transfer to any of the Watchpoints. The ones that aren’t still decommissioned, that is.”

Hana thought about this. Overwatch had only been in operations again for about a year now following the landmark decision from the U.N. to reverse the Petras Act. Watchpoint: Gibraltar
was their makeshift main base of operations while the rest of the Watchpoints slowly rebuilt and recruited more staff. Gibraltar was lovely, but a transfer to Watchpoint: Madagascar was also tempting...

Hana sighed. “It was hard enough to get my transfer request into Overwatch approved. I don’t want to push it, you know?”

“You’d know more about it than me,” McCree replied. He yawned and stretched. “Don’t be late to the training grounds. I’m not waiting around for you youngins again like last time.”

“I wasn’t late last time!” Hana complained. “You gave me the wrong time!”

He seemed not to have heard her. McCree looked like he had finished eating and began to collect used plates and cutlery on his lunch tray ready to place it in the tray return.

Seized by a sudden burst of courage, Hana inched forward in her seat, hoping for an affirmative answer before he left. “Jesse, do you want hang out later? I’m going to be streaming ‘Battle Star 2’ tonight. Maybe we could do some warm-up games before that...?”

McCree shrugged. “Sorry, Hana. Ain’t got time for any of that kid stuff,” he said idly as he stood with his tray, ready to take his leave.

“Oh, okay,” she said dejectedly. Hana watched him stroll away, huffing a sigh when he disappeared from sight. She slumped a cheek upon her fist, elbows resting on the Mess Hall table. She glowered at the remains of her lunch. She should have guessed he would feel that way. Why was no one taking her seriously? It didn’t matter that she had personally defended her homeland from the Gwishin attacks, she was still too young in their eyes.

Gaming was an important part of her life. It was her eSports successes that had originally attracted the attention of the army recruiters who helped her begin a career as a MEKA pilot. Even now, gaming continued to offer an escape and a source of stress relief when the pressures of fighting to protect the world was starting to get to her. The problem was, no one around here seemed to share the same enthusiasm or respect for the practice. To them, she was just a little kid wasting energy on childish pastimes, or some stuck up airhead from the Nano Cola commercials, too immature to comprehend the enormity of Overwatch’s mission and objectives. If anything, when people found out she liked video games, it was alienating. Plenty of times, she had tried to invite others to join in her streams—be it Lena, Brigitte... heck, even Jesse!—but games didn’t interest them or they were always too busy in the end. It made making friends around here somewhat difficult, and Hana felt, despite her notoriety and her follower count, frankly, alone.

Hana was disturbed from her train of thought by the sound of bickering nearby. Two imposing figures had just entered the Mess Hall and were walking her way.

“No! I’m not wrong about this, ‘Hog! It’s supposed to go grenade, then concussion mine, then hook. I can’t believe you stuffed up something we’ve been doing for ages!”

Hana watched as two men made their way across the lunchroom towards the queue near the serving area. One of the men was exceptionally large, the other far scrawner and thinner by comparison, both shirtless despite the fact that it was late winter. Hana supposed they were lucky the Gibraltar base was decently climate-controlled. They looked spent from whatever they had been doing prior to entering the Mess Hall.

Tattoos coated the larger one’s stomach, face obscured by an enormous black gasmask. The skinny one had patchy hair and hobbled on a peg leg across the hall. He was tall by most standards but
was dwarfed by his companion’s larger frame. He was talking rapidly and gesticulating animatedly as he spoke. People in the lunchroom were eyeing them with apprehension and seemed to hurry out of their way.

Hana watched the newcomers pass by her lunch table with rapt attention. She could recognise that accent anywhere.

“You’re wrong,” the one called 'Hog' boomed. His voice was deep and gravelly, seeming to reverberate, amplified inside his large chest. Hana stood and made her way towards them.

The skinny one stomped his peg leg irritably. “No! It’s always been grenade, then mine, then you hook me to safety!”

“Your memory has always been off,” the larger of the pair remarked. Hana trailed behind them so she could listen to the conversation.

“Not this time, it isn’t--!” Skinny barked, having not noticed their eavesdropper.

Hog groaned. “Why are you so irritable today?”

“G’day!”

The two men spun wildly, scanning the room for the source of the voice which had interrupted their argument. Their eyes eventually settled on the much shorter Hana, who was beaming up at them with the broadest grin on her face.

“Christ alive!” Skinny exclaimed, blinking down at Hana. “Where’d you come from?”

Hana ignored the question. “Are you two from Australia?” she asked eagerly, staring up at them with wide eyes.

The two men exchanged a nervous glance. “Er… depends. Who wants to know?” Skinny said, crossing his arms defensively.

Hana could barely contain her glee. “I’ve always wanted to go there! I’m so jealous!”

Skinny looked confused. “Jealous? Of me?” His companion only grunted in reply. “Oi!” Skinny cried suddenly and whirled on him. “I didn’t give anything away!”

“Are you going to eat lunch now?” Hana asked, unfazed by the larger one’s ability to communicate non-verbally. “Are you both new? Do you want to sit with me?”

Skinny scratched at his patchy hair. “What’s with all the questions-?”

“I’m Hana,” Hana said happily. Finally, some interesting people have joined the Overwatch team! she thought to herself.

Hana grinned broadly up at them. “Hurry! Come sit with me!” She grabbed a hold of the skinny one’s arm and tugged him forcefully towards her table. “No wait! You need lunch first! This way!”

Again, she tugged him forcefully in the opposite direction now, leading him towards the queue for the food servers. Jamie had no choice but to be towed along with Roadie bringing up the rear.

As they neared the queue, people seemed to clear a path for them, either eager to avoid contact with the rough-looking Junkers or conveniently remembering a prior engagement and excusing themselves. They were soon at the front of the queue, and with trays laden with food, returned to
“You two are some of the first new people I’ve seen in a while,” Hana explained once they were seated again. Hana took in their strange, scraggly appearance as another kind of testament to how interesting they were. “I’m so relieved!”

“Relieved?” Jamie asked around a mouthful of his lunch.

She glanced around nervously and motioned to the other two men to lean in closer, which they did obligingly. Hana lowered her voice to a whisper so she would not be overheard. “Everyone around here is so boring! We need more interesting people on the team!”

Jamie exchanged a look of confusion with Roadie. “Sorry to disappoint, love, but I don’t think we’re as interesting as you think we are…”

“Are you kidding!?” Hana exploded. Heads turned at the nearby lunch tables to stare at her. “You’re SO interesting! I was beginning to worry I was going to be stuck here with no one to talk to!” Hana started to shovel her lunch into her mouth. “Wait. I forgot. What are your names?” Hana asked suddenly.

Roadie reached up and thumped himself on the chest. “Mako.” His voice was deep and booming in his chest. “Everyone calls me Roadhog or ‘Roadie’.”

Hana smiled and turned her gaze on Jamie, looking expectant.

“Jamison,” Jamie said and reached out to shake her hand with a grin, pretending that they were meeting for the first time. “Jamison Fawkes.”

Hana took Jamie’s hand and shook it vigorously before the smile disappeared from her face, only to return a moment later. She seemed to come to a realisation before smiling broadly at him. “‘Jamison... Fox?’” she asked. Her eyes grew wide. “As in...” She made a gesture with her hands, fingers curled, that Jamie thought looked like she was trying to mimic the paws of an animal. “...Foxes? Cute, fuzzy animals?”

Jamie blinked back at her, dumbfounded. “Wait. What?”

“That’s so cute!” Hana started laughing. “See? You are interesting!” she added.

Jamie was struggling to keep up. Hana was firing on all cylinders, shooting questions at him like someone had given her too much red cordial.

“What’s your specialty?” Hana went on, cheeks full of food. “Special ops? Tactical deployment? You’re probably a tank, right big guy?” She said this while elbowing Roadie in the ribs.

Roadie only nodded in reply.

“Cool! Me too! I’m sure we’ll be working together soon!” Hana told him.

“You’re a tank?” Jamie sputtered. Hana didn’t look like one of the big fellows Lena referred to before as the ‘tanks.’ She barely came up to his elbow in height. “But aren’t you just a kid?”

Hana rolled her eyes. “I’m a mech pilot. Plus, I’m nineteen. That’s old enough to join up.” She said this in a very matter-of-fact way. “You just wait until you see my mech, Tokki! She’s the best tank on the team! She’ll show you a thing or two, Roadie.”
Roadie seemed preoccupied with his *chashumen* and seemed not to have heard her.

Jamie continued to look confused. “Overwatch lets teenagers join?”

“Can’t be any weirder than allowing you to work here,” Roadie said absently. Jamie gave him an annoyed look.

“I’m only here because it counts towards my mandatory military service,” Hana explained. “What about you, Skinny? What are you in for?”

“Oh, um, demolitions...” Jamie said quietly.

“Oh, I *love* blowing things up!” Hana said, nodding enthusiastically.

“You do?” Jamie asked, bewildered.

“Sometime soon I’ll show you what my Tokki can do,” she told him. “When I’m not owning noobs on Battle Star 2, I’m usually down at the training yard.”

Roadie seemed to have lost interest in the discussion.

“What’s Battle Star 2?” Jamie asked.

“Um, only like the best online FPS ever!” she told him. “Duh! What are you doing later? I’ll show you if you want.”

Jamie didn’t want to ask what an ‘FPS’ was in case Hana thought he was an idiot. “Uh, nothing.”

“Excellent! Come the Games Room, E Wing after five,” Hana said.

‘*So, it's some kind of game?*’ Jamie wondered.

Hana went on, “We can play some warm-up games before my stream tonight. I stream as well, by the way. Oh! You should come to the stream too! That starts at seven.”

Jamie felt there was little room to refuse so he just nodded.

Roadie stood suddenly. “I’m heading back to the training yard,” he said.

“Yeah, I better get back to the Workshop,” Jamie replied, standing as well and collecting his tray. He wasn’t looking forward to going back. Training with Roadie had burnt off some of his anger, but he felt things were still going to be pretty frosty with Satya when he got back. He reasoned with himself that Lena *had* tried to warn him, but he was determined to press on with carving out a place for himself in the Workshop. He couldn’t let Satya deter him. “Nice to meet you,” Jamie told Hana.

“Don’t forget!” Hana called after him as he departed. “Games Room! Five o’clock!”
Locating the Games Room was easier than expected. After Jamie found E Wing, he just had to follow the signs helpfully decorated with pink anthropomorphic bunny stickers the rest of the way to the ‘Games Room.’ Jamie had a feeling the stickers were Hana’s doing. When he arrived, he raised his hand to knock but the door slid open automatically.

Jamie stepped into the room, immediately spotting an enormous holographic display screen which took up almost the entirety of one wall. Several comfy looking couches sat nearby, angled towards it. Jamie spotted Hana situated on one of the large couches, and next to her, a young girl he had never seen before. Both girls were watching the holographic display. Various movie posters and even musical instruments were affixed to the walls. There was also a billiards table on his right, over near a set of large plate glass windows which gave way to a view of the huge shipping barges coasting sluggishly up and down the Gibraltar channels.

Hana looked up at the sound of the door. “Oh, good! You’re here!” Hana exclaimed when she caught sight of Jamie. “This is the Games Room!” She gesticulated with a flourish towards the rest of the room.

Hana stood and hurried over to so she could meet Jamie halfway as he crossed the room towards them. She took hold of his forearm as she had at lunch and tugged him towards the couches with a giggle. “Sit here!” Hana directed him and pointed to an empty seat.

The other girl—who was about twelve years of age by Jamie’s estimate—was slumped on the couch with a game controller clutched in her hands. She made no attempt to acknowledge Jamie’s arrival; her eyes were trained with rapt attention on some kind of fighting game on the holographic display. Jamie stared at the animated explosions with keen interest.

“Who’s this?” the girl asked Hana without looking away from the game.

“New guy,” Hana replied, flopping down on the couch beside her and staring up at the gameplay on the large screen. “Let’s go multiplayer next round.”

Jamie took a seat in a nearby armchair, feeling a little like a third wheel, but resigning to watch the gameplay all the same.

“Oh! You should have used the wall jump there to get the hidden coins,” Hana remarked absently.

“I don’t know how to wall jump,” the girl replied. She tried a few times, then huffed in defeat. “How do you do this, Hana? It’s so hard!”

“Keep practicing, you’ll get there,” Hana replied. “Oh, this is Jamie by the way. Jamie this is Efi.”

“Can he be trusted?” Efi asked Hana without looking away from the screen.

“I think so,” came Hana’s reply. “He wants to learn how to game.” This wasn’t necessarily true, but Jamie didn’t protest.

“Okay,” Efi replied. Finally, she turned and briefly make eye contact with Jamie before training her gaze back on the big screen. “Hey, Jamie,” she said.

“Hi,” Jamie replied. Efi refocussed on her game and Jamie watched as her character became overwhelmed by a few enemy NPCs, succumbed, and ultimately fell lifelessly to the virtual floor.

“Ugh! I’m so bad!” Efi grumbled and threw down her controller. “GAME OVER” flashed in large red letters across the screen. Hana plucked the controller up from the floor and returned to menu so she could set up a multiplayer game. “Have you played many games before, Jamie?” Efi asked.
Jamie shrugged. He remembered vaguely from his early childhood that he had once been given a handheld gaming console but it had gotten lost or broken at some point. That was about the extent of his experience with gaming. “Haven’t really touched a game in my life,” he admitted. “Don’t got any where I come from.”

“Where are you from?” Efi asked.

“Australia!” Hana answered for him. “Isn’t it amazing?” Efi only nodded in reply. Hana turned to Jamie and said, “Efi is new too. All the way from Numbani! Just started a couple of days ago.”

Jamie was visibly confused. “Are you an agent too, Efi?” he asked.

Efi giggled. “I wish! Hopefully one day though, after I turn eighteen,” she said. “For now, I’m going to be on the builder’s team.”

Jamie looked surprised. “Wait, really? Me too!”

“Oh, cool!” Efi remarked, looking pleased at this news. “We’ll probably be working together.”

Jamie couldn’t hide his continued surprise at Efi’s statement. Kids were allowed in the Workshop? Had she somehow passed Torbjörn’s initiation test? And for that matter, how were there so many young people working for Overwatch?

“You must be an engineer too. Right, Jamie?” Efi asked.

“Oh, um, I guess so,” Jamie mumbled. This twelve-year-old was surprisingly articulate. “Always thought of myself more of a ‘tinkerer’ though.”

Efi laughed. “Would you mind if I showed you something later that I’ve been working on? I would love to get a fellow engineer’s opinion...”

Jamie had temporarily forgotten that Efi was most likely also an engineer if she was going to be on the builder’s team. The fact that she was so young was really disarming. “Yeah, sure. No worries...”

“Stop talking and play this game with me!” Hana interjected and shoved a controller into Jamie’s hands.

Hana queued up a PVE multiplayer game and helped Jamie select a character. Hana chose a character for herself, a weird-looking scraggly fellow with flaming hair.

"This one's my favourite," Hana told Jamie, nodding towards her avatar. "I think he's interesting. He's usually always free to select in online games because no one else ever chooses him."

"Why?" Jamie asked.

Hana shrugged. "Maybe he's too weird-looking?"

"People are immature like that," Efi remarked absently, eyes locked on the screen as she finished choosing her own hero.

The girls were much better practised at the game than Jamie. Hana had to show Jamie how to use the controller to move his character and shoot. She tried to show him how to wall jump, but it was beyond him. Jamie ended up tagging along behind their characters, trying as best he could to help them mow down the enemy NPCs even with the settings on ‘easy’.
The enemy was some kind of groaning robot creature that Hana referred to as a ‘zomnic.’ It was a play on the word ‘omnic’—he understood that much—but something about the ‘zomnic’ bothered Jamie. He had seen omnics before, plenty of basic units in fact when he arrived in Sydney for the first time. The sight of them had been alarming at first, but Roadie had told him to make peace with it. Most omnic units were accepted into society outside of Junkertown. So, as he made his way around the world, he had been forced to interact with the odd omnic food vendor or retail worker, all under Roadie’s watchful eye. Over time, he had become used to their presence, he sometimes tolerated them even. But he maintained his stance that they all belonged on a scrapheap and were a dime a dozen.

Jamie pursed his lips in annoyance and forced his character to try to fend off a few of the zomnics on the holographic screen. These ones certainly did not seem like the kind that wanted to serve him ice cream.

“Are you streaming again tonight?” Efi asked Hana after some time had passed.

“Yeah, I’ve got to set up soon. You going to watch again?” Hana asked with a wink.

Efi nodded. “Yes, but only until curfew. Abayomi got mad when we stayed up late yesterday.”

“Sure, sure,” Hana smiled.

Jamie watched his character’s health bar run out and go limp as several zomnics dove on him. “What’s steaming?” he asked. Hana had mentioned it before at lunch, but he had no idea what she was talking about.

Hana’s character came over to Jamie’s and attempted to resurrect him. “It’s where you play video games and stream it live over the internet for everyone to watch,” she said. “I’m recording one later, so you can see for yourself.”

Jamie frowned at her. “People really prefer to watch other people play, instead of playing the game themselves?” Hana’s character failed to revive him—there were too many zomnics attacking her—and rag-dolled in an undignified sort of way on top of Jamie’s character. “Actually, I can see why,” he said with a grimace at the screen. “GAME OVER” played across the screen once again.

“Come by at seven, you can sit in on my session,” Hana told him as the game reset.

“Does the commander know that you record in here?” Jamie asked.

Hana nodded. “We have special permission! The Games Room is all ours on Tuesday nights.”

Jamie was astutely aware that he had been cautioned by the Overwatch strike commander during a meeting the other day that he and Roadie were not to be seen publicly and were to take extra care not to be caught in any kind of digital recording for the time being. They were to avoid social media at all costs. This was until Jack figured out something with the U.N. regarding their employment.

“I don’t think I’m allowed to be on camera,” Jamie replied.

Hana shrugged. “That’s okay. You don’t have to be on screen. You can sit to the side and watch.”

This seemed reasonable to Jamie, so he nodded and said, “Okay, I’ll be there.”

They played together for some time and Jamie was starting to actually enjoy the game before Hana pointed out that it was after six o’clock. Hana suggested he and Efi should go get some dinner
before the stream started. “Before we do that,” Efi began, looking at Jamie hopefully. “Will you come with me? I want you to look at something for me.”

*Oh right, I forgot she wanted to show me something, Jamie thought to himself. I bet it’s some kind of adorable home science project-style thing. Jamie was envisioning some kind of papier-mâché replica volcano or a singing toaster of sorts. He stood and followed her out of the room while Hana began transforming the space in preparation for her stream.*

Jamie followed Efi through the snaking hallways deep into the Gibraltar base where the storerooms were. The whole way she chattered endlessly about her excitement over joining Overwatch pausing only to pepper him with questions about the builder’s team.

“Is everyone in the Workshop nice? I really hope so!” Efi was looking up at him hopefully.

Jamie had been trying to put his most recent encounter with Satya out of his mind, but Efi’s question had recalled their encounter that very morning to him with stark clarity. “Oh, um, for the most part, yeah,” he said vaguely.

Efi ploughed on with her next question as they arrived at the door to the storeroom. “What about the work? I bet you get to work on tones of cool machines and stuff!”

“Hold up, there,” Jamie said, trying to make a staying motion with his hands. “I’m new too. I’ve barely done a full day in the Workshop myself!”

“Sorry!” Efi said as she buzzed them into a room with her wristband. “I just can’t wait to get started.” Jamie followed behind in a bemused sort of way.

Efi hurried over to something in the corner of the room while Jamie looked around. There were bits of equipment and machinery he couldn’t identify leaning against the walls or stored on metal shelves. Only a fluorescent tube lit the way from above. The room was otherwise cavernous and dark, with more shelves and machines stretching far beyond Jamie’s sight into the darkness.

Efi reached up and took hold of a sheet of cloth that was draped over something easily twice her size. “Jamie, meet my greatest achievement!” she said and pulled the sheet off with a flourish.

Jamie wasn’t quite sure what he was looking at. There was a giant metal… thing … with rounded edges and seemingly folded neatly into a sitting position on the floor. His eyes began to adjust to the dim light and he could make out a head-like shape with long protrusions on either side framing a face, and arms folded neatly in front.

“Orisa…? Wakey-wakey!” Efi said in a sing-song voice. She looked up at Jamie and smiled widely.

Jamie froze as two eyes illuminated in the darkness. Slowly, it rose on four legs to a standing position. Three tones chimed like start-up music. “Initializing,” came a feminine voice that sounded tinny and robotic. “System analysis in progress.”

A cold chill went through Jamie as he realised what he was looking at. He had heard about OR14s and OR15s. They were *siege automatons*, designed for battle and extremely dangerous.

Efi was beaming. “I was so happy when she was drafted to Overwatch,” she was saying. “But I told the recruiters the only one allowed to work on my friend here is me. So here we both are!”

It was like Jamie couldn’t hear her. He was staring in wide-eyed panic at the thing before him. *An omnic*, Jamie’s brain was screaming at him. *Kill it. KILL IT.* It was what he had always been
taught. But Jamie couldn’t move. This omnic was the biggest he’d ever seen. Towering over him, Jamie was suddenly aware that he was unarmed and trapped in close quarters with a killing machine. He took a shaky step backwards. **Where is Roadie when you need him?**

“System analysis complete. Core temperature nominal. Orisa: online,” the omnic said. Its wide yellow eyes dimmed slightly and narrowed in on Efi. “Hello,” the omnic said and flicked its left wrist in a kind of wave at Efi. Jamie noted that the omnic had no right hand, just a stump where the missing right forearm should be connected.

Efi laughed. She was positively vibrating with pleasure at being able to show off her pride and joy to another engineer. She danced over to the omnic’s side, beaming with excitement. “Orisa, this is Jamie,” Efi said.

Orisa turned to Jamie and performed the same flicking motion again with her left hand to mimic a wave. “Hello,” she said again. “It is nice to meet you.”

“Jamie, this is Orisa! I rebuilt her myself from an old OR15 unit but with all the latest upgrades in A.I. technology and a brand-new personality core of my own design! What do you think...?” Efi had barely finished her sentence when she turned to Jamie and found he was not sharing the same enthusiasm.

Jamie was standing slightly crouched with legs apart, as though he was ready to bolt. His focus was trained on Orisa, watching for any sudden movements. “What is that thing?” Jamie growled at Efi.

Efi looked like all the wind had been knocked out of her. Jamie looked fearful, angry even at her most prized creation. This was not the reaction she had been hoping for at all. She had wanted to impress a fellow engineer with her work, not repulse him.

“She won’t hurt you…” Efi started to say, but the look on Jamie’s face made her stop. He wasn’t just angry, he was furious.

“What are you lot playing at?” Jamie asked, his voice low and dangerous.

Efi was too stunned to speak. Orisa was switching her gaze between the two humans, unsure what to say.

Realising he was not going to get an answer, Jamie huffed and turned on his heel. “Just keep it away from me,” Jamie muttered as he marched away.

Efi watched him go without another word.

Orisa broke the silence. “Did I do something wrong, Efi?” she asked. “I apologize. I still have much to learn, and some social protocols still elude me.” When Orisa turned to look at Efi, she found the small girl standing stock still, lower lip trembling. Orisa lowered herself on hydraulic legs, so as better to see Efi’s face. “My sensors have detected that you are in distress. On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your pain?”

Efi looked up and forced a smile. “I’m alright, Orisa,” she replied.

“Do you need a hug?” Orisa asked.

Efi only nodded.
Jamie was halfway back to his room with a dark look on his face when he ran into Hana again in one of the hallways. He almost bumped into her, lurching backwards when he looked into her face and realised who it was.

“Oh, good! You’re here!” Hana grinned up at him and grabbed hold of his wrist so she could tug him along. “I had to run back to my room and grab a new Razer DeathAdder. My last one broke!” She waved the device in question at him.

Jamie said nothing. He was still getting over his shock at what he’d just seen down in the store room. He had almost forgotten that he had promised he would come watch Hana’s stream. He didn’t even protest as Hana dragged him through the door to the Games Room.

Hana’s streaming space was set up ready to go. Studio lights were shining on a gaming chair sat poised waiting for her. There was also a desk with her gaming keyboard and a camera was set up in front of the desk, pointed towards where Hana would be sitting. A large holographic screen was projected in front of all of this with a countdown displayed on the screen.

“Yikes! Only ten seconds left! We just made it!” Hana cried. Hurriedly, she rushed over and plugged her new gaming mouse into the hard drive. “Jamie, sit over there!” she said quickly and pointed to an armchair beyond the camera’s scope where he would be just out of sight of the stream.

Numbly, Jamie walked over and took a seat as instructed. He watched Hana throw herself into her chair and put on her bunny-ear headphones before the countdown reached “0” and the screen flickered over to a live shot of Hana sitting in her gaming chair. “Annyeong! D.Va here! Welcome to my stream!” Hana smiled widely into the camera. She then added a string of words in Korean that Jamie couldn’t understand.

Jamie watched the large holographic screen overhead and tried his best to follow what was happening, but they didn’t have anything like this in Junkertown and he was really confused about what was going on. At the top of the screen the website name, “APMtv.kr”, was written in large letters. To the right of the video stream was a chat window where viewers were typing questions and reactions to what was going on in both Korean and English. The chat was scrolling so fast, he barely had enough time to read much of what was being said. Jamie squinted and could make out at the top of the screen, the words “LIVE: 51,163 watching.” The number was continuing to climb as more people joined the stream.

‘Over fifty thousand people are going to watch Hana play a video game?’ Jamie wondered. He had no idea Hana’s following was that strong.

Hana was busy thanking everyone for tuning in. Occasionally she would answer a question in Korean or thank someone for subscribing to her channel. Finally, the game seemed to start. The video stream switched to a view of the game from Hana’s perspective with a small shot of Hana sitting at her computer superimposed in the corner to capture her reactions.

Hana selected a character and queued up for a game. Suddenly Hana’s avatar was battling a bunch of creatures in some kind of arena. Hana provided commentary throughout. People were posting reaction icons in the chat as colourful characters danced across the screen. After a while, Jamie started to pick up on what was happening. Hana had to work with a team of other online players to defend a point from invading NPCs. He had actually started to get into it, his run-in with Efi down
at the storeroom all but forgotten. He sat quietly and watched the gameplay for some time, lost in the activity on screen and unaware of how much time was passing.

After a while, Hana took a break and stood so she could stretch. The video stream switched off of the gameplay capture and returned to a shot of Hana in front of the camera. “Do it with me now!” she encouraged the stream. “Come on, everyone stand and stretch with me! Feel all that stress draining away!”

Jamie had been sitting for almost an hour and his good leg was feeling stiff, so he actually stood, careful to remain outside the view of the camera, but grateful for the opportunity to stretch as well. Hana smiled at him. “That’s it!” she laughed. “Nerf that sedentary lifestyle!”

Jamie turned back to the chat window to gauge everyone’s reaction.

_CheetoDust58: stretching = poggers_

_NanoMyCola : H ANA YOU’RE SO CUTE_

_XX_NinjaParty_Xx:  wait who’s that? in the background?_

Jamie froze, eyes trained on the chat window.

_Sneaky_Pachimari : There’s someone else in the room..._

_CheetoDust58: who is that?_

_INeedHealing: Where? What?_

_RaidTomber: Does Hana know someone else is there?_

* _D.Va Main*: In the picture frame. There’s a reflection.

Jamie went cold. He turned to look over his shoulder. Behind him was a large picture frame on the wall. It was angled in such a way that Jamie could see the stream reflected back at him in the glass pane. If he could see the stream through the reflection, then surely the stream could also see him. He sat down quickly.

_NanoMyCola : WHO IS THAT? ??_

The chat had picked up speed with interjections in both Korean and English.

_salty:  I got a screenshot. Running scans now._
Hana finally seemed to have taken notice of the chat. “What are you guys talking about?” she asked her viewers.

People started furiously typing responses to her, trying to alert her someone was in the room.

Hana laughed. “You guys. Calm down. He’s my friend. Everything is fine,” she tried to say. “He’s a little camera shy, that’s all.”

Suddenly the chat lit up again:

FilthyCasual: i sn’t that the guy that escaped from prison
CheetoDust58: w ho?
FilthyCasual : I swear I've seen him somewhere...
CheetoDust58: what is going on???????
KawaiiFive-0: well he looks like a criminal anyway......... :|
salty: Ha na wouldn’t be friends with someone like THAT
*D. VaMain *: why does he look like that? weirdo...

Jamie sunk down in his chair, flushed red with embarrassment. Jack had specifically advised him not to be seen. He had barely been working for Overwatch for a week and already he had broken a very important rule. Roadie was going to be so mad! And to top it all off, he had unintentionally ruined Hana’s stream. She probably wouldn’t want to be his friend after this. Roadie was right; why did he always have to screw everything up?

Hana was trying to de-escalate the situation. “Guys, you’re mistaken. This is my friend...” The chat window kept scrolling.

FilthyCasual : Why did she call h im a friend? He looks like a homeless person
GLHF: Ye I know exactly what kind of ‘friend’ she means ( ; ¬__¬)
Lucio#1Fan: h e doesn’t look like someone she should be friends with. ew
NanoMyCola : DVA CALL THE POLICE!

"STOP!”

Jamie looked up when Hana cried out. She was staring at the screen, hands fist at her sides. She looked furious. Her cheeks were practically glowing red. Her voice had rung out so loudly that the
chat window almost ground to a halt.

“You guys are way out of line,” she said, staring at the holographic display. Her voice was low and dangerous. “And it stops now. We’ll end this stream right now if you cannot be respectful to my friend.”

FilthyCasual: she doesn’t get it
ShoeShoe: Is that guy her boyfriend?
salty: I wouldn’t expect D.Va to understand. She’s too young. It just shows she’s too naïve to get mixed up with someone like that
NerfDis: its not her fault. she's being used. she's too dumb to know
NanoMyCola: SORRY MY CAPS ARE STUCK ON

Hana somehow turned even redder. “Oh, I’m ‘dumb?’ Huh?” Hana demanded, staring at the chat window. “Just another airhead, right?”

“Hana...” Jamie began to say. He felt awful for ruining everything. He wanted to apologise but Hana was in a rage now. Before he could say anything, she pressed on.

“Was I too dumb to graduate top of my class at the Academy? Was I too dumb to become the youngest MEKA pilot in history? Was I too dumb to defeat the Gwishin? Hmm?” Hana’s eyes were like flaming coals burning furiously with indignation. The chat window all but ceased scrolling. “Well, you know what? Maybe you shouldn’t judge someone before you get to know them. Maybe you shouldn’t judge someone based on how they look! This is my friend. And he's the only person who has been remotely nice to me in a long time! He's a good person!”

Jamie didn’t know what a Gwishin was, but it sounded impressive.

“You fuckboys, need to pull your heads in,” Hana went on, pointed a finger at the screen for emphasis. “You are all behaving like children, and why? Because there is a guy in the room? You think you're owed something from me because you watch my stream and drink Nano Cola?”

The room had gone eerily quiet. Jamie was stunned into silence. Hana was displaying genuine anger and he felt wholly responsible. “You don’t even know me,” Hana said with a sneer. “If you think you can judge me and my friends, you’re mistaken. Anyone who has a problem with that, you can unsubscribe right now.”

The silence stretched out for some time. Jamie was too afraid to move or speak. Her outburst had been so sudden and so intense, that Jamie got the impression that the pressure of living under constant scrutiny like she did was something he could never properly comprehend. Eventually, Hana seemed to remember where she was. She rubbed furiously at her eyes. “You know what? I think that’s enough for one night,” she said quietly. She reached forward, pressing a few buttons on her keyboard and the holographic display switch off.

Jamie watched Hana for a moment. She was standing perfectly still, looking down at her keyboard with a blank expression. Instinctively, he rose from his seat and crossed the room to stand beside her.
“Sorry, Hana,” he murmured. “I didn’t mean for any of that to happen.”

“No,” she said quickly. “It’s not your fault at all.” She didn’t say anything else, she just turned and buried her head in his chest.

Awkwardly, he put an arm around her shoulders. He’d only known Hana for less than a day, but she had stood up for him and she seemed so vulnerable all of a sudden. The least he could do was comfort her in some small way.

Hana took a deep breath and stood back. Her eyes were shining. Jamie caught sight of the miserable look on her face. “I’m tired,” she announced. “Good night.”

She stepped away from him, walking towards the door and out of the room without another word. Jamie watched her go, his stomach twisted with unease.

--

After a fitful sleep, Jamie resolved within himself to find Hana promptly the next morning so he could check on her. He rose early, but was unclear which of the dorm room’s belonged to Hana so he decided he would ask Brig where to find her and try to catch up with Hana later.

Before heading to the Workshop, he made his way to the Mess Hall to grab a coffee for breakfast and anything bagel-y that he could bring with him. He was going to need a hit of caffeine if he was going to survive another encounter with Satya. He made a mental note to ask Torbjörn how difficult it would be to install a coffee machine in the workshop. Perhaps it would make sitting next to Satya’s workstation more bearable.

He rounded a corner and almost bumped into the very person occupying his thoughts. Satya, who was carrying a paper coffee cup herself, let out a cry of surprise and almost spilled coffee down the front of her dress had Jamie not reached over and steadied her at the last second.

“Oh, Fawkes!” she said. “You surprised me.”

Jamie reached instinctively forward to help her get a better grip on her tablet computer which had almost slipped out of her grasp. “Sorry, Satya, I didn’t see you there,” he replied awkwardly. Their most recent run-in in the Workshop was still fresh in his mind.

He moved to step around her and continue on his way but Satya turned to capture his attention again. “Oh, by the way ,” Satya began and, internally, Jamie cringed. He didn’t really want to be drawn into a conversation with this harpy right now. “I... well... I’m... sorry about yesterday,” Satya said quietly.

Jamie stared at her, dumbfounded. Then he remembered where he was and who he was speaking with, and that she was watching him for some kind of response. “Oh, well I... I’m sorry too,” Jamie said. “About the ‘suit’ comment.”
Satya nodded. “I was hoping that we could start over, so to speak,” she murmured. Jamie nodded as well.

“Sure, sure,” he replied. “I think that would be great.” Satya looked relieved and, perhaps too embarrassed to continue with the line of conversation, moved to carry on her way towards the Workshop. Jamie watched her as she walked away for a moment.

“Oh, Sat’?” he called after her. She paused to look back. “Did you catch Hana’s stream last night by any chance?”

Satya looked even more embarrassed. “Oh, um... Yes, I do tune in from time to time, if I am available.” There wasn’t really anything else to say so she turned and continued on her way.

Jamie was still dumbfounded by the interaction when he finally made his way into the Mess Hall. There was a crowd of people gathered around one of the tables. As he passed by on his way over to the coffee machine, he spied Hana sitting in the midst of all the people. She was smiling widely as she spoke animatedly with those around her. She spotted him and waved enthusiastically, to which Jamie returned the wave in kind. She seemed to be in much better spirits.

On his way back across the Mess Hall with a cup of coffee and a cheese toastie in hand, Jamie paused at the edge of the gathering to watch for a moment. Jamie saw Reinhardt standing off to one side, watching over proceedings. Jamie edged quietly over to him.

“What’s goin’ on?” Jamie asked, taking a sip of coffee.

Reinhardt looked very proud as he watched the gathering. Hana laughed while someone clapped her on the back and another spoke appraisingly about something. Soon, everyone joined in the laughter. “Our little liebling here,” Reinhardt said with a smile. “Everyone is very happy to hear her stand up on behalf of her friends last night.” Jamie’s suspicions were confirmed. Reinhardt went on with a gleam in his eye, “Let it be known the dangers of underestimating others!”

Jamie turned to look at the supporters who had gathered around Hana. He didn’t think so many people from around base would tune into a nineteen-year-old’s stream. It seemed Hana had many secret fans who were now emerging from the woodwork. He watched as some more of the staff gathered around and listened intently to Hana’s retelling of what had happened last night.

“Jamie!” Hana had spotted him halfway through the story and quickly headed over. “Have you heard? We’ve gone viral! Well, I did. You were off screen.” She quickly pulled something up on her phone and showed the screen to him. It was a headline dated from that same day.

Hana “D.Va” Song Stands Up to Cyberbullies, Speaks Out Against Preconceived Stereotypes

“They’re exaggerating a bit,” Hana explained. “But most people got the gist of what I was trying to say.”

Jamie cast his eyes over the news story briefly and sighed with relief. There was barely a mention about him; apparently the screenshots they had tried to take of his face were too blurry and inconclusive to confirm who it was with Hana during the stream. He was referred to only as a ‘unseen friend.’ Feeling like he had dodged a bullet where the commander was concerned, Jamie congratulated her—it seemed appropriate to do so—and promised to meet her for lunch later.
He spent the rest of the morning in the Workshop and this time things went much smoother. Torbjörn and Brigitte were busy working on the large set of armour, so Jamie was mostly left alone with Satya over by the workstations. They sat in amicable silence. This time when Jamie asked for a spanner, she gently reminded him where the hanging tools were and he shared an apologetic smile with her.

He joined Hana for lunch eventually and listened as she spoke excitedly about her plans for the next stream. Her follower count on social media had skyrocketed overnight and she ended up hitting her subscriber goal in less than twenty-four hours since the stream went live. Her next stream was going to be a celebration to welcome the new followers.

It wasn’t until he headed down to the training yard later to meet up with Roadie for their scheduled training, that it finally seemed to sink in how close they’d come to having their cover blown. He found Roadie standing waiting for him in the changing room adjacent to the drill yard. When Jamie walked over to him, he got a good clout on the shoulder.

“Ow!” Jamie whined. “What was that for?”

“For almost blowing everything last night,” Roadie growled at him. “We’ve been here less than a week and you’re already trying to ruin everything.”

“Well, I didn’t, alright?” Jamie said, rubbing at his sore shoulder. He fixed Roadie with an annoyed look.

Together they started to walk out towards the observation deck from which they could look out over the training yard. They were early and they could wait in the comfort of the observation area until they were cleared to commence their session.

“Nice girl, that Hana,” Roadie said absently, pushing open the door and stepping in. Jamie followed him through the doorway and looked around. There were rows of plastic chairs all angled towards the floor-to-ceiling plate glass windows that overlooked the drill yard. On the other side of the room, someone was sitting in one of the chairs with a laptop perched on their knees. It was Efi, to Jamie’s surprise. She seemed not to have noticed them enter. She was watching the activity down in the training yard intently. Far below, Orisa was running drills with some of the training bots.

Jamie’s expression went sour. “Tch! Tin cans, a dime a dozen,” he muttered. “Can you believe they are actually refurbishing and using these things in Overwatch?” Jamie jerking a thumb towards Orisa far below them.

“Who you talking about?” Roadie asked briskly, helping himself to a seat. “Orisa?”

“And that’s another thing!” Jamie added, sitting as well. “It shouldn’t have a name. Makes it too…”

“Human?”

“Yeah!” Jamie griped.

Roadie’s gasmask angled towards Jamie inquisitively. “What did she ever do to you?”

“’She’?” Jamie squinted up at Roadie. “What? You defending ’her’ or something?” He flapped a hand indignant in Orisa’s direction.

“Maybe,” Roadie replied evasively. “Met her the other day down in the training yard when I went
to meet the other tanks. I thought she was nice.”

Jamie looked flabbergasted. “She’s a bot.”

“Maybe you shouldn’t judge someone before you get to know them.”

This struck a chord with Jamie in no small part because it was exactly what Hana had said to her viewers last night on the stream. Jamie went silent, stewing in his anger. He threw himself back in his chair, crossed his arms over his chest and huffed.

While it was true that Roadie was the more worldly and rational one of the pair, it didn’t mean Jamie didn’t tend to get annoyed when Roadie gently tried to set him right. He also didn’t like how Roadie always seemed to be right about most things.

Jamie realised Roadie was looking at him, waiting for him to say something.

“How can you stand to be near one of those things?” Jamie said with a sneer. “You know what they did back home.”

Roadie was pensive for a moment. “Some of them did something wrong... Doesn’t mean all of them are bad. You Junkers have been brainwashed to hate them.”

Jamie hated it when Roadie referred to him as a ‘Junker’ like it was a bad word. They had often been lumped together under the mantel of “Junkers” by news reporters and the like because it was easier, but the reality was that Roadie hadn’t lived in Junkertown, nor had he been a Junker. Roadie had lived a hermit-like existence outside the Junkertown border but had special permission to visit and do business. They had met in at the pub in Junkertown one night before beginning their worldwide crime spree.

Jamie wanted to argue the point further about his compatriot’s stance on omnics, but before he could say anything, Roadie went on, “At any rate, you should probably apologise to Efi.”

“Me? What?” Jamie sputtered.

“I heard something about her being upset yesterday. Orisa mentioned it this morning. Said that it happened when Efi tried to introduce you to her.” He looked back down at the training yard. “Put two and two together. You must have said something to Efi, I reckon.”

Jamie stood suddenly and fixed Roadie with a glare. “I hate how you’re always right,” he muttered and turned to march towards the girl sitting at the other end of the room.

Jamie watched Efi as he walked towards her. There was something about her demeanor that seemed to indicate she was in a less than cheerful mood. Shoulders hunched, staring blankly at her laptop, she seemed utterly dejected. Jamie started to feel awful the more he realised how much he had likely contributed to her current state. She had innocently wanted to show him her proud creation, and he had handed the introduction poorly. Perhaps Roadie was right? Perhaps there was more to Orisa than a first glance offered, and he had barely given her a chance. If Roadie was willing to give Orisa a shot and work with her, maybe Jamie could at least be open to trying the same.

Efi looked up and seemed to finally take notice of him as he approached.

“Oh, Jamie...,” Efi said automatically. “Hi, I didn’t know you would be training today.”

Jamie watched as Orisa continued to return fire at the self-repair training bots. An automatic
projectile cannon had been affixed to her right arm in the same place he noticed the forearm was missing yesterday. From their position in the observation area, they were protected from most of the firing noise from Orisa’s weapon. “I’m booked in to start after your session finishes,” he said quietly.

Efi nodded. “We’re almost done.” She turned back to her laptop and typed a few more notes to herself.

Jamie took a seat in one of the chairs beside her. They sat in stiff silence for some time until finally, Jamie cleared his throat. “What... er... what kind of training are you doing?”

Efi looked surprised by the question. “I’m testing Orisa’s fusion driver for accuracy and efficiency over time. I want to see if there is a way to avoid overheating too soon. Also, her barrier needs to be tested against different kinds of projectiles.”

Jamie nodded. “Have you looked into upgrading the driver’s cooling system?”

Efi seemed pleased by the line of questioning. “I have, but my grant fund ran out. Mr. Lindholm says I have to wait for the next budget review to see if there is enough departmental funds for the upgrade.”

“Why do you need to keep her upgraded like that?” Jamie asked, nodding towards the automaton far below. On some level, he was still concerned that an omnic needed to be built to be so powerful and for what purpose.

Efi smiled. Orisa was her greatest achievement, and Efi was always happy to answer questions about her work. “I rebuilt Orisa with a specific purpose; to stop Doomfist.”

Jamie looked confused. “What’s a doomfist?” he asked.

Efi looked surprised by this question. “You don’t know... who Doomfist is?”

The name rang a bell, but Jamie had been on the run for the last few years so he barely had time to keep up with the news. Even before that, Junkertown had been so insular that it was hard to receive reports on the goings on outside the Outback. Jamie always had difficulty remembering people’s names anyway. He shook his head at Efi.

“He’s a Talon leader,” Efi elaborated. “A very dangerous, very powerful man. He attacked my home.” Efi’s face darkened in a way that no twelve-year-old girl’s face should. “I won’t let him do it again.”

“Oh,” was all Jamie said in reply.

They lapsed into silence again. Orisa destroyed another training bot under their watchful gaze and turned to tackle another.

“Efi,” Jamie began. “I’m sorry about... before.”

“No, no. Don’t apologise,” Efi said quickly. She looked up at him with big brown eyes and Jamie somehow felt even worse for what he’d done. “It was my fault. I should have realised...”

“No, it was my fault,” Jamie insisted. “I’m still getting used to all of this.” He gestured around himself as if to indicate the whole of the Gibraltar base and its operations. “I’m still kind of unlearning a lot of the stuff I was taught as a kid. I need to know when to pick and choose my battles,” he said. “I should have given you both more of a chance. I’m sorry.”
Mixed emotions played across Efi’s face. “There’s no need to apologise, but I will accept your apology if you accept mine,” she said.

“Deal,” he replied with a grin.

Efi smiled back. “I’m sorry for springing such a big surprise on you. I must have given you a shock.”

“Nothing the old ticker can’t handle,” he said with a smug little smile and thumped himself on the chest.

Efi went on, “I would really like you to meet Orisa. I think you two would get along...”

Jamie shifted awkwardly in his seat. He didn’t say anything at first, but Efi was looking at him again with that same pleading look.

“Will... will you try?” she asked.

Jamie remained silent for some time while he thought about this. Orisa completed her drills below them. She looked up at the observation area, waved, and heading out of sight. Her training was complete.

Jamie sighed. “I... will try.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: How did this one get just as long as the last one... -__-
It was a cool spring morning on the Watchpoint: Gibraltar base and Satya had just finished working on repairs to a small box-shaped device sitting on her workstation. She had gotten to the Workshop early, hoping for a couple of hours of blissful peace before the other engineers arrived to start the work day.

She set down her tools and fixed the metal casing back in place of over the central processing unit on the machine she had been working on. She connected the newly repaired device to a power source and waited for it to power up. Extending one immaculately painted fingernail, Satya tapped experimentally on the outer casing.

“Hello? Can you hear me?” she asked. Satya could hear the machine was whirring as it started up which was a good sign. “Oh, no. Of course, you can’t hear me. I haven’t engaged your verbal systems...”

Satya turned to her laptop which was still connected to the device’s motherboard and quickly typed in a few instructions. She looked up at the sound of the Workshop door sliding open. Jamie came walking into the room, limping as usual on his peg leg and looking dishevelled as ever.

“Morning,” he muttered. He looked tired. A cup of coffee was clutched in one hand.

“Good morning,” Satya said politely. She typed a few more instructions into her laptop.

“What are you doing?” Jamie asked as he took a seat at his workstation, eyeing Satya’s work.

“Oh, I’ve repaired the toaster from the staff kitchen,” she told him. “Well, nearly. I just need to...”

Jamie’s eyes widened all of a sudden as he stared at the device sitting on Satya’s workstation. “Wait a minute. I’ve seen that thing somewhere before...” Jamie’s face actually transformed into a look of horror. “Oh, no! Dismantle it! DISMANTLE IT!”

Jamie scrambled around for a moment, almost knocking his coffee over, until he spotted a discarded hammer nearby and snatched it up. He lunged towards Satya’s workstation, hammer raised ready to bring it down on top of the toaster.

Satya leapt up to intercept him. “Fawkes! What are you doing!?"

“You don't know what he's like! That thing will drive anyone around the bend!!”

“Oh, please,” Satya said, prying the hammer from his grip. She pushed him away and forced him to take a seat again. “I've read the user manual. He's simply a talking toaster, designed to provide light conversation with breakfast. That is all!”

Jamie actually slumped his face into his hands. “Not this one. This one's mental!”

“What are you talking about?” Satya asked in a flat tone. She was in no mood for Jamie’s silliness today.

“He’s defective! He wants everyone to eat toast all the time. He's obsessed! If you don't want four-
hundred pieces of toast every hour, he throws a wobbler!” Jamie said, trying to reach around her again for the toaster. “That's what caused the accident,” he added, a dark expression on his face.

Satya paused in her attempts to bat Jamie’s hands away from the toaster. “What accident?”

“The accident involving me, the toaster, the waste disposal system and a six-kilogram lump hammer,” Jamie told her.

Realisation dawned on Satya’s face. “Ah, so that's why he was in the garbage hold in so many pieces…”

“And another thing!” Jamie went on. “He always says ‘howdy-doodly-do!’ in this weird little high-pitched American accent. Drives you mad! What the bloody hell does 'howdy-doodly-do' mean?”

Satya rolled her eyes at him. “You are being ridiculous,” she told him. She reached over and switched on the toaster in question so she could test and ensure it was fully functional.

The toaster hummed to life, lights illuminating its digital display. After a moment, it spoke. "'Howdy-doodly-do! How's it going? I'm Talkie! Talkie Toaster, your chirpy breakfast companion! Talkie's the name, toasting's the game! Anyone like any toast?"

Jamie had turned red. “No,” he said firmly, staring at the toaster. “I don't want any toast. She doesn't want any toast.” He motioned to Satya as he said this. “No one around here wants any toast. Not now, not ever. No toast.” Jamie turned to organise his workstation, pointedly ignoring Talkie.

“How about a muffin?” Talkie asked enthusiastically.

Jamie whirled around. “Or muffins!” he added, voice rising in volume. Satya actually took a step back from him. “We don't like muffins here! We want no muffins, no toast, no teacakes, no buns, no baps, baguettes or bagels, no croissants, no crumpets, no pancakes or pikelets, no potato cakes, no hash browns, no hot-cross buns no poptarts, and definitely no bloody flapjacks!”

Jamie went back to what he was doing, positively fuming. Satya watched him, concerned. All was silent for a moment.

“Ah, so you're a waffle man!” Talkie chirped.

“See?” Jamie said, looking at Satya and gesturing towards the toaster in an exasperated way. “You see what you've done? Why’d you have to go and fix him?”

Satya huffed in annoyance. “Let me try and reason with him,” she said and took a seat at her workstation again. She leaned in close to Talkie, tapping again on his outer casing to ensure he was listening. "Now, listen here, Talkie,” she began. “You will not excessively offer any grilled bread products to any member of the crew, or overly annoy anyone. If you do, you will once again find yourself on the receiving end of a very large mallet.”

Jamie watched all of this and sighed with relief. “Thanks, Sat’,” he said.

Talkie was quiet for a moment. “Can I ask just one question?”

“Of course,” Satya replied, putting her tools away.

“Would anyone like any toast?” Talkie asked.
Jamie threw up his hands in the air in defeat.

Satya looked indignant. “Didn't you hear what I just said?” she asked Talkie.

“Well, yes,” Talkie replied. “But I thought you might have changed your minds...”

Satya drummed her fingers against her workstation in annoyance. “We haven't changed our minds,” she told him firmly.

“What? No toast?” Talkie’s voice was distinctly small and sad. “But I'm a toaster! It is my raison d'être! I toast, therefore I am!” Talkie made a sound that sounded like a sniffle. “If you don't want toast, why repair me?”

“Yeah, that’s a good question,” Jamie piped up. “Why did you repair him?”

“The commander told me to,” Satya replied evenly. “Our little friend here is a guinea pig for a new technology called ‘intelligence compression.’ His A.I. chips were badly damaged in the accident.” She said this last part while frowning at Jamie disapprovingly.

“That was no accident!” Talkie cried out. “That was first-degree toaster-cide!”

“Oh, shut your grill!” Jamie growled at him.

Satya went on, “By re-routing his circuitry and channelling all his run-time through a single C.P.U., I’ve enhanced his intelligence, at the cost of reducing his operational lifespan.”

This piqued Jamie’s interest. “Why?” he asked.

Satya shrugged. “The commander thinks it could work with other A.I. systems on base. At this stage, we need to run more tests before we can be sure.” Satya disconnected her laptop from the toaster and put the rest of her equipment away. “That means you are not allowed to destroy any more talking toasters,” she said pointedly at Jamie.

Jamie looked perturbed. “I dunno, Sat’. Just because you can brainwash your robot friends doesn’t mean you should. This is exactly how the Omnic Crisis started, because prescriptive fools decided to play God with silicon sentience.”

“Ah, yes, I see it now,” Satya said sarcastically. “The toasters will rise up and overthrow the human race! What ever will we do?” Jamie didn’t look impressed by her statement.

“You won’t be laughing when your cause of death is listed as ‘death by waffles.’”

Satya sighed. “Just don’t break any more toasters, please?” she said.

“I promise nothing,” Jamie replied in a flat tone.

Just then, Brigitte entered the room and strode over to her workstation. “Morning, you two!” she said in a sing-song voice.

“Morning,” Jamie groaned.

“Oh! Brigitte! Would you like some--?” Talkie began.

“No,” Brigitte said firmly before he could even finish. She threw her carry bag down on her workbench and went to retrieve a welder from the storeroom. When she returned, she looked over at Jamie and said, “Oh, by the way, I’ve got some good news about the rubber tires you were
looking for.”

“Oh?” Jamie looked up from his work.

Brigitte nodded. “Found a scrap yard on the other side of Westside. They have a decent supply. The owner said he’d be happy for us to purchase some from him.”

“Thanks, Brig!” Jamie said with a smile. “I owe you one.” The motor and explosives for the RIP Tire were almost done. The final step would be to install them inside the rubber tire and line it with spikes.

“We can go and pick up the first load tomorrow if you like,” Brigitte added.

“Good morning Watchpoint,” a voice sounded over the P.A. system. “It’s Monday, March the Seventh. Today will be sunny, and maximum fifteen degrees Celsius, fifty-nine Fahrenheit. All staff are reminded that requests to report to the meeting hall must be met with prompt and immediate compliance...”

Jamie was resting one cheek drearily upon his palm, elbows propped on his workbench. “Is there a way to opt out of these announcements?”

“‘Opt out’?” Brigitte repeated, looking up from her work. “Of Athena’s announcements?”

“Yeah,” Jamie replied. “Or can we switch them off?”

The P.A. system went on regardless, “Tonight’s film screening is a remake of a beloved classic; ‘Harry Botter and the Chamber of Circuits.’ Commencing at eight P.M. in Cinema Two.”

Brigitte shook her head at Jamie. “I don’t think you can just switch her off.”

Jamie looked confused. “What do you mean ‘her’?” he asked. “I just want to switch off the announcements in here. I’ve got a headache.”

“Athena is an A.I. team member, Jamie,” Satya explained. “She can’t be turned off.”

Jamie whipped his head around to look at Satya, bewildered. “What? I thought that voice was just someone sitting in booth somewhere reading out the morning news into a mic...”

Brigitte and Satya exchanged a look of confusion. “You mean you’ve been here for two weeks and you never noticed Athena was our artificial intelligence system?” Brigitte asked.

“You guys are having me on, right?” Jamie asked, mouth agape. “Athena is... a computer?”

“You know I can hear you, right?” Athena said over the P.A. system. The morning announcements continued at a lower volume in the background while Athena spoke.

Jamie almost leapt out of his seat. “Wha... what?” he stammered.

“You appear to be suffering from some kind of ailment, Agent Fawkes,” Athena went on. “Would you like me to summon a medic?”

“There is no need to monitor our health, Athena,” Satya chimed in. “It's just a headache. Fawkes is fine.” She turned back to her workstation to carry on with another project.

“So I should stop watching him while he sleeps?” Athena asked.
Jamie almost fell out of his chair from shock. “Why does everything around here have to talk?” he groaned.

“Anyone for toast?” Talkie asked. Jamie lunged at him but Satya pulled Talkie out of Jamie’s reach just in time.

There was a knock at the door, which promptly slid open to reveal an omnic standing on the other side.

“Hello, engineers,” the omnic said. Jamie watched the newcomer literally float across the room towards Brigitte’s workbench. Toaster forgotten, Jamie sat back down again.

“Morning, Zen,” Brigitte said cheerfully. “How can we help today?”

The omnic lifted one hand and presented something to Brigitte. Jamie realised with a start that the omnic was offering his own severed mechanical right arm to her. He carefully placed it down on Brigitte’s workbench. It was a macabre sight, but the omnic appeared to be in no pain.

“Genji got a little carried away during our training session this morning,” the omnic explained, his voice sounding tinny and synthetic in a way that only an omnic could. “Would you mind?”

Brigitte laughed at the sight. “I bet he was beside himself when he realised!”

The omnic nodded. “He was very apologetic. I told him I would seek immediate repairs and not to worry,” he said serenely.

“Your arm fell off?” Jamie interjected.

Both Brigitte and the omnic turned to look at Jamie. “Oh, right,” Brigitte began. “Jamie, this is Tekhartha Zenyatta. Zen, this is Jamie. He’s new.”

Zenyatta turned to look at Jamie. “Peace be upon you,” he said, raising his left arm and performing a small circular motion with his hand like a wave.

Jamie did not reply. He looked at the detached arm Zenyatta had placed on the table. “Should we… er… call a medic?” Jamie asked.

“Actually, Zen has come to the right place,” Brigitte began. She motioned to the metal arm on the table. “This is a job for an engineer.” She got up and crossed the room to grab a toolkit.

Jamie frowned. “We have to work on omnics too?”

“Jamie,” Brigitte said in an exasperated voice, sensing Jamie was about to launch into one of his anti-omnic rants. “You're an engineer! You’re working on the builder’s team! It’s literally your job to help build and maintain the machines around base, including our friends like Zen.”

“Yes, and not destroy them,” Satya chimed in. She said this while giving Jamie a stern look.

“Well, maybe I don’t want to,” Jamie said petulantly and turned away with a pout. “Talking toasters? Computers that watch you while you sleep? A line has got to be drawn somewhere.”

Brigitte rolled her eyes. “Fine. Then go back to prison.”

This struck Jamie as not being a preferable option. “I don’t really want that either…”

“Then make up your mind!” Brigitte told him as she returned to her seat and opened the box of
tools. “If you’re not going to do your job, you’ll get sent back where you came from.” Her tone indicated she didn’t want to discuss it further. She got to work on the shoulder joint of the arm, replacing bolts here and there while Zenyatta waited patiently.

Jamie was brooding. He glared at Zenyatta. “Omnics working for Overwatch, huh?” he said. “What’s next? Are the kitchen appliances going to ask for a pay rise?”

“Oh, that reminds me. I need to speak with my union member,” Talkie remarked quietly.

Zenyatta turned to look at Jamie who was glowering at him. “I sense anger within you,” the omnic said.

“Leave it, Zen,” Brigitte told him. She finished working on the shoulder joint and motioned for Zenyatta to scoot closer so she could reattach it. “Alright. Over here.”

“Yes, yes. I know. Basic procedure,” Zenyatta replied. “Turn my head and cough. I know the drill. I know all of the drills intimately; they’re all hanging up there on the wall.” He gestured to the hanging tools for emphasis.

Brigitte giggled.

At that moment, the door to the Workshop opened again and Torbjörn marched into the room with Lena trailing behind him.

“Listen up,” Torbjörn said gruffly without bothering to greet anyone. “Got an assignment for you all.” Everyone stopped what they were doing to look at the two new arrivals.

Lena smiled broadly at the room’s occupants. “We need to send a few technicians to Jordan to check on an archaeological expedition from Oasis University. Their comms have gone down and we’ve lost touch with the team. We suspect that repairs to the comms system are in order.”

Satya looked confused. “Why doesn’t Oasis University look after repairs to their own systems?”

“Unfortunately, Jordan is in a state of civil unrest at the moment, and it’s not safe to send their own technicians,” Lena explained. “As we have a reciprocal agreement with the University’s archaeological department regarding their studies in the area, they have called on Overwatch for assistance to check on their team.”

“Typical,” Torbjörn growled. “Get someone else to do the dirty work, eh?”

“Oh, don’t be sour, Torbjörn!” Lena chided him. “We think a security escort would be a good idea given the circumstances and the University lacks the fire power in that regard. Besides, this is an excellent opportunity to test out our new recruits!” She said this last part happily while looking at Jamie.

“Wait, really? You’re sending me on a mission?” Jamie asked. He clasped his hands together hopefully.

Lena nodded and Jamie punched the air with one fist out of pure happiness. “And Roadie too! Now, don’t worry about a thing!” Lena said cheerfully. “I’ll be coming too to look out for you to make sure everything goes smoothly.”

Torbjörn turned his gaze on Satya and Jamie. “You two will come with me to Petra to repair the comms. It’s time to test your mettle, Skinny.” He said this while looking Jamie up and down. Torbjörn then turned to Brigitte. “Brig, you’ll hold down the fort here,” he told her. Brigitte
nodded in reply.

“Petra?” Satya said. “We’re going to Petra?”

“What’s that?” Jamie asked.

Satya seemed to be reeling from the news. “It is a place of historical importance. It has existed for thousands of years. An ancient city of temples and tombs carved into sandstone mountains, and I’ve heard there is a necropolis hidden in the caves below.”

“Sweet,” Jamie replied. He turned his attention back to Lena. “Do I get to blow any of it up?”

“We’ll see,” Lena replied.

“We’ll need a healer,” Satya pointed out. “It would be unwise to head into a war zone without one.”

Torbjörn looked as though he hadn’t considered this. “I guess that’s true,” he remarked, stroking his beard thoughtfully. He looked over at Zenyatta who was waiting for his arm to finish being reattached. “Zen, I don’t suppose you are free to join us for a mission?”

Jamie looked alarmed. “What? Him?”

“Of course,” Zenyatta said to Torbjörn. “I’m always happy to lend my support wherever it is needed.”

“Brilliant!” Lena chirped. “I’ll let Torbjörn fill you in on the details. I’ll also prepare a mission briefing and send it round to everyone,” Lena added. “If anyone has any questions, you know where to find me. ETD is in forty-eight hours!” With that, she skipped away and disappeared out of the door.

Brigitte had finished reattaching Zenyatta’s arm while they had all been talking. He tested the joints and, seeming satisfied, thanked her and headed for the door. It seemed he never walked, just hovered above the ground everywhere he went. “I will begin my preparations for the mission,” he said as he floated away. Jamie looked annoyed at this.

“Wait! Wait! Before you go! I have a question! It’s imperative! I must know!” came a small voice.

“What? What!?” Zenyatta asked urgently, spinning to look for the source of the voice.

“Would anyone like any toast?” Talkie asked.

--

“Really?” Satya asked. “That’s the callsign you want to stick with?"

“Yeah,” Jamie replied thoughtfully. “I think it’s funny.” Jamie had run a few ideas for mission callsigns by Hana at the last Games Night and she thought this one was the most interesting.

“‘Vegemite Warrior’?” Satya asked incredulously.

They were walking through the Al Siq gorge on approach to Petra, having left the dropship behind
at a safe distance. They were following a narrow path, barely wide enough to accommodate three people walking across, carved between towering rose-coloured sandstone. Jamie had been advised to dress lightly as it was going to be a warm day, so he had chosen a t-shirt and cargo pants.

“Callsigns should ideally be two syllables for ease of use,” Lena interjected. She was walking a few steps ahead of them but had been listening to their conversation. “Definitely, no more than three if it can be avoided.”

“Oh,” Jamie replied. ‘Vegemite Warrior’ was out of the question then. “I can’t really think of anything else… Are you sure it’s necessary?”

Lena nodded. “It’s usually optional, but given that we are trying to keep your involvement with Overwatch quiet for now, it would be a good idea to have one. Sometimes it’s best to avoid using real names on missions for our own protection. There have been times where our comms were compromised. You never know who might be listening.” She paused to wipe the sweat from her brow. “When the mission commences, we’ll exclusively use your callsign to refer to you.”

“You’ve left it very late,” Satya told Jamie. “I saw in the mission briefing that your callsign was ‘to be advised,’ but I assumed you would have chosen something by now. The mission is about to start so you’d better hurry up.” She tossed her long dark hair over one shoulder as she said this. She was wearing a blue dress with slits that came up to her thighs for reasons Jamie wasn’t quite sure of but he was having a difficult time trying to keep his eyes to himself as a result. It was a warm enough day he supposed. He’d never seen her wear this kind of clothing before, but he wasn’t complaining.

Jamie cleared his throat and looked away. “What is your callsign, Sat’?” he asked, eyes skyward.

“Symmetra,” she replied coolly. “If you had read your mission briefing a bit more closely, you might remember that.”

“Yeah, yeah,” he said, waving her comment off. He had to admit ‘Symmetra’ was a pretty cool sounding callsign. But it was three syllables. Maybe he could call her ‘Symmie’ for short?

“What did you pick, Hog?” Jamie asked, raising his voice so Roadie—who was walking a little further ahead—could hear him.

Roadie turned to look over his shoulder at the stragglers. “My nickname,” he muttered in reply.

Lena nodded approvingly. “‘Roadhog’ is a perfect callsign. Two syllables. Easy to remember.”

Jamie frowned. He had never been given a nickname besides ‘Jamie’ before. Roadie had earned his nickname a long time ago, even before the Crisis, from Outback locals for his conspicuous use of a Harley Davidson motorbike around town. Most Harley riders were known as “Hogs” for being part of the Harley Owners Group. Roadie’s precious Harley even ended up forming the base for their ‘Mayhem Mobile,’ a bastardised Harley that they took with them on their adventures around the world. It was sadly long lost now, probably in police evidence storage somewhere.

Jamie threw his mind back to his Junkertown days, trying to remember if anyone had ever given him any kind of nickname before. He had been called plenty of names before, not nicknames though. ‘Idiot’, ‘drongo’, ‘flaming galah’ were among the most prominent in his mind. Including ‘scrap-mongrel’, ‘junkrat’, ‘trashboy’…

“Hang on a tic,” Jamie began. “What about ‘Junkrat’?”

Roadie made a sound of distaste somewhere ahead of the group.
Lena pulled a face. “What’s a junkrat?” she asked.

Jamie grinned with pride. “Something me and the other kids used to call each other back home,” he explained. “Will it do?”

“Well, yes. But…” Lena began.

“Great!” Jamie exclaimed, clapping his hands together as though to seal the deal. “Junkrat it is!”

Satya frowned disapprovingly. “Of all the things to call oneself…” she muttered.

Lena shrugged. She turned to signal to Torbjörn and Zenyatta who were falling a little too far behind. “Come on, you two!” she called out, her voice reverberating around the tall rocks that surrounded them. “We’re almost there.”

Everyone paused to wait for them to catch up. “How are the knees holding up, Torb?” Jamie asked with a smirk when they finally did.

“Mind yer business, Skinny!” he barked back. He seemed to be suffering from aches and pains in his lower extremities. He bent to rub at his knee joints, groaning as he did so.

Zenyatta nodded sagely from his position floating beside Torbjörn. “I have loaned Mr. Lindholm one of my orbs to help ease his pain.”

For the first time, Jamie noticed that a ring of eight floating “orbs” were floating around Zenyatta’s neck. They hadn’t been there before when Jamie had met the omnic in the Workshop, nor had he seen them on the dropship on the way here. Interesting patterns had been carved on the surface of each orb. A ninth orb as floating over Torbjörn’s shoulder, glowing faintly and seeming to feed some kind of energy into the older engineer. Jamie had never seen technology like this, for it must be some kind of tech surely? Zenyatta was an omnic after all.

Lena interrupted his thoughts. “Spit spot, everyone,” she said brightly. “The Treasury is just ahead.”

As she said this, they rounded a corner and the gorge opened up to a wider space. Across from the mouth of the gorge was a large structure, several stories high, of Greek plinths and columns carved straight out of the sandstone rock. The structure framed a large doorway which would lead them into the ancient city. Jamie had to admit, it was breathtaking.

“It’s very quiet here,” Satya remarked.

“Tourism to the site has been banned for some thirty years since the war started,” Lena explained.

“Wait,” Jamie interjected. “You said it was called ‘The Treasury?’” He motioned to the tall columns before them. “Does that mean there’s… treasure inside?” He watched Lena hopefully for her answer.

Lena laughed. “Who knows! They say treasure was once stored in the city, but a lot of it has been carried off by tomb raiders over the years.” Jamie looked disappointed at this.

“Come on. Let’s get this over with,” Torbjörn urged them.

They passed through The Treasury and ascended a few steps into the room beyond. They found themselves in a kind of vestibule, dark and the corners full of sand. The wall opposite the entrance displayed a large carving of a lion. There were storage crates and signs of modern archaeological
activity nearby, but there were no signs of the archaeologists. It was eerily quiet.

“Alright,” Lena began. “Let’s split up and try to locate the expedition crew and their comms system.”

Torbjörn nodded. “Tracer with me. Symmetra and Zen, go that way.” He pointed to a corridor that lead off to the left. “And you two, look over there,” he added, looking at Jamie and Roadie while pointing in the other direction.

“Athena, can you still hear us?” Lena spoke into her earpiece.

“Yes, I’m still here,” she replied. Jamie heard Athena’s answer come through his own earpiece.

Lena nodded. “Let's go.”

Jamie and Roadie didn’t even make it more than a few steps down a darkened corridor before they noticed static coming through their earpieces.

“Athena?” Jamie asked. “You there?”

There was no reply, only static.

Jamie and Roadie shared a look of concern and turned to hurry back to the vestibule. Everyone else was waiting for them when they returned. It seemed everyone was having the same problem with their earpieces.

“What’s goin’ on?” Jamie asked.

“Something must be jamming our signals,” Athena told them once she had re-established contact. “Perhaps this is why the archaeologists were unable to reach us?”

Lena looked nervous all of a sudden. “This isn’t good,” she said. She retrieved two pistols from her backpack, holding one in each hand ready. “Something funny is going on. Just to be safe, everyone should prepare for hostile engagement.”

At this, everyone hurried to retrieve their own weapons from among their equipment. Jamie was a little nervous as he hadn’t had enough time to finish his RIP Tire in time for this mission. He would have to rely on the rest of his kit to get through this.

Jamie tugged his frag launcher free of his bag of tools he’d brought to complete repairs with. He also retrieved and handed Roadie his scrap gun. Roadie checked his chain hook was still secured at his side and made sure it was ready to go should he need it.

Zenyatta watched all of this serenely, hands clasped in front of his chest. “I sense a strange energy,” he remarked.

“What are you? Some kind of empath?” Jamie asked with a sour look.

“Kind of,” Zenyatta replied cheerfully. “I studied at the Shambali monastery. My orbs serve as a means to channel unseen energy. It makes me sensitive to shifts in electromagnetic fields.”

“Let’s try again,” Lena suggested. “We’ll split into two groups this time. Team Alpha will find and disrupt whatever is jamming the comms.”

Torbjörn looked annoyed. “We’ll need to find the radio tower, then we can undo whatever is blocking the signal. It will be up high somewhere.”
Lena nodded. “Team Beta will try to locate the archaeologists' base of operations and perform any repairs needed there,” she added. “We'll reconvene when the comms have been fixed. This will be tricky as we won't be able to maintain radio contact with each other until the jam is removed. Athena, if we don't check in with you in at least two hours, send for help.”

“Understood,” Athena replied.

“Symmetra, Roadhog, you're with me,” Torbjörn growled. “Symmetra and I will attempt to repair the radio tower. Roadhog will provide security.”

Lena nodded. “The rest of us will try to locate the archaeologists. Confirming their safety is of the upmost importance.” She cracked a ChemLight open and attached it to her belt to light the way better. She then turned to look at Jamie. “Okay, Junkrat. I know this is your first mission, so we are going to stick together, take this nice and slow, and...”

Jamie was grinning at her. His next words were all run-together in his excitement. “My first mission! I'm so excited! Everyone ready? Three, two, one, GO!” Jamie immediately bolted for one of the darkened corridors, and, cackling, hobbled out of sight.

Lena looked alarmed. “No! Junkrat! Come back!” she cried, but Jamie was long gone. She stomped her foot in annoyance. “Ugh! Roadhog, make him get back here!” she added, fixing Roadie with a look of annoyance and pointing in the direction Jamie had disappeared in.

Roadie shifted slightly to angle his gasmask towards the much smaller woman. “You do realise I have little to no control over that man?” His gravelly voice rose from beneath the mask like a warning.

Lena huffed. “Come on, Zen,” Lena said and jogged away. Zenyatta floated along behind her without a word.

They caught up with Jamie in a chamber not too far away. To Lena’s relief, the archaeologists had rigged the room with florescent lights, so it was easy enough to find him. He was admiring a very faded and damaged Greek mural of a water scene painted on a crumbling wall. He turned to them as they arrived.

“What is this place?” Jamie asked, looking back at the mural.

“What do you think?” Lena asked sarcastically, still annoyed that he had run off. “It's an ancient city. The original inhabitants controlled the local trade routes. There was some Greek influence eventually.”

Jamie looked up and took in the ornately carved recessed ceilings, painted intricately with patterns and lines. “Yeah, yeah,” Jamie replied, uninterested in the history of the place. “What about treasure? Do you think we'll find any?”

“Will you stop going on about that?” Lena chided him. “There is hardly likely to be any treasure around here.”

“These markings are interesting.”

Lena and Jamie turned to see Zenyatta was examining something on a nearby wall. “My ancient Greek is a little rusty,” he explained, and seemed to chuckle at a private joke. “But there is mention of treasure here.”

“What? Really?” Jamie asked. He hurried over to look for himself, but couldn't make head nor tail
of the markings.

Zenyatta nodded. “I could try to download a new language pack to help translate, but I suspect the communications jam will prevent that. I will try my best,” he said and turned to the markings on the wall again. He recited the writing for them:

“O! He who defeats the enemies of the City of Roses,
His wealth springs eternal and plentiful like grapes on the vine.
O! The beloved King! His domain reigns over the gods and goddesses,
No treasure is greater than his gift, no tomb can be gilded greater than his,
Cursed be any who dare blaspheme him.”

‘City of Roses...’ Jamie pondered this quietly. He had read something about Petra being known as a ‘Rose City’ when he skimmed his mission briefing. It had been named as much for the colour of the stone out of which it was carved.

Lena rolled her eyes. “Sounds like poppycock. Can we focus on the mission, please? While you two are here reading fairy tales, there are four very frightened archaeologists somewhere waiting for us to rescue them.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Jamie grizzled, but his eyes lingered over the writing a little longer, hoping for a hint as to the location of this ‘gilded tomb.’

“Remember, callsigns only from here on, Junkrat,” Lena told him as she led them away. “You’ll need to call me Tracer.”

“I didn’t forget,” Jamie muttered.

“And you may call me ‘Zenyatta’,,” the omnic added. “I have no need for callsigns. I have nothing to hide.”

They passed through more chambers as they made their way deeper into the city. Some rooms had collapsed ceilings where light could pass through, most did not, so the archaeologists had left free-standing lamps or ChemLights in the corners to illuminate the way. Lena brought up a map of Petra on her tablet computer so she could navigate.

“There’s a large chamber up ahead,” Lena said and pointed for emphasis. “It’s the most likely place for the expedition to set up their base. We should check it out.”

“We should stay alert for suspicious activity,” Zenyatta added. He extended one hand to Jamie and offered him something. Jamie realised with a start of alarm that it was one of his orbs, glowing dimly in the darkened room. “Here. Take this, and walk the path to enlightenment.”

Jamie eyed the orb with suspicion. “Uh... no thanks,” he replied. He was beginning realise with every passing minute spent in Zenyatta’s company that he really was unlike any other omnic Jamie had ever encountered.

Zenyatta was unfazed by Jamie’s refusal of the orb. He kept his arm extended, orb proffered to Jamie. “It will heal you. You may require its energy if you find yourself in danger.”

“What? The magic floaty orb is going to heal me?” Jamie asked disbelievingly. “Yeah, right.” They continued on their way through the chambers. They passed by a couple of clay urns half-buried in sand but they hardly looked valuable enough to be treasure to Jamie.

“It’s true. My search for spiritual enlightenment has taught me to harness and channel energy
through these orbs,” Zenyatta said, floating beside him. He gave up on trying to offer the orb to Jamie, and the orb in question returned to its position floating among the others around his neck. “I sense discord within you, Mr. Junkrat.”

“Can you stop saying that you sense stuff?” Jamie growled at him. “It’s creepy. Robots can’t sense anything. They don’t have feelings.”

Lena sighed and decided to leave them to their argument. She stepped ahead of them, studying the map of Petra displayed on her tablet. They trailed behind her.

“What makes you think this, my friend?” Zenyatta asked pleasantly.

Jamie listed his grievances by counting them out on his fingers. “You’re a robot. You’re not really a living person. You’re just electrical signals and processors that make you move and talk. You can’t really think,” he said. “And I’m not your friend.”

“You’re not really a living person. You’re just electrical signals and neurotransmission chemicals that make you move a talk. You can’t really think,” Zenyatta replied calmly.

Jamie actually stopped in his tracks and started at Zenyatta incredulously.

Zenyatta also paused and turned to look back at him. “How does it feel, Mr. Junkrat?”

“Would you two stop it?” Lena said. She had stopped and turned to stare at them with an annoyed look on her face. Her hands were planted firmly on her on hips while she waited for them to catch up. “You’re being silly.”

“There is a universal truth that I think Mr. Junkrat should make peace with,” Zenyatta replied innocently. “True self is without form.”

Jamie looked angry. “Bots are only good for scrapping. Bots can be programmed to imitate humans but it doesn’t make you real or alive,” he said. His voice sounded borderline angry. “You may be able to mimic human vocals and you may even seem really sentient sometimes, but in the end, you could turn an omnic on and off, perform a factory reset, add or delete data, et cetera.” He looked Zenyatta in the face and said in a deadly calm voice, “That is what makes you non-human.”

Zenyatta seemed to ponder this for some time. Finally, he said brightly, “If you hit a human on the head hard enough, you can do all of those things too.”

Jamie threw down his bag of tools and squared up with Zenyatta. “Are you fucking threatening me?”


Jamie looked conflicted. “He started it!” he said petulantly.

“No,” Lena said firmly. “You started it! And I’m ending it!”

Jamie huffed and bent to retrieve his bag, all while Lena watched him like a disapproving mother hen. “All I was trying to say,” Jamie began. “was that when you mill a robot down to its finest parts, it’s just dust.”

“This is true,” Zenyatta said. There was humour in his voice. “The same can also be said of humans.”
Jamie looked like he wanted to throttle Zenyatta.

“I said, that’s enough,” Lena told them again. “We’re almost there. Let’s just try to focus on the mission. I don’t really feel like babysitting you two today.” Jamie responded to this with a look of indignation, but said nothing.

They followed Lena down a few twisting corridors. Suddenly, they found themselves standing in a large room, light pouring in through a collapsed ceiling. On the right, an open doorway lead down a few short steps to an open-air courtyard outside the room, surrounded on all sides by man-made structures and painted with more murals. The floor of the courtyard was lined with mosaic tiles and high above, a dilapidated air bridge crossed the gap between buildings. Jamie heard an eagle cry somewhere in the distance.

Jamie stared around the room Lena had led them to. There was a computer terminal set up in the centre of the space. Whoever had been here before had made use of the collapsed ceiling by setting up solar panels in the sunlight to power the workstation. Bags and crates of equipment were stacked in a corner. More crates and batteries were stored on a shelving unit nearby. There was no sign of the archaeologists.

“Let’s look for clues,” Lena told them. “Maybe there’s something around here that will tell us what happened to the expedition?”

Jamie stepped over to the computer terminal. It was still logged in under a username ‘Dr. Faisal.’ Open on the screen was an outbox folder with a list of emails. and next to each outbox message was a little red exclamation point icon and the message: “Unable to send. Server connection failed.” Jamie clicked on one of the most recent unsent emails. It read:

From: Dr. Hamid Faisal <hamid.faisal@oasis.edu.iq>
Sent: Saturday, 5 March 2078 11:18 AM
To: Dr. Zainab Al-Hassan <zainab.alhassan@oasis.edu.iq>
Subject: Petra Expedition (Project Code: OU.001735)
Importance: High

Professor Al-Hassan,

Your instincts were correct. We have discovered a passage that we believe will lead us to the necropolis in the location you suggested. Preliminary scans indicate large chasms below the city. We managed to break through to one of these chasms last night, although we did not remain there long. Professor Idannidis complained of hearing voices in the tunnels and insisted we return to base. Perhaps if we try again at a more reasonable hour, it will help ease his nerves?

More news to follow.

-Hamid.

Nothing seemed out of the ordinary. So Jamie moved on to the next email.

From: Dr. Hamid Faisal <hamid.faisal@oasis.edu.iq>
Professor Al-Hassan,

I’ve just noticed my last email did not go through. I think there is a problem with the communications system. It may have something to do with the civil war nearby. I’m hoping the issue will be resolved and you will receive these messages soon at any rate.

Exploration of the chasm below the city progresses well. We believe we may soon find the tomb of the 'Great King' and the artefact we seek will be there. Professor Idannidis still complains of voices in the dark. I will keep you posted on our progress.

-Hamid.

The next email in the list was written much more hastily.

From: Dr. Hamid Faisal <hamid.faisal@oasis.edu.iq>
Sent: Monday, 7 March 2078 01:59 PM
To: Dr. Zainab Al-Hassan <zainab.alhassan@oasis.edu.iq>
Subject: RE: RE: Petra Expedition (Project Code: OU.001735)
Importance: Extremely High

Our systems are compromised. We are unable to contact local authorities for help. Something has blocked our communications. I am hopeful these messages may yet go through. Assaultants have entered the city and have threatened us with guns. At first, we though they were tomb raiders, but they are too organised. I’m begging you. Please help us!

Jamie turned to see where Lena had gotten off to. She was busy on the other side of the room, looking through some documents on a table. “Tracer,” Jamie said to get her attention. “Come look at this.”

Lena jogged over and cast her eyes over the unsent emails. She scrolled through to some of the more recently written ones. “Look at this one,” she said. “Someone tried to send this one just this morning.”

Jamie looked over her shoulder and read the email she was indicating.

From: Dr. Hamid Faisal <hamid.faisal@oasis.edu.iq>
Sent: Wednesday, 9 March 2078 09:02 AM
To: Dr. Zainab Al-Hassan <zainab.alhassan@oasis.edu.iq>
Subject: RE: RE: Petra Expedition (Project Code: OU.001735)
Importance: Extremely High
Professor Idannidis is dead. We have been cut off. We will seek shelter in the Great King’s tomb. If you get this, please send help

Lena took a step back from the computer screen. She looked like she was trying to think of what they should do next. She started sifting through other documents that had been left up on the computer screen, searching for something.

There was a crackling noise in Jamie’s earpiece which stuttered to life.

“Hello?” a voice came through the receiver.

“Sym!” Jamie replied. “You alright?”

There was a pause while Satya digested the fact that Jamie had intentionally mangled her callsign. “Of course,” Satya replied flatly. “We have repaired the radio tower. There was a strange device attached which was blocking the signal. It seems some cables were also deliberately damaged. Those have been repaired too.”

“Symmetra, I’m sending you a location marker to your map of the city,” Lena was saying while typing furiously on her computer tablet. “We’ve found the expedition base, but the archaeologists are not here. They’ve retreated to the tomb of a ‘Great King’.”

“Are they in danger?” Satya asked.

“I think so,” Lena replied. “We found information that indicates they were attacked. This just became a rescue mission. Meet us at the entrance to the chasm and prepare to engage hostile forces.”

“Copy that,” Satya replied and the line went quiet.

Jamie became very excited at this news. Things had just gotten interesting. “We’re going to the tomb?” he asked. “Will there be treasure?”


“Yes,” Athena replied. “Thank goodness you’re all alright.”

“We’re fine. We are preparing for contact with hostile forces. Please stand by for further instructions,” Lena told her. She looked up to find Zenyatta was calmly examining a device which was in the middle of printing a 3D plastic replica from scans of a Greek plinth nearby. The news of the archaeologists’ peril seemed not to have bothered him. “Zen, let’s go,” Lena said and led both him and Jamie out of the room.

They backtracked a little through several chambers, descending deeper into the city, and even squeezed through a gap in a broken wall before they found themselves in a very dark chamber with high ceilings. A few florescent lights had been left behind to help light the space. Columns held the cavernous ceiling aloft while a short distance away, the sandy floor fell away to a deep chasm. It must have been a long drop because it was too dark to see much of anything below the cliff’s edge. On the other side of the chasm, Jamie saw pathways and arches carved into the rock. A few thin shafts of light filtered from above, but it was still too dark to make out much beyond the area where they stood.

They had barely just arrived, when they heard shuffling behind them, and turned to find
Satya, Torbjörn and Roadie descending the length of a fallen column from a higher level to the cliff’s edge.

“By the Gods. Look at this place,” Satya said, eyes transfixed on the tall columns all around them.

“We need to find a way across,” Lena remarked. She was studying her map of Petra again.

Satya assessed the chasm before them and, after a moment of consideration, said, “My teleporter cannot bridge a gap that far.”

Lena looked disappointed. “According to the archaeologists’ notes, the tomb of the Great King is across this chasm. But it doesn’t look like there’s an easy way to get across nearby, and we’re short on time...”

Satya approached one of the rose-coloured sandstone columns with reverent wonder. “Will you look at the size of this? It must be hundreds of metres high, at least! It would’ve taken *years* to carve...”

There was an explosion of noise. The ground shook violently and dust was thrown up into the air. Satya scrambled and almost fell before Roadie took hold of her and dragged her back to a safe distance. The column Satya had been examining had toppled over the chasm, forming a bridge to the other side. Everyone was coughing as the dust cleared and revealed Jamie standing next to the fallen column. He pocketed the detonator he was holding in one hand, spent explosive charges lying all around him.

"Hey, look," Jamie said, deadpan. “I made a bridge. It only took me like, what? Ten seconds tops?”

Everyone stared at him.

“Well, come on! Let’s go,” Jamie told them. “I wanna find that treasure!” He turned to scuttle over the newly formed ‘bridge’ without another word.

“How wonderful,” Zenyatta said, admiring Jamie’s work. He calmly made his way across the chasm behind Jamie. A little shakily, everyone silently followed.

As they moved deeper into the darkened necropolis, Lena used the notes and scans of the chasm she had collected from the expedition base to help guide them to the tomb. As they moved along the carved pathways and passed beneath stone archways, a distinct grinding noise seemed to increase in volume.

“What is that noise?” Sayta asked.

“Drills,” Torbjörn told them. “I know that sound anywhere.”

Lena signalled to everyone to keep quiet and they slowly pressed on. The noise eventually became unbearable, and as Lena peeked around a rugged sandstone ledge, she spotted the source. She looked back at her teammates. “Talon,” she whispered.

“Talon?” Torbjörn growled before being shushed by Lena. “What’re they doing here?”

“I recognise that armour,” Satya added, leaning around the corner to take a look for herself. “They must be the ones who disrupted the communications system.”
Jamie positioned himself to get a better look. Over Satya’s shoulder he spotted several men a short distance away with their backs turned. Dressed in black tactical gear, their distinct red and white helmets seemed to confirm Lena’s summation. Jamie gulped. ‘That’s Talon?’ he thought to himself. They looked terrifying.

He had known what Talon was before he had joined Overwatch, but this was the first time facing them on a mission. Talon had offered him employment just a few weeks ago, and it felt strange to suddenly be standing in opposition to them. Some of the men were carrying sophisticated-looking guns. Jamie really wished he had his RIP Tire now.

The Talon grunts were using a large free-standing drill on a tripod to attempt to break open an ornately decorated door. The door itself was large and framed by elaborate reliefs and columns dug out of the rockface. Carvings of lions framed either side of the doorway. The tomb looked like it was thousands of years old. There was noise and clouds of dust everywhere from the drill. Jamie frowned. If he had been on the other side of this situation, he would have had that door open for them with a few of his charges by now.

Torbjörn observed the men and made a sound of annoyance. “They’ll never get in that way,” he remarked. “It will take them forever with that kind of drill.”

“The archaeologists must be in there,” Lena said looking at the door. She referred to her map briefly. “That’s the Great King’s tomb. It must be very well sealed to never have been discovered.” Lena then pointed up high to the pediment of the structure framing the doorway to the tomb. “Up there is an opening. We could bypass Talon and get the expedition team out that way.”

“How did you know it was there?” Satya asked.

“I saw it in the archaeologists’ notes. They probably climbed in that way,” Lena replied. She put her tablet away. “I’ll cause a distraction. Use Symmetra’s teleporter to get up there and haul them out with Roadhog’s hook.”

“I’ll go with you,” Torbjörn said to Lena. “I can set up a turret and help drive them away from the door.”

Lena nodded and together the two of them took off towards the group of men. From behind the rocky ledge, Jamie heard shouting and Lena calling out in a sing-song voice, “Catch me if you can!” before she zipped away. The drill ground to a halt. The sound of Torbjörn’s turret firing up and more yelling could also be heard.

“We must move quickly,” Satya told them. From her satchel she drew out a flat metal device which she set down on the sandy floor. She activated her gauntlet and spun a large blue oval shape out of thin air and suspended it above the teleporter pad. “Hurry,” she said and gestured for them to step through the hard-light portal.

“Wait. What did she mean by ‘teleporter’?” Jamie asked.

“No time to explain,” was all Satya said before she pushed him forcefully towards the entrance she had created.

Jamie didn’t have time to think. He stumbled through and suddenly found himself standing on a rocky ledge above the tomb’s pediment. He was suddenly so high up that he took hold of a rock nearby to steady himself as a wave of vertigo overtook him. Roadie, Satya and Zenyatta quickly exited the teleporter beside him.
Jamie felt he was about to be sick. “What was...?”

“I said, no time!” Satya barked and stepped passed him towards an opening through which shafts of light were shining out of the tomb below. The ceiling of the tomb was collapsed here as Lena had said. Looking down through the gap, Satya could see a raised platform on which sat the Great King’s sarcophagus surrounded by mountains of gold. Huddled in the corner of the tomb were three very frightened-looking archaeologists.

“I only had the one teleporter pad,” Satya told them. “We need to find another way down.”

“Here,” Roadie growled, offering his hook to Satya. “I’ll lower you.”

Satya shook her head fervently. “No way. I’m not going down there.”

“Why not?” Jamie asked.

Satya was quiet for a moment. “Well... there may be scorpions down there,” she said, looking a little embarrassed.

“Oh, for the love of— Here, Roadie. Lower me down,” Jamie said, taking the end of the Roadie’s hook and setting his good foot securely inside it.

As Roadie winched him into the tomb, Jamie looked around at the piles of coins, ancient weapons, bronze armour and pottery below. The archaeologists had placed a single ChemLight inside the tomb, making all the pieces of gold glisten and gleam. His mouth started to water. It was more gold that he’d ever seen in his life. Even more than his and Roadie’s secret stash back home.

Jamie made a signal to the cowering archaeologists to draw their attention. “It's alright,” he said as he touched down on top of a heap of gold coins lining the floor of the tomb. He had to be careful not to slip on his peg leg. “We’re Overwatch. We’re not going to hurt you.” Jamie flashed the Overwatch logo on his shirt sleeve for proof.

“Thank the heavens!” one of the men said, stepping forward. He was dressed in dirty khakis and a plain button-down shirt. All of the archaeologists seemed to have sustained light cuts and bruises, but otherwise seemed reasonably safe and well.

“My name is Hamid,” the man said. “You have to help us!” he added desperately. “There are strange men trying to raid this tomb! The artefact they seek is the greatest of all the King’s treasures.”

Jamie waved the man’s ramblings away. “Look, let's just get you out of here, alright? There isn’t much time,” Jamie said in a placating voice. “We can go back up two at a time.” Jamie looked up at Roadie through the gap in the ceiling to confirm this was alright and received a nod of confirmation in reply.

Hamid motioned urgently to his colleagues. “Quickly,” he said. “Doctor Nachareon, Doctor Al-Hamadan, you two go first.”

While the other two men were winched up. Hamid turned to Jamie and implored him. “There is something you should know,” he began. “We have studied this site for years. Our research has been leading to one very important discovery. An artefact. This is what our assailants seek.”

Jamie felt conflicted. As much as he wanted to, they had little time to entertain treasure hunting. Talon could be back at any moment. Besides that, their mission was just to rescue the archaeologists and repair the communications system. There was not enough time for much else.
“Look, mate,” Jamie said with an apologetic expression. “We’re just here to get you lot out...”

Hamid looked distressed as he said these next words. “My research here is my life’s work,” he said. “If the artefact falls into the wrong hands. The damage could be insurmountable.”

Sensing that Jamie perhaps didn’t believe him. Hamid pointed at a wall nearby. Jamie saw the walls were painted with more elaborate murals and carvings. There were markings similar to the ones he had seen before in the chambers above. “Look here,” Hamid said. “It’s an ode to the Great King.” He translated the writing for Jamie:

“Blessed be the King. Blessed be his gifts, his people, his victories. Even in death, his power protects and watches over us. When his greatest treasure lies in the heart of the Rose, his power will be awakened, the pillar of civilisation.”

Jamie considered the markings for a moment. “Oh, I get it,” he said. “The ‘greatest treasure of all is the people of the city’ or some crap like that, right?”

Hamid shook his head. “While I admire your poetic optimism... no, it’s referring to an actual treasure,” Hamid told him. “The ‘heart of the rose’ is a pillar where the treasure should be placed. Doing so will unleash a great power.”

“What?”

“The Great King was greatly revered by his subjects,” Hamid went on. “Even after his death, he was deified and worshipped extensively. The people of Petra exalted the Great King’s treasures in his absence. It is said that these artefacts are imbued with a certain power.”

Jamie fixed the shorter man with a disbelieving look. “Come on,” Jamie said. “Pull the other one.” Treasure infused with magic powers? Perhaps the archaeologists had gone too long without sunlight and were now delirious.

“Look there,” Hamid told him. He pointed at the Great King’s sarcophagus. Resting on top was something that at first glance Jamie through was a wreath of leaves. On closer inspection, he discovered it was made of gold in a horseshoe shape crafted to resemble a laurel of olive leaves. The metal had discoloured with age, but there was still a strong lustre to its shine. “It’s the King’s crown. A chaplet,” Hamid explained.

Jamie frowned. “And it has... magic powers?” he asked. “Are you sure you’re feeling okay?”

“You just need to believe me!” Hamid implored him. “If Talon gets their hands on this power, there’s no telling what they could do!” He pointed again at the markings on the wall. “Place it on the pillar, and the crown will be neutralized.”

There was a grunt of annoyance from above. It was Roadie, looking expectantly down at them. He had lowered the hook again and was waiting for them. Jamie made a split-second decision. He lunged forward and grabbed the crown off of the sarcophagus. “Let’s go,” he barked at Hamid and together they jumped onto roadie’s hook, hands gripped around the chain and a foot planted firmly in the hook. Jamie looked forlornly down at the treasure they were leaving behind. He wished he had a chance to grab more.

As they crawled back through the gap to the top of the exterior pediment, Jamie held the crown aloft to show his teammates. “Look,” he began. “It’s a...”

“We know,” Satya interrupted him. “We heard everything.” She tapped her earpiece to indicate
that they had been listening to their conversation below in the tomb.

“We should make haste,” Zenyatta remarked and ushered the archaeologists through the teleporter. Everyone followed suit and soon they were standing once again on the dirt path that lead to the entrance to the tomb.

Satya disabled the teleporter. “Let’s hurry,” she said. “Talon could be back any moment.”

“My colleagues are injured and tired,” Hamid told her. “We need a moment to rest.”

“Allow me,” Zenyatta said serenely. He gestured with his hands and three glowing orbs obediently floated over to each of the archaeologists to feed them healing energy.

While the other archaeologists stared at the orbs with wonder, Hamid turned to Jamie. “You must go!” he said. “Take the crown to the pillar in the courtyard near our base, like in the ode.”

“What?” Jamie asked. He looked down at the crown, still clutched in one hand. He also remembered the courtyard adjacent to the expedition base of operations. It would be easy enough to get there.

“It’s the only way to neutralize it! Placing it on the pillar will destroy it, preventing it from falling into Talon’s hands,” Hamid told him.

Jamie looked to Satya, suddenly unsure. Satya had been on more missions than him; she would know what to do. She returned his gaze evenly, then shrugged. “It can’t hurt to try,” she said.

“Go,” Zenyatta told Jamie. “I will stay here and look after the expedition team.”

“Why?” Jamie asked with a sneer. “So you can take all the credit for rescuing them?”

Zenyatta turned to Jamie. “You know what? I’m trying really hard here but you’re just being an asshole,” he said as calmly as he could muster.

“Enough,” Roadie growled. “We’ll make sure this lot get out safe.” He gestured to the archaeologists as he said this, then turned to point at the crown in Jamie’s hand. “You go take care of whatever that is.”

Satya nodded. “I’ll go with you,” she told Jamie and together they took off without a backwards glance.

They hurried back along the same paths Lena had used to guide them to the Great King’s tomb. They came upon Jamie’s ‘bridge’ across the chasm and dashed along. With every step the air became warmer and fresher as they neared the surface.

A voice came through Jamie’s earpiece. “Tracer here. Everything alright?”

“Yes, fine,” Jamie replied. “Where are you?”

“We’re still in the necropolis,” Lena told him. “We led Talon off deep into the tunnels and got them properly lost. Let’s rendezvous back at the dropship.”

“Uh, yeah, sure,” Jamie replied, “Be right there.” He didn’t feel like telling her that he and Satya were on an unscheduled mini-mission at that point in case he got them in trouble.

“Let’s do this quick,” Satya told him as they squeezed through a gap in a wall.
“This way,” Jamie told Satya. “There is a base of operations up ahead and from there we can enter the courtyard.”

They ran full pelt through several chambers and Jamie soon found himself standing in the expedition base once again. He dashed to the right and threw himself through the doorway to the courtyard. Satya was close on his heels.

“There,” Jamie said, pointing to the centre of the courtyard. At the centre of the mosaic tiles was a slightly raised square just a few metres across inlaid with pink tiles in the depiction of a rose. “Just like the markings said!” Jamie exclaimed. He was about to take a step towards it when Satya took hold of his shoulder and jerked him back roughly.

“Hey! Why’d you...?”

“Look,” Satya said sternly, and pointed to the floor of the courtyard. The mosaic tiles were dusty and faded, cracked in places, but Jamie saw nothing out of the ordinary. He looked back at Satya, confused. “It’s not safe,” she said, indicating again.

Jamie looked again and saw that the platform surrounding the central rose mosaic was bow-shaped in places, heavily cracked, and looked ready to collapse.

“There is a chasm below. I saw it in my map of the city,” Satya told him. “The rose is on top of a pillar which is safe, but if you put too much weight on the tiles around it, the whole courtyard could collapse.”

Jamie made a noise of annoyance. “Then what are we supposed to do?”

“Here. Use my teleporter,” Satya said. She set the same teleporter base down as she had used before and activated it with her gauntlet. She set the exit point right next to the depiction of the rose. “This will take you across safely.”

“Me?” Jamie asked. “Why me?”

Satya gave him a withering look. “Because this whole stupid side mission was your idea!” she snapped. “Now get this over with!”

“Alright, alright,” Jamie groaned. “There’s no need to get upset.”

Jamie stepped through Satya’s teleporter as he had before and immediately found himself standing over the mosaic rose. This part of the courtyard seemed sturdy enough, but Jamie was restricted to a small square surface of safety. He bent down and tried to dust some of the sand off of the pink tiles, looking for a place to put the crown. He held it tight in one hand, but he could have sworn he could feel it almost vibrating in his fist.

As Jamie swiped some of the sand away, he found an indentation among the tiles the same size and shape as the crown. It seemed to frame the petals of the rose perfectly. That must be where it should be placed.

“Stop!”

Jamie looked up. Across the courtyard was a group of Talon soldiers, weapons trained on Jamie. “Hand it over!” one of them shouted. Jamie didn’t even have a chance to respond before they opened fire.

Several things seemed to happen at once; whatever had been fired at Jamie was powerful enough to
shake the pillar below him and he dropped, gripping the raised edges for support. Somewhere behind him, Satya cried out and dove for cover under a hail of bullets. Then, all around him the courtyard started to collapse. Sand and broken tiles were cast into the air. Jamie saw in the corner of his vision, the black chasm below swallow the sandstone rock and a couple of the Talon grunts like a gaping maw. Jamie could only think of escape so he quickly jammed the crown into the indentation and turned to dive through the teleporter.

He didn’t make it that far.

There was a blast of something—a kind of energy Jamie thought—that shattered the pillar and sent sprays of sand in all directions. Jamie couldn’t see anything; he only knew that his feet were gone from under him and he was falling most likely to his death. His left arm was warm and wet. His whole body screamed with pain.

Something blue flashed in front of him. He had squeezed his eyes shut as he braced for the fall but something compelled him to look. As he fell, he saw Satya’s teleport spinning wildly through the air. In a split second, he reached instinctively for it, and miraculously it seemed to sprout an arm and reach for him as well. Confusion overtook him. He didn’t remember Satya’s teleporter having metal arms before.

Following the arms, a metal head and shoulders also appeared in the teleporter entrance. Zenyatta took hold of Jamie around the torso and pulled him towards the portal. To Jamie’s surprise, Zenyatta was positively glowing like a beacon. Jamie should have been scared, but he suddenly felt unafraid and tranquil. The next thing he knew, he was hauled up on a solid surface. The sudden sensation of no longer falling made him immediately nauseous.

“Mr. Junkrat? Are you alright?”

Jamie found himself sprawled on the sand at the edge of the chasm he had just been falling through. He looked up at the omnic. Zenyatta was still glowing and Jamie felt strangely calm and whole in his presence. “What— What just...?”


“Junkrat? Are you alright?” It was Satya, looking worriedly over Zenyatta’s shoulder. Beside her, Lena and Torbjörn were also there, staring down at Jamie with disapproving looks.

"What happened?" Jamie asked. He sat up a little. There was blood on his clothing, but a cursory pass of his fingers over his body failed to find any wounds. Had Zenyatta healed him? Maybe the omnic was right about that electromagnetic healing thing...

Lena shrugged. “There was some kind of explosion. You were standing on that pillar but it collapsed.”

Jamie looked around. “Where’s Talon?”

“We drove them off,” Torbjörn muttered. “Looks like you got a little lost on your way back to the dropship. Eh, Skinny?”

Jamie shot a cheeky grin at him.

“Roadie radioed and said he was escorting the expedition team back to the dropship,” Lena said, fixing Jamie with a pointed look. “He also mentioned you had snuck off on your own little adventure. We thought we’d check on you.”
“Sorry, love,” Jamie said, looking appropriately chastised.

“As long as you are alright, that’s the main thing,” Lena replied. “Nice work, Zen,” she added, clapping the omnic on the shoulder. She turned to look at the collapsed courtyard and the bullet hole-riddled buildings. Bellow them, there was rumbling and the ground was shaking slightly, like the fallen courtyard was possibly causing damage to the tunnels and tombs below. Lena’s expression was grim as she thought of the damage wrought to the historic site. Her voice was weirdly calm as she said her next words.

“We are going to be in so much trouble when the commander finds out about this.”

--

It was some days later after Jamie’s first mission had concluded that he found himself sitting alone in the Workshop late one night, trying to finish work on his RIP tire. He was tired, but determined to get this damn thing done. He was never going on a mission without it again.

Jamie’s first mission kept replaying again and again in his mind. He didn’t quite fully understand all that had happened but Hamid had thanked him all the same for his efforts and reassured him he had prevented a great catastrophe in stopping Talon from retrieving the crown. The crown had, apparently, been destroyed in the ‘explosion.’ Hamid had told Jamie the resulting fluxes in electromagnetic fields at the Petra site would provide a source of ongoing study and research for years to come.

“You know what?” Talkie asked from Satya’s workstation. “You look like a man who could use some toast.”

Jamie sighed. Satya had told him that she needed to keep Talkie in the Workshop for a little longer while she finished her tests. He knew he should have been annoyed at being offered toast again for the seventh time that hour, but he was too tired to complain. In actuality, he was kind of glad for the company.

“No thanks, Talkie,” he said tiredly.

Just then, the door to the Workshop slid open and none other than Zenyatta appeared in the doorframe. Jamie watched him float uncertainly in the doorway. He didn’t say anything, he just raised his right arm and presented his severed left arm to Jamie. No explanation was required.

“Again?” Jamie asked with a smirk. Zenyatta nodded.

Zenyatta looked questioningly over at Brigitte's workstation. It was neat and tidy, all the tools put away. Brigitte had retired for the evening several hours ago. Jamie sighed again.

“Brig’s gone to bed,” Jamie told the omnic. He stood and went to grab a toolkit.

“Alright. Over here, Zen,” Jamie said when he returned. Zenyatta obliged, and floated over to his workbench while Jamie silently got to work on the repairs.

Chapter End Notes
A/N: I don't take credit for Talkie Toaster. He’s from an episode of Red Dwarf (Series IV, episode 4), but I feel certain there would be talking kitchen appliances in 2078 or whenever...

Also, why do these keep getting so long....... I’m sorry.
Jamie was seated in a plastic chair toward the rear of the Watchpoint: Gibraltar Briefing Room. It was one of the big monthly team meetings where most combatants and researchers were in attendance. It was Jamie’s first meeting of this kind and he was surprised to find so many people crammed into the small space.

Somewhere at the front of the room, an older lady with dark skin was making some important announcements about accomplishments in recent missions as well as discussing upcoming operations and projects. Jamie thought he had heard someone refer to her as “Captain Ana Amari” on the way into the meeting room. The captain was seated beside the strike commander at a desk at the front.

Jamie stifled a yawn. They were about twenty minutes into the meeting, and he was bored. Beside him, Roadie was quietly snoring behind his gas mask or listening to an audiobook, either way Jamie was sure he wasn’t paying attention from his slumped posture. Sitting on Jamie’s other side, Hana was engrossed in a video game on her handheld gaming device. She looked equally uninterested in the announcements.

“We’d also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge that Tuesday night’s galvanic corrosion awareness meeting, was I think, a big success,” the captain was saying. “So, we would like to thank Tekhartha Zenyatta, for organising that for everyone. Thank you, Zen.”

The was a polite smattering of applause from the meeting attendees. Somewhere towards the other side of the room, Jamie heard a tinny, robotic voice reply, “You’re welcome.”

Zenyatta had been attending the Workshop regularly enough to request repairs and upgrades since his training sessions had ramped up, and as a result Jamie had been getting along better with the omnic since his first mission had concluded. Zenyatta often requested Jamie complete his repairs, explaining that he preferred Jamie’s craftsmanship. This had led to them striking up a few tentative conversations and Jamie was finding he was beginning to warm up to their resident robotic monk. Jamie’s promise to Efi was still fresh in his mind that he would give himself a chance to at least try to get along with his omnic teammates. Why had he been unable to resist Efi’s big brown puppy-dog-eyes in that moment?

Ana had moved on to a new subject. “Also, we would like to provide an update to the team that recently completed the Petra mission. The University of Oasis has extended their thanks for our assistance. They have expressed that our prompt action prevented the deaths of three of their academics.” The captain paused to clear her throat. “There was some damage to the Petra site during the operation...” she said this with a slightly disapproving look around the room. “All team members are reminded that damage to historic sites is, generally, to be avoided when carrying out Overwatch operations. This goes without saying. We don’t need a repeat of the Havana sea-fort incident.” The captain’s expression was particularly bleak as she looked sternly over in Lena’s direction. Lena on the other hand seemed to be suddenly interested in how many ceiling tiles were immediately above her. She was sitting cross-legged in her chair in the row in front of Jamie’s.

“However,” Ana went on. “the University has stated they will not be pursuing reparations and that exploration of the Petra site will continue. Well done, team.”
Again, there was a modicum of polite applause.

“Lena, great shot-calling as ever,” Ana added, shooting a much more approving glance at Lena this time.

“Thanks Cap’!” came Lena’s cheerful reply.

“To add to this,” Ana went on. “It has come to our attention that Talon forces are focusing their energies on historic sites, in search of certain artefacts. We are anticipating, through the research shared with us by Oasis University, that there will be a greater need for us to dedicate time and resources towards protecting these artefacts. There will, of course, be more news to come on this matter.”

Jamie leaned forward in his chair so that he could whisper to Lena over her shoulder. “Still think it’s all ‘poppycock’?” he asked. Lena turned and wrinkled her nose at him in a look of mock annoyance.

Jamie smirked and leaned back in his chair. The Petra mission had been interesting to say the least for a first mission. It had been about a week since they had returned from Jordan, and Jamie was still trying to puzzle out exactly what the significance of the Great King’s crown had been. It must have been important, right? It had made a whole pillar of sandstone explode after all. It occurred to Jamie that perhaps Talon had been after more than just treasure hunting at Petra. Zenyatta had mentioned electromagnetic fields at the archaeological site. Could that be the power Talon had been trying to obtain? He would have to ponder on it more.

The captain seemed to have finished her announcements. She shuffled her notes into a neater pile and turned to Jack to let him know it was his turn.

Jack stood so that he could be seen by all attendees. “I know you’re all busy, and I don’t want to take up too much of your time. I want to make a small announcement.”

Everyone seemed to sit up a little more alert in their chairs. The strike commander rarely made appearances at meetings, let alone announcements, so something important was likely about to be said.

“This year, we will be running the Ingenuity and Innovation Challenge again,” Jack said and a few people let out sounds of delight, although for most of the attendees, the excitement and energy seemed to suddenly escape the room like air out a deflating balloon.

Jack took no notice of this. “Last year’s challenge—to build a new waste disposal and sorting system—was a great success and this year I’m looking for equally good numbers in terms of participants and submissions,” he said. “This year’s challenge will be to find a solution to the increasing issue with the leaky roof on D Wing.”

Jamie looked around the room. It seemed like most people had stopped listening to the commander.

“Our estimated budget for conventional repairs is around three-point-eight million,” the commander went on. “Obviously, we’d like to put our own best minds to work and come up with a better, cost-effective solution. That will be the challenge for you this year. Each department is invited to participate. To enter, you only need to submit a proposal in forty-eight hours.”

Jamie watched the commander as he addressed the somewhat disinterested room and slowly digested what was being said. It was true some of the best minds in the world worked at
Overwatch, although he had difficulty believing the H.R. department or the kitchen staff would have much luck participating in such a challenge if indeed all departments were invited to join in. It was an interesting idea to suggest that instead of forking out for expensive repairs, they find the solution internally for a lower cost.

“There will be a prize for the best proposal submitted. The cost of funding the winning idea will be covered by a discretionary budget, and a second grant to the value of one-point-five million will be made to the winning department to use as they see fit towards their own projects,” Jack said as he read these points off of his own notes. “Any questions, can be directed to my secretary.”

Jack turned to nod at the Captain who returned the gesture as though to indicate there was nothing further to discuss. “Dismissed,” Jack told the rest of the room.

Everyone stood at this and began to shuffle out of the room. Roadie stood almost immediately and headed for the exit with a sigh of relief. He never seemed interested in any kind of team meeting, preferring to get back to the training yards as soon as possible.

Jamie however was preoccupied with his thoughts. What could they do with that much money? Jamie was keenly aware that funds in the Engineering department were depressingly wanting. Torbjörn was being especially careful to track their overheads to ensure there was no unnecessary spending. Maybe the commander’s challenge was the solution to their problem? Jamie was never one to shy away from a challenge, and certainly not from a money-making opportunity.

“Lena,” Jamie began, standing up and catching hold of her shoulder as she stood to leave. “Are you going to do the commander’s challenge?”

Lena shook her head. “Nah. Tactical Ops generally don’t participate,” she explained. “We usually leave it to the ‘science-y’ types.” She shrugged and carried on her way out of the room despite Jamie’s look of confusion.

Jamie turned to Hana seated beside him. “What about you?” he asked.

Hana was still engrossed in her handheld gaming device. “What? You talking about the innovation challenge thing?” she asked without look away from her game. Jamie made a quiet noise of confirmation in reply. “Nope. Tanks never go in for that stuff. There’s no point in trying.”

“What do you mean, ‘there’s no point’?” he asked. “That’s a lot of money to win!”

Hana looked up from her game this time. “Tanks never win. Nobody ever wins apparently. Except for the Science team.” For the brief moment Hana had looked away from her screen, her character plummeted into a pit and died. She swore and reset the game.

“Science team?” Jamie asked.

Hana raised a hand and pointed while she waited for her game to load. “Over there,” she said.

Jamie looked in the direction Hana had pointed. On the other side of the room, a group of team members were talking animatedly, presumably about the commander’s announcement. Jamie spotted among the group of scientists a short woman with glasses and an impeccably neat hair bun. Beside her was a tiny, hovering drone-like robot with animated eyes. Perhaps the most startling of all, however, was an enormous silverback gorilla that Jamie hadn’t noticed in the meeting room until this moment. He was wearing glasses too and dressed in some kind of bodysuit. He was speaking with the other woman and her drone about something.

“Holy fuck,” Jamie swore. “There’s a monkey over there!” he added in an urgent tone to Hana.
Hana seemed unfazed. “That’s Winston,” she explained. Her game had started up again, and she was back to staring at the screen. “He’s very smart.”

Jamie had many questions, but he was stunned into silence, staring across the room at the gorilla with mouth agape. Hana went on, “He’s head of the Science division. Seems that the Science team always wins the commander’s challenge. So, there’s no point in trying.” Hana didn’t seem to be faring so well in her game because she threw it down in her lap with a huff of annoyance. “Wanna go grab some lunch?” she asked.

Most of the staff had filed out of the room by now. Jamie shook off his shock regarding the gorilla-come-team-member who apparently could talk from the looks of things—he was still in the middle of a conversation after all—and stood with Hana to walk out of the Briefing Room. “Sorry, Hana. You go ahead,” he told her. “I need to get back to the Workshop.” They parted ways, and Jamie headed off towards the Engineering Workshop at a brisk pace.

--

“What?” Satya asked, staring at Jamie with confusion. “You want to participate in the commander’s challenge?”

“Yeah!” Jamie said excitedly. “Should be easy with our team, don’t you think?”

Jamie had been roped into helping Brigitte with her repairs to the giant armour set next to her workstation as soon as he stepped into the Workshop. He was holding one of the armoured plates up while Brigitte welded it in place. Brigitte’s face was obscured by her welding mask. When Jamie asked if he should be wearing one too, Brigitte had said he could just turn his head away from the sparks.

“But the Science team wins every year,” Brigitte told Jamie, her voice muffled behind her mask. Jamie had asked her once why she always seemed to be working on Reinhardt’s armour and she had replied that fixing it was a full-time job thanks to her master’s propensity for getting into trouble.

“Yes, I know,” he replied, exasperated. “But that don’t mean we can’t try.”

Efi was sitting at a workstation nearby, cheek resting on one hand, elbows propped on the table while she watched the others work. Her morning classes were over, so she usually joined them in the Workshop in the afternoons. “I think we should give it a shot,” she said. “Jamie is right. What have we got to lose?”

“It’s a lot of work preparing a proposal only to have it rejected,” Brigitte explained. “After a while, you just stop trying.”

Efi swung her legs while she sat on her work stool. “Oh, come on,” she said acrimoniously. “They can’t have won ‘every year’.”

“I can assure you, they have,” Satya replied on Brigitte’s behalf. She was seated at her workstation halfway through an important hard-light build. “Before the Recall, the challenge was run each year when Overwatch was active, or so I heard. From what I understand, each year they won. They won last year too, despite our efforts. This will be the second time the challenge has run since the Recall. Guess who is tipped to win.”

Jamie looked over at Satya. “What do you mean, ‘despite our efforts’?” he asked.

Satya looked uncomfortable. “Last year, we put forward a proposal,” she said. Jamie noticed her
jaw was clenching. “We worked very hard on it, hoping things would be different this time. We didn’t even make it to the finalist round.”

“Oh,” Jamie replied. Satya struck Jamie as the kind of person who accepted nothing less than an exceptional work ethic from herself. Losing to the Science team must have been a blow to her pride. “But think of what we could do with the grant!” Jamie went on. “We could... we could... um... get a new coffee machine for the Workshop!”

Brigitte giggled. “I think you get plenty of coffee on your own anyway, Jamie,” she said.

“Yeah, but I have to walk all the way to the Mess to get one every time,” Jamie complained. “And coffee makes me work better. We should get a machine for the Workshop!”

Satya seemed to be considering Jamie’s idea. She tapped her chin thoughtfully. “Actually, that’s not a bad idea,” she said. “I would not be averse to a source of caffeine close to our workstations. It could help improve workplace efficiency.”

“See?” Jamie said cheerfully. “We could get one that makes ‘babyccinos’ so Efi can use it too!”

“I’m not a baby!” Efi complained.

Brigitte raised her welding mask and grinned at Jamie. “The grant is for implementing departmental projects, not buying coffee machines,” she told him.

“Yes, but if there are funds left over, we could just buy a little machine,” Jamie began. “One that doesn’t talk!” he added as an afterthought. Brigitte had finished welding the armour plate in place so he stepped back while she tested it for durability.

“I wouldn’t mind using some of the money for upgrades to Orisa,” Efi added. “She is in need of a new driver cooling system.”

“It’s not like we couldn’t use the funds,” Satya added thoughtfully. She seemed to be coming around to the idea. “Our team is expanding. That means there are more projects to fund.”

“Don’t waste yer time.”

Everyone turned to look at Torbjörn sitting at the other end of the workshop at a big desk. He had been listening to their conversation while he scribbled away on a ledger. He looked up so he could scowl at the other engineers.

“If the commander thinks he can get my department to volunteer to take on extra work by framing this ‘challenge’ as some kind of prize-winning scheme, he’s got another thing coming,” Torbjörn grumbled. “Besides, I’m not having that ape rub my face in it again when we lose,” he added. He looked back at his ledger. “The commander will get his leaky roof fixed regardless. There’s no need to waste your energy.”

Everyone was quiet. Usually, Torbjörn’s word was final. “But the money...” Jamie began.

“You are obsessed with money,” Brigitte remarked quietly and smirked at Jamie.

“Put it out of your mind, boy,” Torbjörn told him. “Now, I see you’ve got nothing better to do. If you’re done standing around, lollygagging, you can come with me to the storeroom. I need help digging out that metal sheeting you were asking for.”

“Oh, really?” Jamie asked. He had requested more scrap for the metal spikes on his RIP-Tire.
Torbjörn had approved this request, finally, it seemed.

“You can do the heavy lifting,” Torbjörn muttered. “I’ll show you where it is.”

Jamie left Brigitte to it and followed Torbjörn through a couple of doors on other side of the Workshop to the biggest of their storerooms. As they stepped into the darkened space, Torbjörn switched on the lights. Row and rows of half-finished projects, building materials and other equipment stacked on shelves were illuminated by the light. There were some larger crates against the far wall, some with tarps thrown over them. Jamie could smell grease and dust.

Jamie followed Torbjörn across the room. “Hey, Orisa,” Jamie said absently as they passed by the automaton. She was resting to one side of the storeroom, plugged into a recharging station. She stirred at Jamie’s words. Orisa began running through her start up procedures, but Torbjörn and Jamie took no notice.

“It’s over here,” Torbjörn told the younger man. He indicated to a few different shelves containing metal pieces. “You can take these. And these too, they can be melted down. Then there’s the metal sheets over there…”

“Gotcha,” Jamie replied and starting pulling the items down off the shelves.

“What are you doing?” Orisa asked, coming up behind them.

“Looking for scrap, Orisa,” Torbjörn told her.

“Perhaps I can be of assistance?” Orisa asked. “I am programmed to provide assistance wherever it is needed.”

“Can you get these down?” Jamie asked her, indicating in the scrap metal on the shelves up high beyond his reach. Orisa only had one arm, as her fusion driver was being kept in the Ammunition Dump in another part of the base. She obliged all the same by lifting the items down from the shelf with her left arm.

“Torb, I think you should re-think the whole innovation challenge thing,” Jamie said. He headed over to the other wall to look for the metal sheets the chief engineer had mentioned. “It could be great!”

“I keep telling you,” Torbjörn said churlishly. “Yer wasting yer time.”

“But we need the funds!” Jamie argued. He started rummaging around the crates.

“No! Not that one, Orisa. Put it back,” Torbjörn growled at the automaton. “You should focus on your own work, Skinny,” he said to Jamie.

Jamie pulled a tarp off a crate. “Oh, come on, we only need to... hey, what’s this?” Jamie asked. As Jamie had pulled the tarp out of the way, he found it was not covering a crate after all, but something similarly large and square. “Is this one of your turret prototypes?”

Torbjörn looked over. His eyes suddenly went wide. “Hey!” he barked. “Put that back!”

Torbjörn rushed over to snatch the tarp from Jamie, but it was too late. The tarp fell away and Jamie stood staring at some kind of automaton with a machine gun barrel mounted on the front.

“Oh!” Orisa said brightly. “That is my friend, E54!”
“What?” Jamie asked her.

“Never you mind!” Torbjörn ground out. He had gone bright red.

An E54? Jamie wondered. He had heard of them. They were battle automatons. They formed a large part of the omnic infantry during the Omnic Crisis and continued to do so in ongoing pockets of insurgencies across the globe. To many, Bastion units symbolised the horrors of the Crisis. This one seemed to be dormant, or switched off at the moment.

“Torbjörn,” Jamie began. His voice was low and suspicious. “Why is there a Bastion unit in here?”

“It’s none of yer business, Skinny!” Torbjörn told him. “He’s harmless.” He was trying somewhat futilely to take the tarp back from Jamie so he could cover up this new discovery. Jamie kept his end of the tarp out of reach.

“‘He’?” Jamie asked. “Does the commander know about this?”

“Of course,” Torbjörn barked again. “But no one else is supposed to know about it for now.”

“Well, hiding it in the main Workshop storeroom probably wasn’t a good idea then, was it?” Jamie asked with a smirk. “What’s it for?” Jamie assumed Torbjörn planned to take it apart for research.

“You might as well know,” Torbjörn said with a huff, giving up on retrieving the tarp. “The commander hopes to send him on missions. He’s my responsibility.”

Jamie looked alarmed. “Are you lot mental?” His eyes were practically aflame with indignation. “Sending a Bastion out into the field?”

“He’s a very good conversationalist,” Orisa interjected. She had finished retrieving the materials as instructed, and was staring at the two engineers. “A very good listener. We talk for hours. Well, I do, he listens.”

Jamie shot a withering look at Orisa. “Where did he come from?” he asked Torbjörn.

“I found him,” Torbjörn ground out, annoyed by this line of questioning. “Near the Swedish coast. He appeared gentle so when the Recall went out, I brought him here for further study.” He turned to cast a cursory glance over the Bastion unit. “He seemed to have lost his original programming. The commander thinks he could be reprogrammed and sent out to work for Overwatch.”

Jamie digested this for a moment. What would a reprogrammed Bastion unit be like? Would it be safe? “What did you mean when you said he was your ‘responsibility’?”

“Well,” Torbjörn began, looking decidedly embarrassed. “Since I helped design the damned thing...”

Jamie was surprised by this revelation. “You what, mate?”

Torbjörn heaved a sigh. “It’s a long story,” Torbjörn explained. “I don’t want to get into how my designs were misappropriated in the past, but I and some others from the Ironclad Guild helped design the units.” He looked pensive for a moment. “When they started being mass-produced for the war...” He was quiet for some time. “I don’t even want to think about all the damage that has been done. The least I can do is get this one off the streets. Maybe give him a chance to make a difference.”
Jamie watched Torbjörn standing stock still, staring down at the Bastion unit. The news of the older man’s involvement with the design of the E54s should have angered Jamie after all the damage done to central Australia, the lives lost at the hands of the local omnium, but something in Torbjörn’s face and tone indicated to Jamie that he was genuinely remorseful. They were both quiet for a moment.

“Don’t touch him,” Torbjörn said. It wasn’t a threat, just a calmly stated request. “He’s just had his armour replaced. There are special surface-bound nanites on him that we are testing to see if they can effectively repair small cracks and scratches.”

“Oh,” Jamie replied. “Self-repairing armour? That’s pretty clever...”

Torbjörn rubbed at the back of his neck tiredly. He let out a heavy sigh. “If it goes well, we may be able to introduce the technology to Rein’s armour,” he said. “Although I don’t think it will help with any damage bigger than a hairline fracture. That big lug has a habit of getting into rough scrapes.”

Jamie looked down at the Bastion’s armour. Now that he looked closer, the armour was not standard for Bastions. Torbjörn must have worked hard on the redesign. It certainly looked more up-to-date.

“You should’ve seen him when I found him,” Torbjörn said, seeing that Jamie was looking at his handiwork. “Very bad shape,” he went on. “Armour needed to be completely redone.”

“Oh, it did, huh?” Jamie asked, suspicious. “Is that why the budget for department projects has been lacking of late? Because it all went towards this Bastion?”

Torbjörn growled at him. “Look, just forget you saw anything, alright?” he barked, trying to throw the tarp back over the Bastion. Jamie took this as confirmation of his suspicions.

“Oh, I will,” Jamie replied with a growing smirk. “If you let us do the commander’s challenge.”

Torbjörn coughed violently, choking on this news. “You...!” he sputtered. “You little—!”

“Come on, Torb! You know we could use the money after you wasted all the funds on this bucket of bolts!” Jamie said, gesturing to the Bastion with a grin.

Torbjörn just stared at him for some time, indignant. Jamie only raised an eyebrow in response. Suddenly, Torbjörn made a noise of annoyance. “Oh, fine! But I’m not helping you at all.”

“Fine by me, old man,” Jamie said triumphantly. “You’d only hold us back anyway.”

Jamie turned to race back to the main workroom, leaving his scrap pieces behind, forgotten. Without a backwards glance, he charged past Orisa who watched him run by with bright and curious eyes. Torbjörn was shouting angrily after him, but Jamie ignored this. As he flew back into the Workshop, he burst through the door. Several heads snapped up to look at him, startled.

“We’re in!” Jamie crowed. “We’re doing the challenge! Torb said we could!”

The three girls stared back at Jamie. Satya’s gaze drifted to the door that led to the storeroom. “What happened in there?” she asked.

“Never mind!” Jamie said excitedly. “We’ve got forty-eight hours to come up with something to solve the leaky roof of D Wing. Brig, stop welding that armour! This is important!”
Brig groaned and flipped up her visor so she could fix Jamie with an annoyed look. “As I recall, I said that I didn’t want any part of this,” she complained.

“Sorry, Brig. You’re outnumbered,” Jamie said, sweeping tools and loose screws off his workbench to make space. “This is a dictatorship, not a democracy.” He grabbed a notepad and started scribbling, the joints of his prosthetic arm, clicking noisily.

Efi, who had become very excited at the news, pulled a stool up to Jamie’s workstation. Satya also scooted over. Brigitte resigned to at least stand and watch over Jamie’s shoulder.

“Okay, ideas!” Jamie began. “Go!”

“Um... we could use some kind of hard-light to plug the holes in the roof?” Satya began. With Satya, hard-light was usually the solution to everything.

“Is hard-light waterproof?” Jamie asked without looking up from his notepad.

“Of course,” Satya replied primly.

“How do we detect the existing leaks?” Brigitte asked.

“Drones?” Efi suggested.

“Drones are expensive,” Jamie remarked. “And D Wing is huge. We have to keep costs down.”

“What will produce the hard-light to plug the gaps?” Brigitte asked Satya. “Some kind of machine?”

“Unless, Sat’ wants to personally sit up on the roof manually filling each leak with her gauntlet, I’d say so,” Jamie chimed in sarcastically. Brigitte punched Jamie in the arm playfully.

“It would be easy enough to build a rudimentary device that would produce hard-light in specified shapes. Something would need to carry the pieces to fill the holes. Doing it by hand would be time-consuming and possibly dangerous.”

“We would also need something to measure the size and shape of the hole for the hard-light needed,” Brigitte remarked. “It seems like an overly complicated solution for a simple problem.”

“I’m not giving up on the drones,” Efi said. “I’ve seen surface-bound sanitary droids that stick to high-rise buildings and clean the glass. Could they be programmed to make small repairs to the surface of the roof?”

Jamie paused in his scribbling to look up at her. “Wait, say that again. Surface-wotsits?”


Jamie was trying to remember something he had heard Torbjörn say down in the storeroom earlier. Various emotions transformed his face at once. He seemed to surge with energy, and returned to frantically jotting down his notes.

“What is it?” Satya asked.

“What about surface-bound nanites?” Jamie asked. The other three engineers watched him closely. He finally looked up at Brigitte and said, “The kind that goes on self-repair armour. What if we made a self-repairing roof? What if the nanites could carry hard-light particles, not pieces, to the
gaps. They could fill up the holes bit-by-bit until we have a smooth surface.”

Brigitte considered this. “It’s feasible,” she said eventually. Brigitte checked something on her tablet computer. “The challenge briefing says the leaks are from hairline cracks and holes between the metal sheets on the roof. Nanites should be able to handle it. But where would we get the nanites from?”

“There’s a whole bunch in the storeroom,” Jamie said excitedly. “Torb could spare a few!”

“That would certainly keep costs down if we already have nanomachines on base,” Satya remarked. “We would only need to provide the hard-light particles.”

“And program the nanites,” Efi added. “I could do that. Easy!”

“Jamie, that’s a really good idea!” Brigitte said, patting him on the shoulder.

“Why does everyone always sound surprised when they say that?” Jamie asked.

“I’ll begin a prototype for a device that will produce the hard-light particles,” Satya said, standing quickly to return to her workstation. “Efi, could you provide a run command for programming the nanites?”

Efi nodded enthusiastically and hurried back to her own workstation to begin putting one together on her laptop.

“I’ll start drafting the proposal,” Brigitte said with a smile and headed over to her workstation. Jamie returned Brigitte’s gesture with an equally elated grin. This could really work!

While everyone got to work, Brigitte suggested Jamie run tests with some of Torbjörn’s nanites, which meant going back to the storeroom to pester the Chief Engineer to hand some of the nanites over and more threats to reveal the E54 to the rest of the base. Brigitte found some old pieces of discarded crusader armour plates that were badly damaged, and Satya provided some small hard-light particles that looked and felt like grains of fine blue sand. Jamie took these and set up a laptop to track how the nanites fared with repairs to the armour over time. These nanites had already been programmed to repair armour like on the E54 unit in the storeroom, so Jamie only had to isolate them and watch them carry the particles to the indentations in the armour.

Everyone ended up working late into the day. At some point Torbjörn appeared from the storeroom, complaining of having to clean up alone. He took one look at their work and glowered at the other engineers. “Tch!” he tutted at them and marched out of the room. “Good luck. You’ll need it,” he remarked on his way out.

Eventually, the end of the work day rolled around and usually at this time the builder’s team would head down to the Mess Hall for dinner or somewhere else on base to relax, but they all pressed on until well after dark. It became so late that Efi’s legal guardian—a nice lady called Abayomi who looked relieved when she found them—came looking for her young charge and insisted it would soon be time for bed. Efi begrudgingly slid off her work stool and bid everyone goodnight.

“What were you doing all this time in here, Efi?” Abayomi asked as she escorted the young girl out of the room.

“We’re working on the commander’s challenge!” Efi spouted excitedly. “We’re making nanomachines that can fix the roof!”

“That’s nice,” Abayomi remarked with a blank expression. The door slid closed behind them as
they departed.

Jamie was determined to continue with his tests even as the day grew long. He was staring at a growing data set on a holographic display which was showing the progress of repairs to the piece of crusader armour resting on his workbench. Glowing, blue lines of hard-light spiderwebbed across the armour plate where they built up in cracks and crevices, slowly growing in intense brightness. His attention was divided between the tests and trying to help Satya with her hard-light machine.

It wasn’t long after Efi disappeared out the door, that Brigitte also announced that she was tired of staring at her computer screen and she was going to bed. “We’ll pick up where we left off tomorrow,” Brigitte told them as she headed out the door. Jamie and Satya bid her goodnight.

When they were finally alone, Satya turned to Jamie. “Thank you for your assistance,” she said. “These builds can be complicated.”

“Oh, no worries, darl’,” Jamie replied automatically, then immediately worried he might have offended her by using a term of endearment. If it bothered her, she didn’t let it show.

Jamie watched Satya with rapt attention as she constructed another hard-light component with her gauntlet and carefully laid it down with the other parts for the machine. Everyone who worked for Overwatch seemed to be exceptionally talented in some way, Jamie reflected. For Satya, it was wielding light like a weapon and shaping her environment as she saw fit with her hard-light creations. Jamie wondered if he could ever be as accomplished as her.

Jamie tried to keep his hands busy as he assembled part of the machine’s casing for Satya. Satya’s hard-light producer was only a very basic prototype to show the commander how the hard-light particles would be made. If the project was approved, they would probably need to rebuild the whole thing with sturdier materials.

“How is your tire coming along?” Satya asked politely while she analysed the diagram of the hard-light producer on her holographic display.

Jamie’s face broke into a grin, pleased she was taking an interest in his work. “Almost done,” he replied. “A few spikes around the edges, some tests on the navigation system and she’ll be right as rain, ready to be packed with dynamite. It’s been a lot easier this time around using old Torb’s plasma cutter to make the internal framework.”

Satya was trying to look an appropriate amount of interested but when she thought of the completed RIP-Tire, she couldn’t help feeling apprehensive. It was going to be a devastating weapon when it was finished.

“I’ve never known anyone to work with machines as you do,” she remarked. “Reusing materials and turning them into something else, I mean.”

“Chief means of constructing anything where I come from,” he said with a smirk. “One man’s scrap is another man’s... something-something. I can’t remember how that saying goes...”

Satya smiled and nodded. “I’ve heard of Junkertown,” she said in her usual even tone. “Is it really constructed out of ‘junk’?”

Jamie looked proud. “You betcha. The only town of its kind in Aus,” he said. “I could tell you stories about it. You’d like it, I think. Full of builders like you and me.”

Satya frowned disapprovingly. As an architect, an accomplished one too, hearing of a city built out
of ‘junk’ offended her on a fundamental level. “I suppose that’s where you learned your craft,” Satya mused.

Jamie nodded with a barely contained giggle. “Born and bred tinkerer, I am,” he said. He was also pleased to note that Satya was taking an interest in getting to know him. Their interactions were becoming warmer and less awkward the more they spoke to each other. “What about you. How long have you been a suit?”

Satya wrinkled her nose at him. “Why do you keep calling me that?”

Jamie worried again that he had offended her, and was quick to correct his faux pas. “I don’t mean anything by it! You’re a nice girl and all. In fact, I’m willing to overlook the whole suit thing,” he insisted. “Just surprised me, is all. You don’t seem like the ‘desk job’ type.” In fact, Jamie thought that Satya looked like the kind of person who should be modelling the latest fashions on a Paris runway, not building machines in a greasy workshop. Her body was slender and her dark features accentuating her natural beauty, although, Jamie was sure he would never be brave enough to tell her any of this.

Satya considered his words. “Ah. So that’s what you mean by ‘suit’.”

“Yeah,” Jamie replied. “Someone obsessed with business and other corporate stuff.” He gestured vaguely with his hands. “But you’re alright, y’know? A builder and an Overwatch agent to boot. That’s pretty sick,” Jamie added with a decisive nod.

“I shall take that as a compliment, I suppose,” Satya said wryly, although she wasn’t entirely sure she was following what he was saying. “Since I was eleven.”

Jamie blinked at her. “What?”

“That’s my answer to your question,” Satya replied. “How long was I a ‘suit’? I suppose it started when I joined Vishkar Academy. Could you hand me that spanner, please?”

Mystified, Jamie handed over the tool as requested. “What academy?”

“Vishkar Academy. That’s where I learned how to bend light into material objects,” Satya explained. She began tightening a screw on outside of the hard-light producer with the spanner. “I studied there for many years. I graduated top of my class.”

Jamie swallowed hard. And she was brilliantly intelligent too. “Er... sounds like fun.”

“Actually,” Satya began with a sigh. “I do not reflect fondly on my time there. It was a difficult period for me. There was a lot to deal with. I had just been through an upheaval from my home so I could relocate to the academy. Days were long and arduous then. My classmates did not make things easier.” She set the spanner down and seemed to look off into the distance, thinking hard about something, brows furrowed.

Jamie watched her with concern. “Satya?”

Satya glanced back at him with a look of mild surprise, as though she had forgotten he was there. She smiled and offered the spanner back to him. He reached out to take it. For a brief moment, the fingers of his left hand brushed over hers as he took the tool back. When they withdrew from each other, Jamie could feel his hand tingling where their fingers had touched, though he tried to hide his surprise and embarrassment with a downward glance, hoping Satya wouldn’t notice. The tactile contact was fleeting, but left a burning sensation in its wake. Satya looked away and the moment passed.
“This was a really good idea,” Satya said quietly and motioned to the hard-light producer. “I just hope it’s enough to win.”

Jamie smirked again. “Don’t worry. If we lose, I’ll just switch to the Science team. Better prospects there, I reckon. Then my genius will finally be recognised.”

Satya stifled a giggle behind one hand. “Oh, I don’t think so,” she said in a chiding tone. “I’m not letting you go so easily.”

Jamie laughed as well. Satya didn’t laugh often, but her face lit up when she did so.

Satya put down her tools and assessed their progress so far. “It’s late,” she announced, after a moment. “But we’ve done well. I think we should leave the rest until tomorrow.”

“Good idea,” Jamie remarked. “Best to get some rest. Big day tomorrow.”

Satya nodded and together they packed up their things and got ready to depart the Workshop. Jamie checked on the progress of the armour plate which seemed to be going smoothly so he left the laptop running to collect data overnight.

Jamie and Satya parted ways in the corridor outside the Workshop with a promise to be back early the next day to continue work. Jamie felt tired but confident that they would be able to finish the proposal in time for submission.

"Good night,” Satya said simply and turned to head off down the corridor in the opposite direction, hips swaying and heels clacking as she walked. Jamie watched as her silhouette disappeared into the dark and something Roadie had said on his first day on base echoed in his recollection. No messing around with any of the girls here. That’s what Roadie had said, right? Jamie gulped a little and limped off at a brisk pace towards the men's barracks.

--

Jamie got up early the next morning and headed to the workshop ahead of the rest of the team so he could continue work on their nanite project. He’s only slept a little the night before but sleep usually eluded him when he was excited about a project anyway.

Arriving at the Workshop in the dim light of dawn, he found the data-set was complete. The armour plate sitting on his workstation was smooth and whole with blue streaks of bonded hard-light inlaid across the surface, bright and luminous like forks of lightning. It was perfect. He started scribbling notes again on his notepad. Satya would be pleased with this result!

“Jamison?” A voice came from above his head. It was Athena.

“Mm-hmm?” he said without looking away from his notes.

“Someone is at the door, but they lack security access,” she said. “Would you like me to let them in?”

Jamie looked up at this news. The door to the Workshop was a large steel sliding door but there was a small ribbon of frosted glass inlaid against the metal to allow people to see if someone was standing on the other side or not. Jamie could see a silhouette of a person standing there.

“Sure. Okay,” he replied.

The door slid open and someone Jamie had never met before stepped into the room. He was a
young man, tall and thin in professional attire. He looked around with a sneer at the state of the Workshop, which perhaps was not clean enough for his taste, and then spotted Jamie.

“Ah,” the newcomer said. “Who is in charge around here?”

Jamie stared back at the man. He hadn’t even introduced himself. “Er, who are you?” Jamie asked.

“I’m an intern,” the man said impatiently. Jamie couldn’t quite place his accent. “My name is Riley. I’m looking for your supervisor.”

Jamie took in Riley’s crisp suit, highly polished shoes, and neatly trimmed facial hair. He suddenly felt overly dishevelled in his hoodie and uncombed hair. He assumed Riley was here to discuss something important with the chief engineer.

“Er, Torbjörn Lindholm usually starts at nine,” Jamie said.

Riley sighed impatiently. “I want to know what possessed him to enter his team in the commander’s Ingenuity and Innovation Challenge.” Riley approached Jamie’s desk and swiped his finger along the surface. He inspected his dirtied fingertip with disdain.

Jamie gaze narrowed at the man. “What’s it to you?”

Riley turned away. “If you must know, I’m hoping to save your team some embarrassment. Anything you come up with for the challenge is likely to fail, as it did last year.”

Jamie bristled at this. They had all worked hard yesterday on their submission for the commander’s challenge. Jamie didn’t like the insinuation that there was something about the builder’s team that was inherently incapable of winning. “Let me guess; you’re from the Science team?” he asked.

Riley cast his eyes over the machine on Satya’s desk, the hard-light producer. Jamie cursed himself for not thinking to cover it up or put it away overnight. “I intern there, yes,” Riley remarked absently. “and we have worked hard on this challenge. We are sure to win, as always. So, there is no need for you to bother with your submission.”

“Why don’t we see what the commander says?” Jamie asked, growing increasingly annoyed at Riley’s inflated sense of self-worth.

“Indeed,” Riley replied, eyes narrowing at Jamie. “I overheard a young woman in the Mess Hall talking about the builder’s team’s intent to enter. And something about micro-machines.”

Jamie clenched his fists. Surely no one on the team would have given away what they were working on for the challenge? But Efi’s guardian, Abayomi, had been in here yesterday. Could she have mentioned something?

“So, you’re worried we might win,” Jamie asked. “Is that it?”

Riley shrugged. “I’m not that terribly concerned actually,” he said. “Someone of your background is unlikely know what a screwdriver is, let alone how to fix a leaky roof.” Jamie was about to stand up and give this smarmy bastard an earful but he paused halfway through rising to his feet.

“What did you just say?” Jamie asked. How did this man know about Jamie’s background?

Riley regarded him coolly. “What? That you came here from prison? Everyone on base is talking about it, Mr. Fawkes.” Riley seemed to finally notice the armour plate sitting on Jamie’s
workbench which he paused to consider before turning away with disinterest. “Perhaps it would be best to withdraw from the challenge,” he went on. “Otherwise, you may find that your identity and location is accidentally revealed to the press.”

Jamie knew he should have been angry at this thinly veiled threat but, in that moment, all he felt was a pang of fear. If someone on base decided to ‘out’ him, which they very easily could do, he might be sent back to prison. Jamie went cold at the thought. Jamie didn’t want to withdraw their submission and let the girls down, not after all their hard work! But the alternative would mean leaving Overwatch, if Riley’s threat was serious.

Riley was staring at him. “We wouldn’t want that, surely?” he asked quietly.

Jamie was silent. He looked down at the sooty surface of his workbench. Before now, the crimes he had committed in the past had only ever affected him. Nobody ever got hurt from his crimes, well, no body he knew nobody that didn’t already have it coming. He never would have expected his past to ever catch up to him like this. He really had no choice. How would the other engineers react?

“Then again,” Riley went on. “Maybe it would be best if you weren’t around to cause any more harm to the builder’s team’s reputation. Demolitions and incendiaries? That’s your specialisation, isn’t it?”

Jamie looked back up at Riley, but didn’t respond.

“Someone like you, is a danger to Overwatch. I wonder what the commander was thinking, putting a madman in charge of explosives,” Riley said with a sneer. “Perhaps it would be best if you just left, after all.”

Roadie’s words echoed again in Jamie’s mind. ‘If anyone works out you’re totally barking, we’re gonna be turfed out.’ Jamie tried to take a deep, steadying breath, but it didn’t help much.

The door to the Workshop slid open again and Satya was revealed standing in the corridor. She cast her eyes between the two men. “What is going on here?” she asked.

Riley plastered a pleasant smile on his face and turned to face her. “Oh, hello. I’m looking for Mr. Lindholm, but your ‘colleague’ here is unfortunately being of no help—” he said.


Riley frowned at her, particularly irked to hear she had been listening in. “And you should know that you are wasting your time on the commander’s challenge,” he said.

“The Science team must be very worried about our submission if you came all the way here to say this,” Satya told him. She paused to gauge Riley’s reaction, noting that his eyes almost flickered with uncertainty. “They don’t know you’re here, do they? The Science team?”

“Well... I...” Riley sputtered.

“I thought so,” Satya replied. “Don’t worry. I’ll ensure your superiors hear of your disrespect toward my colleague.” She emphasised the word as Riley had done and shot him a saccharine smile.

Jamie stood stock still staring between the two of them. Satya seemed truly angry, glaring at the young man as she made her way past him over to her workbench. She deliberately placed her carry-
bag down in front of her hard-light producer to conceal it better from Riley's sight, though she tried to make her movements appear casual. He didn’t seem to notice.

“Disrespect?” Riley asked, turning to sneer again at Jamie. He was slowly going red in the face. “Towards this convict?”

Satya rounded on him, voice rising in volume. “Agent Fawkes outranks you.” Her anger was swift and palpable. Her gold-coloured eyes were boring holes into Riley’s. “You will not speak to him in this manner again, or the commander will hear of it.”

The room was eerily quiet.

“You are not authorized to be here,” Satya added, staring at Riley. “You should leave so I can report your infractions.” She sat down at her desk and started up her laptop. “Out of my sight, before I call security,” she barked at him.

Riley was furious. Beet red, he turned on his heel and marched out of the room without a backward glance.

Jamie, who was still standing behind his workbench, retook his seat and tried to busy his suddenly jittery hands with tidying away some of the loose tools and equipment. The Workshop was silent for some time. When Jamie turned to Satya, she was positively fuming in her seat. “Thanks, Sat,” he said quietly.

Satya took a deep, calming breath. “No problem,” she replied. Jamie could tell she was upset because she wouldn’t meet his eyes. “I’m sorry if I spoke out of turn,” she said.

Jamie paused. “You didn’t,” he replied.

Again, Satya took another deep breath. “Do you think he saw the hard-light producer? Do you think he’ll have guessed what our submission will be?” she asked, brows furrowed with concern.

Jamie shook his head. “I don’t think so,” he said. “Bloke was a brick short. Didn’t even know what he was looking at, I reckon. Just came to make a threat and leave.”

Satya nodded.

“Ms. Vaswani?” Athena began. “Would you like me to prepare a report and a recording of what just transpired for the commander?”

Satya considered this, then said, “That is for Fawkes to decide.”

“Agent Fawkes?” Athena asked.

“Oh, um...” Jamie didn’t want to make a fuss, but he had never been threatened with being outed before. Perhaps a bit naively, he had assumed integrating into Overwatch would be fairly simple. He wasn’t ashamed of his past, but he had been unprepared for the severity with which someone could throw his background in his face. The commander should know about what happened at the very least because Jamie didn’t want his association with Overwatch to put the commander in a difficult position.

“I guess so,” he told Athena.

Satya looked over at Jamie after a moment of silence had passed between them. “You... are not a madman,” Satya said quietly. “I don’t think you are.”
Jamie didn’t respond for some time. No one had made Jamie feel ashamed of being different in a long time, not since leaving Junkertown. Riley had struck a chord when he called Jamie a ‘madman.’ Finally, Jamie returned Satya’s gaze and said, “A.D.H.D.”

Satya stared at him. “What?”

“That’s what the prison doc called it,” Jamie elaborated. “Never had a name for it before. I was just always ‘weird’ before I got diagnosed.”


Jamie tried to hide his surprise with moderate success. To his recollection, he had never heard Satya address him as ‘Jamie’ before, just ‘Fawkes’ or ‘Mr. Fawkes.’ It felt strange to hear her say it. She appeared unaware of the slip.

Satya plucked at the sleave of her dress, deep in thought about something. “When I was at the academy, the other pupils spoke about me in a similar fashion. It disturbs me when I hear such talk again. It makes me want to do something about it.” Satya became a little flustered all of a sudden, perhaps feeling she had revealed too much. She opened her mouth like she wanted to say more, but seemed to decide against it and turned away.

Jamie only nodded in response. He understood why she had gotten so mad now. Feeling it was time to change the subject, Jamie reached for the armour plate on his workbench. “Look, Sat. The experiment worked,” he said showing her the blue lines glowing faintly within the surface of the armour. He managed a weak smile.

Satya smiled back. “This is excellent news. Well done,” she said. “Can you send me a copy of the results?”

“Sure,” Jamie replied and proceeded to email her a copy.

Satya pulled the data up on her tablet computer. She seemed satisfied with what she was looking at. “The others will be pleased with this outcome. I believe we are ready to finalise the proposal.”

Satya stood from her chair and stepped over to Jamie’s workbench so she could inspect the armour plate more closely. “Look, the hard-light has solidified perfectly with a very low roughness profile. Well within acceptable parameters,” she said. She shot him a triumphant grin, then added, “We are going to win this, mark my words!”

The presentation of the proposals the following day was an uneventful affair. There were only two departments that arrived to present their proposals for the commander, the Science department and the Engineering department, as Jamie had suspected. He scanned the Briefing Room for any sign of Riley, but he was nowhere to be seen.

The Science team went first. Jamie and the rest of the engineers listened patiently while the mousy girl in glasses with her flying robot hovering over her shoulder explained some kind of roof-mounted dispenser system that would release biotic sealant over the surface of the roof at pre-timed intervals. Throughout her presentation, she referred regularly to an equation on a chalkboard and explained how the intervals would be calculated and timed according to weather, heat and other variables. It wasn’t a bad idea, by Jamie’s estimation.

Satya had elected to present their proposal and findings, so she stood next to take the stand. Jamie
flashed her thumbs up as she was just about to start and she smiled back at him.

Satya explained in detail for the commander and Captain Amari how the nanites would be programmed to carry the hard-light to fill the gaps in the leaky roof. She even presented the repaired armour plate alongside her hard-light producer prototype to demonstrate how the process would work.

When Satya was done, Jack thanked them for their time and advised them he would deliberate over lunch and announce the winning idea that afternoon. While everyone stood to head out to the Mess Hall, the giant gorilla approached the engineers before they could leave.

“If yer here to give us a hard time,” Torbjörn began, looking at Winston. “you can save yer breath.”

Winston actually laughed. “You should know, Mr. Lindholm, my jests are all in good fun,” he said good-naturedly. “Actually, I’m here to speak with Mr. Fawkes.”

Jamie was still kind of shocked by the sight of a talking gorilla, but he stepped forward all the same. “What? Me?” he asked.

“I heard there was some kind of incident in the Engineering Workshop yesterday,” Winston explained. “I want to apologise. I had no idea that my intern was going to behave that way. We will of course be seeking disciplinary action.”

Jamie caught sight of the confused look Brigitte and Torbjörn shared and resigned himself to the fact he would probably have to explain what happened to them as well now. “It’s fine,” Jamie said to Winston.

“Excellent, excellent. I’m glad to hear it.” Winston replied. He then turned to Torbjörn. “I’m glad to see you decided to enter the challenge. We were worried we wouldn't have any competition this year.”

“Wasn’t my idea,” Torbjörn growled. “Skinny here insisted.” Torbjörn jerked a thumb at Jamie for emphasis.


Winston was joking, but Torbjörn looked annoyed all the same. Jamie hurried to usher him out of the room before the two heads of department could get into a heated argument.

“Come on, Torb. I want my lunch,” Jamie said, adopting a bored tone. “Oh, by the way, Winston, there’s an error in your equation,” Jamie added and nodded towards the chalkboard on the other side of the room. Winston whipped around to stare at the equation with a start of alarm. The engineers took the opportunity to make an exit.

When they came back from lunch, the commander was waiting for them at the front of the briefing room. He waited for everyone to retake their seats before proceeding.

“First of all, I’d like to thank both the Science and Engineering departments for their time and effort towards participating in The Ingenuity and Innovation Challenge,” Jack said. “The captain and I have taken your proposals into consideration and in doing so(3,4),(996,994)
“Yes!” Jamie shouted suddenly, practically leaping out of his chair and pumping the air with his fist. “In your face, Winston!” he added, pointing across the room at the gorilla. Brigitte took hold of his arm and pulled him forcefully back into his seat, shushing him urgently.

The Science team were staring across the room at the Engineering team with mouths agape. Winston was speechless. The mousy girl looked particularly annoyed.

“Yes, well,” Jack said, frowning at the interruption. Suddenly, his pager went off and Jack paused to look down at the message coming through. “I’m late to a meeting,” he announced. “Dismissed.” With that, he headed out of the room at a brisk pace, leaving the two teams behind to stare after him.

Perhaps the most surprised of all was Torbjörn, who was staring around at his small team of ragtag engineers with pure amazement. “Did I hear him right?” Torbjörn asked, quietly. “Did we win?”

Brigitte grinned and nodded enthusiastically. “We did it, Papa!”

Some of the Science team had come across the room to shake hands with the engineers. Torbjörn returned the gesture with a few of them a little numbly. The mousy girl and her flying drone didn’t bother congratulating the engineers. Instead, she stormed out of the room soon after the commander’s announcement.

“Well done,” Winston muttered when it was his turn to shake Torbjörn’s hand and then led his team out of the room without saying much else.

Jamie was positively vibrating with elation. He turned to Satya and, raising a hand, managed to elicit a high-five from her, although she did so with a wry smile. “We did it!” he cried.

Satya laughed. “Looks like we’ll be keeping you after all, won’t we, Mr. Fawkes?”

For a moment, Jamie had forgotten his light-hearted suggestion that he was going to leave and join the Science team if they lost the challenge. He laughed. “Guess so!”

Brigitte reached out and shook Jamie’s hand in a congratulatory way. “Nice one, Jamie,” she said. “Who’d have thought yours would be the winning idea!”

Jamie returned Brigitte’s gesture with enthusiasm. Nothing could contain his joy in that moment. The sensation of validation and accomplishment came rushing over him in waves of excitement. Perhaps he had not realised just how much he wanted to win until that very moment. He couldn’t wait to tell Roadie and Hana!

Looking down, Jamie noted that Efi seemed to be in the middle of some kind of victory dance.

Torbjörn’s expression went from stunned to understanding as he realised his team had just acquired a sizable monetary grant. “Just think of all the upgrades we’ll be able to make around the Workshop now...”

“Hang on, hang on,” Jamie said, turning to making a staying motion with his hands at Torbjörn. “If I recall correctly, you wanted no part of this, wasn’t that right?”

Torbjörn frowned. “Well, they were my nanites that you used.”

“But we did all the work on the proposal!” Efi chimed in. She stopped dancing and turned to glare at the chief engineer with hands on hips. “We should get the prize money!”
“Exactly,” Satya confirmed. Her tone indicated the topic was not one for debate. “The money will be divided among the team members' projects who actually helped work on the challenge.”

“Yeah, and I want my coffee machine!” Jamie said, nodding decisively.

“Alright, alright,” Torbjörn muttered. “You all did very well. Is that what you want to hear? I’m...”

Everyone was quiet, waiting for Torbjörn to finish his sentence. “Go on. We’re waiting. ‘I’m...’ what?” Jamie asked.

Torbjörn looked annoyed. “I’m proud of you all, okay? ”

Brigitte smiled warmly and patted her father on the shoulder. “Thank you, Papa,” she said.

“It was Jamie’s idea that won us the prize,” Efi said. She reached up and high-fived Jamie as Satya had done.

Torbjörn, on the other hand, sized Jamie up critically. Jamie had certainly proved himself in Torbjörn’s eyes, even if the older engineer didn’t particularly like the cheeky grin currently plastered on Jamie’s face. “Yes... Well done, lad.”

Jamie looked thoughtful at this. “Ah. Praise from Caesar,” he said pragmatically. Satya elbowed him in the ribs playfully.

They chatted all the way back to the Workshop, talking enthusiastically about what they would be spending their share of the grant on and how they were going to celebrate this very welcome windfall. Torbjörn clapped Jamie on the shoulder in a fatherly way and Jamie would recall the moment later as one of his happiest days on base.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: There is a really good video on YouTube about how Junkrat’s RIP-tire would be constructed in the real world: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJrXth2Cyuk. I referred to this a bit when describing the construction of the RIP-Tire over the last few chapters and I recommend you give it a view!
Jamie sat up and spat out a mouthful of snow. In the distance, through the trees, he could see what was left of the dropship going up in flames. The force of the explosion had knocked him into a snowbank.

He scrambled upright, looking around frantically.

“Sym!” he called, then waited for a response. When none came, he called out again, more urgently, “Sym!”

Jamie took hold of his patchy hair with both hands and spun in the snow, looking around himself for a sign, an answer, a solution, anything!

“Oh, no,” he said to himself. “Oh, no, no, no…” What was he going to do? He had lost her. He had absolutely lost a teammate. And a valuable one too! What was he going to tell the strike commander? He’d be barbequed alive! Roadie was going to flay his skin! He…

“Over here…,” came a small voice.

Jamie spun and practically gasped with relief. He trudged hastily through knee-deep snow to the source of the voice. He could see now the blue of Satya’s winter uniform sticking out of the snow. Her hard-light producing arm was hanging out of the snow drift, slightly raised as if she were intentionally signalling her position to him. Jamie, however, had got the impression that the gesture was entirely accidental. He fell to his knees beside her and started digging.

“Sym! Are you alright?” Jamie cried.

“I think so…,” Satya moaned and tried to sit up as she shed layers of snow. She tried to focus her gaze on Jamie’s face as he continued to dig her out. “You’re bleeding,” she remarked.

Jamie had suspected as much. He had been trying to squint through the blood in his eye. He raised a hand to his forehead and felt a shallow gash above his left eye. Perhaps he had been grazed by shrapnel. “Don’t worry, it will stop soon,” he told her.

“I’m not worried,” Satya stated calmly. “I’m much more concerned about our ship.” Jamie frowned at her statement but said nothing as Satya sat up and looked down the snowy terrain towards the remains of the ship.

“The commander won’t be happy. He’ll have to explain another ship loss to the U.N.,” Satya mused. Her hair, flecked with snowflakes, had been pulled into a loose bun and was now starting to come undone. She paused for a moment, before adding, “I do hope Tracer got out safely.”

Jamie looked again down the snowy decline towards the burning wreckage of their dropship. Smoke was rising in thick, black plumes above the evergreen pines. All Jamie could remember was that he had been dosing in his chair while they made a return flight from South Korea to Gibraltar when the emergency alarms went off and Lena had been calling over the intercom to brace for impact. Everything was a whirlwind after that. Jamie estimated that Lena had somehow managed to achieve a mid-air engine restart and an emergency landing in the North Siberian forest without any fatalities. He remembered Lena had ordered from the cockpit that they evacuate the ship and
Jamie had obeyed, thinking she would be following them soon after.

Jamie had managed to run to a safe distance just before the ship exploded from the impact. It was not a bad explosion either by his estimate, but now Jamie realised that Lena was nowhere to be found. Had she been on board when the explosion happened? He hoped not.

With Satya now free, Jamie picked up a handful of snow and pressed it to his temple, hoping it might stem the flow of blood there. “I’m sure Tracer got out fine,” he said quietly. “She’s a smart bird.”

Satya met his gaze and nodded, but she still looked worried. “What happened?” she asked. “Why did the ship go down?”

Flames had all but engulfed what remained of the dropship by that point, but Jamie could still see the damage to the aircraft’s starboard side wing, and remembered the way the ship had spiralled in the air before the crash. He suspected something had struck, or more precisely, been fired at them as they flew over the forest.

“Look there,” Jamie said, pointing. “I reckon we were shot down.”

Satya looked over at the dropship, her face tense with alarm. She stared at the ship for a moment, absorbing what Jamie had said.

The wind howled through the trees at that moment and fanned the flames in the distance. Jamie shivered and looked around at the tall pines towering above, suddenly feeling as though they might not be alone. He was very much aware that they were standing in the snow, exposed and unarmed. “We should go,” he said firmly to Satya. “We might not be safe here.”

Satya nodded and allowed Jamie to help her to her feet. He steadied her with one hand. “Tracer will have sent a distress signal back to base,” she told him. She shivered where she stood, wiping snow from her eyes. “We should find higher ground. Rescue will be on the way and we will be easily spotted from an elevated area.” Jamie nodded in response.

“How long before they get here, do you reckon?” Jamie asked, squinting through the trees at their surroundings.

Satya tried to adjust her rumpled clothing. “At least a few hours,” she replied. She paused in the middle of dusting snow off of her fur-lined coat to look around with alarm. “Wait. Where is Bastion?” She remembered all three of them and little Ganymede evacuating the ship soon after the emergency landing. The explosion that followed soon after had thrown them several metres and blown snow in all directions. Somewhere in the confusion, they must have lost the Bastion unit.

Jamie motioned for her to follow him and set off through the snow. “Bastion? You’re asking about that bucket of bolts at a time like this?” Jamie exclaimed. “Who cares? Glad to be shot of the clunker.”

Satya rolled her eyes but set off after him all the same. “Bastion is the whole reason we are out here!”

“Exactly!” Jamie rounded on her and threw up his hands in the air for emphasis. “It’s all his fault! If I ever see that good-for-nothing pile of scrap again…”

“You know very well that Bastion is very important to Mr. Lindholm,” Satya interrupted. “If we lose him…”
“God willing,” Jamie muttered, thinking Satya couldn’t hear him.

Satya frowned at his comment. “If we lose him,” she continued with determination. “Torbjörn will never forgive us.”

Jamie scoffed but said nothing else. Satya rolled her eyes. She was beginning to grow very tired of Jamie’s juvenile attitude towards omnis which was, at best, a highly suspicious regard for any of their non-human teammate. Even Athena was up to something according to Jamie. “What have you got against Bastion?” she asked.

“What have I got against...?” Jamie fixed her again with an incredulous stare. “Sym, did the Omnic Crisis not get mentioned in the Indian newspapers or something? Did someone discover the world’s biggest curry that day and the Omnic War was it just a footnote at the bottom of the front page?”

“You’re not funny,” she replied in an even tone.

“Baston units are dangerous,” Jamie went on with his rant, kicking piles of snow out of his way. “And I’m not convinced that this one is safe just yet! Sure, he’s got a cute bird sidekick, but I’m sure he’s secretly plotting our demise....”

“Do you hear yourself?” Satya argued. On some level, she knew it was pointless to bicker with Jamie over something like this, but they had just been shot out of the sky and felt like burning off some of her adrenalin. “You know Torbjörn has had the E54 fully upgraded with new safety protocols. He’s not capable of plotting anything...”

“That’s what everyone thought about omics, and then the War happened!”

“Well, I quite like him,” Satya said in an almost defiant tone.

Jamie tried to take a step forward with his peg leg and immediately sank into the snow up to his mid-thigh. “Who? Bastion?” he asked, trying somewhat futilely pull his prosthesis out of the snow.

“No. Ganymede,” Satya replied. “We’ve only known them a few weeks, but I rather like the little fellow.”

Jamie rolled his eyes. “What kind of omnic has a pet bird? And for that matter, what kind of bird-brained, Tweety wannabe goes and obsessively follows a no-brained omnic around?”

Satya shrugged. “I think its sweet. They’ve bonded to each other.”

“Baston is about to bond with my fist if he makes me look for him in this snow.”

Satya sighed. She urged Jamie onwards and they continued to move uphill away from the crash site. “You’ve some audacity,” she remarked in a flat tone.

“Scuse me?”

Satya fixed him with a disapproving stare. She unfurled a hand at him like a Greek goddess about to offer a dose of wisdom. “Once again, it has completely escaped your understanding just how much has been sacrificed for you, hasn’t it, Mr. Faw—I mean—Junkrat,” she said, clearing her throat. Satya had almost forgotten they were in an unsafe position and that she was obligated to use Jamie’s callsign in such a situation for their own safety. She cast her eyes around at the trees nearby as though she might see eavesdroppers there.
Jamie rolled his eyes. “What are you on about now?”

Satya huffed and tried to pull her boot out of a snow drift without much success. She wobbled and Jamie reached for her at the last moment before she fell, leaning effortlessly towards her with all of his six-foot frame and steadying her with a hand on her arm. This just seemed to annoy her even more; she wanted to stay focussed on why he had irked her so much so she could tell him as much and here he was kindly offering her a hand. She pulled herself free of the drift and Jamie retrieved his hand once he was satisfied that she was not going to fall.

“What I’m ‘on about’,” she continued as they turned and carried on climbing uphill. “Is that Torbjörn graciously arranged for us to meet with his peers at Pohang University so we could oversee E54’s upgrades and learn from some of the world’s best robotic engineers in the field. A generous gesture towards someone so new to the team such as yourself. Not to mention that Tracer dropped everything to fly us to Korea at the last minute. God knows what’s happened to her now!” Jamie made a noise that sounded like ‘Pffft!’ “She’ll be fine,” he replied. “She’s probably time-hopped back to base or whatever that chronal-thingy does.”

“I don’t think that’s how that works...” Satya began.

There was a sharp crack to their left that sounded like a branch snapping. Jamie and Satya held still, each falling silent. They both watched the line of trees nearby for movement. Everything was eerily silent. After a moment, they turned to each other and shared a look of apprehension.

“What was that?” Jamie asked.

Satya wasn’t sure of her answer. “Perhaps it was an animal? Or Bastion?” she wondered aloud.

Before she could stop him, Jamie took a trudging step through the snow towards the source of the sound. “Oi! Bastion! Drag your metal carcass over here!” Jamie shouted into the forest.

Instinctively, Satya reached out to grab his shoulder. “Will you hush, please?” Satya chided him urgently. “We don’t know who else is out here.” She looked around cautiously but the forest of pines remained stoic and silent.

Jamie seemed not to have heard her. “Bastion, if this is one of your stupid hide-and-seek games, I’ll...”

“Junkrat!” Satya admonished him. “Not so loud!”

Satya made out the sound of branches cracking again through Jamie’s tirade, this time from behind their position. She looked around and saw movement; something had darted behind a tree. Jamie was still hollering for Bastion. “Junkrat...” she began to say, but there was the sound of snow crunching underfoot and something moving on their right now. Looking up, there was a man slowly moving towards them with a rifle in his hands. Satya’s eyes widened.

Jamie spotted him too, quickly stilling himself and eying the man’s weapon. He raised his hands so the newcomer could see they were unarmed.

“Whoa, whoa! Easy mate,” Jamie began.

The man was expressionless and he gestured towards them with the barrel of his rifle. He barked something at them in what sounded like a Russian dialect.

Satya checked behind them. More men were emerging from the trees. They were dressed in worn
furs, leathers and winter clothing. They appeared unshaven and dishevelled, carrying antique-looking and hastily-repaired rifles. Satya had heard of Russian rebels setting up camps in the North Siberian forest following the Omnic Crisis. Could these men be the ones who had shot down their dropship?

“No... comprende?” Jamie tried with an awkward grin at the first man. Satya inched closer to Jamie as she realised they were surrounded. She tapped his shoulder to alert him to this fact, and he turned to see there were guns pointing at them from all directions.

The first man was getting closer now. He lifted his rifle again and spat out a string of words indecipherable to Satya, but the authoritative tone was unmistakeable. He reached out for Jamie, taking hold of the prosthetic forearm, and jerked him off his feet and into the snow.

“Hey!” Satya cried with alarm, reaching for Jamie. Someone approached her from behind and Satya reacted on instinct. She threw up a hard-light barrier the height and breadth of a door to block the man before he could make physical contact with her. The man staggered backwards, startled. The rebels were staring cautiously at Satya now, rifles raised. They began to shout angrily to one another.

Satya crouched over Jamie who was now trying to pull himself upright out of the snow. She spun and held her prosthetic arm out, fingers extended towards the rebels. Her arm began to whir and vibrate as it warmed up, light glinting off of the blue crystal resting in the palm. Satya was banking on these men not know the full extent of what her arm was capable of. Perhaps this stance alone would be enough to strike fear into their hearts. ‘Let them think I can shoot lasers,’ she prayed silently.

“Stay back!” Satya warned them. She whirled to point her arm at the men on her opposite side, and they recoiled from her. With her back turned, she didn’t see two of the rebels suddenly dive on Jamie while he was still prone, hoisting him up, arms pinned behind him in an instant. A third rebel jabbed the end of his rifle into Jamie ribs.

Satya turned back to find her companion had been apprehended. “Junkrat!” she cried, taking a step forward.

“Sym! Look out!” Jamie yelled.

She didn’t have enough time to react to the blow. Something struck her head from behind and she stumbled in the snow. One moment she was upright, and the next she was facedown, face pressed into the ice. She was dimly aware that there was muted commotion and she could just barely make out that Jamie was yelling as the darkness crept in around the edges of her vision.

--

When Satya woke, she found her vision was blurred. Wherever she was, the room was dark, cold, and smelled of mildew. She could hear something dripping nearby. She could also hear a strange shuffling noise.

“Who’s there?” she croaked, finding her throat dry and parched.

The shuffling stopped. “Sym!” A blurry shape moved into her field of vision.
“Junkrat...?” She tried to sit up, her head immediately beginning to throb. She groaned.

“Easy, love,” came Jamie’s voice. “You took quite a blow. Just rest for a moment.”

She tried to settle back down into her original position, noting she seemed to be resting on a small cot. She tried to shift so she was more comfortable, and found that her parka was wet through. Inquisitively, she lifted her right arm and crept her fingers along her opposite side to confirm her hard-light arm was still there. It was, they hadn’t taken it. She sighed with relief.

“Where are we?” she asked.

“Dunno,” the Jamie-shaped blur replied. “Someplace bad.”

Satya’s vision was beginning to clear. She could make out a small, dank room comprised of 3 brick walls and a line of rusty metal bars along the fourth side. There was a sink, a toilet and only one cot which Satya was currently resting on. Beyond the bars there was a small wooden desk that must have belonged to some kind of warden. It was cluttered with dusty papers and long-discarded cigar boxes. Satya could also make out some filing cabinets, several wooden crates, and a heavy looking door that lead who-knows where. Sunlight filtered through a hole in the ceiling above the small office area. Everything seemed to be in a state of decay, from the rusting filing cabinet opposite the warden’s desk to the cracked, dripping pipes in their cell.

Jamie seemed to have returned to what he was doing before. He was standing in the corner of the room wrestling with something she couldn’t see.

“Can you get us out of here?” Satya asked him. “Can you blow up a wall or something?”

“No luck,” Jamie laughed. “Didn’t bring anything to do any blowing up with! Criminal, isn’t it?”

Satya raised an eyebrow at him. “That’s not like you...” she remarked.

“I know, right?” he laughed again. “Ol’ Torb said I wasn’t to go blowing up anything at Pohang Uni. Thought it would be best to leave all of that stuff behind.”

“Just my luck,” Satya groaned. “The one time I actually want you to use your explosives and you haven’t any on you.”

He giggled in reply. Of course, he probably thought this was all very funny. He had likely spent plenty of time behind bars in the past, she mused to herself. He didn’t seem remotely worried about their predicament, in fact he seemed perfectly calm like he was right at home.

She watched him for a moment. He was still fiddling with something she couldn’t see over by the wall. “What are you doing?” she asked.

“This brick is loose,” he replied, but did not look up from his work. Satya noted that the walls all around them were cracked and crumbling. They were still too thick to harbour any attempt to burrow through, but Jamie seemed determined to disassemble what he could of the bricks and mortar. He managed to pull the brick in question free of the dilapidated wall and hefted it in his hand appreciatively. “Anyone who comes in here, I’m going to splatter their brains against the wall,” he told her.

“Charming,” Satya remarked. She tried to sit up again. Reaching out a hand, she managed to take hold of the edge of the nearby sink and pulled herself over to it so she was hunched over the basin. She quickly splashed some water from the faucet on her face before allowing herself to sit again. The act of pulling herself upright had made her feel nauseous. She let her head rest in her hands.
“How long was I out?” Satya asked. “I assume the extraction team should be here soon to rescue us?”

Jamie was practicing swinging the brick through the air with his good arm. “It’s been an hour or two since they brought us down here,” he said. “Looked like some kind of old building outside with barbed wire around it. Nothing but mountains all around.”

“I hope Overwatch will find us alright,” Satya remarked. She checked her ‘beacon’—a bracelet-like device wrapped around her right wrist which Overwatch could use to geolocate her during missions—and confirmed it was undamaged.

Jamie laughed again. “I don’t know about you,” Jamie said, turning to look at her. “But I’m not sitting around here waiting to find out, or for any of those blokes to come back and finish us off.”

Satya looked up at him, perplexed. “What do you mean? We only need to sit and wait for rescue, surely!”

“I’m serious,” Jamie said. He gave the brick in his hand a calm, calculated assessment, then turned to fix his gaze on Satya intently. “And don’t call me ‘Shirley’.”

Satya rolled her eyes. “Jokes. At a time like this,” Satya grumbled without humour.

“I couldn’t understand a word any of those fellas were saying out there,” Jamie continued, rubbing at his chin thoughtfully. “How do we know they’re not planning to off us the first chance they get?”

“Because they would have done it by now, wouldn’t they?” Satya replied, rubbing feebly at her temples in a vain hope that she might be able to stop her headache. What did she do to deserve being trapped in a room with Jamison Fawkes, she wondered.

Jamie watched her for a moment. “You alright, Sym?”

“I’m feeling a little better, yes,” she replied. She looked around. “This place. It makes me uncomfortable.” She shivered. “And I’m very cold.”

Jamie nodded decisively. “Then that settles it. Let’s get you out of here.”

“You can’t!” Satya interjected.

“Don’t try to stop me,” Jamie said resolutely. “And don’t call me a cu—”

“Junkrat!” Satya interrupted, exasperated by his persistent and crude humour. “There is no need to escape. We only need to wait for extraction!”

“Fine,” Jamie said with a firm nod and marched over to the bars. “Wait here then. I’m going to find a way out.” Satya sighed as Jamie tried to wedge the brick between the gap where the bars met the wall. It seemed he was hoping to make the gap bigger by any means, perhaps so they could wriggle through. “Unless you want to use that 3D printer attached to your left shoulder to fashion us a key, Sym, I’m going to have to dig us out.” Satya rolled her eyes again, but Jamie didn’t notice. He continued to try to hammer his way out of the cell. “You’re looking at a man who escaped from one of the highest maximum-security prisons in the northern hemisphere! You watch! Nothing can stop me!” he cried.

Satya did watch Jamie for a while as he tried to hammer some of the bricks nearest the bars with his own brick. It was almost inaudible, but Satya could hear him very quietly giggling to himself—
a breathy, absent-minded sound—as he focussed entirely on the task before him. The mark above his eye had stopped bleeding, but now dried blood darkened his face. He had a peculiar, almost jovial attitude towards being captured, she noted, as though escaping from any prison was merely a mildly-challenging puzzle to eventually be solved. It must be that being imprisoned happened so frequently to him so it didn’t seem to bother him at all, she mused.

Jamie continued his work and Satya resigned herself to watching him from her position on the cot. She sighed again. If only she could be as calm and unperturbed as Jamie was in that moment. She watched him without saying anything for some time while he carried on, occasionally making small noises of effort. He was very determined to remove her from this terrible place, and seemed even more resolute when she had said the place made her uncomfortable. It was noble really that he was concerned about her discomfort. She smiled. Perhaps it was not such a bad idea to at least take a look around beyond their cell. Maybe they could find a place to wait that would accommodate a faster, easier extraction.

She watched him for a little longer but Jamie seemed to be making poor progress. During one of his many shallow strikes against the wall, his thumb got in the way and he suddenly let out a yelp, dropping the brick and jumping back. He clutched at this left hand, groaning with pain.

This time Satya laughed. “You are a particularly talented escape artist, Junkrat. I’ve no doubt of your abilities, but I think this time you might need a little extra help.” She stood and made her way over to him.

Jamie glowered at the bars with contempt. “You might be right,” he began, “What we really need is...”

Satya came to stand beside him and held up something he couldn’t identify at first. “A door?” she asked. He looked at the device in her hand. It was a teleporter base. She must have had one spare hidden in her parka.

Jamie grinned at her. “Sym, you are a gem.”

Satya looked very pleased with herself as she placed the teleporter pad on the floor of their cell. Bringing her hands up in front of her. The hard-light arm began to hum, and between her fingers she spun soft blue light. With a flourish of her arms, the hard-light flowed from the crystal in her palm and arched outward, forming a large oval shape. The teleporter base opened like the petals of a flower unfurling, with the glowing blue portal poised perfectly above. Beyond the bars, Satya had positioned their exit just short of the warden’s desk. Jamie watched the proceedings with rapt attention. Hard-light technology was still so new and fascinating to him.

When she was finished. Satya took a step back. She turned to Jamie looking fatigued.

“You alright, love?” Jamie asked. Activating the teleporter seemed to have drained her energy, and she was already in bad shape from the run-in with the rebels. He truly wished now that he had some explosives with him so he could have busted them out a different way and save her the trouble.

Satya winced, but nodded affirmatively. “I’ll be fine,” she replied. “We should hurry. There may be guards upon us at any moment.”

Satya stepped through the portal first. Once he saw her safely through and standing outside the metal bars, Jamie followed after her. As he emerged, Satya quickly disabled the teleporter and reached into the cell again to retrieve the pad, sliding it deftly between the bars. It folded itself up neatly and Satya pocketed it.
“Another successful prison-break!” Jamie crowed. He turned to admire the cell bars. “That’s... what? Seven now, I think. All thanks to my new accomplice!” He shot Satya a triumphant grin.

Satya raised an eyebrow at him. “Remember when I told you that you weren’t funny?”

Jamie shrugged. “Tough crowd.”

Satya rolled her eyes. “Let’s go,” she said and together they moved past the warden’s desk, and through the heavy wooden door. They found themselves standing in a corridor. To the right there were more cells for prisoners stretching onwards into the dark. Many of the walls that lined the cells were collapsed in places and debris littered the floor. The uneven stone floor was wet and moss-covered. To their left, the corridor led to a set of stairs. It was difficult to tell if they were above or below ground. Everything was quiet.

“What is this place?” Jamie asked, eyeing the rusted and broken bars to an empty cell nearby.

“I’m not sure,” Satya replied. “But I think it may be an old gulag.”

“A what?”

“Gulag,” she reiterated. “A place built by the Soviets in the twentieth century for prisoners.”

Jamie kicked a fallen wooden beam out of the way and watched as dust motes erupted into the air. “Doesn’t look like anyone has been here for ages. Why build it out in the middle of nowhere?”

Satya motioned for him to follow her towards the stairs at the end of the hall. “Because they often forced the prisoners to perform manual labour like mining for coal out in the wilderness.”

Jamie whistled. “Poor bastards,” he remarked.

“This place is so remote, it’s the perfect place to hide and never be found. I expect the rebels have probably had no contact with the world outside of Siberia for years, probably decades,” Satya went on.

As they made their way up the stairs, Satya noted that the crumbling walls and partially-collapsed ceiling was allowing snow to blow into the stairwell and pile up in the corners. “We should be careful not to be seen,” Satya told Jamie who was trailing behind.

Jamie’s peg leg was clunking against the perforated metal of the stairway’s steps. “Seems an odd place to set up camp, don’t you think?” he asked.

Satya shrugged. “I suppose they had nowhere else to go.” She turned to watch him for a moment as he hopped over a gap where one of the steps had collapsed. “Besides, those who live in glass houses should not throw stones,” she added wryly.

Jamie looked up and caught Satya’s grin before it vanished. He winked at her. “Junkertown is plenty odd I’ll grant you that!” he laughed. “You should come visit sometime.”

She tried to ignore how genuine his tone was. “I’ll pass,” she replied, deadpan, and he laughed again.

As they reached the landing at the top of the stairs, they passed into a room with a high ceiling. Windows set high in the walls allowed waning light into the room. Flood lamps had been set up in the corners to light the otherwise dark room, but there was little other sign that anyone had passed through recently. It was some kind of storage space, Satya noted, with crates and unidentifiable
equipment lining the walls. Satya saw various tools scattered around the room, and, funnily enough, random omnic parts. There was a fusion driver from an OR14 unit, as well as arm and leg components from other siege automatons.

Satya heard shuffling again and turned to find Jamie was rummaging around in one of the crates. “What are you doing now?” she asked.

Jamie plucked a few small bottles from the crate and held them aloft triumphantly. “Lookee this, Sym!” he cried. “Vodka!”

Satya frowned. “I hardly think this is the time or place...” she began, but stopped when he pulled the cap off each bottle and started to pour some of the contents out. He placed the half-filled bottles on top of a nearby crate and continued to rummage for more materials. “What are you making?” she asked finally.

“Molotovs!” He grinned at her. “You never know, love. We might need to defend ourselves!”

Satya sighed. “Of course,” she muttered. Jamie had explosives on the brain, as she had come to learn. He always seemed to be looking at his surroundings and devising ways to turn different objects into fire, smoke and loud noises, preferably a combination of all three.

Satya turned to take in the room once again. She tried to scan the room as best she could for an escape. Looking up, she could see a kind of mezzanine made from rotting wood that wrapped around the upper walls of the room where the only access to any windows was available. Perhaps if she could teleport herself and Jamie up there, they could slip out of a window and make a run for it? But she was still feeling weak from the last time she activated the teleporter and she was unsure she had the strength to pull off such a feat again.

Something caught her eye across the room. As she crossed the concrete floor, Satya noticed an enormous Soviet hammer and sickle mural had been painted on the opposite wall from the door they had entered through, now faded and peeling from age. Satya approached it cautiously, running her fingers over the brittle and flaking colours. There was plenty of graffiti on the walls; the rebels had tried to deface the mural, Satya noticed.

Jamie’s voice jolted her out of her reverie. “Alright, Sym, I reckon I’ve got enough Molotovs to get us...”

There was noise. Light flickered through a doorway off to the side of the room, like shadows passing in front of a flame. Dark shapes were shifting through the corridor beyond. Satya heard voices, distant at first, but drawing nearer.

Jamie immediately fell silent. Satya froze and watched him with wide-eyed panic. He motioned to Satya to hide as he slipped behind the crate he had been using as a makeshift workbench. She glanced around, spotting a desk nearby littered with old papers and boxes, and dove beneath it.

People shuffled into the room, struggling to carry something between them. From her position beneath the desk, she could see several men from the waist down, seemingly dragging and hauling a very heavy load. They set whatever it was down in the centre of the room and Satya cursed; they had positioned themselves in between her and Jamie, cutting them off.

Whatever the heavy object was that they brought in with them was obscured from her sight. It appeared to be a lot heavier and more cumbersome than Satya had first thought. The men were muttering to each other again in that language Satya couldn’t understand. Eventually they set the object down and stepped apart so Satya could get a better look. She could barely contain her
shock and surprise.

It was Bastion.

Satya held in a gasp. The E54 unit was folded up into ‘sentry’ mode, which made him look smaller than usual. She heard Bastion make a low, drawn-out beeping sound in his own nonverbal way, that sounded decidedly nervous. Satya knew they had travelled without any kind of ammunition, so Bastion had nothing with which to protect himself. There was no sign of Ganymede.

Between the legs of the table, she sought out Jamie across the room. He was peeking out from behind his crate. He shared a similar look of confusion and concern with Satya.

Returning her attention to the rebels, Satya saw the men start to collect equipment from around the room and bring it back to where they had placed Bastion. Tools, crowbars and the like were collected and laid out on a nearby table. One of the larger men—someone Satya had not seen before when they were accosted in the woods—oversaw all of this, nodding his approval as each item was placed before him. Another man started up a noisy angle grinder. Bastion beeped more furtively, alarmed by the noise. He appeared to shiver with fear amongst the men, too scared to move. Satya began to understand what the men were planning when the rebel approached bastion with his angle grinder raised. Suddenly it became apparent why there were so many omnic parts lying around. They were going to take Bastion apart.

In half-panic, she had no time to think out her plan or make any kind of signal to Jamie; she simply reacted on instinct. She scrambled from under the table and stood facing the men at the centre of the room. She held her hard-light arm outstretched in front of her as she had before and took aim at the men.

“Stop!” she cried, and the men turned to look at her with alarm. Everyone froze. The angle grinder came to a halt.

Satya stared back at them for a moment, suddenly realising that she could speak no Russian and was effectively unarmed. She had managed to trick them into fearing her hard-light-producing arm before, but could she keep them convinced this time? Some of the men were armed, and adjusted their weapons cautiously.

“Step away from that Bastion unit,” she said, trying to enunciate clearly enough to be understood but still sound threatening.

No one moved, but Bastion let out a hopeful sound. The men stared back at Satya without saying anything. It was clear they had not understood her. Satya gulped. Before she could speak out again or even motion for the men to move, a booming voice echoed off the high walls.

“Please. Put your arm away.”

The tallest of the rebels, the one that seemed to be their leader, stepped forward. He had spoken in plain English though his accent was unmistakably thick and Russian. He took a few more steps towards Satya, eyes locked with hers. He was enormous, Satya noted, middle-aged and carrying a kind of rifle. His salt-and-pepper hair was cropped close to his head, and there was a scar above his right eye.

Satya held her ground. “That’s far enough,” she told him. “Let the Bastion go. I won’t tell you again.”

He was eyeing her arm now. “That won’t be possible,” he explained calmly. “We need this
Bastion.”

Bastion whimpered somewhere behind him.

Satya tried to stay calm. She schooled her face to remain as neutral as possible. She was about to ask what they needed him for when something caught her eye. There was a very old, tattered and long-faded insignia on the upper breast of the man’s jacket. For a moment, she felt that she had seen the symbol somewhere before. A memory of a long-ago corporate meeting she had attended at Vishkar headquarters between her superiors and an external company flickered across her mind briefly. It was unmistakably the same company logo stitched onto the rebel’s clothing as what she had seen neatly printed on top of her briefing documents at that meeting.

“Volskaya...” Satya’s voice was just above a whisper.

The man heard her, his eyes widening slightly, eyebrow arched. He smiled at her after a pause. He reached inside his jacket and removed a packet of cigarettes. He lit one of them with an old-fashioned lighter. “So, you know what this symbol means, hm?” He tapped the logo just above his breast pocket for emphasis.

Satya watched him, but held her ground. She kept her arm outstretched at the group of men. They were watching her warily, shuffling on the spot.

The leader finally regarded her again. “You must also know the Svyatogor, yes?”

Satya knew. During that meeting, many years ago, they had discussed projects with Vokskaya, including improvements to the Svyatogor manufacturing facilities. She had only been a junior staff member back then, but she had understood the importance of the human-piloted Svyatogor mechs to Russia’s campaign to end the ongoing omnic insurrection across the country. But what did that have to do with these ruffians camped out here in the Siberian wilderness?

“You are defectors, aren’t you?” Satya asked. The leader only stared back at her. “From the war,” Satya went on. “That is why your jacket has that old logo and why you are so far from the frontlines.”

The man took a long drag on his cigarette. “Close,” he said finally. “I was not a soldier. My comrades here...” He motioned to the group of men standing behind him. “They fought. Not me. I was a consultant for Volskaya Industries. But no more. I have left that life behind.”

Satya considered this for some time. Eventually, she said, “It doesn’t matter. Move away from the...”

“But it does matter,” the leader interrupted her. Suddenly his expression changed and though he had remembered something important. “How rude of me. I should introduce myself, yes? My name is Dimitri.”

Satya said nothing.

Dimitri took another puff of his cigarette. He went on, “And you are Vishkar, yes?” The cloying smell of smoky nicotine spread with every casual wave of his hand. “I have seen these kinds of... devices before,” he said as he indicated her arm.

Satya’s heart sank. Slowly, she lowered her arm. If he knew about her hard-light-producing arm, then he probably also knew that she could not shoot lasers out of her palm. She held still and watched the man.

He took a long drag. “The Svyatogor,” he went on. “They work well against this one’s kind.” He
motioned towards Bastion again.

Satya did not respond.

“A single Svyatogor can take on dozens of B73s, E54s and OR14s at once. Did you ever wonder why?” Dimitri went on. “Why the Svyatogor weapons systems can so easily neutralize the omnis? Hm?”

Satya continued to say nothing. Where was he going with this?

Dimitri smiled, his expression dark. “Katya Volskaya is up to something. I intend to find out what.”

Satya’s eyes narrowed at the man. She had heard of Katya, the Volskaya Industries CEO. Was this some kind of conspiracy Dimitri was trying to uncover? Was there collusion between Katya and the omnis? “I won’t allow any harm to come to this E54. He is our friend. As an Overwatch agent, I am ordering you to stand down.” Satya kept her tone firm and commanding, head raised high.

Dimitri remained expressionless. Behind him, the men shifted impatiently on the spot, watching the exchange with incomprehension. Dimitri made a low noise in his throat that may have been amusement. “So, you are Overwatch too?” He thought for a moment, brows brought together in concentration. “I thought you were disbanded.”

“Not anymore,” Satya replied.

Dimitri nodded. “Forgive me. I have been out of touch with the outside world for some time. News travels slowly here.” He continued to watch her closely. “Tell me, what need has Overwatch to consort with this one’s kind, hm?” He nodded again towards Bastion. “Are they not our enemy?”

Satya was beginning to tire of this man’s talk. “I have no obligation to discuss such matters with you,” she replied coolly.

“Or is he an exception?” Dimitri went on. “You coexist with this particular unit because he is... different? Special?”

Satya was uncomfortable with hearing Bastion being referred to as the ‘enemy.’ She had only known him for a short period since Torbjörn had introduced him to the team just a couple of weeks prior. In that time, she had only ever known him to be gentle—particularly when Ganymede was concerned—and helpful to the team.

“That unit is an Overwatch agent too. You will release him immediately,” Satya said firmly.

“Ah, so he is special to you,” Dimitri replied. “Then I am truly sad to disappoint you, my friend. Because I am going to take this thing apart and I will discover the truth as to what makes the Svyatogor so powerful.”

“I will stop you!” Satya said defiantly.

“You, my friend,” Dimitri began calmly. “...will be dead.” He unholstered a pistol from his belt and raised it to aim directly at Satya’s chest.

There was a flurry of activity. Bastion cried out and transformed into ‘recon’ mode and, standing upright, tried to reach for Satya. The rebels whirled and moved to stop him.

Jamie leapt out from behind his crate. “Bastion! Code: Red!” Jamie cried. He then jumped on top
of one of the rebels and started wrestling him for the gun he was carrying.

The rest of the rebels barely had time to look up and register what was going on. Before them, Bastion transformed. His arms and other protrusions folded away again as he shifted into tank form. Bastion emitted a series of beeps that sounded like a cavalry bugle call, the sound strangely ominous through his high-pitched beeps. In a panic, the rebels ran for the exit, in their fear forgetting that Bastion had no ammunition.

“You idiots!” Dimitri yelled. “What are you doing!?” He tried to grab hold of one of the rebels as they tripped and clamoured over each other.

Satya saw something yellow flash through the air before her. Looked up, she saw Ganymede fly directly into Dimitri’s face from a window high above. There was an ungodly screeching noise as Ganymede scratched and tore at Dimitri’s face before flitting out of his reach. Dimitri was hollering indignantly. In the confusion, his lighter dropped from his pocket.

Jamie literally dove on the ground for the lighter but it bounced out of his reach. Satya realised with a start that Jamie needed the lighter so he could light the Molotovs. She stooped instinctively, reaching out for it in the chaos as it bounced towards her.

Jamie almost ploughed into her as he shouldered his way past a guard and ran at her. “Go!” he bellowed. Satya stuffed the lighter in his hand quickly. “Bastion! This way!” Jamie added as they ran towards the hammer and sickle mural. Bastion brought up the rear behind them while the rebels dove out of his way. Satya threw down a teleporter pad and summoned what was left of her strength to create a hard-light portal above it.

“Hurry!” she cried and ushered Jamie and Bastion through, then dove after them. As she emerged, she closed the portal with an urgent wave her gauntlet so they couldn’t be followed. Suddenly feeling fatigued, she lurched forward and Jamie caught hold of her around the shoulders. “We must go,” she managed to say weakly. Creating the teleporter with the last of her energy had exhausted her.

They were now standing on the mezzanine, high above Dimitri and the rebels who were still scrambling around below. In the chaos, someone spotted them high above and pointed, shouting out in urgent tones. Bastion reconfigured back to recon mode, making a few low noises of concern.

“Run!” Jamie barked at Bastion and practically dragged Satya as they took off down the length of the rickety mezzanine towards an open window just ahead of them. He threw one of her arms over his shoulder and wrapped his prosthesis around her waist to keep her upright.

Suddenly gunshots rang out. Jamie heard Bastion cry out and the ping of bullets on metal. Jamie grit his teeth, hoping Bastion’s armour would be enough to shield them, and lurched forward, throwing himself and Satya through the open window.

The sky was blinding white. Fresh air! Jamie thought to himself. Sweet, delicious fresh air! He didn’t even mind that it was icy cold and almost burned his throat as he took in a deep breath. Well, he did actually because he hated the cold but there was no time to complain.

Jamie scrambled upright to take in their surroundings. They had just landed in a pile of snow that had gathered beneath the window they had jumped through. He found himself standing on a flat rooftop. Behind him, angry shouts wafted out of the open window. Bastion was trying to squeeze through the window frame, whining nervously.

Jamie leapt towards him and started to pull on Bastion’s limbs to tug him through the opening.
Bastion was more than three times Jamie’s weight and made of metal, so Jamie was not able to be of much assistance. He kept pulling on the automaton all the same. Ganymede appeared then, fluttering around their heads and chirping urgently at Bastion.

“Come on,” Jamie urged him as Bastion scraped though the window and onto the snowy adjacent rooftop. “We have to run.”

Satya was pulling herself weakly to her feet and tried to take a few steps before stumbling. Bastion offered her a hand with a few beeps of concern and she tried again to stand with his help, a hand braced against the rifle barrel on his right forearm for support. She looked over her shoulder and watched as Jamie took a couple of the Molotovs he had secured into his belt and lit the cloth hanging out of one end with Dimitri’s lighter. He heaved them through the window without a backwards glance. Satya heard the glass shatter in the room below and more angry shouting.

Once again, Jamie threw one of Satya’s arms over his shoulder and they took off across the rooftop away from the window which was beginning to emit the smell of burning wood. Bastion jumped down from the single storey building without pausing and turned to help Jamie and Satya. Being over seven-foot tall made it easy for him to reach up and help them onto his shoulders and then down to the ground.

“Sym, you gonna be okay?” Jamie asked once they were safely on the ground. Satya looked like she could barely keep her eyes open. She nodded groggily and Jamie helped her cross the prison yard they found themselves standing in towards a chain link fence on the opposite side. They passed by a few rusting GAZ-66 military vehicles heaped with snow and Jamie wished his hands were free so he could chuck another Molotov into each of them.

As they approached a tall gate ringed with barbed wire, they found their exit was padlocked shut. Jamie didn’t even have a chance to ask how they were going to get through because Bastion reached out and seared the padlock in half with his built-in soldering iron. He forced the gates open and they pressed on with Ganymede twittering angrily over their heads.

As they surged into the Siberian wilderness, Jamie heard shouting coming from behind them. He spared a glance over his shoulder and saw smoke was rising from the gulag’s prison-like buildings. The Molotovs had worked a treat!

Satya, with her arm still slung over Jamie’s shoulders, raised a hand to weakly point towards an uphill slope. “That way,” she murmured and Jamie took off in the direction she had indicated, with Bastion clunking along behind them. It wasn’t easy with Jamie’s peg leg which kept sinking deep into the snow, but he tried to keep up a brisk pace. Jamie was aware that they were leaving conspicuous tracks in the snow and could be easily followed. Their best hope now was for a quick extraction from the Overwatch search and rescue team. If they could just get to higher ground, they would be much more likely to be located by their GPS beacons.

The forest grew thicker the further they went from the rebel’s hideout. If they hadn’t been fleeing for their lives, Jamie might have considered the towering snow-capped alps and the impressive backdrop they painted to the serene forest, an idyllic setting for a nature walk. As it was though, his main concern in that moment was getting Satya to safety.

As they made their way uphill, Jamie turned occasionally to check if they were being followed and saw that the gulag was almost entirely ablaze now. Angry red flames burned bright in the distance as great, black clouds of smoke began to darken the sky.

“What’s that noise?” Jamie asked, pausing in their gruelling uphill climb to rest a moment. He turned his head and listened carefully as he caught his breath. Something like a dull roar could be
heard in the distance, and it seemed as though it was drawing nearer as it increased in volume.

“Dropship?” Satya asked quietly, also taking a moment to catch her breath.

Jamie squinted through the trees and the noise became louder. There! Something had moved in the distance. Whatever it was, it was heading towards them.

Bastion began beeping urgently, trying to urge them onwards. Jamie realised with a start that it was one of the military trucks from the gulag making the distant growling noise. He turned to haul Satya to her feet again. “Go!” he barked at Bastion and they took off running.

After trudging uphill through knee-deep snow a little ways, it became apparent that they were not going to outrun the old Soviet vehicle, despite its age. Bastion was still carrying on in trilling tones and pointing to something up ahead. Ganymede was also flitting ahead and then back to Bastion as though he were trying to draw their attention to something. Jamie looked in the direction Bastion had indicated and saw between the towering pines, what remained of a guard tower constructed out of dilapidated wood. It must have been some kind of outpost for monitoring traffic heading to and from the gulag.

Considering that as they were cornered and unable to outrun the rebels at this pace, Jamie saw no choice but to make for the tower. Perhaps they could buy some time for the rescue team to arrive if they could hold out long enough up high out of the rebels’ reach.

Somewhere behind them, Jamie heard the GAZ-66 military truck crashing through the snow, then grind audibly to a halt a few yards from the fleeing Overwatch agents.

A voice echoed in the forest. “That’s far enough!”

Emerging from the passenger side door, Dimitri leapt from the cabin of the truck and advanced towards the agents. He was staring at them, a wild look in his eye as he approached with pistol drawn. Jamie froze. Bastion also turned to face their pursuers.

Behind Dimitri, the rebels were clamouring over the back of the military truck, pulling tarps away and loading ammunition into some sort of cannon mounted on the back. With a jolt of surprise, Jamie realised immediately it was an anti-aircraft weapon, and that it was most likely what they had used to down the Overmatch dropship earlier. Jamie watched the rebels prepare the cannon ready to fire and saw it was being aimed directly at him and his teammates.

“Jesus Christ!” Jamie exclaimed, unbidden. “Are you fucking crazy?” he shouted at Dimitri. The forest was otherwise eerily silent as Jamie’s voice easily carried over the fifty yards that separated him from the rebels.

“Hand over the E54!” Dimitri barked back, ignoring Jamie’s words. There were deep, red gashes on his face where Ganymede had attacked him which were now bleeding. He continued to advance towards them, eyes unblinking with rage. Seemingly unhindered by the deep snow, it was like there was no stopping Dimitri as he stalked towards the agents.

Bastion was beeping more furtively now, continuing to point to the tower ahead. The rebels had finished setting up the cannon and Jamie realised that they had taken aim at the automaton.

“Bastion!” Jamie called out, hoping to alert him. Jamie stumbled in the snow with Satya still leaning heavily on him. Her arm slid off his shoulders and Jamie reached for another Molotov, although he would not get as far as unhooking it from his belt.

Several things seemed to happen at once. There was a flash of light and something purplish
streaked towards them from the back of the GAZ-66. The air cracked like thunder, leaving Jamie’s ears ringing. Bastion stepped forward, shuffling snow out of the way with his heavy metal legs to place himself between the rebels and the Overwatch agents. Jamie felt the heat from the flash of light, blinding him and causing him to fall with Satya in the snow. He landed on top of her, and she let out a groan. The heat scorched the nearby trees and left the smell of burning in the air. Snow seemed to rain down on top of Jamie as he tried to right himself.

Jamie brushed the snow from his face with a frantic energy and looked up to see Bastion was standing protectively over the two prone Overwatch agents. There was a ring of melted snow around him. He was positively glowing. Further downhill, the rebels were staring at Bastion, astounded.

“Again!” Dimitri screamed at the other rebels then barked something in Russian. They hurried to prepare the cannon again.

Somewhere over Jamie’s head, Ganymede swooped down from the trees and began twittering at the Overwatch agents. Jamie took hold of the bird and stuffed him into his coat pocket as gently as he could given the circumstances and was met with muffled screeches of indignation. He scrambled to his feet and tried to drag Satya up with him. The forest was humming with electricity and Jamie felt that was not a good thing.

The cannon fired again. Once more, there was an ear-splitting burst of noise that echoed through the forest. Jamie thought it looked like purple lightning leaping through the air. It struck Bastion in the middle of his chest, who staggered briefly but held his ground.

“My arm...” Satya said weakly.

Jamie tore his eyes away from Bastion and looked down at Satya, noticing her right arm encased by the hard-light gauntlet had gone limp. There was a strange buzzing noise emitting from the device. “It won't work...” Satya added, brows furrowed with frustration. “No shield...”

*An EMP?* Jamie wondered, looking back at the GAZ-66. The cannon seemed to be charged with a kind of plasma shot that had interfered with their electronics. Did that mean their beacons would be deactivated? How would Overwatch be able to find them now?

Jamie realised something else with a start of alarm. “Bastion?” Jamie asked, looking up at the automaton again with wide eyes. “Y— you okay?”

Bastion turned to acknowledge Jamie, completely unfazed by the EMP. He trilled inquisitively.

Across the stretch of snowy incline between them, Dimitri was also staring at Bastion. “It's not possible,” he remarked under his breath, too quiet for anyone else to hear. He didn’t have long to think on it. The ground beneath him began to rumble and Dimitri looked back to see if the rebels had prepared a third shot without waiting for his command to fire. He found the other rebels stationary, however. The rumbling began to increase in volume. One of the rebels shouted and pointed at the mountain peaks to their left. Dimitri spotted the problem immediately. An avalanche was cascading towards them at an ungodly speed. He turned and threw himself towards the military truck, barking orders at his men to get them the hell out of there.

Meanwhile, Jamie had also noticed the avalanche making its way towards them in the distance. The furore with the cannon must have triggered the deluge. Bastion began beeping again in an insistent tone, pointing towards the guard tower once again. Jamie understood what he was trying to say and took off trudging through the snow as fast as he could with an arm around Satya’s middle. The roar of cascading snow drew nearer as Jamie forced his legs to work faster, muscles
screaming and lungs burning in the cold air. When they reached the tower, Jamie realised with a jolt of cold dread that the ladder which lead to the top was suspended above them, just out of reach.

Jamie swore, but Bastion didn’t even hesitate before taking hold of both Satya and Jamie with his long arms and hoisting them up above his head.

Realising that Bastion was trying to lift them out of danger’s path, Jamie braced himself against the automaton’s shoulders and pushed Satya towards the ladder. “Sym, you’ve got to climb,” he shouted over the din. The rumbling noise was almost deafening now. “That’s it! You can do it!”

Satya slowly pulled herself onto the ladder, breathing heavily under the strain, and Jamie pulled himself up behind her, his chest pressed into her back. He knew that if she fell, he would have to do everything he could to catch her and hold her upright, and he was having trouble holding on himself with only one good leg. He wrapped his right leg around the ladder’s side rail and held on for dear life.

Jamie turned to look down at Bastion, wondering how they were going to get him up but before anything could be done, snow suddenly washed across Jamie’s field of vision and Bastion was immediately swept out of his view in a river of flowing ice.

“Bastion!” Jamie called over the din. Trees were flattened all around them. The snowy mountainside where they had just been standing moments before had transformed into a cavalcade of snow. Felled trees and even boulders were rolling by just metres below Jamie’s feet. The avalanche had thrown snow up into the air and the nearly flattened forest all around them became a raging storm of ice. Jamie tried to squint through the whiteout and scanned the area below the guard tower for Bastion, but there was no sign of him.

Jamie tried again to urge Satya to climb, but she was shaking and frozen in place. All of her strength was gone now. Jamie dared not move, even when the snow rose higher and higher, almost touching the bottom rungs of the ladder. Somehow, the guard tower seemed to withstand the onslaught.

It only lasted a few minutes but for Jamie it felt like hours. The flow of ice beneath them began to slow to an eventual stop. The air was filled with clouds of icy mist.

After a pause, Jamie looked around as the snow settled. “Bastion?” Jamie called, and then again, more urgently, “Bastion!?”

The forest was silent.

Oh, no, no, no… What was he going to do? Jamie had lost him. He had absolutely lost a teammate. And a valuable one too! What was he going to tell Torbjörn? He was going to be...

Suddenly, Bastion’s head casing popped up out of the snow and for one horrific moment, Jamie thought Bastion’s severed head had floated to the surface of the snow. Jamie gasped in shock, sputtered, and almost lost his grip on the wooden ladder. Bastion, however, made a low noise that sounded like a giggle and then started singing, actually singing, what sounded like a childishly mocking tune at Jamie. He seemed to be amused by Jamie’s momentary panic.

Jamie’s expression slid into severe glower. “Bastion,” Jamie said with the disapproving tone of a mother about to scold a child. Bastion responded with an inquisitive beep, as though to innocently ask, ‘Yes?’
Jamie pointed uphill to a boulder that was sticking out of the snow. "Stop messing around and go stand on that rock. *Now.*"

Bastion whimpered apologetically and started making his way through the loose snow as instructed. Jamie watched as the omnic’s head bobbed along above the surface of the snow, body obscured below, as he hurried to follow Jamie’s instructions.

Jamie took a moment to take a deep breath and gather his thoughts. The adrenalin in his system was starting to wear off.

What did I just witness? Jamie wondered. Bastion had stepped in front of him and Satya to protect them from the rebels' cannon. He had saved their lives, and then again from the avalanche by lifting them up to the guard tower ladder. He had never seen a E54 behave in such a way. And when Dimitri had tried to EMP them, it was like there had been no effect on Bastion at all, even when Satya’s gauntlet failed. Could it have something to do with the modifications performed by the academics at Pohang University? Jamie knew Bastion had also received preliminary system upgrades from Torbjörn, but to have broken his programming to the extent that he was able to resist an EMP was surprising to say the least. What did it all mean? Jamie had a feeling there was more to Bastion than met the eye. Dimitri had surmised as much back in the gulag. That Bastion was “special.”

At that moment, Satya made a noise that sounded like a combination of exhaustion and pain.

“Sym!” Jamie cried, having almost forgotten all about her. He realised that he was still pressed up against her back and was probably the only thing keeping her from falling at that point. He cleared his throat, embarrassed by the realisation that he was in very close proximity to her with no way to get back down to the ground level at all. Jamie tried to ignore the steady increase in blood flow to his cheeks.

“Um, Sym?” he began. “Should we get down? I mean, *get off*—wait, no! I meant, should we *descend* the ladder?” Jamie tried to ignore the imagery conjured in his mind by his poor choice of words.

There was no time for Satya to respond. Another dull roar could be heard in the distance, steadily increasing in volume. The snow was whipped up by the downdraft of some kind of aircraft which rapidly approached their position and then hovered a few hundred metres above their heads. Jamie squinted up through the stinging flurry of ice and saw a search and rescue helicopter was slowly lowering rigs for them, a bright orange Overwatch logo painted on the side. Jamie heard Bastion make noises of elation nearby. Their beacons must have started working again if the rescue team had been able to find them.

“Hello down there!” a voice came over the loudspeakers on the exterior of the helicopter. The voice sounded distinctly like Lena’s. *So she's safe!* Jamie thought to himself. She must have reunited with the Overwatch search and rescue team soon after their own dropship had crashed.

At that moment, Ganymede started making noises of annoyance from inside Jamie’s pocket, perhaps frustrated at being unable to free himself or alarmed by the volume of the loud speakers. Jamie tried to shush him, to no avail.

“Good afternoon passengers,” Lena said cheerfully, her voice echoing loudly over Jamie’s head. “This is the pre-boarding announcement for your G01 flight to Gibraltar. We are now inviting those passengers with small animals of the avian variety, omnics, and any passengers requiring special assistance, to begin boarding at this time. Please have your boarding passes ready.” Lena paused for effect, then announced, “Next stop, Gibraltar!”
“Sym?” Jamie asked. “We’re going home. Everything is going to be okay!”

Satya was panting heavily but she nodded in acknowledgement. Jamie watched as Bastion, still standing on his rock, converted to sentry mode in preparation for extraction. A suspension rig descended and attached itself to the automaton, then began hoisting him up. Next, two more rigs descended for Jamie and Satya. Jamie very carefully hooked Satya into hers and ensured the rig was also fastened to her belt just in case she passed out before she made it aboard the helicopter.

Jamie watched as Satya was brought up first, relief washing over him as he waited for his turn. He hoped the rest of the journey back to base would be uneventful, feeling a calming sensation seeping into his bones when he finally saw Satya safely aboard. Jamie made a mental note to ponder further on the enigma that Bastion had presented to him that day, and instead turned his mind towards thoughts of a hot shower and his warm bed waiting for him.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: follow me on tumblr for Junkmetra stuff: https://orderwillberestored.tumblr.com/

You can read a deleted scene from this chapter here: https://orderwillberestored.tumblr.com/post/189824786262/misfits-freaks-ch5-deleted-scene
Satya Vaswani was aware only that she was completely lost in the rhythm.

She sank into the repetitive beats of traditional music from her homeland, and let it guide her through the familiar motions of ritualistic dance. Her hands formed the mudras instinctively, without her needing to pay any mind at all to the gesture. Her body flowed and wound its way through the patterns and rhythmic motions of the Bharatanatyam dance form, 'Pushpanjali.'

Satya’s thoughts began to wander. She remembered her dance teacher at the Academy and how she had praised Satya’s technique. Dance had been an escape for her back then, something that rooted her in her traditions and culture amidst an increasingly changing, chaotic world. Her instructor, an older woman, had put particular emphasis on displaying the correct Navarasa, or facial expressions according to the dance being performed. Satya carefully schooled her face to adopt the hasa, an expression of mirth.

With her eyes closed, Satya swept her hands across her body, knees bending, gestures controlled yet gentle. With every sway of her hips, she coaxed her mind towards calming, orderly thoughts. When she had had a particularly fitful sleep, this was the only way, she found, to soothe her nerves.

She raised a hand to the corner of her mouth, her fingers forming the correct mudra, to emphasise the curl of her lips as she performed the hasa again.

As she lowered her hand, her eyes slipped open for a moment and a flash of colour on the other side of the Rec Room caught her attention. Satya’s eyes darted up meet the eyes of the figure standing in the doorway. Early morning light reflected off the bright orange prosthesis which was raised as though its owner were about to knock on the door frame. Standing there, seemingly transfixed, was Jamison Fawkes.

Satya gasped and ceased what she was doing immediately, gaping back at Jamie with complete surprise. Her lips were parted, but no sound came out. Jamie seemed to be frozen in place.

“Oh!” Satya exclaimed, suddenly embarrassed. “I... Sorry... I was just--!”

“Satya,” Jamie began, staring at her with wide eyes and stepping into the room. “That was amazing.”

Satya rushed to turn off the traditional music she had set to play from her phone on a table nearby. She fumbled with the device, dropped it, and stooped to pick it up hurriedly, face flushed red.

"What are you doing here?” Satya snapped when she had finally switched the music off. She whirled around to stare him, angry all of a sudden. “It’s barely even dawn!”

“Oh, um. Couldn’t sleep,” Jamie mumbled. “Sorry. I just... you looked so happy...”

Satya was irate, her internal meditations completely forgotten. “You can’t just... just barge in here, and— and...!”

Jamie seemed to finally realise that he had interrupted something important for Satya and his presence was probably not wanted. “Oh, I’m sorry...” he began, flushing red.
“Forget it!” Satya barked at him. She walked purposefully past Jamie, disappearing out of the Rec Room door with a huff and marching off down the hallway.

Jamie watched her go in a sleep-hazed stupor. It seemed as though he had genuinely upset her, although that had not been his intention. He hadn’t meant to interrupt her or embarrass her, but he couldn’t help it. Satya, lost in her dancing, was one of the magical things he had ever seen.

Jaime scrubbed tiredly at his eyes. He would need to apologise to her later, he realised.

--

It was sometime later that Jamie was standing on an observation deck positioned high above Hangar 18, one of the base’s smaller aircraft hangars, still lost in thought about what he had seen that morning. Slowly lowering into the docking bay was a slipstream craft Lena had told him was called the ‘Orca.’ Below him, several members of the ground crew, braced against the lashing winds whipped up by the aircraft, were waiting for the Orca to finish its decent so they could commence post-flight checks. High overhead, the hangar doors that also formed the ceiling slowly drew closed now that the Orca was safely inside, the interlocking sides finally coming together like gnashing teeth.

Jamie watched the craft ease to a stop, while he puzzled over his earlier interaction with Satya. He hadn’t seen her at breakfast and she hadn’t even turned up to the Workshop at all that day, although Brigitte said it was because she had gone to the training yard. He had tried to wait for her, but Hana said she needed help with something so Jamie had to leave and head down to the hangar. He was worried he wouldn’t get a chance to apologise to her at all...

“Pretty impressive, huh?” Hana asked. She was standing beside Jamie, nose practically pressed to the glass of the observation window as she watched the ship below them powering down. “My private jet is almost the same size. State of the art though.”

Jamie didn’t respond, even when Hana tugged on his arm and motioned for him to follow her down to the hangar floor so they could greet the new arrival.

Something was bothering Satya, Jamie was sure of it. Satya didn’t usually speak to him as she had done that morning, not since they had become friends. She could be curt, matter-of-fact, and abrupt with her tone, but she never snapped at Jamie. It was like something had happened to her...

Jamie looked up as the hatch to the Orca opened and a figure began to descend the short few steps to the hangar floor. Hana was practically bouncing on the spot from excitement. Jamison watched as a young man in a colourful tank top, long dreads and dark coloured skin crossed the short distance to the alighting passenger's area. He spotted Hana and a huge grin broke out on his face.

“Woo! D.Va in the flesh! Can I get your autograph?”

Hana laughed. “Only if I can get yours, too. I love your new album. It changed my life!”

Jamie watched the exchange with confusion. Autographs? Albums?

The young man came to stand in front of the two Overwatch agents. He dropped a duffle bag from his shoulder and reached out to shake Hana’s hand in greeting.

“It's nice to finally meet you in person!” the man said. “For some reason, communicating online didn’t do you justice.”

Hana giggled. “How was the trip?”

“Oh, Lúcio, this is Jamie,” Hana said, as though finally remembering Jamie was still standing beside her. “Jamie this is Lúcio. He’s going to be joining Overwatch.”

Lúcio reached out and shook Jamie’s hand too. “Luckily I’ve scored the best tour guide to show me around.”

Hana looked suitably proud. “Flattery will get you everywhere,” she remarked.

Jamie watched as the ground crew started off-loading large crates from the dropship. Most of the metal cases were printed with the same name; ‘Lúcio Correia dos Santos’. Jamie wondered what kind of equipment it was that Lúcio had brought with him.

“What team are you joining?” Jamie asked conversationally, wondering if there was any chance they might be getting a new builder for the builder’s team.

“My speciality is good vibes and positive energy,” Lúcio replied, gesturing excitedly. “I’ll be doling out feel-good sonic waves of inspiring beats and energising rhythms. Ain’t no body able to resist that curative feeling when D.J. Lúcio’s beat drops!”

Jamie’s face scrunched up with confusion. “What?”

“Healing,” Hana interjected on Lúcio’s behalf. “He’s going to be a field medic.”

“Oh,” Jamie said, nodding.

Lúcio retrieved his bag and they headed away from the noisy Orca and the bustling flight crew. They made their way out of the hangar, past the Ordnance Bay, and into the base all while Lúcio stared around in wonder.

They stepped into an elevator and began their decent in to the part of the base that housed the dorm rooms. “You still with your same music label, Hana?” Lúcio asked conversationally.

Hana sighed. “Yeah, but I feel like they just don’t get me, you know?” she said with a shrug. “They want me to be more ‘cutesy.’ I want to be more... modern.”

Lúcio nodded. “I can understand. Maybe I could hook you up with a guy I know. Independent producer. It might be a better fit.”

“Well I’d have to get out of my contract somehow...” Hana mused.

“I’ll give you my lawyer’s number,” Lúcio said. “He’ll take care of that.”

“How are you so nice?” Hana laughed.

Jamie had been thinking the same thing internally. Lúcio seemed to be exceptionally kind and easy-going.

Their first stop was the men’s dorms so Lúcio could drop off his belongings in his newly assigned room. He looked around at the facilities, taking in the size of his new bedroom for a moment, before nodding in approval. “Yeah, I can make this work. I’m pretty sure I can get all my recording equipment in here,” Lúcio remarked.

Hana then announced that their next stop on her grand tour of the base would be the gym and
“I was beginning to think you were never going to show up,” Hana said as she led them through the winding hallways. “Lena said they’ve been waiting for you to finally join us for months.”

Lúcio laughed. “Have you seen my schedule, Hana?” He started counting things out on his fingers. “I’ve got two clubs to run, one of them an underground club; a world tour for my latest album, ‘Pulsivity’ to finish; a meet-and-greet in Tokyo; three not-for-profits to oversee; and somehow I have to squeeze some charity appearances in there somewhere.”

Jamie listened to Lúcio’s words with dawning realisation. From what Lúcio was describing, he must be some kind of huge international super-star. How come Jamie had never heard of him before? He supposed that news had always travelled slow in Junkertown, and he had never been into popular music much. Local grunge and rock bands had been more his thing. When he left Australia, he had been on the run most of the time, and there hadn’t been a spare moment to check what was top of the charts. Jamie felt a little embarrassed for being so out of touch.

“All right, we get it,” Hana said to Lúcio with a smirk. “You’re super busy saving the world!”

“Yeah, and I finally found a gap in my calendar to take Overwatch up on its offer to become a freedom fighter!” Lúcio replied. “Just another thing I can check off my bucket list.”

They turned a corner and set off down a narrow corridor. On their left, a broad window which stretched along the length of the hallway overlooked the shipping channels beyond Gibraltar’s shore. Several commercial shipping liners were making their way sluggishly across the scene.

“What about your secret project you told me about?” Hana asked Lúcio as they continued on. “You must have been working on that as well up until now?”

“It wouldn’t be much of a secret if I told you about it now would it?” Lúcio laughed.

“Come on!” Hana pleaded. “Just give me a hint.”

“No can do,” he replied, shaking his head. “It took a little longer than I expected to get it completed—that’s what delayed me so long—but all will be revealed soon.”

“Wait, I’ve just remembered something,” Jamie said suddenly. He paused mid-step, looking off into the distance while his face seemed to dawn with realisation. “I think I saw a billboard with your face on it somewhere,” Jamie said to Lúcio. “Was it in Paris? No... somewhere in Europe...”

“I was on tour in the U.K. recently,” Lúcio volunteered. “Maybe you saw it there?”

Jamie looked directly at Lúcio, eyes widening. “I know who you are. You’re that famous D.J., aren’t you?”

Hana rolled her eyes. “Are you just now figuring this out?”

“And you’re Jamison Fawkes,” Lúcio said, smiling at Jamie with humour. “I’ve seen your face before. On a wanted poster, I think. Or maybe it was on the news after your break-out...”

Jamie’s face broke into a grin. “You recognise me then?” Jamie asked. “Most people who recognise me want to turn me in for the reward,” Jamie remarked.

Lúcio laughed. “No way. Not me. People like you and me? We need to stick together.”
The grin vanished from Jamie’s face. “What do you mean?”

“Freedom fighters. Divergents. People who stick it to the man. Those kinds of people are fine by me.” Lúcio said. There was a kind of passion to the way he spoke that you really want to listen to him.

“Does grand larceny fall into that category?” Jamie asked as they carried on down the hallway.

“Of course!” Lúcio exclaimed. “You’re redistributing the wealth to the proletariat! That’s an act of resistance that I admire! Why should the means of production be controlled by the wealthy? Everyone should be free to live as they choose.”

“Could you help me explain that to the cops that arrested me?” Jamie asked with a laugh.

“Cause they didn’t see it that way.”

Lúcio laughed. “Man, I’ll see what I can do!”

“Can we have a debate about socialism later?” Hana asked, rolling her eyes at them. “We’re almost there.”

They turned a corner and made their way towards a large door that opened onto an open area. The training yard was mostly used for drills and military exercises by the infantry troops on base. The space was surrounded on two sides by buildings, including an observation deck, set into a rocky cliff face. Opposite the buildings, a guard rail framed the yard which looked out over the sea beyond. It was a sunny day, the sounds of waves crashing against the rocks far below. A few gulls rode an updraft, shooting up past the training ground and disappearing into the cliffs overhead. It was altogether a pleasant sight. Except that they weren’t alone.

From the shelter of an undercover area, Jamie could see that the training yard was currently occupied by someone. Satya was standing inside the orange painted lines of the training area, watching intensely as her turrets, currently set up in a circle around a training bot, slowly devoured the automaton. Meanwhile, Satya was intensely concentrating on launching fully powered hard-light orbs at the bot from a short distance away. The bot collapsed under the onslaught and there was silence for a moment until it popped up again. The bot’s parts and limbs reassembled themselves as if by magic and before long, the bot was whole again. Then the cycle started anew with Satya’s turrets and orbs firing away.

“Oh, looks like the training yard is occupied right now,” Hana remarked.

Jamie watched Satya as she fired her weapon again at the training bot. Her brow was furrowed, and she was totally fixated on the task before her. She hadn’t even noticed that she was being watched. Jamie got the impression from the intensity of her concentration that she was still angry after their run-in that morning.

Lúcio was also watching Satya’s turrets closely. “What are those?” he asked.

“They’re turrets,” Hana explained. “They belong to Satya.”

“Really?” Lúcio was watching the turrets and their bright blue beams closely. “That’s looks like hard-light technology.”

“Well, she is a photonic engineer,” Hana explained.

“Oi, Sat,” Jamie called out. “Come meet the new guy.”
Satya finally looked over and saw the other three agents observing her training session. Her expression softened. “Oh, I didn’t see you there,” she said, just loud enough to be heard over the crashing waves.

Lúcio watched as the woman, ‘Satya,’ turned and headed towards them, leaving her hard-light turrets behind to finish off the bot. His eyes narrowed. Now that she was facing them, he could finally see the small company logo clearly printed on her shirt just below her left shoulder.

"Vishkar.

“Satya, this the new starter,” Hana began, motioning to Lúcio. “This is Lúcio Correia dos Santos.”

Satya froze at Hana’s words. All the colour drained out of her face. She seemed to take in Lúcio’s appearance with a look of recognition. “Ah, yes. I know this man.”

Hana was surprised. “You do?”

Lúcio didn’t seem pleased to meet Satya. “So, I see the Vishkar Corporation has even managed to get its claws into Overwatch too?” Lúcio remarked with a sneer. “Why am I not surprised.”

Satya looked down her nose at the young man. “I was told you would be coming today,” she said, her voice low and dangerous. “I was hoping it was because you were going to turn yourself in.”

“Turn myself...?” Lúcio asked, then laughed. “You're serious right now?”

Hana and Jamie were staring between the two of them, confused by the strange, frosty turn this interaction had taken. “Er, how do you guys know each other?” Hana asked.

“We’ve never met,” Lúcio clarified. “But I am very familiar with Vishkar.”

“I was briefed on this man’s name and description. This man is a criminal,” Satya said icily. She turned her attention back to Lúcio. “If you are not here to surrender, then perhaps I will have to arrest you.”

“Hold on there, Sat,” Jamie began, trying to subtly put himself between Satya and Lúcio. The conversation seemed to be escalating quickly. Perhaps he could calm things down? “I’m a criminal too, remember? But you didn’t arrest me! Besides, up until a few months ago, everyone in Overwatch was also a criminal.”

“We should form a club,” Hana said thoughtfully.

Satya’s expression did not change. She was glaring daggers at Lúcio. “I can’t believe the Commander invited you to join Overwatch. I told him nothing good would come of it.”

Jamie scratched at his head, confused. The last time he had seen Satya this angry was when she confronted Riley in the Workshop. Why was she so upset? “What did you do?” he whispered to Lúcio. “Why does she think you’re a criminal?”

Satya rolled her eyes. She could hear Jamie perfectly well. “Because he is a thief,” Satya interjected. “You should return what you stole from Vishkar,” she told Lucio, hands fisted at her sides.

“Stole?” Lúcio laughed. "Psh! You need to go ask your bosses where it all came from; then we can talk.” Then, he pointed a finger at Satya. “If you want to talk about crimes, let’s talk about what Vishkar has been up to.”
“This interaction is not going well,” Hana remarked quietly.

Lúcio went on, “What you Vishkar will never understand is that people should be free!”

This time it was Satya who scoffed. “What you call ‘freedom’ is an illusion that causes more harm than good,” Satya remarked primly. “You should be thanking the Vishkar corporation for all it has done for you.” Seeing, she was getting nowhere. Satya headed over to a bench nearby and started collecting her personal items, ready to leave the training yard.

“‘Thanking you’?” Lúcio asked incredulously. “For enslaving the people of Rio?”

Somewhere behind her, Satya’s training bot collapsed under the onslaught of her turrets and reassembled itself again.

“We created order for Rio,” Satya huffed. “The true enemy of humanity is disorder. I will put a stop to the chaos people like you cause.”

“You really believe that? I don’t even know what to tell you,” Lúcio said, shaking his head. “Vishkar is using you just like they used my father. You just wait. You’ll see. The truth is going to be revealed soon.”

Satya whirled on Lúcio as she made her way towards the exit. “Your father was a Vishkar employee. He understood our company’s vision. A shame he never educated you.”

Colour seemed to have risen to her cheeks again. She glared at Lúcio, face flushed with anger.

Jamie’s eyes went wide. What was all this talk of Rio and Lúcio’s father? He was trying to piece what he could together, but it sounded positively scandalous.

“I’m going to speak to the Commander and get all of this resolved at once,” Satya told the other agents. “I’m not going to be forced to work with this street ruffian.”

“You think I’m happy about this arrangement?” Lúcio said in a challenging tone.

“Look I think we’ve all just gotten off on the wrong foot...” Jamie tried to say, making a staying motion with his hands.

Satya shot a sneer at Lúcio, and with that she stormed away towards the hatch that lead back into the base. Hana and Jamie watched her go, stunned.

“What just happened?” Hana asked.

“What do you expect?” Lúcio remarked with a shrug. “She’s a suit. Suits are all the same.”

Jamie watched as the tail of Satya’s blue dress disappeared through the hatch and then she was out of sight. What was going on? He had thought Satya seemed out of sorts that morning when he walked in on her dancing, but now? Jamie was sure what he had just witnessed was Satya’s true anger. She had said that she had known Lúcio was coming. With a jolt of realisation, Jamie understood now that Lúcio’s impending arrival must have put her on edge today and made her snap at him in the Rec Room that morning.

“So... What happened in Rio?” Jamie asked, turning to Lúcio. The light-heated, jovial chap that Jamie had met twenty minutes ago was gone. In his place, a very angry young man stood glowering at the door Satya had retreated through.

“Vishkar is what happened,” Lúcio replied darkly. “They won a contract to redevelop parts of Rio
de Janeiro. Then they enforced new, stricter laws and curfews of their own invention. They practically enslaved everyone. Should I mention the exploitation and the torture, or is that enough?”

Jamie’s jaw dropped. Surely Satya would never take part in something like that? What Lúcio had described sounded like pure evil. Jamie had had plenty of run-ins with suits since leaving Junkertown and he did not reflect on the experiences fondly. Jamie felt confounded by this revelation. Could Satya really be involved in this mess? Was Lúcio right? Were all suits the same?

“I had no idea…” Jamie remarked.

Hana was watching Jamie’s conflicted expression. She smirked and poked him in the cheek playfully. “You really need to read the news more often,” she told him.

--

So he did.

Over the next few days, Jamie looked up news articles about the “Rio de Janeiro” incident and Vishkar’s involvement on his standard issue tablet computer. Jamie even read the whole Wikipedia article about it. It took him a few days because his A.D.H.D. kept trying to get the best of him with thoughts of building explosions and other distractions, but he persevered whenever he had free time between his other duties.

It looked like Lúcio had been telling the truth. It appeared that some kind of uprising against Vishkar had taken place some four years prior. Vishkar had been contracted to redevelop the poorer areas of Rio but the locals didn’t appear to be pleased about it. The was some information about a fire, enforcement of new curfews, and then some kind of rebellion. The leader of the protests and freedom-fighting was none other than Lúcio himself.

The Wikipedia page claimed that the uprising was triggered by ‘lawless behaviour’ and ‘a desire to remove Vishkar from the local neighbourhoods.’ Jamie frowned. He got the impression that this wasn’t necessarily the full story. Lúcio had mentioned slavery and torture the other day, but there was no mention of that here. Had he been exaggerating? Or had the article been censored? And if so, by who?

The Wikipedia article also referred to various different news sites which had covered the Rio incident from the very beginning. Some of the articles were helpful in creating context for how the public felt about Vishkar’s activities at the time. One article dated from prior to the commencement of Vishkar’s redevelopment project in Rio stood out to Jamie:

*High-Ranking Vishkar Official’s Death Ruled a Suicide*

*By Harlan Mcleod | May 26, 2071 02:39 PM | Atlas News*

The death of Régulo Heliodoro dos Santos, who was purported by the press to have died under suspicious circumstances in recent days, has been ruled a suicide by the coroner.

The body of dos Santos, 45, was discovered at a Vishkar Corporation construction site in downtown Rio de Janeiro last Wednesday with a bullet wound to the head. Due to the location of the body, it was first thought dos Santos had fallen to his death from the Orleana Tower, currently midway through construction under Vishkar’s stewardship. Police who attended the scene had suggested the death was an accident, however an investigation by a medical examiner of the
Instituto Médico Legal (IML) found the cause of death to be a gunshot wound.

The death comes a difficult time for Vishkar, with stocks plummeting and the company experiencing a decline in public approval. Vishkar came under heavy criticism recently after their controversial proposal of plans to redevelop large tracts of Rio’s inner-city areas was leaked.

When reached for comment, a spokesperson for the Vishkar Corporation did not immediately respond to requests for an interview. At the time of publication, Vishkar has yet to comment on the death of dos Santos.

When contacting the dos Santos family for comment, Atlas News was provided with a statement from the family’s lawyer. In it, the family stated, “We do not accept the coroner’s ruling. Régulo was a loving and caring man who showed no signs of being suicidal. We request that the media respect our privacy as we take this time to mourn.”

An inquiry into the death of dos Santos is expected to be initiated by the coroner's office in coming days. A complete autopsy and toxicology report are still pending.

Dos Santos leaves behind a widow and one son.

Something about the article struck Jamie as odd. Maybe it was the cold and matter-of-fact manner in which the details of Lúcio’s father’s death were stated. Or maybe it was that something about the events described felt off. The lack of reaction from Vishkar following the death of one of their ‘high-ranking’ officials, and the way that the death occurred coincidently at a Vishkar construction site, seemed suspicious to Jamie. Not only that, but the family of Régulo had adamantly refused to accept the death as a suicide. Perhaps strangest of all was the fact that it was almost exactly seven years to the day that Lucio's father had passed away.

Jamie did a quick, additional search to see if any further rulings had been made following the inquiry mentioned in the article, but the results of the formal inquiry were inconclusive. Something smelled fishy.

Meanwhile, in the days that following the confrontation in the training yard, Jamie noticed that Satya seemed to have reverted to the same aloof person she had been when he first met her. He saw her in the Workshop as he normally did, but she was cold and distant, complaining she was too busy preparing for an upcoming mission to talk. Her expression remained pinched and angry, no matter Jamie’s attempts to lighten the mood. Even though the revelations about Vishkar’s involvement in Rio had come as a shock to Jamie, he couldn’t shake the belief that Satya was a good person. He had known her for months now. How could she be anything else?

A couple of days after Lúcio had arrived on base, Jamie received a message from his new friend asking him to drop by his dorm room. Jamie’s lips quirked upwards as he read the message, musing to himself that Satya’s appeals to the Commander to have Lúcio removed from Overwatch must not have been successful because he was still hanging around. So, Jamie found himself standing outside Lúcio’s room one sunny afternoon. He raised his right hand, knocked, and the door slid open almost instantly.

Jamie almost staggered at the sight before him. Wires and cables ran the length of Lúcio’s room, and even up some of the walls, connecting equipment and speakers together. An assortment of machines with knobs, dials and digital screens lined the walls. The curtains were drawn over the windows, darkening the space which was primarily lit by the light of Lúcio’s computer screens and
a few hanging festoon lights above Jamie’s head. Somewhere in the midst of it all, Lúcio’s neatly made bed stood slightly pushed to one side.

Lúcio was sitting at a mixing table, surrounded by computer screens. He looked up at Jamie and smiled. “Come in, man,” he said.

Jamie took a couple of steps into the space. It was a snug fit with all the equipment around.

“Woah. Are you allowed to have all this stuff in here?” Jamie asked, looking around.

Lúcio laughed. “Well, I don’t really have a choice. I’ve got a single coming out in a few weeks and I still need to fine tune it a little bit.” Lúcio leaned back in his chair and watched Jamie as he stared around the room. “Thanks for coming,” he added. “First thing’s first. There’s something I want to tell you.”

“Oh yeah?” Jamie asked, surprised by this sudden announcement.

Lúcio nodded. “I wanted to apologise for my behaviour the other day,” he began. He leaned forward, bracing his elbows on his knees. “I don’t usually get into arguments with people I just met. I’m sorry if I made you uncomfortable.”

Jamie realised that Lúcio was referring to his recent run-in with Satya which Hana and Jamie had awkwardly witnessed the other day. “Oh, don’t worry about it, mate,” Jamie replied good-naturedly.

“You’re kind,” Lúcio said with a smile. “Still, I probably painted a dark picture of myself for you. That’s not what I’m normally all about.”

Jamie laughed. “It would take a lot more than that to make me uncomfortable,” he said with a smile. “I’ve seen worse than that where I come from.”

Lúcio nodded. “You’re a Junker, aren’t you?” he asked. “I think I read that in the news somewhere.”

“Yeah,” Jamie replied, scratching awkwardly at the back of his head. It wasn’t that he was ashamed of where he came from, but he was mindful that his background probably made him one of the weirder people on base. Sometimes people who were weird had a rough time being accepted.

Lúcio seemed to be considering something. “I like that,” he said. “That means you’re good at building things. Are you any good with machines?”

“Am I any...? Mate! Do you have any idea who you’re talking to?” Jamie laughed. “You’re looking at one of the engineers who won the commander’s Ingenuity and Innovation Challenge this year!”

Lúcio’s expression remained blank, like he didn’t know what Jamie was talking about, but seemed to take this as confirmation regardless. “Good, good,” Lúcio said, nodding with approval. “In that case, I need to ask a favour.”

Lúcio stood and headed over to the bed. He reached under it and pulled out a case of sorts, putting it on top of the bedcovers so Jamie could see it better. Jamie came to stand beside the shorter man, watching curiously over his shoulder as Lúcio flipped up the latches on the side and popped the lid of the case open. Inside was what looked like two prosthetic legs to Jamie. They were plated with blue and green metal, cables threading through and around the devices.
“I’m in need of some of your engineering expertise,” Lúcio said, lifting one of the legs out so they could both get a better look at it. “I could use some help getting my gear battle-ready.”

Jamie took a step closer, careful not to trip on any of the cables criss-crossing the floor, looking confused. “What are these things?”

“How’s the gear battle-ready?” Lúcio asked with a smile.

Jamie shrugged. “No.”

“Well now you have,” Lúcio laughed. “These are my pride and joy. It's been a while since I've had to use them, not since my last collab with Overwatch. They might need a little tune up.”

Jamie picked one of the blades up so he could examine it more closely and found it was surprisingly light weight. It must have been made of carbon fibre. “Did you make these yourself?” he asked.

Lúcio shook his head. “My father made them for me.” He looked wistful for a moment. “Before he died,” he added.

Jamie nodded. He guessed that Lucio’s father must have must have been a photonic engineer or inventor of sorts. Jamie was also mindful that it was the seven-year anniversary of Régulo’s passing, so he was hesitant to say anything further to Lúcio about such a sensitive topic.

“Well, I can take a look at them, no worries,” Jamie said. He put the blade back in its cushioned case before rubbing his chin thoughtfully. “I’m no hard-light expert, but I’ll give them a look over.”

“Thanks!” Lúcio said, shaking Jamie’s hand as though to settle the deal. He pulled up his communication pad and put in a request with Maintenance to have the blades ported to the engineers’ Workshop as soon as possible.

Jamie eyed Lúcio cautiously. “You know, we have a photonic engineer on base and she’s very good with hard-light machines...” he said, trying to keep his tone innocent.

Lúcio’s gaze narrowed. “You mean that suit from the other day, right?” Lúcio asked. “No. I don’t want her near these.”

Jamie rolled his eyes. “Oh, come on!” he cried. “Are you two going to be like this for the whole time you’re working together?”

Lúcio turned and retook his seat at the mixing table. “If I have anything to say about it, we won't be working together at all.” He watched Jamie close the lid to the case and refasten the clips that held it closed. “I have a plan that will take care of that soon, I hope.”

Jamie paused what he was doing and turned to look at Lúcio. “What do you mean by that?”

Lúcio was quiet as he set his tablet computer down on the table and turned to face Jamie. “Let's just say my special project is about to launch.”

Jamie’s expression hardened with suspicion. “What special project?”

Lúcio’s mouth was set in a firm line. He stood suddenly and crossed the room. He retrieved something from a shelf next to his bed. He returned and handed it to Jamie wordlessly then retook
Jamie looked down at the device Lúcio had placed in his hand. It was a small data stick. “What’s this?” Jamie asked, holding the stick up to eye level so he could examine it better.

“Belo Caos.” An advance copy,” Lúcio replied. “You might as well have a look. It launches worldwide tonight anyway.”

“What launches tonight?” Jamie asked, confused by Lúcio’s cryptic words. Was it a song? A music video?

“My documentary about Vishkar,” Lúcio replied calmly.

The room was silent for some time. Jamie stared down at the data stick again, a sinking feeling developing in the pit of his stomach. Jamie got the impression that any documentary about Vishkar, based on what he had read over the past couple of days, would be unlikely to paint the mega-conglomerate in a positive light from Lúcio’s point of view.

Lúcio had mentioned that he did not want to work with Satya. Was this some kind of plan on Lúcio’s part to... what? Embarrass her? Encourage the commander to exile her from Overwatch? Jamie could not help but feel like the timing had something to do with it. The fact that the death of Régulo seven years ago coincided with Lúcio releasing a documentary about Vishkar now could not be ignored. It was clear Lúcio held strong views on Vishkar. What if this was a way for Lúcio to honour his late father, or contrarily, avenge his death?

Jamie could help but worry about how Satya would feel about a documentary about Vishkar being released. On some level, Jamie felt conflicted between his loyalty to her as a friend, and another part of him that agreed with Lúcio; suits could not be trusted. Somewhere inside of him, at some point, he had decided Satya was an exception to this rule. But having learned all he had about the terrible things Vishkar had done and their involvement in Brazil in the last few days, Jamie was beginning to question himself all over again.

Jamie excused himself in a hurry and Lúcio bid him farewell quietly, watching Jamie as he tore out of sight, a dark expression on his face. Jamie hurried down the hall, making a bee-line for his dorm room. Mentally, he blew off returning to the Workshop that day. His priority was finding out exactly what was on the data stick Lúcio had given him.

--

It was bad.

Well, not bad in the sense that it was anything other than a well-made documentary—in fact, it was very well made—but it was bad in the sense that it was a devastatingly, no-holds-barred, exposé on Vishkar’s every misdeed in relation to Rio and its ongoing shady business practices. Lúcio and his team behind the scenes had obviously worked very hard on it, Jamie had to give them credit for that at least.

Jamie sat quietly on his steel framed bed, staring at the holographic display on the opposite wall. He had just finished watching Belo Caos in its entirety. The words “Written and Produced by: Lúcio Correia dos Santos” danced across the screen and then the credits started to roll from bottom to top.

The documentary touched on a lot of the events described in the Wikipedia pages and news articles Jamie had read before, but somehow it was even worse than anything he had been expecting. At
the heart of the story was a full expose on who was responsible for the fires in Rio, the mishandling of funds, but most important of all, the personal impact on the lives of Rio’s people. And Lúcio lay the entirety of the blame at Vishkar’s feet. There was blood, there were riots, there was brutal force. And all of it totally blew apart what had been described online and in other media reports. What Vishkar had done was even worse than Jamie had feared.

This was going to devastate Satya.

Jamie grabbed his tablet computer and noted the time in the upper right corner of the screen indicated it was late. The documentary was probably about to go live if it hadn’t already.

“‘Athena, where’s Sat?’” Jamie asked, rubbing tiredly at his eyes. “I need to talk to her.” Maybe he could at least warn her that this documentary was about to drop and rock the proverbial boat.

“‘Agent Vaswani is not on base at this time,’” Athena replied in her usual calm and neutral tone.

“What?” Jamie asked, looking up.

“She left on a scheduled mission earlier this afternoon,” Athena confirmed.

Shit. Jamie had forgotten she had been preparing to go on a mission over the last few days. He growled with frustration. “Well, when does she get back?”

“Two days from now,” Athena replied.

With a huff of annoyance, Jamie opened up an internet browser on the tablet screen and navigated to a popular social media site that Hana had told him about. He was not a particularly prevalent user of social media himself, but Hana had told him she frequently monitored what was trending with her fans on this website. Jamie typed in Lúcio’s name and waited for the search results.

Oh, bugger.

The word “Lúcio” was one of the top trending words in past hour.

Scrolling through the hundreds of thousands of comments pouring in, Jamie could see that everyone was talking about Lúcio’s latest project. Many expressed surprise and anger at the revelation that Vishkar was heavily involved in the razing of the favelas in Rio, and that they engaged in sordid and underhanded methods to accrue business contracts.

If Satya had been angry before about Lúcio joining Overwatch, now she was going to be furious.

A text message popped up on his screen. It was Hana.

[Did you hear the news?]

Jamie typed in his reply.

[Lucio’s doco ?]

[Ye! Everyone is talking about it!]

[I just finished watchin it. U?]

[Watching it now. Omg. I’m losing my mind.]

Jamie gulped.
Jamie got an idea. He exited the chat with Hana and began typing a new text message to Satya.

He thought he would leave it at that and wait for her to reply. He waited a whole hour, an hour spent biting his nails anxiously while continuing to scroll through comments about the documentary online, but there was no response from Satya. Part of him wanted to send a follow up message, but something told him Satya probably didn’t want to be pestered with questions right now. If he was in her shoes, he probably would have turned off his phone by now.

Over the next two days, Jamie tried a few times to tentatively reach out to Satya but each time his messages went unanswered. Meanwhile, Lúcio was lauded as a hero by the staff on base. Everyone, it seemed, was talking about the bombshell documentary, and Belo Caos became an international hit overnight. Jamie often spotted Lúcio in the Mess or the training facilities, surrounded by people congratulating him for his success like a crowd of gushing fans.

Two days had gone by since the documentary was released and finally it was the day that Satya was scheduled to return, a day that he had been waiting for and dreading with keen anticipation. Jamie found himself sharing a table with Lena and Hana in the Mess Hall as they quietly finished their breakfast. Lena seemed equally worried about the turmoil Satya would be returning to. She was busy scrolling through news reports on her phone, brows furrowed, when she drew Jamie’s attention to the fact that Vishkar had just released a statement on their website regarding the documentary. Lena read it aloud from her phone for Jamie and Hana.

“They got onto that real quick, Jamie thought to himself with a sneer after Lena had finished reading from her phone. Even quicker than the time it took them to make a statement about the death of Lúcio’s father.

Lena was busy tapping away at her phone. “Looks like Vishkar’s not doing too well in the stock market either,” she remarked. She flipped her phone around to show Jamie a chart which displayed a net loss in red.

Jamie nodded distractedly. It had been several days since he had heard from Satya and he would be lying if he said he wasn’t worried about her. He poked at the remains of his breakfast with his fork. For some reason he didn’t feel particularly hungry.

Hana was chewing thoughtfully on her cereal. “Things are going to be super awkward around here now,” she said. “I wonder if the commander will have to step in to keep Lúcio and Satya apart?”

“Oh, dear,” Lena remarked suddenly. When Jamie looked up, he saw she wasn’t staring at her phone any longer, but now was fixated on something across the room over Jamie’s shoulder. “They must have gotten back early...”

Hana followed Lena’s gaze and gasped. Jamie turned to look behind him and saw exactly the
person who had been occupying his thoughts for the last few days; Satya.

She was standing in the doorway to the Mess Hall, looking very tired and drained. That was not unusual, Jamie noted, as she likely had just stepped off a long return flight to base. She was looking around the crowded room for something. *Perhaps a familiar face?* Jamie wondered. He stood instinctively and waved to get her attention.

“Sat, over here,” he said just loud enough to be heard over the din of staff in the middle of their breakfast.

Satya spotted him and started to head over. As she made her way between the tables, angry and suspicious eyes turned to follow her across the room.

“You’re back early,” Hana said cheerfully when Satya finally arrived at their table.

“Yes,” Satya replied. “We achieved our objectives ahead of schedule and were able to return sooner than anticipated.” She took a seat beside Jamie.

Jamie and Lena shared a look. “You been paying much attention to the news lately, love?” Lena asked tentatively.

Satya’s expression hardened. “Yes, I’ve heard,” she replied primly. “A paltry attempt at discrediting the hard work of Vishkar by an ungrateful agent of chaos. I will not bend so easily to these lies.”

Jamie was shocked by this statement. “Lies?” Jamie asked. “You think the doco was a lie?” At least she was handling it better than he had thought she would.

“Well,” Satya began. “I haven’t actually *seen* it for myself yet. I was very busy on the mission. But I received communication from Vishkar regarding the incident and was briefed on the specifics. Vishkar’s official position will be to reject these false allegations.”

“We know,” Lena said quietly. “We were just reading about that online.”

“You haven’t seen *Belo Caos* yet?” Hana asked Satya brightly. “Here, let me show you!”

Hana dropped her spoon with a clatter and started rooting around in her pockets for her phone.

“Hana, you don’t have to...” Jamie began, but Hana seemed not to have heard him. She successfully dug out her phone and held it aloft triumphantly.

“Here!” She unlocked the phone with her passcode and thrust the device into Satya’s hands across the table.

Jamie watched over Satya’s shoulder. The phone was open already to a news website reporting on the documentary. A newsreader was talking about “music superstar” Lúcio’s latest project and making the leap from producing music to ground-breaking documentarian. Satya’s brow furrowed. Following the short news segment, a highlight reel began titled, *Top 10 explosive moments from ‘Belo Caos’ that blew our minds!”*

“Maybe that’s enough,” Jamie remarked and tried to reach for the phone.

Satya leaned away from Jamie’s attempt to take the phone. Her face was difficult to read as she scrutinized the video playing before her eyes. Clips were playing of favelas ablaze with tall flames. A captioned headline overlayed across the footage indicated that documents had leaked proving
local fire officials had been bribed to delay attending the scene. Images continued to flash across the screen of sick and injured people who had survived the fires but had been denied medical aid in the days following. Clips played of harsh and cruel punishments meted out to any who opposed Vishkar’s presence in their neighbourhoods.

Most of the never-before-seen footage seemed to be from cell phones recorded by locals as the media had been denied entry to the favelas at the time of Vishkar’s oppression. Although some of the clips were jumbled together in an order other than chronological, it was clear that there had been extensive malfeasance on Vishkar’s part both before and after the events in Rio.

The headlines went on to describe leaked emails that indicated Vishkar had obtained the redevelopment contract by taking out the competition in underhanded ways. Another headline outlined how according to witness reports, the cariocas were exploited and denied basic human rights in violation of U.N. conventions during Vishkar’s occupation.

“Sat, I really think...” Jamie began, then paused when he registered Satya’s reaction to the clips.

Satya raised a trembling hand to her mouth. The images danced across the screen before her. Every heart-breaking moment, every piece of evidence, was destroying another little piece of her world and everything she had ever thought to be true. On the phone screen, a man was being interviewed who claimed to have survived an incident of being interrogated and tortured by Vishkar law enforcers. Then Jamie saw the tears balanced on Satya’s lashes, threatening to spill.

A final clip played captioned as “#1 mind-blowing moment.” In it was a personal email from a Vishkar official to the CEO, pleading for the return of his sonic technology inventions and threats to quit the organisation. Another captioned headline appeared: “Régulo Heliodoro dos Santos was found dead two days later.”

There was a heavy silence at the table as Satya switched off the phone and gently placed it down on the table. She stared down at the surface of the table without saying anything for some time.

“Sat, you okay?” Jamie asked. She looked positively shell-shocked. She didn’t reply.

Jamie shot Hana a stern look. She shrugged in reply, as if to say, ‘She was going to find out at some point anyway.’

“Uh oh,” Lena said quietly, watching something across the room.

Everyone looked up and saw Lúcio standing in the doorway to the Mess Hall. Some of the staff sitting around the other tables also took notice of this and started glancing between Satya and Lúcio nervously.

Satya turned to see what had captured everyone’s attention and spotted Lúcio. A hush fell over the room. Satya stood and turned to face him.

Lúcio spotted her too. He had a sour look on his face, like he was ready to let some vitriol fly at the Vishkar employee. He opened his mouth but before he could say anything, his expression softened. He caught sight of the tears on Satya’s cheeks, the devastation, the apparent remorse evident on her face. He held still and remained silent.

Satya’s chest was heaving as she crossed the room, eyes locked with Lúcio’s. There was a brief moment where Satya paused just before she passed him. Something transpired between them, standing just a few feet apart in the entrance to the Mess Hall. It was only a second of acknowledgement of one another before Satya turned, trembling, and fled from the room as fast as
she could.

Suddenly, his victory over Vishkar had left a surprisingly bitter taste in Lúcio’s mouth.

--

Short of searching the entire base for Satya, Jamie simply asked Athena where she was, and was told he could find his fellow engineer in the primary storeroom behind the Workshop.

When Jamie entered the space, he found Satya busy taking full inventory of the storeroom’s shelves upon shelves of equipment and half-finished machinery. She looked totally preoccupied with the task before her.

“*Wee woo?*”

Bastion was in his recharging bay in sentry mode nearby watching Satya work, Ganymede perched on top of his machine-gun housing.

“I told you, I don’t want to talk about it,” Satya insisted, sparing a glance for the automaton. Neither of them seemed to have noticed Jamie had entered the room yet.

“Are you sure?” Jamie interjected. Satya jumped with surprise, having not realised he was there.

“Oh, Jamie!” she began. “You need to stop sneaking up on me.” She fixed him with a half-hearted smile.

Jamie laughed. “Sorry, Sat.” He was pleased to see she was at least smiling a little. “Shame I didn’t catch you dancing again this time.”

“Yes, well,” Satya said, tucking a stray lock of hair behind her ear. “I’ve been trying to keep busy.” She turned away to take note of the number of welders on a particular shelf and then jotted something down on her tablet computer.

Jamie strode across the room and took a seat on a crate beside Bastion. Ganymede returned to tending to his nest he was in the middle of building atop Bastion’s shoulder.

“I’m sorry about what happened, Sat,” Jamie began tentatively.

Satya said nothing. With her back turned, she carried on cataloguing the items on the shelf in front of her.

“Is there... uh... anything I can do?” Jamie asked. He watched Satya’s shoulders slump as she released a sigh of defeat.

Satya was quiet for some time before eventually turning to look at Jamie. She still looked tired, but now he could see that her face was blotchy, her features drawn by fatigue. She had probably been crying before he came into the room, Jamie guessed.

“I just can’t believe it,” Satya said quietly. “Every terrible rumour about Vishkar, every accusation... I had always assumed it was just people trying to tear our organisation down. People who believed in chaos and upheaval over the merits of order and stability.”

Jamie listened carefully without interrupting. He wanted her to get this all out of her system.

“But Lúcio was right. And I was blind to it all,” Satya went on. She plucked anxiously at the sleave of her shirt. “I was part of the problem.”
Jamie saw tears welling in her eyes once again.

“All this time, it was me. I was the bad guy,” Satya murmured. “Not those poor people who suffered...”

Her whole body shuddered as a sob took hold of her voice before she could finish speaking. She raised her hand to her mouth again, head slowing bending. “I didn’t know... Gods, I could have done something!”

“Hey,” Jamie said simply. He stood and reached tentatively for her. Was it okay to touch her? He wasn’t sure. He did not have time to think on it long because suddenly Satya was burying her head in his shoulder as she was overcome by grief.

Jamie drew his hands inward around her shoulders slowly, keeping his touch light. They stood like that for several moments with only the sound of Satya’s muffled sobs until Ganymede flitted up to Jamie’s shoulder and stood there chirping at Satya inquisitively. Satya leaned back to take in the sunny, yellow colour of the little bird. It was enough for her to pause her tears and get a hold of herself again. She scrubbed at her wet cheeks with the back of her hand, embarrassed suddenly.

“Sorry,” she said, and they stepped apart.

“Look, Sat,” Jamie began. “I’m not really in a position to speak objectively about moral relativism and the way that society tries to enforce universal truths on every ethical proposition faced by certain individuals and refusing the acknowledge the relativity of one’s moral standing based on their social, cultural, historical or personal circumstances, but I just can’t accept that you’re a ‘bad’ person.”

Satya stared at him, dumbfounded by his surprisingly eloquent speech. “I... You’re very kind,” she said. “But I don’t deserve such kindness. I have done terrible things. Apparently.”

“I’ve seen you do brilliant things,” Jamie insisted. “And I know you're doing your best to make the world a better place.” He watched her as she composed herself, trying to take control of her still hitching breaths. “The most important thing is that you’re doing your best. It’s not your fault you didn’t know.”

“That’s no excuse,” Satya replied. “I should have known.” She rubbed tiredly at her back of her neck. “How can I show my face around the others after this?” she asked quietly, eyes downcast.

“We’ll figure it out,” Jamie replied.

Satya nodded. Finally, she looked up at him with something that bordered on a smirk. “How did you do that?”

Jamie looked confused. “Do what?”

Satya fixed Jamie with a calculating look. An upward quirk at the corner of her mouth softened her expression. “You’ve found a way to wheedle your way into my life,” she said. Her fingers danced across the edge of a shelf. “You know, when we first met, I wanted nothing to do with you. I even told the commander that he should not have allowed you into Overwatch.”

Jamie’s face dropped. “Oh,” was all he could say.

“But now, I don’t feel that way anymore. I can’t help but feel like you’ve been nothing but a good friend to me,” Satya went on. “I didn’t really have a choice in the matter. You were determined to befriend me.”
Jamie scratched at his patchy hair, suddenly embarrassed. “I can’t help it. Where I come from, the people around you are all you’ve got. They’re your mates. And mates are supposed to look out for each other.”

Satya nodded. “Thank you, Jamie,” she said. “For looking out for me. I appreciate it.”

She seemed better now, to Jamie’s relief. He watched her for a moment, considering something before motioning for her to follow him. “Come on,” he said. “I want to show you something.”

They left Bastion and Ganymede in the storeroom as Jamie lead Satya back into the main part of the workshop. For some reason, it was deserted at that time, even though it was late morning. Perhaps Brigitte and Torbjörn had gone down to the training yard, Jamie surmised. Efi wouldn’t be joining them until that afternoon.

“Well?” Satya asked.

Jamie headed over to his workbench where a large case was sitting. It had been delivered to the Workshop two days prior by the Maintenance team, but Jamie had yet to open it. He flipped up the latches on the side and revealed Lúcio’s hard-light blades.

Satya’s expression hardened with recognition. “What are those things doing here?”

“Well,” Jamie began. “They need to be checked out before Lúcio can use them in the field. Wanna help me get them ready? You know, since you’re so good with hard-light ‘n all...”

Satya didn’t like the knowing smile plastered on Jamie’s face at that moment.

“Of course not,” she said primly and went to sit back at her workstation. “I don’t want anything to do with those things.”

Jamie went to retrieve a toolkit from the storage cupboard. “Are you sure? Last chance.”

“I’ll survive,” Satya remarked, switching on her holographic display so she could carry on with another project.

Jamie shrugged. “Okay, then.”

Jamie lifted one of the blades out of the case and placed it on his workbench. He flipped open the toolkit and purposefully selected a tool, any tool, at random. As it was, he picked up an adjustable spanner. He waved it around for effect. “Oh no!” he said, loudly so Satya could hear him. “What a shame that I know almost next to nothing about hard-light repairs!”

Satya frowned, pointedly ignoring him and looking very determinedly at her holographic display.

Jamie tapped experimentally on the outer casing of one of the blades with his spanner. “Gee!” he went on. “It sure would be a shame if I mucked up these beautiful specimens of fine hard-light machinery with my complete lack of understanding of the finer workings inside...”

“Stop that,” Satya said suddenly, her gaze snapping over to Jamie at once. Jamie only grinned back at her.

Satya stood and marched over to Jamie’s workbench. With a disapproving scowl, she plucked the spanner out of his hand and tossed it back into the toolkit. “That is the wrong tool,” she scolded him. “And I think you know it.”
She returned to her workstation briefly to retrieve a set of specialist tools that Jamie couldn’t identify. She shooed him out of the way and moved to stand over the hard-light blade so she could begin her assessment.

Jamie resigned himself to watching her work. He pulled up a stool and sat next to the workbench, one elbow propped on the table surface and a cheek resting in his palm, so he could watch proceedings.

Satya frowned at the smug look on Jamie’s face. She knew he probably felt very proud of himself in that moment. “If you think you’ve been clever, you haven’t,” she told him.

“Nah,” Jamie said with a smirk. “Actually, I was wondering something.”

“Oh?” Satya replied.

“What now?” he asked. “If you don’t agree with what Vishkar has done, what’re you going to do?”

Satya sighed. “I don’t know. I’ll have to think on that.” She finished removing the outer casing on one of the blades and began prodding at the cables inside. She set down her photonic laser tool and retrieved another from her kit that looked like a delicate surgical instrument. “Vishkar is my home. They’re the only family I’ve ever known.”

“Oi, that’s not true!” Jamie protested.

Satya laughed. “Okay, fine. They’re the first family I’ve ever known,” she said. Then her eyes became distant. “I can’t just leave them. They rescued me. Gave me purpose. Made it possible for me to build and shape the world as I saw fit. I thought I was doing good...”

Jamie watched the way her face lit up when she spoke about Vishkar. He couldn’t deny that he was still worried about her.

“Promise me something, Jamie?” Satya asked.

“Yeah?”

“Promise me you’ll stop me if I ever lose sight of what’s important like that again,” she said quietly.

Jamie nodded in agreement. “Okay,” he said. “But only if we promise we’ll keep looking out for each other from here on.”

Satya smiled.

“Deal.”

--

There was one last matter that needed to be laid to rest.

Jamie was not the kind of person to let something of this nature go unresolved, so when he texted his plan to Hana, not even five minutes had gone by before he got a reply from her:

[I’m in.]

The following day, they put ‘Mission: Reconciliation’ into action. Jamie sent a message to Lúcio to
let him know his hard-light blades had been inspected, serviced and were ready for battle. In the
message, Jamie told Lúcio that he and Hana would be waiting in the Games Room with the hard-
light blades, ready for pick-up.

When Lúcio arrived at the Games Room that afternoon at the time specified in Jamie’s message, he
found neither the peg-legged engineer nor the M.E.K.A. pilot in sight. Instead, Lúcio walked into
the room and immediately spotted Satya Vaswani sitting on one of the sofas. Her eyes went wide
when she saw him and she stood hurriedly, as though looking to make a quick escape. Lúcio was
equally surprised to see her, having noted that she had been pointedly avoiding him for the last few
days. It was clear neither of them was expecting to encounter the other that day.

Lúcio frowned at Satya and turned to make his exit. He would have to catch up with Jamie and
Hana later. Before he could make it to the door, it slid shut in his face, sealing him in with Satya.
Unperturbed, Lúcio swiped his wrist band on the security panel beside the door to activate it, but
nothing happened.

“What the...?” Lúcio muttered. He turned to shoot a suspicious look at Satya. “Is this some kind of
prank?”

Confusion washed over Satya’s face. She came over to try her own wrist band. Still, the door did
not move. She tried to shove the door open but it remained immobile.

“What is going on?” Satya demanded to know, glaring at Lúcio. “This must be your doing.”

“Me?” Lúcio growled. “As if I would want to be stuck in a room with you.”

Satya rolled her eyes. “The feeling is mutual,” she said airily. “I’m only here because Ms. Song
said she had something important to tell me.”

“Well, where is she?” Lúcio asked. “And Jamie for that matter.”

At that moment, Lúcio could hear giggling coming from the hallway on the other side of the door.
Satya seemed to hear it too, because she suddenly became very angry.

“Oh, this is ridiculous!” she barked. “Athena open this door at once! Locking this door is a
violation of the fire code.”

Satya crossed her arms impatiently, waiting for Athena to take action. Both Satya and Lúcio stared
at the door. Nothing happened.

“Athena?” Satya asked, growing concerned.

“Sorry, Agent Vaswani,” Athena’s voiced sounded overhead. “I’m on Agent Fawkes’ side on this
one.”

Satya turned beet red. “What!?”

“Remember when you tried to blackmail your way into the commander’s office by threatening to
reveal my cryptomining side hustle?” Athena asked. “Karma’s a bitch.”

Satya sputtered, gaping indignantly at the empty room. Lúcio was equally annoyed. “Well, now
what?” he asked her.

There was a small glass pane in the door that allowed people to check if others were on the other
side. Jamie’s face appeared suddenly in the small window, startling Satya and Lúcio.
“G’day!” Jamie said cheerfully from the other side of the door, his voice muffled by three inches of steel and glass. “You have been captured! Please follow our instructions if you want to escape!”

“Jamie, what is going on?” Satya demanded to know. “Did you bribe Athena?”

“That’s not really important right now,” Jamie said dismissively. He retrieved a piece of paper from his pocket and began to read from it. “To open the door, we first require one full rendition of Lúcio’s single ‘Harmony’ from his upcoming album, ‘Pulsivity’, played in its entirety,” Jamie read from the paper.

Hana’s face also appeared in the window. “Second, we require one full performance of one traditional Indian dance of your choosing to take place at the same time as the aforementioned song,” she said. “We will judge your performance and if it is acceptable, the door will magically open.”

“Are you both insane?” Satya demanded to know.

Lúcio looked around. “What am I supposed to play the song on?” he asked.

Satya whipped around to stare at him. “Are you actually entertaining this nonsense?” she asked incredulously. Lúcio shrugged in reply.

“Your blades are on the table over there,” Hana said pointing towards the centre of the room. “You can use them.”

Lúcio looked and saw the case which contained his hard-light blades on the coffee table beside the sofa as Hana had said. The blades had built-in turntables and sonic technology amplifiers on the sides of each thigh to allow him to play healing music when he was in battle. He headed over and started to unfasten the clips on the side of the case.

“What are you doing?” Satya asked him. “You’re not actually going ahead with this are you?”

“Look,” Lúcio began. “It’s the fastest way out of this room. Let’s just get it over with.”

“You can’t be serious,” Satya scoffed, watching as Lúcio sat on the sofa and started putting his blades on.

Sensing dissent, Jamie said in a mock-threatening voice, “Do as we say or we’ll be dobbing you in to the commander!”

“For what?” Satya said turning on him with a stern look.

“For... um... refusing the magical power of friendship!” came Jamie’s muffled reply.

Satya, stony faced, glared at Jamie through the portal of the door.

“Come on, Sat,” Jamie pleaded from the other side. “How can you dance without a little music?”

“Yeah!” Hana piped up enthusiastically. “And isn’t the point of music to make people dance? Come on you two, this will be fun!”

Lúcio seemed to have finished putting his blades on. He tested the hard-light edges on the bottom which formed the actual blade by quickly scooting across the room and back. He checked the amplifiers at each side; everything seemed to be in order.

“Hey, thanks for fixing up my blades, Jamie,” Lúcio called out. “They’re working great!”
“Actually, I have to confess something,” Jamie replied through the door. “It wasn’t me. Satya did most of the work.”

Lúcio looked surprised. He glanced over at Satya. “Really?” he asked. He should have been angry that Satya had interfered with his blades, which went directly against his request that she not touch them, but he couldn’t deny that they felt great. The blades were working smoothly, perhaps better than ever. “Uh... thanks,” he murmured.

Satya eyed the devices up and down, then crossed her arms defensively. She still wasn’t happy about this situation. “You’re welcome,” she said quietly.

“Come on then!” Jamie’s muffled voice called out. “Do you want out of this room or not?”

Lúcio smirked at Jamie. “You want music? I’ll give you music!”

His hands were like blurs as Lúcio spun what appeared to be a hard-light vinyl album out of thin air and slammed it down on the turntable at his left thigh. Rhythmic beats starting pumping out of the amplifiers on each side of Lúcio’s blades. A melody emerged as Lúcio started bobbing his body and working his hips in time to the beats of one of his favourite songs, ‘Harmony.’

Satya stood stock still and watched him, arms still crossed. She seemed reluctant. Lúcio nodded at her encouragingly. “Come on!” he said. “The sooner it’s done, the sooner we can leave.”

Satya rolled her eyes again, but unwound her arms and, a little hesitantly, sunk into one of the Bharatanatyam dance forms. Her hands started to form the mudras as she fell in line with the rhythm of the music. It wasn’t the kind of music she normally danced to, so she had to improvise a bit, but Satya found the song was pleasant enough with steady, consistent beats to mould her body to.

Satya closed her eyes and let the melody take hold of her, sweeping her through the motions like the current of a stream. She started to feel at peace, as she often did when dancing, allowing the music to direct and conduct her movements. Before long, she had to stop because the music ran out and when she looked up, she saw the door to the Games Room was open. Jamie and Hana were standing in the doorway grinning at her.

Satya turned and looked over at Lúcio, who was smiling at her. “Hey, that was really cool!” he said. “Can you do it again?”

“Yeah, come on Lucy!” Jamie crowed. “Play another one!”

Lúcio laughed, fiddling with something at his side and another song started to play.

Hana bounced over to Satya and took hold of her hands. “Dance with me, Satya!” she laughed.

Satya couldn’t resist. Lúcio’s music was actually pretty good, and her mood was lifted instantly by the pleasure of dancing. She started swinging her arms with Hana and the two began to weave and bob to the music.

“Lookee this!” Jamie cried. “This is called the ‘Kangaroo Bop!’” He started throwing himself around on the floor like he was trying to breakdance which made everyone laugh.

Athena engaged ‘Party Mode’ which made the lights in the room flash an array of different colours, turning the space into a disco of sorts. The music and dancing drew the attention of a few other nearby occupants on base who came by the Games Room to find an impromptu dance party going on. Lúcio treated the situation like a block party from back home and debuted some songs
from Pulsivity for the gathered crowd. He encouraged everyone to join in, and the rest of the afternoon was spent dancing and laughing the hours away.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: This is the dance I was picturing Satya doing from the first scene of this chapter: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGiLOzFQh14
Mako hadn’t had any company in years.

Yesterday, he had started walking with nothing besides a bag of scrap metal on his back and set a course for Junkertown. The plan was to pick up some supplies and maybe treat himself to a beer at the local pub. The next day, he was bringing home some scatter-brained idiot with burnt hair and two missing limbs to his ram-shamble farm. He’d been questioning this decision ever since they had gotten back.

“Can I borrow your toothbrush?” the idiot called out from another room. “I didn’t have much of a chance to pack.”

It was not that Mako did not want people coming to visit, but ever since the queen gave him the boot, people were not necessarily allowed to associate with him. Living in exile was a pretty lonely experience all things considered. Now he had some weird kid scuttling around the place like a rat sticking his grubby little fingers in everything, and Mako was beginning to reconsider his desire for visitors.

As it was, Mako’s farm was not really an appropriate space for entertaining guests. At some point years prior, when funds were getting low, Mako had sold off his solar panels and pig farming business to make ends meet. He had moved out of the main farmhouse into the old shed where he kept his Harley not long after that. The old shed was barely holding together and the amenities left something to be desired, however, Mako had been forced to move because the main farmhouse had gotten too difficult to keep up with maintenance. It had been several decades old and falling apart, so Mako made the decision to scrap what was left of the place and use the money for supplies.

Mako shook his head. He couldn’t afford to be distracted by thoughts of the past now. The immediate plan right now was to get the hell out of Haasts Bluff, where Mako resided, and get to Sydney before the queen could send more of her puffed-up bastard goons after them. What happened after they got to the Big Smoke, Mako wasn’t sure. The idiot had been making noises about bigger plans, but for now Mako was keenly aware that they needed to take this precious little time to prepare for a hasty exodus.

The idiot’s voice echoed from another part of the old tin shed. “The sink is back flowing!” he called out. “Don’t worry! I’m ace at fixing things! You got any tools around here?” Mako groaned in annoyance.

Mako, who had been working on his bike and was lying on his back on the dusty floor of the shed, grunted as he rolled up into a sitting position. He swiped at his sweaty brow.

“Leave it,” Mako called back to the younger man. “We’re not staying here long anyway.”

The idiot appeared in the door to the portion of the building Mako used for a garage. “You almost done?” Jamie asked, leaning against the doorjamb like he was right at home. “I wouldn’t mind borrowing a spanner.”

Mako looked over. “I said not to worry about it,” he reiterated.

“Now, now,” Jamie began, making a placating motion with his hands. “I am nothing if not a
courteous house guest. If something needs fixin’, I’m there!” He crossed the garage over towards the workbench where an assortment of tools lay about. He started poking at them, making them clink nosily against each other.

Mako’s breath rattled deep in his chest. “We don’t have time,” he said. “We gotta get out of here.”

“Yeah, about that,” Jamie began without looking up from the tools. “How exactly do you propose we leg it from here?”

Mako swiped again at the perspiration accumulating on this forehead, just above the line where his gasmask ended, leaving a greasy mark behind in the wake of his hand. “You’re looking at it,” he growled.

Jamie frowned, looking back over his shoulder at Mako and the rest of the dusty shed. He then cast his eyes over the workbench, the miscellaneous farming equipment, the small table and chair across the room where the fridge and microwave where. Assessing each of these things, and finding them unsatisfactory, Jamie turned his attention on the large Harley motorcycle Mako had set on a wooden pallet to raise it up a little higher, making it easier for him to work on.

Jamie raised a brow. “Er, you want to go to Sydney, on a Harley?” he asked, jerking a thumb at the dusty old bike. “Where am I supposed to sit? Don’t tell me you want me to sit on the handlebars?”

“Don’t be stupid,” Mako barked. He slowly got back to his feet with a grunt of effort. “You can ride on the back.”

The scrawny little man laughed. No, laugh wasn’t the right word. He cackled. Giggles wracked his body. “You expect me to...?” He could barely finish his words before another fit of giggles overtook him. “And what if I bounce off before we even get to Oodnadatta!”

“Lucky me,” Mako muttered, turning to toss his adjustable wrench back onto the workbench and swapping it for a socket wrench.

Jamie seemed to recover himself. His giggles petered off and he looked up at Mako again. “I’ve got a better idea!” he said, pointing a finger at the older man. “If we’re leaving, let’s just scrap the place!” He gestured wide with his arms to indicate the corrugated shed walls all around them. “We could sell it for two bus tickets to Sydney!”

Mako shook his head. “You could scrap every panel here and it wouldn’t get you more than a few K’s toward a real city,” he said. “And you know buses don’t run around here.”

“They don’t?” Jamie replied, scratching at the back of his head again. “To be honest, I can’t remember much about what happens on the outside of them green walls, y’know?”

Mako grunted in acknowledgement. He knew the young man was referring to Junkertown. It seemed he had lived almost his whole life there by the sound of it.

Jamie seemed to take notice of Mako’s attempts to fix the Harley’s engine. “Do you want some help with that? I’m pretty good at fixin’ things, y’know,” he said. He plucked a spanner from the surface of the workbench and spun it between his fingers. “I used to be an apprentice of Bruce Kelly’s. He owns a scrapping business on the main drag of Junkertown.”

The larger man nodded. “I know him,” Mako said. “He makes hogdrogen for me.” Bruce Kelly was an old friend of Mako’s who had made a consumable form of biotic healing fluid to help keep Mako’s throat healed. He had coined the affectionate name for the substance, ‘hogdrogen’, named after Mako.
“Makes what?” Jamie asked. Mako shook his head as though to indicate not to worry about it.

Jamie shrugged and went on, “Not to be confused, of course, with Bruce Crompton who runs the take away shop... Why do we have so many Bruces?” He made as if to step closer to the Harley with his spanner raised, but Mako intercepted him and stood towering over the smaller man. Jamie took a hesitant step backwards.

Mako’s expression was obscured behind his gasmask, but there was something threatening about the stance he had adopted. He had clearly and deliberately put himself between Jamie and the bike to protect it from Jamie’s interference. He was silent for some time before finally saying, “Have you always talked too much?”

Jamie looked up into Mako’s gasmasked face. “Uh... Yeah... Yes. I think so?” he replied somewhat nervously.

Mako said nothing while he considered this. He eventually leaned in closer to speak his next words low and threateningly. “I don’t like talkers,” he growled.

Jamie visibly gulped and almost dropped the spanner in his suddenly trembling fingers. “It’s just that... Well... I was only going to suggest that maybe if we’re going to bike to Sydney, maybe it might be a good idea to... I dunno... maybe... build a sidecar?” Jamie’s voice had taken on slight timbre as Mako loomed over him.

“A what?” Mako ground out.

Jamie gulped again. “A... a sidecar. So I can ride beside you?”

Mako was silent for some time. Jamie worried he had gone too far, and that Mako was about to pummel him into the concrete floor for his insubordination. The gasmask left Mako’s face completely unreadable, so Jamie merely blinked up at the taller man and waited for a reply.

“Let me make one thing very clear,” Mako said finally. “You are not touching my bike.”

Mako pushed past Jamie at that moment so he could return to his work. Jamie realised he was holding his breath and released the air pent up inside his lungs. He watched Mako, sweaty and covered in dust, return to the bike and lean down to fiddle with something on the side. For the first time, Jamie realised just how enormous the man was. Mako’s large, meaty hands dwarfed the socket wrench as he jerked the tool to tighten a sprocket on the Harley. If he wanted to, he could very easily mangle Jamie’s face with one hand and zero remorse.

There was a reason Mako had a fearsome reputation around Junkertown. The hermit often visited to conduct business whenever the queen permitted it, and as such, most people were aware of who he was. He was known for being ruthless, unafraid to kill and a penchant for cruel, wanton destruction. The locals had called him ‘Roadhog’ which had originated from his pre-Omnic Crisis bikie days but now leant a strange air to the man; like he was some kind of faceless animal, pounding the pavement looking for his next kill. Jamie had once heard a rumour that Mako had killed a man at the pub one night for looking at him funny. Sometime after that, the queen had given him the boot and Mako had lived as a recluse ever since.

“Come on, mate! Don’t be like that,” Jamie said with a forced smile. Maybe he could try to turn Mako’s sudden dark mood around. “I only wanted to show you my appreciation!”

Mako took what appeared to be a deep, steadying breath. “What part of ‘no’ do you not understand?”
“Hey, now!” Jamie said placatingly. “This is going to be fun! We’re going to have a good, old-fashioned road trip. Just us boys! Together at last!”

Mako cast his eyes skyward as though the answer to why he had suddenly become a cosmic joke beset by a fool would be written on the ceiling. “Why did it have to be me?” Mako muttered to himself. He had thought his tone was low enough that Jamie would not hear him, but apparently he did because he responded as though Mako had spoken to him.

“You want your share of the treasure or not?” Jamie asked with humour. He had returned to the workbench and started poking around again, looking to switch his spanner for a larger one.

Mako narrowed his gaze at the idiot bent over his workbench. He had prattled all the way back to the farm about this mysterious ‘treasure’ and promised Mako a cut in exchange for his bodyguard services. Mako to some extent had readily agreed because he had told himself just days prior that the next opportunity that presented itself as a means of exit from this decaying hellhole, he would take it. When Jamie had popped up at the local Junkertown bar, seemingly besieged by royal guards set on squeezing his precious treasure out of him, Mako had seen an opportunity and taken it. But what exactly had he agreed to? Now he was saddled with this annoying boy who could not stop running his mouth for more than a few minutes. Was the treasure even real? And would it be worth it? Mako was questioning everything Jamie had told him.

“What exactly do you need me for?” Mako demanded to know. Sure, from the outset, it appeared that Jamie had wanted to get out of a sticky situation with the queen’s guard and readily agreed to a partnership with Mako back in that Junkertown pub, but something told Mako there had to be more to it than that. If that was the only thing that united them as partners, there wasn’t much stopping Jamie from ditching him at the first opportunity and keeping the treasure for himself. “If you wanna leave Junkertown, just leave,” he added.

Jamie appeared to be embarrassed about something because he suddenly dropped the tool in his hand and flushed a deep shade of red.

“Oh, well, um, you know,” he stuttered, half-turning to look at Mako sidelong. “It would best to have some company for such a long journey, right? Its best to be alone together, isn’t it?”

He was running his mouth again, Mako noted. It was like there was almost no filter between anything that popped into the idiot’s head and what came out of his mouth. “What are you on about?” Mako asked.

“Well,” Jamie began. His eyes were shifting, flitting with restless phrenetic energy over any random item in the near vicinity, like it might save him from his sudden feelings of awkwardness. “I can’t exactly... How do I put it...? That is to say...”

Mako was losing his patience. “Spit it out!” he barked.

The sudden rise in volume in Mako’s voice seemed to startle the younger man and jumpstart his mouth again. “I don’t know how to drive,” he blurted out. As if surprised by his own admission, his arms snapped down to his sides, fingers curled in anxious balls. “Never learned how,” he went on. “So, I guess I kind of... need a lift?”

There was a heavy silence. Mako blinked at Jamie from behind his mask in disbelief. Was he saying that he could fix complicated machines, had been an apprentice of Bruce Kelly’s, and he didn’t know how to drive a vehicle?

Mako’s gasmask was turned towards Jamie, expressionless. The large black eyeholes were like
angry voids, boring holes into Jamie’s skull. Although it was difficult for Jamie to gauge what Mako’s true feelings were with his face completely obscured. Finally, Mako spoke.

“That’ll cost ya.”

Jamie blinked. “Huh?”

“I’d say, at least a fifty-percent cut.”

Jamie’s gaze ended up settling on the ceiling. Mako got the impression the young man had not become suddenly interested by the bare beams of the rafters or the myriad of long abandoned cobwebs up there. “Oh yeah...” Jamie said in a drawn-out kind of way. He planted his prosthesis on his hip and scratched at his chin with the other hand. “That’s what we agreed on, wasn’t it? Wait, no. Wasn’t it twenty-five percent? Or Thirty?”

“Fifty,” Mako reiterated.

“Are you sure?” Jamie asked. “I could have sworn...”

“What are you planning exactly?” Mako cut in. “You want a lift. Sure. Makes sense. But where are you going?”

“Sydney!” Jamie spouted cheerfully. “I told ya that already!” Jamie turned to carry on scrounging around on the workbench, searching for an appropriate tool. He picked up a larger spanner and examined it closely. Finding it was not to his liking, he tossed it back into the pile.

“No, I mean after that,” Mako groaned. He set down his own greasy spanner and took out a rag from his pocket to wipe his hands. He took a seat on a nearby barrel of engine oil.

Jamie’s expression became thoughtful. “Well. The thing is, I don’t want you thinking I’m gonna stiff you on the treasure or anything.” Jamie seemed to find a spanner that he liked and waved it through the air as he spoke in emphasise his point. “Fair’s fair, and I’m a man of my word. But I was thinking I might sweeten the deal. Just in case anything goes pear-shaped, so we got plenty of riches to fall back on.”

Jamie’s movements were frantic again and his eyes darted around with a nervous energy. Mako watched him with suspicion. “Sounds like you are planning on stiffing me.”

Jamie was quick to correct him. “Not at all! Not at all! Quite the opposite! I only want to make sure you get your dues, my friend!”

“How do you mean?” Mako asked. His sense of suspicion did not ease.

“Think about it,” Jamie went on. “At this point, you just gotta take my word for it that the treasure is real, don’t ya? Sets us up in an unfair power dynamic.” Jamie began to circle the bike, admiring Mako’s handiwork. As he spoke, Mako got the impression he was measuring his words carefully, like an actor giving an award-winning performance. “I want everything nice and fair between us. So how about we reap some spoils, eh? We make some cash along the way, we pull off a few heists, and split everything sixty-forty!”

“Fifty-fifty,” Mako reminded him.

Jamie seemed not to have heard him. “We can even use this old place to stash everything we nab!” He cast his arms wide to indicate the shed all around them.
Mako sighed. What exactly was he agreeing to here? He wasn’t averse to crime and snatching what you could when you could; they lived in the apocalypse after all. You did what you had to do to survive out here. It had been that way for decades now. Mako hoped this was not an attempt to disguise the fact that there was no ‘treasure’ after all, and Jamie just wanted a partner in crime that he could string along for these so-called ‘heists.’ Then again, the treasure must be real because the queen had sent her guard after Jamie. That must count for something surely.

“So, you wanna hold up some banks or something?” Mako asked.

“Please,” Jamie said, a hand clutched to his chest as if offended by the notion. “Nothing so crude. I’m thinking bigger.”

“Bigger?”

“Like whole bars of gold. Treasures! Jewels bigger,” Jamie said, looking over at Mako between the handlebars of the Harley lying between them. “And what’s the best, most famous of all jewels on the planet?”

Mako thought about it for a moment. “The Hope Dia—?"


Mako was silent for a moment. “You want the Crown Jewels? ” he asked incredulously. “The most protected treasures in the world?”

Jamie giggled with manic energy. “Can’t you just see it? Me, the King of Thieves! Properly regal!”

Mako stifled a groan. Not only did he talk too much but he had an inferiority complex too? Just what Mako needed, a junkrat with delusions of grandeur. Not content with pickpocketing and errand work to get by, he had set his sights much bigger now. Mako should have expected the young man's aspirations to leap in grand strides like his attention span did.

“All hail King Jamison Fawkes the First!” Jamie went on. “And, erm... Duke Roadhog?” His face dropped, then he scratched at the back of his head, thinking hard on something. “What is your name anyways?” he asked.

The larger man fixed Jamie with a look of annoyance, not that it could be seen behind the gasmask. “Mako,” he growled.

Jamie’s face scrunched up with confusion. “‘Mako?’ Weird name. I’m just going to call you ‘Roadie’ from now on. Easier to remember.”

Mako could feel his annoyance levels rising again. “‘Mako’ is too hard to remember?” he asked. “Or ‘Roadhog’?”

Jamie shrugged. “Yeah. Do you not understand how this works?” he asked. “The word shortening technique? You take the first syllable of a word and then you whack a vowel sound on the end. Done.” he said, sparing a glance at Mako. “Like how everyone calls me ‘Jamie’. ‘Jamison’ is too long.”

Mako’s fists were clenching. “‘Roadhog’ and ‘Mako’ have the same number as syllables as ‘Roadie,’” he pointed out in his gravelly tone. “You’re not actually shortening the word.”

Jamie seemed to take notice of the tension in Mako’s voice. He looked over, eyebrows raised,
perhaps surprised by the strength of Mako’s reaction. “Oi, mate, calm down. It doesn’t matter. No need to have a tantrum.”

Mako stood, staring incredulously at Jamie. “You mean a ‘tantrum?’ Which is two syllables. The same as ‘tanty’?” Mako took a very calculated step towards Jamie so he could loom over him. “You sick fuck.” he growled.

Jamie actually took a step back, surprised by Mako’s sudden anger. “Roadie, calm down! I don’t make the rules,” he said in a placating voice. “It’s just how language works, innit?”

“How about you leave the language making to someone with half a brain?” Mako said with a sneer. He turned away to he could cross the room to the makeshift kitchen on the other side.

Jamie was busy pouting at Mako’s retreating form. “For the record, I was also considering ‘Hoggie’,” he muttered. He watched as Mako started to pour some water from the fridge into a mug.

Jamie turned his attention on the bike again. He could see that Mako had removed the primary transmission cover so as to repair the stator, but was clearly halfway through the job. Jamie’s fingers twitched. He felt he could get in there and fix that quite easily. The sooner it was fixed, the sooner they could leave, right? He stepped forward with his spanner in hand.

‘But, wait. Didn’t Roadie say something about not touching the bike?’ Jamie asked himself. He always did have trouble paying attention. It was why his school teacher, the only one in Junkertown, had said he would never amount to anything. Jamie thought hard, trying to remember what Roadie had said, but in the end gave up. ‘It couldn’t have been that important,’ he told himself. Besides, it was only polite to help with the repairs. At Mako’s pace, it would take them days to ready the bike and leave Haast’s Bluff.

Jamie inched closer to the bike. All he needed to do was loosen that compensating sprocket and...

“Hey!”

Jamie jumped in alarm. Mako had spotted him approaching the bike with his spanner raised. Jamie watched as Mako came lumbering towards him, positively radiating anger. Jamie felt like a cold chill shoot through him. He had clearly gone too far this time and now Mako was about to flatten him. Jamie recoiled from the larger man out of terror.

“I told you not to touch—!”

Suddenly, Mako coughed violently. Jamie took a step back, startled by the noise. The coughing turned into deep, body-wracking retches and Mako doubled over. Mako continued to cough and Jamie watched him with concern.

“You okay?” Jamie asked hesitantly.

Mako wasn’t used to talking at length like this, something he should have realised would be an issue if he ever had prolonged company. And this company was particularly talkative.

Mako turned and stumbled away from the young man, still coughing, and reached out towards some sort of machine on the far side of the shed. It looked like an old slushie machine, the kind they had at petrol stations, but this one was filled with and churning a kind of yellow liquid. Jamie watched Mako as he retrieved a cannister from a shelf beside the device and pulled the lever on the side. He poured some of the yellow liquid into the cannister. He coughed again, then stuffed the opening of the cannister into one of the inhalation valves on the side of his gasmask and chugged.
Jamie watched all of this with wide eyes. The coughing stopped and Mako tossed the cannister aside. He leant heavily against the slushie machine for some time, trying to catch his breath. Eventually, he turned and lumbered back towards the Harley.

“What was that about?” Jamie asked, eyeing Mako warily.

Mako retook his seat on the barrel. “Got a problem with my throat,” he said, his voice noticeably more raspy.

Jamie nodded. He knew many people around Mako’s age who had similar injuries or ailments, most of them ex-ALF members who had experienced some kind of trauma in combat during the Omnic Crisis. Even the Bruce that owned the local take away shop in Junkertown had a peg leg like Jamie, having lost his leg in battle. Jamie was unsure if it was safe to ask Mako more about such a sensitive topic, but something compelled him to try anyway.

“What happened?”

Mako tried to bring his laboured breaths under control. He thought back to his time fighting to defend this land. A fat lot of good it had done. The memory of white, hot smoke in his face. A blast of heat from below which set his ears ringing. He remembered only that his throat was on fire and one side of his face was wet and dripping. Someone had taken hold of him from behind and dragged him backwards away from the searing heat.

“Chlorine gas. Breathed it in. Long time ago. Now I gotta wear this mask.”

Jamie eyed the cannister on other side of the room that Mako had cast aside. “What is that stuff?” he asked.

“Hogdrogen.”

Jamie nodded slowly. Mako had mentioned the stuff before. Seemed he needed it to help with his breathing. That and the gasmask. Without them, it seemed he would probably experience respiratory failure.

Jamie watched Mako struggle to regulate his breath for a moment longer. “Listen, mate. Maybe you should call it a day, eh?” he said. “Maybe go lie down and have a rest.”

Mako seemed to nod in agreement. He stood slowly and headed for the door. His bedroom was down the hall.

Jamie watched him cross the garage slowly. A thought struck him. “Er... What about me? Where am I sleeping tonight?”

“There’s a couch in the shed outside,” Mako grunted. He carried on without looking back.

Jamie gaped at him. “What? You can’t be serious!” he cried. The accommodations offered did not sound safe or comfortable. “What if the queen’s goons come to bump me off in the night!”

“We can only pray,” Mako muttered. As he rounded the doorjamb and set off down the corridor, he called out, “We leave first thing in the morning.”

Jamie watched Mako leave. Despite his momentary outrage, a feeling of guilt washed over him. He felt responsible for Mako’s angry outbursts and subsequent coughing fit. Mako seemed like the
kind of person who was always at the tipping point of flying into a white-hot rage. Jamie would need to be careful not to set the old man off again.

Jamie was beginning to wonder if it was wise to enter into this partnership with Mako at all. What if he was looking for the first opportunity to dump him, nick the treasure, and run off? Maybe, Jamie considered for a moment, it would be safer to simply do a runner now while he had the chance? That is, if Mako didn’t just wallop him into the ground first for trying to scarper on him.

Jamie shook his head as if to dismiss these thoughts. Perhaps there was a way to make it up to Mako? Once again, the warnings about not touching the Harley completely slipped his mind. Jamie cast his eyes over the bike again, an idea beginning to form in his mind.

He knew just what to do to make Mako feel better.

--

“What the bloody hell is that?” Mako asked.

They were standing on the hard, red soil at the front of Mako’s shed. It was around mid-morning and the heat of the day was already starting to set in. Bright sunshine poured down on them and a few Major Mitchell's cockatoos shot overhead screeching to one another.

Mako was in the middle of shrugging on a leather biker jacket in preparation for their departure. He had gone looking for the idiot and the bike as soon as he noticed both were missing from the garage. He paused when he caught sight of Jamie’s enormous grin and beside him, what had formerly been his half-finished Harley, now whole and painted a bright sheen of yellow.

Jamie gestured dramatically to his handiwork. “Ta-da!” he announced with a flourish of his hands.

The Harley had been decorated with little smiley faces here and there. Mako suspected they were a trademark of Jamie’s as he had noticed them popping up around his shed over the last twenty-four hours, doodled on scraps of paper or detailed with a finger on a dusty surface. The most conspicuous addition to the Harley, was the large yellow sidecar now attached to one side.

The main body of the side car was an old oil drum out of which Jamie had cut out a large opening for himself to sit on the sofa cushion stuffed inside. Each end of the drum was capped with a metal sheet banged out into a dome to form a more aerodynamic shape, like the fuselage of an aircraft. Jamie had painted an obnoxiously large smiley with bright red eyes on the front-facing side.

Jamie looked exceptionally proud. “What do you think?” he asked excitedly. “Stayed up all night working on it. I wanted to surprise you!”

Mako should have been annoyed, angry even. He had told the young man not to touch the bike. But to be fair, it was not a bad job. Mako had never seen the old dusty bike shine so bright, not in years. It actually looked really good!

Jamie came around the side of the bike and kick-started the engine so Mako could see and hear that everything was in working order. When he felt Mako was satisfied, he switched the engine off and grinned. Mako had to admit, the kid was as good as his word when it came to fixing things.

Mako felt any residual anger dissipate. On some level, Mako understood that Jamie would need
somewhere to sit on their long journey. Mako didn’t necessarily want the scrawny little junkrat clinging to his back all the way to Sydney. The sidecar did not look too bad for something he had slapped together in a few hours. And painting the bike the same colour to match was a surprisingly nice touch. Mako noticed Jamie was practically bouncing on the heels of his feet, waiting for Mako’s response.

“It looks like something out of Mad Max,” Mako grunted.

Jamie waived the comment off. “Never watched Mad Max. Always thought it was a ridiculous concept,” he said. “But what do you think?”

“It’s alright,” Mako replied with a shrug.

Mako’s response seemed satisfactory to Jamie because he made a noise of elation, hopping on the spot with pure glee. Mako was glad his gasmask was able to obscure the smirk he made as he watched Jamie’s obvious excitement.

“I call it the Mayhem Mobile!” Jamie said dramatically, running his hands across the polished surface of the sidecar. “Gives it a kind of chaotic je ne sais quoi, don’t you think?”

Mako finished pulling on his biker jacket and stepped closer to the Harley with its new sidecar to get a better look. “Yellow is hardly an inconspicuous colour if we are wanting to avoid the queen’s guard or bandits.” Mako pointed out.

Jamie seemed a little deflated by that comment. “But it's my favourite colour…” he murmured.

Mako rolled his eyes beneath the mask. “It’ll do,” he added in a conciliatory way, and Jamie’s expression brightened again. “Come on. We’d better get going.”

Jamie nodded enthusiastically and bounced over to the sidecar. He leaned down next to the spoked wheel, careful to avoid being poked by the jagged pieces of metal mounted to the wheel house for decoration, and retrieved the ‘RIP-Tire’ he had carried on his back to Mako’s farm from Junkertown.

Mako watched Jamie lift the RIP-Tire onto the back of the sidecar and begin strapping it in place. “You bringing that with you?” he asked.

“Of course!” Jamie replied cheerfully. “This here is my pride and joy!” He said this while stroking the RIP-Tire lovingly.

Mako eyed the device with suspicion. “If that thing blows up my bike before we get to Sydney, you and I are going to have words,” he said.

Jamie looked offended. “Please. You think I don’t know how to build a class three explosive without destroying everything in a five-metre radius? What do you take me for? Some kind of idiot? Don’t answer that,” Jamie added hastily when he saw Mako making a gesture with his hand like he was about to object.

Jamie finished mounting the explosive device to the back of the sidecar with a grunt of effort and then hopped into his seat, reclining on the cushion with legs cast over the side of the sidecar’s body, head pillowed on arms folded behind his neck. He stretched languidly like a lizard sunning itself, the muscles on his naked chest pulled taught. Mako declined to remind the young man to wear sunscreen just to see how sunburnt he would get riding in the sidecar without a shirt on.

Jamie had no other luggage to bring with them it seemed, as he made no motion to load any other
kind of baggage onto the sidecar. He apparently planned to travel light. Mako made his way back inside and then around to the rear of the bike so he could strap some items on the luggage rack; his scrap gun, a box of hogdrogen canisters, and a toolkit in case they needed to make repairs on the run. Other than that, all Mako had were the clothes on his back and a little bit of cash sewn into one of the seams of his jacket. The Harley was full of petrol, which would hopefully be enough to get them out of the government-enforced exclusion zone around Junkertown, but eventually they would need to stop somewhere to refuel.

Mako took his seat on top of the Harley and turned to cast his eyes one last time over what was left of his farm. He had locked up what he could but Mako realised that with no one here to guard the property, there was no guarantee there would be anything left when and if they ever returned. Scrappers might take the place apart, or bandits might move in. Mako heaved a sigh. He resolved within himself to let go of the place there and then. His desire to get out of the wastes and the promise of Jamie’s treasure painted a much more alluring picture in his mind than staying here ever could. Still, he was probably going to miss the old place.

“Come on, Roadie!” Jamie said impatiently. He gestured with one hand towards the rocky, unpaved road ahead. “The world awaits!”

Mako kick-started the old Harley’s engine. The beast roared to life and Jamie grinned broadly up at Mako. Mako had to admit, the idiot had done a good job on the engine after all.

“I told you to stop calling me that,” Mako growled over the din.

Mako didn’t look back as they took off, heading for the horizon.

--

It was a hot day and as they tore down the abandoned highway, the windchill did not seem to bother Jamie. He fell asleep almost instantly once they crossed the border of the queen’s territory. Mako thought he would have been more excited, but there he was, lying precariously across the sidecar seat, head tipped back and tongue lolling out.

Their journey would take them through rugged scrubland, with not much more than red dirt as far as the eye could see and a few rocky ranges that marked where the national parks were in the distance. Well, they used to be national parks before they became part of the exclusion zone. Occasionally they passed through a burnt-out husk that must have once been a small country town, but was now long-abandoned and picked clean. From this point on, they would need to make their way to the edge of the government-enforced exclusion zone and hopefully find some place to stop and refuel.

As time went by, the idiot was still sleeping and the bike’s engine was too loud to hold a conversation over anyway. Mako was left alone to watch the endless stretches of highway passing by hour after hour in silence. Even when he pulled off the road after a while for a short break, Jamie still did not wake and remained sprawled out in the sidecar.

Mako snorted derisively. He really must have stayed up all night to finish the bike and the sidecar, or so it seemed. Mako surmised that he must have been exhausted and decided to let him sleep.

Several hours later, the sun was starting to dip towards the horizon and the air was finally
beginning to cool. They were cruising down a straight length of highway when Mako spotted a building drawing near over the horizon. Having not seen a single other traveller all day, he hoped that perhaps someone might be inhabiting the place and be willing to sell him some petrol. As they drew near, he pulled into the forecourt of the dilapidated establishment and spotted an old rusted fuel pump that looked promising. The attached hose was padlocked to the pump. Mako assumed he would need to inquire inside if he wanted to use it.

Mako switched the engine off and climbed off the bike, rubbing at his sore behind. Sitting on a bike all day was probably one of the most uncomfortable experiences of his life. He looked over at Jamie, but he did not stir.

Mako stepped around the bike and clipped Jamie on the back of the head. “Oi,” he said. “Wake up.”

Jamie jumped, startled. He choked momentarily on his drool, coughed, and looked around. He blinked in the bright light. “What’s going on? Are we in Sydney already?”

“No, you idiot,” Mako barked. “Rest stop.”

“Oh,” Jamie replied. He crawled out of the sidecar and stood so he could stretch. Mako could hear his joints popping. “Reckon they sell any beer here?”

“We haven’t got money for beer,” Mako replied. “In fact, we haven’t got much money at all.” He watched Jamie closely. “We’re going to need some if we want to make it to Sydney.”

Jamie turned his gaze on the taller man. He seemed to understand was Mako was suggesting. A broad grin appeared on his face. “Ah, I see what you’re getting at. You wanna rob this place.”

Mako only grunted in reply in a non-committal way. “Don’t want necessarily,” Mako replied. “But we might need to.”

Jamie nodded. He headed around to the back of the bike and started pulling things out of the rear compartment on the sidecar. He pulled out some sort of weapon on a leather strap and slung it across his back.

“What’s that?” Mako asked, shrugging off his leather jacket and tossing it down on the seat of the Harley.

“Just something I’ve been working on,” Jamie replied in a mysterious tone. “Nothing you need to worry your pretty little head about. Here.” Jamie tossed Roadie his scrap gun, then turned and headed for the main entrance. Mako checked he had plenty of spare scrap pieces in his pocket for his gun, and then trailed behind his accomplice.

The building appeared to be an old motel which was probably no longer in operation now that it lay inside the exclusion zone, but Mako could see that there were lights on inside. The forecourt was filled with red dust and scraps of rubbish. The two planters that framed the main entrance were full of long dead, dried-up plants. Much of the front-facing façade was covered in graffiti but there were also several painted signs that indicated “beer”, “food” and “petrol” was sold there. A neon sign also illuminated one of the windows, spelling out the word “PUB.” Jamie had already disappeared inside so Mako jogged to catch up to him.

Stepping out of the heat and into the darkened bar area, the smell of stale beer and cigarettes hit Mako square in his face. The oxygen valves of his gas mask barely helped obscure the odour. Much of the room was trashed with tables and chairs upturned here and there. A woman in her
thirties with long red hair was standing behind the bar. She paused in her work to look over at them, her expression fearful at the sight of the two men. Once she got a good look at them, she relaxed, then confusion washed over her face.

Jamie was halfway across the room to the bar when he saw a young boy, perhaps five or six years old, sitting on the bar top beside the woman. He was swinging his legs while he watched the woman work. Realising she was most likely his mother, Jamie’s expression dropped.

Jamie shot a subtle glance at Mako, who stared back at him. They both had the same thought at the same time, they couldn’t rob a mother and certainly not with a child present. Jamie kept his weapon slung across his back and Mako also discreetly holstered his scrap gun out of the woman’s view.

Jamie took a seat on one of the stools that wasn’t broken at the bar. “G’day, love,” he said with a smile.

The woman’s expression remained grim. “What’ll it be?” she asked.

“A beer!” Jamie said pleasantly. “For me and my very best mate, Roadie, here!” As Mako took a seat beside the young man, Jamie clapped him around the shoulders and grinned at him. Mako shrugged him off.

The woman poured two schooners from the tap and placed them on the bar matt in front of the two men. Jamie dropped some coins on the counter and started gulping his beer down enthusiastically. Mako carefully regarded his own. It was the correct colour and smell. Pure beer that wasn’t watered down or tainted in some way was difficult to come by.

Jamie set his glass down for a moment and looked over at the little boy still sitting on the bar top. “Alright, little fella?” he asked, waving. The child stared back blankly and didn’t reply.

“You’ll need to be quick,” the woman said, planted her hands on her hips. “You don’t want to be here after dark.”

Mako looked back up at the woman. “Why’s that?” he asked.

“You just don’t,” she replied. She turned to her son. “Marcus, go out the back.”

The little boy stopped swinging his legs. “But I want to stay.”

“Now,” the woman barked at him. The boy slid off the bar and disappeared into a back room with a frown.

The woman turned back to the men. “You're Junkers, aren't you?” she asked.

Jamie polished off his beer and dropped the glass back onto the bar top. “How’d you know?” he asked. Mako made a mental note to have a word with Jamie about giving information about them away for free.

“You look like Junkers,” she replied.

Mako looked down at his steel capped boots, the spiked makeshift pauldron on his right shoulder, and the craftsmanship of the various bits of armour he wore, realising they had probably given him away. Looking over at Jamie, he noted the ratty cargo shorts he was wearing but nothing else besides the careful engineering that had gone into his prosthetic arm made of scavenged materials marked him as Junker. Maybe it was the peg leg which had received much less careful engineering by comparison.
“They won’t like that,” the woman added.

Jamie seemed not to have heard her. He polished off his beer and set the empty glass down on the bar. “Got somewhere I can take a leak?” he asked the woman.

The woman nodded towards a door across the room. Jamie hopped off his bar stool and trotted away.

“Who’s ‘they’?” Mako asked the woman.

The woman glanced nervously over at the main entrance, then the clock on the wall. When she looked back at Mako, there was an unmistakeable sorrow in her eyes, a quickness to her breath. “Just leave quickly, alright?”

Mako didn’t have much of a chance to ask her what she meant. There was a noise outside like the rumbling of engines. Mako turned to look at the door.

All of the colour had drained out of the woman’s face. “They’re early,” she muttered. She looked back at Mako, fear apparent on her face. “Go! Now!” she barked at him.

“But I haven’t finished my beer,” Mako complained.

The engine sounds cut out and Mako could hear male voices outside. Glancing at the woman behind the bar, Mako noticed that she was staring at the main entrance, frozen with fear. Mako looked back at the door, then pushed himself to his feet and walked across the room to one of the windows overlooking the forecourt. He leaned over the booth seats so he could look through the window, and saw a bunch of motorcycles parked on the forecourt and around a half-dozen men circling the Mayhem Mobile. He didn’t recognise any of them and they didn’t appear to be Junkers. They were dressed in dark, ripped clothing with rifles or machetes strapped to their backs. All of them had the same insignia stencilled with white spray-paint straight onto their clothing: a snarling dingo. They were bandits, or so Mako guessed. Mako could just make out the letters surrounding the depiction of the dingo which spelled out ‘PREDATORS.’

Mako watched the men for a moment. They were pointing at his bike and exchanging words. Then they turned and headed for the door.

The door to the bar was suddenly flung wide. The bang as the door ricocheted off the wall resulted in a shallow echo around the bar room.

"There she is!” One of the men crowed with mock joy. “It’s my best girl, Pat!”

The men poured into the room and strode right up to the bar, their gaze fixated on the woman behind the beer taps. Mako found that he had gone unnoticed by the men as they crossed the room. With their backs to him, Mako slumped down in one of the booth seats and watched.

“What’s with the yellow bike outside?” one of the men asked.

“Someone left it behind,” the woman, Pat, said. She was watching the men warily. “Couldn’t pay their tab.”

“That so?” the first man asked. He strode right up to the bar. Mako noticed that Pat had cleaned away their used beer glasses before the newcomers could see them. “I hope it’s true. Predators don’t like being lied to.”

Pat didn’t reply. She hurried to start pouring beers for the men without being prompted.
The men watched her closely. “Where’s our money?” another one asked.

“I’ve got it, alright?” Pat said, her voice tense. “I’m just a little short this week.”

“Really,” the first man spoke again, his tone flat and disbelieving. “Even with that pretty bike out there?”

“Yes,” Pat replied, her voice shaky.

“You wouldn’t be lying to us, would you?”

Pat looked down. “No.”

The man suddenly slammed his fist down on the bar. Pat practically jumped out of her skin. A couple of the beers Pat had set out toppled and amber liquid poured onto the floor.

“Come on, Pat. It’s not Bush Week,” the man said, voice raised. “Did you forget how this works? We provide protection for your fine establishment; you pay us a weekly fee and we get to drink all we want. You trying to stiff us on our agreement?”

Pat bit her lip and said nothing. The man leant forward, bracing an elbow on the bar.

“Do we need to make it clear to you what is at stake here?” the man went on. His eyes roamed over the bottles on the shelves behind Pat towards the door that lead into the rear of the building. “You’ve got a little boy to think about, Pat.”

The man’s eyes slid back over the neat rows of liquor to rest on Pat again but this time there was a moment of pause. Behind the shelves was a sheet of mirrored glass. The entire surface was cracked and large shards of it were missing, but through the broken pieces, the young man’s eyes lined up with the black holes of Mako’s gasmask.

The man whipped around to look at Mako. “Well, now,” he began, a sickly smile curling at his lips. “What do we have here?”

Pat sunk down nervously behind the bar. The rest of the men also turned to look at Mako. They unholstered their weapons with looks of surprise and took aim. “Looks like a Junker,” one of them said.

The one that appeared to be their leader adopted a relaxed pose, leaning back against the bar. He reached over and plucked up one of the remaining glasses of beer and took a sip.

Mako looked them over with disdain. They were exactly the kind of people Mako usually tried to avoid. The kind that had settled into the decaying landscape of Central Australia following the Omnic Crisis, like they were right at home, and immediately started fighting over the scraps left behind. Mako was not a stupid man. He knew that outside the queen’s territory the exclusion zone was the kind of place where you sometimes had to kill a man just so you could live to see another day. It was the place that most criminals and outcasts ended up when they had been booted out of Junkertown by the queen, or they did not want to be found by the government. Bandits like these ones had ruined what had was left of the land Mako had fought so hard to protect. It was cold consolation to think that they deserved to live the rest of their lives in this hellhole.

Mako pushed himself back onto his feet then so he could square up with the men. Sometimes just showing someone his full size and height was enough to scare them off. The bandits watched him; weapons trained on his every movement. Now that they could see him properly, they looked a little more nervous.
“I’m not a Junker,” Mako said. It was true, Mako had been kicked out of Junkertown long ago and he really did not consider himself a Junker anymore.

The bandits eyed him disbelievingly. “You sure look like one,” another man said.

“This is Predator territory,” another said. “We should sort you out for trespassing!”

Mako sized each man up. For a brief moment, Mako considered how quickly he could get to the door—he was standing nearest to it after all—and get on his bike before the men could take hold of him. Doing so would mean abandoning the idiot here in the middle of nowhere. Not an altogether unwelcome outcome really. But in the end, Mako decided against it. They had made a deal and they had come this far. Mako could not leave Jamie behind.

There was a click of a lock and a door on the other side of the room opened. Jamie stepped through the doorway, drying his hands on his shorts. He looked up, eyes widening with surprise at the sight before him. Mako on one side of the room, six bandits on the other, weapons drawn. Several pairs of eyes turned to stare at Jamie. No body moved and the room was eerily silent.

“Uh...,” Jamie began. “Hi?”

The leader of the bandits took in Jamie’s scraggily appearance, his peg leg, his prosthetic arm, and seemed to come to a realisation. “Wait. I think I’ve heard about you,” he began. “Aren’t you the kid that found a treasure or something?”


“Yeah, yeah, you are!” the leader went on. “There’s a bounty out for you.”

The room went still again.

Mako involuntarily clenched his fingers. Of course, the idiot just had to run his mouth at every opportunity and spread the word that he had a treasure. And of course, gossip just had to travel fast around here. Mako stared angrily across the room at Jamie. If these bandits didn’t kill them, Mako was going to throttle that idiot.

The bandit nearest Jamie turned and leered at him. “A bounty, eh?” he asked with a sneer. Then his expression became deadly serious. “Dibs,” he said then launched himself toward the young man.

Mako reacting on instinct. He unleashed his trusty meat hook at his side and sent it soaring towards the bandits. It sailed through the air and hooked around one man and Mako pulled on the chain that connected the retractable hook to his hip. Mako threw himself to one side, bringing the chain with him and slammed the man on the end of his hook against the man beside him. Both were thrown to the side and sent tumbling into a bunch of tables and chairs which collapsed beneath them.

The bandit leader roared in rage and push himself off the bar towards Mako. He had barely taken a step before Pat brought down a bottle of liquor on his head from behind the bar. The bottle shattered, liquid pouring everywhere, and the leader dropped to the floor, out cold.

Mako turned to help Jamie. He had scuffled with his assailant on the floor but had managed to shove him away with a strong kick of his peg leg. The man rolled to one side, giving Jamie enough of a reprieve to reach behind himself and pull his weapon over his head. He fired at the man and Mako barely caught a glimpse of the small round projectile sailing through the air before it exploded, sending dust and broken furniture in all directions. Even Mako staggered from the resulting blast and noise. Pat screamed.
Mako looked over at Jamie as the dust cleared. He was holding that weapon again, some kind of frag launcher. It appeared to be made out of miscellaneous scavenged pieces, now that Mako could see it better. The weapon was more powerful than Mako was expecting. It was actually kind of impressive.

When the dust finally cleared, Jamie’s attacker was buried beneath the broken bits of furniture. Mako was so shocked by what had happened and how quickly Jamie had taken out the bandit, that he didn’t see the machete-wielding man coming at him from one other side.

“Roadie!” Jamie cried out a moment too late.

Mako reared back when he caught sight of the man from the corner of his eye. The machete sliced upward toward his face and just barely missed slicing off his ear. Mako felt his gasmask decompress as the seal around his face broke. The machete had sliced open one side of the mask just near his right cheek. Mako could feel the pure oxygen he needed to breath escaping through the gash in his mask. His cheek was stinging where the blade had nicked his skin. He took a wheezing, rattling breath but it was like trying to breathe underwater. His throat started to burn.

A glint of light off the machete blade as it arched towards him was enough warning for Mako to raise one hand to capture the bandit’s forearm in his hand, blocking the second blow before it could land. Wheezing, he grabbed hold of the bandit by the scruff of his neck. The machete dropped. Mako lifted the man and threw him with both hands across the bar. He went sailing through the air, over the bar top, and colliding with the shelves of liquor. Everything came crashing down, including what was left of the mirror. Pat barely had enough time to duck out of the way.

Mako was breathing heavily now. He reached for his back pocket where he usually kept a spare hogdrogen bottle. His vision was going white now, he could barely see from lack of oxygen. He sank to his knees, bracing himself on one arm. He felt the bottle in his palm, but fumbled it and heard it roll away out of his reach.

“Roadie!” Jamie cried again, climbing to his feet and trying to cross the room towards Mako. Someone shoved him from behind and Jamie fell forward, all of the wind knocked out of his body. Gasping with surprise, Jamie immediately braced his hands ready to push himself upright again when something cold was pressed to his temple. Jamie’s eyes went wide and he stilled himself.

With his limited range of movement, Jamie looked up and saw the barrel of a rifle pressed to his head. With one side of his face pressed into the carpet, Jamie made eye contact with the bandit on the other end of the rifle.

“I’ll make you fucking pay for this!” the man yelled as he released the safety mechanism. His finger inched towards the trigger. Jamie held his breath.

There was a clanging, and then a whooshing noise. Mako’s hook had appeared and snagged the man. Suddenly, he was gone from Jamie’s line of sight. There was as loud bang and the sound of shattering glass. Jamie scrambled upright and looked around.

Mako was still on his knees, his hook in one hand. Behind him, one of the large windows that overlooked the forecourt was smashed. Mako had hooked the man then thrown him clean through the window. Mako took a stuttering breath and then collapsed, falling backwards.

Jamie felt dizzy as he righted himself. Confused, adrenalin pumping, he thought only of escape. He felt around for his frag launcher, found it, and picked it up with one hand. Looking up, he could see the fading light illuminating the door that lead back outside and instinctively, he staggered towards it.
Gotta get out of here, he thought to himself. Gotta get on the bike and get the hell out of here!

Jamie didn’t care that he did not know how to drive, he would figure it out. His right leg hurt and his head was throbbing, but Jamie hobbled along as fast as he could. He would not stay here another minute!

Jamie paused halfway towards the door. Roadie! He has almost forgotten about him.

Turning to look, Jamie noticed Mako was twitching on the floor. Something was wrong with him. His breaths were hitching and laboured. One hand was reaching out for something yellow nearby. Jamie peered around Mako’s enormous form and saw it was a cannister of hogdrogen.

Jamie began to piece together that something was very wrong. He looked at the door, then back at Mako. He turned and hobbled toward the cannister and practically fell on it. He scooped it up and shuffled forwards on his knees towards Mako.

“What do I...?” He began to ask.

Mako, wheezing, pulled the gasmask to one side and motioned to Jamie like he was beckoning him forward. Jamie unscrewed the cannister’s lid and tentatively tipped it towards Mako’s face. Jamie caught a glimpse of the scarred flesh underneath the mask but said nothing. He held his hands as steady as he could and slowly poured the hogdrogen into Mako’s mouth.

“What’s wrong with him?”

Jamie looked back over his shoulder. The woman who had served him beer before was there, her son in her arms and braced on one hip. They both looked down at Jamie.

“Do you have any duct tape?” Jamie asked. “I need to fix this mask.”

The woman nodded. “Marcus, go get some from out back,” she said, setting the child down. Marcus scampered away.

Marcus soon returned with some black tape and turned it over to Jamie. While Mako caught his breath, Jamie did his best to patch up the gasmask. “It will have to do until we can fix it proper,” he told Mako.

When Mako was feeling well enough to sit up, Jamie stood and turned to Pat. “Sorry about your bar,” he said, looking over at the destruction. It somehow looked even worse than before they had walked in and there were several strange men groaning in various states of consciousness under the broken furniture.

Pat shrugged. “It's okay. I’m not staying here. It’s not safe,” she said, casting her eyes over the state of her bar. “Once the rest of the Predators hear of what happened here, they’ll come back for revenge. It’s best that I just leave.”

Jamie frowned. “Sorry about that, love,” he said.

Pat looked back at him. “It’s ok. You've given me more than enough of an excuse to get out of here.”

“Where will you go?” Jamie asked.

Pat considered his question thoughtfully. “Might try at stay with my sister for a while in Adelaide. Been meaning to go visit her,” Pat replied. Marcus was clinging to her legs looking up at the adults while they talked. Jamie shared a smile with him. “I’ll take one of them bikes out there, should get
me out of the exclusion zone at least,” Pat added.

“Could we buy some petrol from you before you go?” Jamie asked.

Pat shook her head. “Take it,” she said. “I’m not going to use it, and it will only get stolen once I’m gone.” She took some keys out of her pocket and handed them to Jamie. He assumed they were keys to the padlocked fuel pump outside.

Pat turned and picked Marcus up again. She turned and headed out the back of the bar to collect her things. Jamie looked back at the bandits all around them. Some of them appeared to be starting to rouse themselves so he urged Mako to get back up to his feet hurriedly.

When they were back outside on the forecourt, Mako huffed and wheezed his way over to the Mayhem Mobile and practically threw himself into his seat. He waited while Jamie filled the gas tank from the fuel pump and then hurried to stow their stuff away in the rear of the sidecar. When he was done, he jumped back into his spot and Mako fired up the engine.

“You were pretty good in there,” Jamie told Mako. “We make a good team.”

Mako nodded. “We still need to find some money before we get to Sydney,” he reminded Jamie.

Jamie smiled as they pulled away from the old motel and back onto the main road. “Buck up, Roadie!” he said. “We just had a thrilling adventure!” Jamie reached over and patted Roadie on the back in a friendly way. “But the real treasure…” he began.

Mako looked over and Jamie grinned up at him in that same annoying, self-assured kind of way that grated on Mako’s nerves. Jamie batted his eyelashes innocently and went on, “…was all the money I looted off the bodies of them bandits back there.”

Mako rolled his eyes and shook his head.

--

“Mr. Rutledge?”

Roadie opened his eyes and looked up at the source of the voice. There was a gentle hand on his shoulder, as though the owner were testing to see if he was awake. Roadie blinked while his eyes adjusted to the bright light overhead. Reinhardt was looking down at him.

“You dosed off, my friend,” Reinhardt said and took a seat beside him. They were sitting in the gym on Overwatch’s Gibraltar base. Roadie had been on the weights but when he took a break, he must have decided to rest his eyes for a moment.

“Must be getting old,” Roadie remarked.

“I know that feeling well,” Reinhardt replied with a smile. They both sat in peaceful silence for a moment and watched the other people in the gym make use of the various equipment from their sofa against the wall.

Across the room, Jamie was struggling with a piece of gym equipment and Brigitte was beside him trying to show him how to use it. Despite Jamie’s obvious frustration, Brigitte was taking her time
and being patient with him, helping to spot while he did some bench presses. Staying fit was part and parcel with being a field agent, but Jamie seemed to be finding this expectation a difficult one to meet.

“Your young charge is learning well,” Reinhardt said, nodding with approval. “He is getting better every day.”


Reinhardt nodded. “She is coming along nicely too. Soon she will be a great warrior,” he said.

Roadie cast his eyes over Jamie floundering around on the gym equipment again, then Brigitte as she watched over him. He looked back at Reinhardt. “Wanna swap?” Roadie asked.

Reinhardt let out a boisterous laugh and clapped Roadie on the shoulder. “You’ll need to convince Brigitte, not me,” Reinhardt told him, still laughing. Then, his eyes became distant. “They grow up so fast you know.”

Roadie nodded. He thought back to something that had happened soon after that day he and Jamie had confronted those bandits in the remote run-down motel. He remembered a sunny day on Bondi Beach after their long trip to Sydney. It was Jamie’s first time seeing the ocean let alone the big city, and he should have rightly been beyond excited, but Jamie had gone all quiet and just stared at the water instead. He had tried and failed to walk on the loose sand because of his peg leg, so Roadie threw the young man over one shoulder like a sack of potatoes and walked him down to the water edge.

“It’s so big,” Jamie had said as they stood in ankle-deep water and watched the waves. “It's more water than I’ve seen all together in my life!” Roadie nodded in reply.

They watched the squawking gulls sailing overhead and let the breeze rush over them like a gentle sigh.

“What’s on the other side?” Jamie asked.

The thought struck Roadie that Jamie had probably never left Australia before. He had probably never even left Central Australia before. Jamie’s understanding of how the world worked was likely based off of what TV shows or movies he had seen. It was probably where he had learned such a ridiculous notion that he needed the Crown Jewels in order to make himself a ‘King of Thieves’ in his own words.

“Everything,” Roadie had answered. Jamie nodded and looked back at the lapping water.

Roadie always found it striking just how different the world was on the outside of the apocalypse. People still tried to cheat you and wrong you in some way, but it was comparatively different to the world he had lived in post-Omnic Crisis. Roadie always felt that deceit was more underhanded on the outside. These crooks wore suits, slicked hair and smiled at you like jackals. Roadie was keenly aware that Jamie had a lot to learn about the world at large and who he could trust. Part of him was a little worried about how they would fare on the outside.

“You’re not inside them walls anymore. It’s not safe out here,” Roadie had told him as they stood on the beach. “You need to stick close to me.”

Jamie had nodded absentmindedly, watching as a few fishing boats scooted along the waves in the distance. They had been enjoying the ocean air for a little while longer when a lifeguard patrolling...
the beach marched by and barked at them to swim between the flags. Roadie had told him to fuck off.

From that moment on, they had always been together.

“What are you thinking about?”

Reinhardt was watching him closely. Roadie made a noise that sounded half like a chuckle, and half like a grunt of derision. “It’s just as you say,” Roadie replied. “They grow up so fast.”

Jamie appeared to have given up on the bench press and had left Brigitte to it. He was walking over to where Roadie and Reinhardt were sitting, looking annoyed.

“What’s wrong, young master?” Reinhardt asked. “Did Brigitte lose patience with you?”

“Nah. He’s too weak to do one bench press,” Roadie told him.

“Shut up!” Jamie told him. He threw himself down beside Roadie with a pout on his face, rubbing at his sore biceps. Roadie and Reinhardt exchanged a look.

“What are you two smirking about?” Jamie asked.

“Thinking about the old days,” Reinhardt replied wistfully.

“You old grogans love that shit,” Jamie said, side-eying Reinhardt. “I bet you think everything was better in ‘your day’.”

“People certainly complained less,” Roadie growled at him. Jamie elbowed him roughly in the ribs, but it appeared not to affect Roadie.

“Have you always been a grumpy old fart?” Jamie asked him. “Or is this a particularly recent development?”

Reinhardt went on as though Jamie had said nothing. “I’ve been with Overwatch almost my whole life,” he said. He was watching Brigitte again who was still across the gym working on the bench press. “But now a new generation has come into the fold. It helps keeps things interesting.”

Jamie considered his words. He didn’t really have a basis for comparison, but he had made friends with many of the younger agents on base. He enjoyed his work and his friends made life on base fun. Jamie could tell some of the older members of staff had been doing this kind of work for a long time and had a set way of doing things. He knew his methods were unconventional, but he hoped Reinhardt was right and that senior staff would find it equally ‘interesting.’

“Are you happy you joined Overwatch?” Reinhardt asked, turning his gaze on the men seated beside him.

Roadie glanced over at Reinhardt, and thought about the question. Reinhardt had done so much for him, helping him to get settled in to the base, showed him all their strategies and drills as a new Tank on the team. Reinhardt was even learning to read Roadie’s body language around his mask and had gone so far as to make accommodations so he didn’t have to be so verbal in the field. Reinhardt had gone above and beyond to make sure Roadie was comfortable. It was more than he could ask for.

Jamie looked up at Reinhardt, then nodded in reply. “Pleased as punch,” he said. He considered Roadie’s body language but could not get a read on him. “What about you?” Jamie asked him.
“It’s fine,” Roadie replied.

Jamie scuffed his foot along the polished concrete of the gym floor. “You know, now that I think about it, I didn’t really give you a choice. We just kind of... joined. It all happened so fast...” Jamie trailed off.

Roadie shrugged. “You’re right. Didn’t have much a of a choice,” he said. “I never do.”

Jamie’s expression changed. Roadie thought he looked a little guilty. He watched the younger man start to pluck nervously at the sleeve of his shirt, an old habit of his that betrayed his anxiety.

“But I’m glad we did,” Roadie added a moment later. “Reminds me of my ALF days.”

Jamie’s hands stilled. “You sure?” he asked.

Roadie thought about that. He was glad in the end that he and Jamie had met. They had gotten into a lot of trouble over the last couple of years. When Roadie gave it any serious thought, he always came to the same conclusion; if given the choice to have his time over again, he would not have done it any differently. There had been some close scrapes and Jamie had got them into some serious hot water from time to time, but in the end, Roadie had gotten out of Haasts Bluff, which had ultimately been a goal of his for many years. He had seen the world and he had got his one last hurrah before he got too old to travel.

Roadie would not have changed a thing.

He looked down at Jamie, seated beside him. Jamie sensed that he was being scrutinized behind the snout-like gasmask.

“What?” Jamie asked.

“Nothing,” Roadie replied.

“Idiot.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Some translations...

Big Smoke = nickname for Sydney

Do a runner / scarper = run away

Bush Week = An imagined or symbolic time when assumedly unsophisticated people from the countryside come to the city, likely to be preyed on by tricksters there, or who are unaware of social norms in the city. Apparently from an actual attempt to organise a Bush Festival in Sydney in 1919. Sometimes people in Australia will say “It’s not Bush Week!” to mean “Don’t treat me like an idiot.”

Grogan = old person
Let me know in the comments if anything else needs to be explained/translated!
Jesse McCree knew he only had minutes to live. A gunshot wound to the stomach was a death sentence and a slow, agonizing demise at that.

He grunted with effort, rolling onto his back so he could look his attacker in the eye. “You got me good,” he ground out. “But you won’t get away with this...” He clutched at his stomach with both hands.

Her eyes, cold and calculating, stared down at him. The girl who had shot him was standing over his prone body, her expression blank. “I thought you were supposed to be the best gunslinger in the West?”

“I was. Looks like I've been bested,” McCree replied, the corner of his lips curling with dark humour at the situation. He coughed a little and then grimaced from the effort. Suddenly, he went slack, head rolling to one side. The room was still for some time.

“I won,” the girl said, extending her leg to toe McCree’s side, testing him for a response. “Now hand over the hat.”

McCree didn’t move.

“Jesse?” The girl crept closer. “You okay?”

McCree snapped upright and took hold of the girl, pulling her into a bear hug as she let out a squeak of surprise. “Jesse!” she chided him. “I already told you; I won!”

“Allright, allright.” McCree grinned and released her so he could stand up. “A deal’s a deal,” he said, taking off his hat and handing it over to Fareeha as requested. She took hold of her prize and promptly pulled it over her head. McCree smiled at the sight of his broad-brimmed cowboy hat perched on her head. It was just a little too large and kept slipping down over her forehead.

“How do I look?” Fareeha asked with a broad grin.

McCree laughed. “Like Annie Oakley herself. A real sharpshooter.”

“Really?” Fareeha asked. She took aim with her finger gun again and pretended to shoot at something across the room.

It was raining hard that day, so they were spending their afternoon in the Games Room of the Overwatch Swiss headquarters. McCree had been tasked with babysitting the eleven-year-old while her mother attended an important meeting. Fareeha had wanted to play cops and robbers, and as usual, his hat was the prize. She was probably a little too old for the game, but McCree suspected Fareeha just wanted to spend time with him and would come up with any excuse.

“You wait until your mother hears about it,” McCree added. “Her very own daughter following in her footsteps. The best shooter on base, I’d say.”

Fareeha frowned. “I asked mom for a toy gun for my birthday, but she said ‘no’,?” she said. “Mom said I could shoot an eye out.”
McCree knew that Captain Amari could be a little overprotective of her daughter, which had led to some tension between them. Part of him considered approaching the Captain about it, but being just eighteen years of age didn’t lend him much sway against the higher ups, despite his skill with a pistol. “I’m sorry, champ,” McCree replied.

“Can I at least watch when you and Uncle Gabe go to the shooting range later?” Fareeha asked, looking up with hopeful brown eyes.

McCree ruffled her hair. “Of course, kiddo!”

The door to the Games Room swung open and Angela Ziegler stepped into the room. She looked harried and annoyed about something. Sweeping her eyes across the room, she spotted McCree and Fareeha standing over by the sofas and sighed with relief.

“Ah, there you are,” Angela began. “Your mother is ready for you, Fareeha. I told her I would come check on you.”

“Coming!” Fareeha replied. She took off the cowboy hat and returned it to McCree, then skipped over to Angela’s side.

“What’s up, Doc?” McCree asked Angela with a sly grin. Angela only frowned back at him.

Angela had finished her PhD and joined Overwatch all before turning eighteen. Despite her similarity in age to McCree, she seemed to have taken a distinct dislike to him. The disparity between their accomplishments and, McCree’s criminal history notwithstanding, it had created a point of contention between them. Angela had been vocal about her dislike of allowing ex-criminals into the Overwatch ranks. McCree had taken to deliberately ignoring her disapproving looks and being overly nice to her as a form of petty revenge.

“Let’s go, Fareeha,” Angela said and led the girl out of the room. McCree heard her ask Fareeha once they were in the corridor, “Are you alright?”

“Of course!” Fareeha chirped in reply. “We were playing cops and robbers!”

“How fitting,” came Angela’s deadpan reply.

McCree watched the pair disappear through the door and sighed. That Angela was a tough egg to crack, that was for sure. She wasn’t the only one vocal about their displeasure at McCree joining Overwatch either. McCree was not blind to the staff whispering to one another and their wary glances when they thought he wasn’t looking, but he pretended to be. The arguments were always the same; “Allowing criminals to join? What’s next?”,” “I shouldn’t have to work with him”, “What if he attacks us?” The wide berths he was given in the hallways were not lost on him either.

Joining Overwatch hadn’t really been a choice for McCree. It was either that or jail. He had only been a part of the secretive organisation for less than a year, but some days were more difficult than others when it came to reminding himself that this was the better alternative. Reyes was the one who had seen some kind of promise in him, the one who had convinced the commander that letting him join was a good idea. And who was he to object? It was better than a bunk bed and bowl of prison gruel. Did prisons even serve gruel anymore? He hoped he’d never find out.

Maybe the strange looks and the whispering behind hands was the universe’s way of punishing him for the things he’d done? Becoming a Deadlock gang member was another thing he didn’t feel he had a lot of control over, but he couldn’t deny that he had been in a bad headspace back then and becoming a part of Deadlock had been an attractive alternative to sleeping on the streets.
When Reyes found him and offered him a better life, McCree felt he at least owed it to the old man
to give it a shot. He had saved McCree from Jail after all.

McCree bent and grabbed some sofa cushions left behind on the floor from an earlier attempt to
build a pillow fort. He tossed them back into their respective positions on the sofa and made for
the door at a brisk pace. He needed to find Reyes.

--

Jack arched an eyebrow in annoyance down at the training yard from his position in the
observation area. Somewhere below amidst the walls of semi-transparent hard-light and the
training bots moving through the maze they created like roving sentries, two figures were standing
in the first portion of the challenge, having failed to make it any further in their time trial.

Jack cast his eyes back at the holographic screen to his right. Large red digits showed the time had
run down to “00:00”, indicating the combatants below had run out of time. And they hadn’t even
made it past the first test.

Somewhere behind him, Jack heard someone clear their throat awkwardly. It was Lena. Jack
spared her a glance, and she smiled at him weakly from her seat in one of the observation deck’s
plastic chairs. He did not return the gesture.

Jack returned his disapproving gaze to the floor of the training yard. Temporarily erected hard-light
walls spanned the yard, shaping the space into a maze-like series of rooms that needed to be
escaped by solving a series of problems. It was a standard covert mission simulation, one that
agents rarely failed to pass.

Jack leaned forward and pressed one the buttons on the console in front of him which would
activate the P.A. system. “That’s it?” Jack’s voice reverberated over the speakers and echoed
across the exterior training yard. “I sat here for thirty minutes, and that’s the best you can do?”

Somewhere below, Jamison Fawkes was shuffling awkwardly on the spot, squinting up at the
tinted glass of the observation area in the midday sun. He frowned, feeling particularly
disappointed in himself. He hadn’t thought they would do that badly at a simple escape room-style
simulation. Jack pressed another button on the console and the hard-light walls around them
disappeared.

“It’s not my fault!” Jamie began. He gestured at Roadie who was seating on the ground not too far
away, entertaining himself by reading a book. ‘How did he even sneak a book into the training
yard?’ Jamie wondered to himself. “It’s all Roadie’s fault, the great bloody oaf! He wouldn’t even
help me!”

Roadie groaned irritably and looked up from his book with disinterest. “I already told both of you,”
he groaned. “You hired me for muscle. Man-power. Not solving silly puzzles. That’s what Intel is
for.” Roadie snorted derisively and turned his attention back to his book.

Jamie threw up his hands in defeat. “You see what I have to deal with?” Jamie cried, looking
imploring up at the observation area.

Jack’s eye twitched as Jamie’s high-pitched whinging resounded through the P.A. system back at
him. He took hold of the mic attached to the console a little roughly, making the system whine. “At
some point, your ability to think quickly and rationally under pressure may very well save your
lives,” Jack growled down at them, his voice barely composed.
Jamie looked appropriately chastised. Roadie didn’t even look up from his book.

Jack sighed. How was it that two reasonably physically fit men who had broken into some of the most protected buildings and vaults in the world, who had escaped prison on no less than six separate occasions—not to mention one of them was a maximum-security Helix facility—were totally incapable of completing a simple escape simulation? Overwatch agents had been completing this very simulation for years without issue. Jack supposed this is what he got for hiring mercenaries instead of properly training military personnel. The two Junkers had done well on the Petra mission, but maybe he would need to rethink their reliability to complete missions at all after today.

The first test was simple enough, or so Jack had assumed. Find the code to unlock the ‘Zone 1’ door by decoding a cypher hidden somewhere in the same space. Doing so allowed them to proceed to Zone 2 where several training bots were waiting. The combatants were to neutralize the patrolling bots and locate a particular hard drive, their operation target, then proceed to Zone 3. Making their way through a series of twisting hard-light corridors, they would have had to avoid detection from armed training bots before locating Zone 4, which contained their means of escaping from the simulation; a thick door that would require expert lock-picking. All of which Jack had been perfectly confident that the two Junkers could handle. He was sadly mistaken.

Once the exercise had begun, Jamie had searched endlessly for the cypher in Zone 1 but had been distracted by almost everything in the room. He didn’t find it until almost all of the thirty minutes allotted to them had expired and by then it was too late to make any headway on the difficult decoding process. Roadie had resolutely refused to help at all and sat to one side of the room, reading, for the entire thirty-minute duration.

“Ahem.”

Jack turned to glare at Lena and she cringed slightly at the irritated look on the strike commander’s face. “What?” he barked at her.

Lena looked uncomfortable. “Well, I was only going to suggest that maybe we let them do it again... their way?”

“‘Their way?’” Jack asked, eyes narrowing in her direction.

Lena nodded affirmatively. She stood and crossed the floor to Jack’s side in just a few steps. “They’ve worked well together for a long time and they have a unique set of skills which I don’t think they got a chance to use,” she explained. “I think we should let them try again.”

Jack remained expressionless and he turned to look back at the training yard. Jamie had started packing up his equipment, looking decidedly dejected as he did so. Roadie had pocketed his book and was standing ready to head back into the base. Jack huffed his annoyance. The fact that neither of had managed to complete the task in the allotted time, Jamie’s A.D.H.D. notwithstanding, caused a great deal of concern for Jack. How was it that these two career-criminals had managed to survive this long without basic problem-solving skills? There must be some kind of strange method to their madness that had gotten them this far, surely?

Seeing Jack was not going to put up any resistance, Lena leaned around him and activated the P.A. system again.

“Lads, how about you give it another bash, eh?” she said, her voice echoing over the training yard. “This time, you do it your way.”
Jamie and Roadie had been halfway to the hangar door that lead back inside the base when they paused mid-step and looked up at the observation area. Lena pressed another button and the hard-light walls sprang up again around the training yard. She watched the two Junkers exchange words, nod to each other, and then turn and head back over to the simulation.

Lena shot Jack a knowing look and reset the timer back to thirty minutes.

Once Jamie and Roadie were poised and ready, standing in Zone 1, Jack resigned himself to watching begrudgingly through the tinted glass with arms crossed over his chest. What could they possibly do differently this time that would result in a better outcome? What exactly was the Junker ‘way’?

Lena pressed a button and the P.A. system beeped, signalling the start of the simulation. Suddenly there was a burst of energy from both agents in the training yard. Jamie flung something at the door that lead to Zone 2 and simultaneously decompressed the detonator in his hand. The concussion mine shattered the hard-light door instantly and both Junkers surged forward.

“Hey!” Jack cried, eyes going wide. He unfolded his arms, hands twitching involuntarily like he wanted to reach out and take hold of the P.A. system and shout at the Junkers. “That’s cheating!” he said incredulously.

“Sh!” Lena hushed him. “Just watch.”

Jack could barely register his indignation. Jaw agape, he watched as Roadie sent his hook flying without hesitation through the smoking gap where the door had been. The hook smashed through the armour of one of the training bots on the other side, secured itself to the inner workings and Roadie viciously ripped the chain back. The bot hurtled through the air and smashed into two other bots, instantly disintegrating them. Jamie leapt forward into the second room and snatched up the hard drive from where it was resting on a table and they set off running to the opposite wall.

To Jack’s amazement, they didn’t bother following the corridors of Zone 3, they simply vaulted over the open air hard-light walls altogether. Roadie used his enormous frame to smash apart the hard-light in an instant and clamber over the rubble, while Jamie launched himself over the walls like an Olympic high-jumper. He flung himself towards the patrolling bots, taking them out with a few concussion mines. At one point, Roadie hooked another bot towards them and Jamie took it out with a well-timed grenade.

Jack watched with slack-jawed amazement. He noted that from time to time, the Junkers would call out to each other to share important information such as the number of enemy forces spotted or correcting the other’s trajectory of travel. Each time they did so succinctly, clearly and without hesitation.

Both Junkers burst into the final room; Zone 4. The large door was all that lay between them and exiting the simulation. Jamie unloaded the last of his explosives on the door and both men retreated behind one of the few remaining pieces of hard-light wall that was still upright. Using the wall as a blast shield, they pressed the backs urgently to the hard-light surface. Jamie motioned to Roadie and without saying anything, they covered their ears as the explosives were detonated. As the smoke cleared, they leapt up again and rushed the door which had buckled in its frame, but was still blocking the exit. Roadie threw his weight against it and together they pushed the door partway open and squeezed through the gap.

They practically fell all over each other as they scrambled out of the simulation. Jamie tripped, fell and immediately leapt upright again so he could yell, “TIME!” while looking up at the observation deck expectantly.
Jack was shocked out of his stupor. They did it. They actually did it. They had thrown the rules to the wind on several occasions and practically destroyed or incinerated the entire simulation, but they had somehow done it, and with lightning speed.

Jack looked over at Lena, noting her triumphant grin. She motioned casually to the timer. The device indicated that the simulation had been completed in two minutes and forty-two seconds.


“You saw it with your own eyes, Jack!” Lena said cheerfully, then quickly corrected herself when he caught sight of Jack’s stern look. “I mean, Commander,” she added hurriedly.

Jack cast his eyes once again over the training yard below; the fizzing remains of several training bots, the shattered hard-light walls, the doors hanging off their hinges. He noted that Roadie had thrown himself down on the training yard floor and devolved into a coughing fit. Jamie thumped him helpfully on the back.

“See?” Lena said, her gaze coming to rest on the Junkers below. “You’ve got to play into their strengths and that might not necessarily be clandestine operations. They’re much faster and more effective when left to rely on their own skills.”

Jack was silent for a moment while he considered this. He glanced at the timer once again. “I’ll be damned,” Jack murmured eventually. Both Junkers had just broken the record for fastest completion of this particular simulation.

--

“Why do you care what they think?”

McCree sighed. “I don’t, that’s what I’m trying to say.”

“Doesn’t seem that way,” Reyes replied. “Seems like you care a lot actually.”

They were sitting on one of the benches at the side of the training yard, having just finished an intense training session. It was a cold day at Overwatch Swiss Headquarters, and every now and again a cold wind would blow through, making McCree clutch his jacket closer around him. Growing up in the one of the more arid parts of the States had not prepared him for how cold the rest of the world could be. The training yard was open air and it was starting to drizzle with rain.

“You’ve been with Overwatch for five years now,” Reyes went on. “And you’re still letting this shit bother you?”

McCree’s brow furrowed. “I told you, it don’t bother me at all.”

Reyes was watching McCree closely, trying to gauge if he was telling the truth or not. There was a steeliness to Reyes’s stare that unnerved most people, but McCree had grown used to it.

“You should just do what I do,” Reyes said eventually. “Fix them with a cold look. Stare right into their souls, and then draw your thumb across your throat slowly...”

McCree elbowed him in the ribs. “Y’know threatening people doesn’t actually help the situation much,” he said. “I don’t want people to fear me.”

“Why not?” Reyes asked with a laugh. “Works all the time for me. Most people leave me alone after I do that.”
McCree’s face grew stern. “Does the Commander know you threaten the other staff?” he asked.

Reyes shrugged in that humourless sort of way. “What the Commander doesn’t know won’t hurt him,” he replied. McCree didn’t like his devil-may-care attitude. It was exactly that attitude that Reyes had around concealing things from the Commander that got them into a lot of trouble.

“Jack always wants things done his way,” Reyes went on. “I think he could benefit from a different perspective.”

McCree smiled ruefully. “No wonder the Commander is always pissed at you.”

Reyes smiled in return. “I can handle Jack,” he said. “He knows not to cross me. Even if he did...”

McCree went quiet, looking up at Reyes and waiting for him to finish. Reyes was watching something in the distance. There was a dark expression on his face. McCree eyed Reyes with suspicion, but said nothing. Reyes didn’t finish his sentence.

They sat in silence for some time.

“You heard from Fareeha?” Reyes asked eventually.

McCree nodded after a pause. “She wrote me the other day. She started her cadetship.”

“Good,” Reyes remarked quietly. “She was a good kid. Shame her mother wouldn’t let her join Overwatch.”

McCree nodded. Fareeha had been one of the few on base who genuinely liked him, idolized him even. He had been glad to hear from her, and even more so to know she was doing well as a Helix cadet.

“She might come back...” McCree said hopefully. He looked up at the overcast sky. A few dead leaves skittered across the courtyard in the wind.

“Maybe,” Reyes said. “She would’ve made a good Blackwatch agent. At least she never got all mopey.”

“Would you lay off?” McCree said with a sneer. Reyes laughed.

“Ah,” Reyes said knowingly. “So, it does bother you.”

McCree shot him an annoyed look. “Alright, fine! It bothers me. Happy?”

“No,” Reyes replied. He took a drink from his water bottle. “Does moping about what people think about you help?”

McCree was quiet for a moment. “No.”

“Does letting people get to you help?”

“No.”

Reyes nodded, satisfied. “See? That’s what you got to do. You've got to completely disregard what other people think about you. Trust your instincts.” Reyes turned his gaze on McCree once again, he was staring at the concrete, thinking hard on something. “Life’s too short to worry about what other people think.”
McCree sighed. Reyes was right. He usually was. It was for that reason that McCree was glad the old soldier had taken him under his wing. He always seemed to know what to do.

“Come on,” Reyes said eventually. “That's enough rest. Let's finish these drills.”

--

“And then, me and Roadie burst through the walls! Tore them all down and started blowing up the bots! It was ace!”

It was midday, which meant the Mess Hall was busy with activity for the lunch time rush. Crowds of professional staff, agents and service staff were queuing in at the hot displays or sitting at the scattered tables engaged in conversation. At one of the tables, Jamie was gesticulating wildly as he explained what had happened earlier that morning, his lunch sitting forgotten in front of him. Roadie was sitting beside the smaller Junker, reading a book. On the other side of the table sat Hana, Satya and Lúcio, listening politely to Jamie’s story while they ate their lunch.

“Roadie and I,” Satya corrected Jamie.

“Isn’t that cheating though?” Hana asked, sticking a fork into her salad bowl and swirling it around absent-mindedly. “Blasting your way through the walls?”

“I don’t think so,” Jamie replied, shaking his head. “We did it ‘our way’ just like Lena told us to.”

“But how did you get through the final door?” Lúcio asked.

“Easy! A few concussion mines and Bob’s your uncle! Blew that baby apart faster than a starving horse on a bale of...”

“Hey!”

The voice had rung out so suddenly that it ricocheted off the Mess Hall’s towering walls and sent a jolt of surprise around the table of seated agents. Everyone looked up to see who had interrupted Jamie’s story. Jamie had been so focussed on his story, he did not hear the heavy, booted footfalls of someone approaching from behind. He also swivelled in his seat, eyes wide, trying to see who had called out.

Standing there was a tall man in chaps, spurs and a loose cotton shirt. His face was partially obscured by the broad, cowboy-style hat worn low on his brow, but from what Jamie could see, his expression was dark. Jamie could smell nicotine wafting off the newcomer.

The man nudged his cowboy hat up so it was resting a little higher on his forehead, affording him a better view of the young man seated in front of him. “I heard there’s a nice reward for bringing you fellas in...” he drawled in a southern accent, fixing Jamie with a calculating look.

There was a long paused, and then Jamie ‘eeped’ loudly and tried to scramble upright. His legs got tangled around his chair in his haste and he fell to the Mess Hall floor, tipping the chair with a noisy clatter. Several people at nearby tables looked up with alarm.

Jamie flailed briefly on the floor, trying to right himself. The man took a step closer, spurs chinking against the Mess Hall floor, and stood over Jamie, observing his attempts to stand again. Giving up on making any kind of quick escape, Jamie stopped struggling and looked up. He managed a weak smile.

“Er... Maybe we could... uh... work something out, mate?” Jamie’s voice waivered as he raised his
hands in surrender.

McCree smirked to himself internally. The young Junker hadn’t cottoned on yet that he was only fooling, but McCree had to admit he found Jamie’s obvious concern about being turned over for a reward a little amusing. McCree was about to quip something back at Jamie when he felt a presence looming over his shoulder. Against his better judgement, McCree turned to look.

It was Roadie, all two-hundred-and-fifty kilograms of him, staring down at McCree. McCree actually gulped. Oh, shit. What had he done now? McCree could feel the anger radiating off of the larger man. McCree swore he could almost see steam escaping the valves of Roadie’s gasmask.

“You say something about a reward?” the enormous man growled at McCree.

McCree gulped again. “Er... maybe?”

Roadie leaned in close so he could mutter his next words threateningly into McCree’s face. McCree actually had to lean back to accommodate him. “Try me.

“Get him, Roadie!” Jamie cried from the floor. “He threatened me! You all saw it!”

“Aye, partner,” McCree began, his mouth quirking up into a smirk. He tried, without much success, to hide the nervous timbre in his voice. “I— I was just kidding!”

Hana, who had watched the entire exchange and had detected from the beginning that McCree was playing at some kind of prank, finally released a peel of laughter at the display. Jamie was still sprawled out on the floor and Roadie looked like he was about to grab a fistfull of McCree’s shirt and put a fist through his head. McCree’s ‘joke’ had certainly backfired on him. Everyone turned to look at her as she devolved into a fit of giggles.

“You should all see your faces!” Hana laughed.

“Jamie, what are you doing?” It was Satya. She was now also standing over Jamie, having come around the table to see what was going on. “Get off the floor.”

“I’ve fallen!” Jamie said dramatically, the back of his hand pressed to his temple for effect. “And I can’t get up!”

“Stop it,” Satya said sternly. “Of course, you can.” She took hold of him by the shoulders and started jerking him unceremoniously to his feet.

Roadie started to realise that McCree had actually meant them no harm and took a step back. He retook his seat beside Hana, who patted his arm reassuringly.

“Mighty sorry,” McCree began, wiping a bead of sweat from his brow. “I meant no harm. I was just looking for the two agents who, rumour has it, broke the record for completing the escape simulation today.”

Jamie eyed McCree up and down cautiously. “Who wants to know?” he asked. He stood with Satya’s help and took in the full height of the stranger dressed as a cowboy before him. McCree offered Jamie a hand to shake and steadied him on his feet with the other.

“The name’s McCree,” he said, taking his hat off politely. “Jesse McCree. And I’d like to congratulate the two of you.” McCree made a grand gesture to both Roadie and Jamie.

“You would?” Lúcio asked flatly.
“Of course,” McCree replied in that smooth southern accent. “I’d say smashing my record today was no small feat.” There was a friendly self-assuredness to McCree’s posture that disarmed Jamie, the prank all but forgotten.

“You used to hold the record for that escape simulation-thingo?” Jamie asked.

“Sure did. Five minutes, eleven seconds,” McCree said with a nod and a wink. “Held that record for fifteen years, I did.” McCree’s expression changed. “Well, me and a... friend did.”

A shadow of an expression Jamie could not quite place passed over McCree’s face. The moment passed before he could ask more. “Until you came along of course,” McCree went on, the same sly smile returning to his face again. “Well now, I’d say celebrations are in order. How about drinks on me tonight?”

“Er... really?” Jamie asked. He scratched at his chin thoughtfully. It was a tempting offer.

“Yeah. Why not swing by my room around eight?” McCree said. “C Wing, room one-fourteen. I’ll show you my appreciation, real hospitable-like.”

“I thought alcohol was banned on base?” Lúcio asked. McCree seemed to have conveniently not heard him.

“How about it, Big Guy?” McCree asked, sliding into the seat beside Roadie and clapping him around the shoulder. “Let me make it up to you for my failed attempt at humour?”

Roadie groaned in annoyance.

“That means ‘yes’,” Jamie translated.

“Excellent!” McCree exclaimed. He stood again and replaced his hat on his head. “Don’t be tardy now,” he said, tossing the words casually over his shoulder as he strode away.

The five other agents watched McCree’s retreating form with looks mild bewilderment.

“What just happened?” Jamie asked.

--

Another rumble shook the floor and walls of Swiss headquarters. McCree paused mid-step and steadied himself with a hand against a wall until the shaking stopped. He knew he had to get out of there, but first he had to find Reyes. Where was he, damnit?

Another explosion went off somewhere in the base and the lights flickered out. Dust and plaster was cascading from the ceiling. The air was beginning to fill with the cloying smell of something burning. With grit teeth, McCree set off again.

McCree made his way past the Medical Wing and chanced a glance through the large observational windows into the research lab beyond. Everyone had been evacuated by that point, so the rows upon rows of workstations were all empty. All except for one.


Noting the change in plan would likely delay him further, McCree accepted it as a loss and charged through the main entrance to the research lab.
Angela’s gaze snapped up to meet McCree’s as soon as she heard him enter.

“What’re you doing in here?” McCree barked at her. “The whole place is coming down!”

Angela turned back to her screen and continued typing. “I’m trying to save my research!” she retorted. “There’s ten years of data here and I’m not leaving without it!”

McCree crossed the open plan office in just a few strides, stepping with ease around the rows of computers and desks, and grabbed hold of Angela’s wrist. He pulled her to her feet, not even responding as she cried out in protest. He immediately started manhandling her towards the door.

“What are you doing!?” Angela demanded to know. “Unhand me!”

McCree maintained his iron grip on her wrist. “Everyone has been evacuated for a reason. You trying to get yourself killed?”

“Oh, please,” Angela huffed at him as the approached the large glass doors that lead back into the rest of the base. “If I’ve managed this long, I hardly think I’m in any danger—”

Before Angela could finish her sentence the ceiling collapse overhead, dumping tonnes of cement, plaster and office furniture from the floor above onto Angela’s computer, destroying it instantly. The lights cut out overhead and the room went dark, lit now only by the external windows against the far wall. Angela went rigid, staring at the spot where she had been sitting not moments ago.

McCree, having been caught off guard by the sudden calamity, paused to catch his breath. “Do you believe me now?” he growled at Angela.

Angela didn’t respond. She continued to gape at what remained of her desk. “My... research...” she said quietly.

McCree jerked her roughly by the wrist again and practically dragged her out into the hallway. He started to haul her toward the emergency exit at the other end of the corridor. He needed to make sure she got to safety before he pressed on with his search for Reyes. They did not get far before Angela wrested her arm away from McCree’s grip and fixed him with an annoyed look. “Stop dragging me around. I can take care of myself!”

McCree sneered in response. Why did it have to be her? Why did he have to be stuck trying to escape a collapsing building with Angela of all people? “Could’ve fooled me,” McCree barked back at her. “Any longer in there and I don’t think there wouldn’t have been enough of you left to scrape together for a funeral.”

Angela’s brow furrowed. “And what’s your excuse? Hm?” she asked him. They set off down the long corridor towards the emergency exit again. Angela’s white lab coat billowed behind her, giving the illusion of wings at her back. “What are you doing in here if you think it's so dangerous?”

McCree was not of the opinion that he needed to explain himself to her but he felt she may as well know if only to pass the time in a way other than stony silence. “Reyes is still in here somewhere,” he told her as they marched towards the exit. “I’m not leaving without him.”

“How do you know that?” Angela asked. “He could be waiting outside for you in the evacuation area.”

A cold shot of dread traversed McCree’s body. He remembered what Reyes had said many years ago, sitting in the training yard on a cold afternoon, or rather, what had been left unsaid. The
vague way Reyes implied that he knew how to take care of the Commander if he ever needed to had stuck with McCree since that very day.

“I just know, okay?” McCree ground out.

Angela rolled her eyes. “Of all the bull-headed nonsense...”

There was a loud bang and McCree dove instinctively for Angela. For one terrifying moment, he thought the ceiling was collapsing over them as it had done in the research lab. He practically tackled the Doctor and pulled her with him behind one of the large free-standing planters full of ferns that lined the hallway. Crouched down behind their makeshift cover, McCree peered out to see what had caused the commotion.

The door to the emergency exit had burst open and into the hallway came several men dressed in black. They scanned the hall with rifles raised. The mechanism that latched the one-way emergency door that prevented re-entry had been destroyed with a small incendiary device, causing smoke to billow into the hall. The laser sights on their guns cut through the haze as radio chatter from their helmets punctuated the silence.

McCree took a deep breath. It was pretty dark in the corridor, so McCree was sure they hadn’t been seen, but he was also keenly aware that he had no weapon and neither did Angela. They weren’t permitted to carry openly on base, so his peacekeeper and ammunition were being kept in the armoury on the other side of headquarters. How would he protect them against armed intruders?

Angela tapped on McCree’s shoulder. He looked over at her, squeezed between himself and the wall. ‘Blackwatch?’ she mouthed at him. He didn’t recognise the men or their clothing, so he shook his head in reply.

She motioned again for him to follow her and, under the cover of slowly dissipating smoke, slipped through a nearby door on hands and knees before they could be seen. Once on the other side, Angela leapt up and grabbed hold of a nearby chair and braced it under to the door handle to bar anyone from following them.

“That won’t last long,” McCree said quietly, slowly getting to his feet. Looking around, he noted they were in some kind of boardroom. He could already hear the men in the hallway starting to search the other rooms. Soon they would come and force their way into this one.

“Then we shouldn’t stay long,” Angela remarked. She crossed the room and opened a window. Rain immediately began to splatter across the polished floors. Angela swung a leg over the window sill and started to climb out

“Have you lost your mind?” McCree barked at her, trying to keep his voice down. He kept his ear pressed to the door, listened for any activity on the other side.

Angela didn’t respond. McCree watched as she straddled the sill, then ducked through the window, her pant leg disappearing behind her. He growled with annoyance. This whole side-excursion to rescue Angela was wasting too much of his time, and now she was throwing herself out of fifth story windows which was wholly uncooperative with being saved in his opinion.

“Angela!” McCree whispered urgently. He crossed to the window and looked out. The rain was still pelting down outside. Being that they were several storeys up, it was impossible for Angela to have jumped and survived. Still, he looked down to the gardens below the window but there was no sign of her.
“This way.”

McCree looked over and saw Angela was scooting along a ledge on her tiptoes. “Do you have a death wish?” McCree growled at her. “You’re gonna get yourself killed!”

Angela continued her tiny shuffling steps away from the window, fingers hooked into a higher ledge above her head. “There's a ventilation duct over here. It should get us into the elevator shaft next door,” she said. “It will take us straight down to the ground floor.”

McCree was going to ask her how exactly she planned to pry open the vent cover when he heard banging on the door behind him. The sound startled him into action and he threw himself through the open window. The rain made the ledge below the window slippery and McCree almost slid clean off the building in his urgent attempts to right himself. Holding on by his fingertips, McCree forced the window closed behind them before the intruders could find the chair braced against the door and work out how they escaped.

McCree turned to follow Angela but found she had disappeared from view. “Angela?” McCree asked and then, panicked, looked down at the gardens below again, thinking she had fallen.

“How did you do that?” McCree asked her. A little further down the duct, he could see another opening that lead to the elevator shaft.

“The grate?” Angela asked, wiping her wet hair out of her eyes. “A little trick I learned in med school.”

“What are they teaching kids these days?” McCree muttered to himself.

Angela shed her lab coat which was now wet through. Before leaving it behind, she pulled out of the pocket a small flashlight, the kind one might use to perform a pupil test on a patient, and switched it on to light their way. She turned and started crawling down the duct. McCree had no choice but to follow her.

When they made it to the shaft, Angela climbed onto the metal rungs embedded in the concrete beside the duct opening. They must have been installed for service technicians to access the elevator shaft for repairs. The power was still out, but a few emergency lights provided a minimum amount of light. The elevator itself was too far away to be seen, hidden in the darkness. McCree could hear more rumbling in the distance and felt the metal duct vibrating underneath him.

“Let’s go,” Angela said, and began to climb down the ladder. “If we hurry, we can alert the Commander about those men.”

McCree watched her descend a few ladder rungs. Part of him knew very well that the Commander was not waiting for them down in the evacuation area, but he needed Angela to get somewhere safe and he needed her to believe she had to report to the Commander if it got her out of here.

“You go,” McCree told her. “I still need to find Reyes.” He also stepped on the ladder rungs, but started climbing upward instead.

Angela sighed loudly. “You don’t need to do this, McCree,” she said. “Reyes can take care of himself. You’re being silly.”
“You go and warn the Commander,” McCree said, pretending not to hear her. He continued to climb up into the darkness. “If I’m not back in an hour, avenge my death.”

Angela hoped he was joking. She watched him go, the spurs of his boots clinking every time he stepped on a rung.

“McCree,” Angela called after him. He paused and looked down at her. “Thank you,” she said. “For saving me.”

He smirked at her. “Same to you, darlin’,” McCree replied and turned to carry on climbing upward.

--

“I dunno, Roadie,” Jamie was saying. “Who dresses unironically like a cowboy in this, the year of our Lord, twenty-seventy-eight? Something seems suss.”

“If you want to leave, we can,” Roadie told him. “Don’t worry about him. My job is to keep you safe.”

Jamie nodded absentmindedly, eyes fixed on the floor in front of them. “Would be rude not to have a beer with someone when they ask you to,” he said. Roadie shrugged in response.

They were making their way down a set of stairs in C Wing, trying to find room one-fourteen. Jamie had been expecting to find a men’s dorm or something on this level, but so far all they had managed to find was storerooms. Maybe McCree was playing another prank on them? Maybe there was no room one-fourteen after all.

Outside, the sky was thick with summer rain which left the air inside the base feeling humid and oppressive. Jamie became lost in thought wondering if McCree had given him the truth when he said he wanted to invite the two Junkers over for a celebratory drink. Jamie considered again that his might be some kind of trick or attempt at an ambush. He was glad that Roadie agreed to come in the end. When Jamie had asked any of the others if they wanted to come along, Satya had said she had no interest in drinking alcohol, Hana explained she had Games Night, and Lúcio had also complained of being too busy finishing another track which was scheduled to drop in the next few days.

Before long, Jamie looked up and realised they had arrived at room one-fourteen. Roadie turned to regard him. “Last chance,” he boomed.

Jamie said nothing.

Roadie took a deep, wheezing breath and raised one large meaty hand to knock on the metal sliding door. It ‘whooshed’ open a moment later.

Jamie stepped into a wide room that was very dimly lit. It was much larger than a dorm room, Jamie realised. On the furthest side of the room, rain was pelting heavily against a window pane. Looking around, Jamie noticed rows of boxes stacked up against the walls. There was no sign of McCree.

“What is this place?” Jamie asked, looking around. “This isn’t a dorm at all. It’s a storeroom.”

Roadie also stepped in behind Jamie and looked around. “Where is he?”

Jamie stepped over to the stacks of boxes and pulled back a flap to look inside. “Cigars!” he
exclaimed, looking over at Roadie.

“Must be a smoker,” Roadie remarked.

“Shit, that’s a lot of cigars though,” Jamie said. He eyed the rest of the rows of boxes. “Isn’t smoking banned on base?”

Roadie nodded. “So’s drinking,” he reminded him.

“Well now.”

Both Jamie and Roadie jumped and looked around at the source of the voice. McCree had stepped out of the darkness from behind a row of stacked boxes. His cowboy hat was absent, leaving his short-hair to fall around his face, framing his neatly trimmed beard.

“Find the place okay?” McCree asked. He had a heavy-looking crate of bottles in his hands which clinked together as he moved. He set them down at his feet.

“Why you gotta sneak up on us all the time?” Jamie asked with a frown.

“Seems I can’t help it, can I?” McCree said with a grin. He crossed the room to a set of shelves and retrieved a bottle of whiskey. “Told Athena to let you in when you arrived. Whiskey, gentlemen?”

Jamie nodded his ascent absentmindedly while considering the boxes once more. “What’s with all the cigars, mate?”

“Oh, that’s my cigar smuggling gig,” McCree replied while he searched among the items on the shelf for drinking glasses.

Both Jamie and Roadie turned to regard McCree with wide eyes. “Your what?” Jamie asked.

“Cigar smuggling. Cubans. You want some?” McCree asked. He turned to look at the other two men. “Oh, how rude of me. I should offer you both a seat! Got a card table around here somewhere... Big Fella, help me get this table out,” McCree said. He crossed to the other side of the room and started pulling out a folding table from behind some boxes.

“You set that up there, Big Guy,” McCree said. “I’ll find the folding chairs.”

Roadie accepted the folded up table like it weighed nothing. “The name’s Mako,” he said.

“But you can call him ‘Roadie’,” Jamie added.

“No, you can’t...” Roadie began to say.

“Roadie it is!” McCree said with a smile and Roadie groaned.

While McCree searched for chairs among the boxes, Roadie set out the table for them. McCree eventually found the chairs and set them out around the table with Jamie’s help. Soon they were all seated. McCree set out three glasses and the bottle of whiskey which he began to pour.

“A toast, gentlemen,” McCree said, raising his glass. Jamie and Roadie followed suit. “To your success today. Congratulations.” He saluted the two Junkers with his glass and inclined his head towards them.

Jamie returned the gesture and then sipped his whiskey.
“Been meaning to invite you fellas over for a while now. Long overdue,” McCree remarked, one arm slung casually over the back of his chair.

“What do you mean?” Jamie asked.

“Well you’ve been agents for almost five months now, and we haven’t had the pleasure of each other’s company yet, now have we?” McCree elaborated. “And already breaking records too.”

Realising he was talking about the simulation that morning, Jamie shrugged in response. “To be fair, we mostly cheated,” Jamie said. “And it was only a level one simulation.”

“Now, now. Don’t be so modest,” McCree said earnestly. “You were resourceful is what you were. Never apologise for being yourself.”

“Why’re you smuggling cigars?” Roadie interjected.

McCree took a long sip of his whiskey and then smiled languidly up at the older man. “I’m being resourceful,” he said, quirking an eyebrow at him.

Roadie grunted in response, as he frequently did, but Jamie detected a note of disbelief in his tone this time.

“These babies are contraband,” McCree said, motioning to the boxes by the wall. “I organise to have them brought in discreetly and then sell them to a select clientele on base. Nobody is supposed to know about it. Except for Athena of course; she knows everything that goes on around here. That couldn’t be avoided. But I knew you boys would understand.”

“Aren’t you worried about getting caught?” Jamie asked.

McCree smirked. “The Commander’s bark is worse than his bite. He’s a soft touch really. If he ever found out, I wouldn’t get more than a slap on the wrist,” he replied.

Roadie was staring at the boxes again. “What about the whiskey?”

McCree shrugged. “Same story,” he said. He took out a cigar case from the top pocket of his cotton shirt. He removed a cigar from the case and retrieved a lighter from his pocket. “You fellas don’t mind if I smoke, do you?”

Jamie looked up and noticed the smoke detector had been completely covered by duct tape. The rest of the room smelled similarly of nicotine so Jamie guessed McCree had smoked in here before and never set off the fire alarm by accident.

“Nice set up you got here,” Jamie remarked.

“Thank you kindly,” McCree replied.

Jamie shared a glance with Roadie. Roadie seemed to know what Jamie was thinking without either of them saying anything and nodded almost imperceptibly back at the young man.

Jamie turned back to McCree. “We want in,” he said.

“I beg your pardon?” McCree asked.

“The smuggling thing,” Jamie clarified. “We want in.”

At first McCree smiled and then his eyes widened slowly. His smile broke out into a broader grin
and suddenly he was laughing. Each guffaw heaved his body in spasms. He broke off only to ask, “You serious?”

Jamie and Roadie nodded.

“Well now. You jump right to the chase!” He laughed again. They had been there just barely a few minutes and already they wanted to do business. McCree found it all very amusing. “That is a fine proposition. I could use the help.”

Jamie reached across the table and shook McCree’s hand as if to settle the deal. Roadie followed suit a moment later. McCree accepted the resulting crushing handshake with good humour.

Jamie sipped his whiskey again. “So, what kind of cowboy are you?” he asked, eyeing McCree up and down, noting that he was wearing cowboy boots when he crossed one leg over the other.


Jamie noticed the change in McCree’s expression; the subtle purse of his lips and a quick glance to one side.

“Oh, Brokeback, huh?” Jamie said. “Cool.”

McCree looked over at Jamie and sized him up, as though he was trying to detect if Jamie was making fun of him or not. Sensing he might have offended McCree, Jamie added hastily, “I got nothing against that, you know! Where I come from, that stuff doesn’t matter. You give someone a hard time about something like that, you’d likely get a face full of shotgun lead.”

“Jamie, shut up,” Roadie told him.

“No, no. It’s fine,” McCree assured him. He took a long drag of his cigar. “You sure do like to talk a lot, don’t you, Jamie?”

“Yeah, sorry about that,” Jamie replied, feeling a little sheepish now.

McCree seemed to be looking at something in the distance, his expression thoughtful. There was a gentle upward quirk to one side of his mouth which Jamie took to mean he had not offended McCree too much. He watched as McCree tapped out the ash from the end of his cigar and regarded the men once more.

“Gentlemen, I say we should celebrate this newfound friendship,” McCree said then as he poured out more whiskey into their glasses. “How about a round of poker?”

--

The rooftop of Swiss headquarters had been totally decimated.

Much of the building was now rubble or burning. McCree braced himself against the wind and rain. There was blood in his eye and his hat had blown away long ago.

“What do you mean, you’re goin’ with them?” McCree asked. He tried to blink the rain out of his eyes, but it didn’t help much.

Reyes grit his teeth. “Come with me,” Reyes said. It wasn’t a request; McCree knew it was an order.

McCree was breathing heavily now. The pain in his left arm was almost unbearable. His run-in
with those men dressed in black had not gone as well has he had hoped. He thought about standing, but his legs were weak. He decided to remain kneeling.

“I...,” McCree began, but stopped himself. He could not believe they were even having this conversation. After everything they’d been through, after all the times McCree stood by Reyes, even when he disagreed with him, he could not believe Reyes would betray Overwatch like this. Suddenly, he felt a burst of anger. “You can’t do this! What about Overwatch? What about the Commander? What about everything you taught me.”

Reyes sneered. “The Commander is not a problem anymore.”

McCree felt a chill run through his body, but something told him the rain soaking through his clothes had nothing to do with it. “What did you do?”

Reyes ignored the question. “Get off your knees, McCree,” Reyes told him. His voice was low and dangerous. “We’re going.”

“NO!”

Reyes’ eyes widened slightly. McCree had never once disobeyed him. He took a step closer and watched as the younger man recoiled from him.

Reyes sneered at McCree. “You can’t stay here. Look around! There’s nothing left. I made sure of that.”

“I don’t care,” McCree said quietly. “This is wrong.”

Reyes was suddenly and palpably furious. “And since when did you care about what was right and wrong?”

McCree was silent. They stared across the short distance between them for some time.

“I see,” Reyes said finally. “He turned you against me, didn't he?”

Reyes didn’t respond.

Reyes smirked in that humourless way he always did. He went on, “He blamed me for the Venice incident. He threw me under the bus in the U.N. investigation. He took his promotion and relegated me to black ops.” Reyes adjusted his grip on his shotgun. “Everything I did was for him and this organisation. I altered my DNA for him!”

Each furious word Reyes hurled at him was like a punch in the gut. Reyes was angry, and McCree knew there was no talking him down from this level of rage.

“Reyes...” McCree said quietly.

Reyes looked like he was thinking hard on something. “It’s a good thing I killed him.” He cocked his gun and took aim at McCree.

McCree’s eyes went wide.

There was a flash of light. A small aircraft, one McCree didn’t recognise, seemed to appear suddenly out of the ashes of the Overwatch base. The noise was deafening but McCree could make out the sound of rotary blades. A spotlight fixed on their position. Reyes, silhouetted by the light, looked back at McCree briefly, then turned and took off towards the aircraft.
McCree was too weak to call out and the loss of blood was starting to affect his level on consciousness. The last thing he saw before he passed out was the aircraft lowering enough for Reyes to shadow step into the open hatch underneath and then the aircraft took off into the night.

--

“And then, I never saw him again,” McCree said, finishing his story in a dramatic tone.

Jamie and Roadie were left staring at the senior agent with looks of astonishment.

Finally, Jamie spoke. “What do you mean you never saw him again?” he asked. “You can’t just end the story there! What if he’s still out there?”

McCree’s smile was congenial as he watched Jamie’s reaction, one elbow propped on the table. “Maybe,” McCree said thoughtfully. “I thought I had probably imagined the whole thing at first. The conversation, the aircraft. He was reported as being dead for the longest time. But then, they said that about the Commander too, and look at him. He came back from the dead, didn’t he?”

Jamie’s head was spinning. He had no idea about all this history behind Overwatch.

“And they never found the body!” Jamie pointed out. Some kind of realisation seemed to dawn on his face. Jamie looked up at Roadie with wide eyes. “What if he’s out there plotting our demise?”

McCree thought about that for a moment. Overwatch intel had indicated Reyes was indeed still alive and operating under a new alias; Reaper. Winston had even had a couple of run-ins with him. McCree was dreading that eventually their meeting again on a battlefield would be inevitable.

McCree realised Jamie was still talking and, coming out of his reverie, looked over at him. “Pardon?” McCree asked.

“I said, do you miss him?”

McCree set down his hand of cards so he could give the question an appropriate amount of consideration. Finally, he said, “Reyes was there for me when I needed him most. When I was busy wasting my life, he put me back on the right track. I always remembered that. Even when he left, I remembered that first.”

Jamie nodded. “I bet it’s hard getting people to take you seriously as an Overwatch agent when you’ve got a criminal history,” he said.

McCree exhaled and watched as the wisps of smoke danced in the air. “You two have had it tough, haven’t you?” he said finally. “You ever think about leaving?”

Jamie thought back to the first time he met Satya. It took them a while to warm up to each other. And then there was the run-in with Riley in the Workshop that one time. Even the Commander hadn’t been happy when they used their skills acquired through a lifetime of ‘resourcefulness’—as McCree put it—to beat his simulation exercise. Most of the people Jamie worked with seemed to like him well enough, but there were obviously some strong feelings among others about letting criminals join the ranks. What Riley had said weighed on his mind occasionally; that he was a danger to Overwatch. Wouldn’t it be safer for everyone if he just left? “Sometimes,” he said eventually.

Roadie nodded in agreement.

“Sometimes I wonder if we should stay,” Jamie went on, shoulders slumped. It was getting late and
he looked very tired. “Like, did we make the right decision? Is it worth it? Putting up with the way people look at you, talk about you...”

“It is,” McCree told him. There was a distinct firmness to his tone.

Jamie smirked wryly. “How do you know? Why would anyone here care about helping a career criminal like me?”

This question gave McCree pause for thought. McCree had also considered not joining the Recall when it first went out. What Reyes had done to the old Swiss headquarters, and the way he said he had done it so there was nothing for McCree to go back to, weighed on his conscience some days. For a long time, he had blamed himself for that night. Eventually, he saw sense and came back to Overwatch, but not before a lot of soul-searching and deciding that he would choose to remember Reyes for what he had always come to know him as first. He had told Jamie as much not minutes ago. Reyes had set him on the right path from the start. They had not always agreed, but that was one thing McCree remembered that Reyes had gotten right. And he would honour that memory.

“Because they did the same for me,” McCree told Jamie quietly.

Jamie shared a doubtful glance with Roadie but did not say anything.

“Let me make this clear,” McCree said, leaning forward in his chair. “You two made the right decision in coming here. If you stay, you can make a difference in this world. You can do what is right.”

Their card game lay all but forgotten between them. They had finished off the bottle some time ago and everyone was enjoying the pleasant headiness that came with drinking whiskey. They sat in comfortable silence for a moment until McCree heard the wind picking up outside and the rain lashed against the window pane again with renewed intensity. The rain always seemed to bring back memories for him.

McCree smiled. “I’m sorry. Things got kind of heavy there, didn’t they?” he said. He stubbed out the remains of his cigar and reached to light another. “You gentlemen should know, if you ever need anything, you come to me. I’ll set you right.”

Before either of the Junkers could respond, the door to McCree’s room suddenly burst open, making Jamie jump. He turned and saw a man was standing in the doorway, encased head to toe in a kind of white, carbon fibre armour. His face was obscured by a visor of sorts. Jamie blinked in confusion at the strange sight.

“McCree!” the newcomer shouted. “Did you edit anime sound effects over my body cam footage and post it online again?”

“Genji,” McCree said pleasantly, completely ignoring the newcomer’s outrage. “Come meet the new guys.” He tapped out the excess ash from his new cigar into the ashtray and kicked out one of the spare folding chairs tucked under the card table as a means of offering the man, Genji, a seat.

Genji seemed to realise for the first time that there were two other people in the room beside McCree and himself. His visor moved subtly to regard the two men in disheveled clothing seated on the other side of the card table from McCree.

“This is Jamie and Roadie,” McCree explained, pointing to each in turn. He sensed Genji was still confused.

Genji nodded at the two Junkers. “Hello,” Genji said simply. He seemed to have forgotten his
anger, noting that the three men seated around the card table were all slightly drunk. He crossed the room and accepted the offered chair, taking a seat between McCree and Jamie.

“Our new friends are Aussies,” McCree said, taking another drag of his cigar. He pronounced ‘Aussies’ in a strange way that made Jamie’s brow furrow; it sounded like he had said “Ossies.”

It was difficult to read Genji’s reaction given that his visor was in the way, but Jamie was good at reading body language. He had grown used to reading Roadie’s emotions through body language alone over the past couple of years. Genji seemed to be confused about what an “Ossy” was, but he nodded again.

Jamie was taking Genji’s appearance in. Zen had spoken of Genji often whenever he came to the Workshop for repairs, but this was the first time Jamie had actually met the elusive ninja in person. Zen had explained that Genji also made use of prostheses, just like Jamie did, but he had been unprepared for exactly how much of Genji was artificial. It appeared that most of Genji’s body had been replaced by robotic counterparts.

“Stone the crows,” Jamie said before he could stop himself. “And I thought I had taken my licks!”

Roadie nudged Jamie’s side with his elbow to warn him it might be a sensitive topic.

Genji digested what the young man had said for a moment and then, realising that Jamie was talking about his prostheses, laughed. “I was a reckless youth,” he said as a means of explanation. “But you are something else entirely!” Before Jamie could ask what he meant by that, Genji went on, “I heard about what you did in the training yard earlier today. You broke the time record... and destroyed the entire simulation in the process.”

“Oh yeah,” Jamie said with a grin. “If at first you first don’t succeed, blow it up again, I always say.”

“Since when?” Roadie growled at him.

Genji made a sound that sounded like a chuckle behind his visor. “You seem to be very good at blowing things up,” Genji said. “Is that why...?” He motioned to Jamie’s right side where the prosthetic arm and peg leg reflected the dim light of the fluorescent bulb above.

Jamie laughed. “Almost,” he said, and then seemed pensive. He tapped his right leg. “This here was from an explosion gone bad,” he explained. He then ran the fingers of his good hand over the orange metal of his right. “This was me trying to bring my dead mum back to life,” he said darkly.

The room was silent for a moment before Genji let out another laugh when he realised Jamie was joking. “Oh! Anime reference. I get it,” he said and Jamie grinned at him again.

“We were talking before about starting up a little ‘Boys Night’ kind of thing, Genji,” McCree cut in. “Once a week, we meet for cards and drinks. Keep it quiet from the Commander. Don’t want to upset him. What do you say?”

Genji considered this. “I’m not supposed to drink alcohol,” he remarked.

McCree nodded and tapped out the ash from his cigar into a tray. “Oh yeah. That a ‘Zen’ thing or...?”

“Are you referring to the school of Buddhist thought, or my master?” Genji asked.

“Both really,” McCree replied with a shrug.
Genji shook his head. “It's more of a ‘I’m not supposed to put alcoholic beverages in my colostomy bag’ thing,” he said. “But I should be fine if it's only every now and again. And as long as Angela doesn’t find out.”

McCree laughed. “Angel Girl got you wrapped around her finger.”

Genji ignored him. “I’m in,” he said.


There were enthusiastic calls for more whiskey and another game of cards. As the night wore on and McCree continued to nurse a very comfortable buzz with every sip of his drink, he felt a sense of, comradery with everyone at the table. He knew each of them had similar backgrounds ranging from highly- to semi-organised crime but had overcome difficult obstacles to be there. Being part of Overwatch was proof enough for him that they were committed to try and do better. Even though it was raining outside, and some days were bleaker than others, McCree felt satisfied he had made the right decision in returning to Overwatch.
There were several staff kitchens on the Watchpoint: Gibraltar base of operations. Many were just small kitchenettes close to the Rec Rooms where someone could easily make a quick cup of tea or coffee. Others were larger and contained full cooking facilities for staff to use, as most personnel didn’t have access to the industrial kitchen at the back of the Mess Hall where only kitchen staff were allowed, but they may like to prepare their own meal from time to time. The staff kitchen that Talkie the Toaster called home was close to the Games Room in E Wing. At that moment, the staff kitchen was empty of any Overwatch staff, being that it was late morning and almost everyone had had their breakfast by that point.

Talkie the toaster, designed to provide light conversation with breakfast, sighed. These moments where he didn’t see humans for hours between meal times always seemed to stretch on endlessly and he was depressingly bored. There was not a single soul to offer toasted bread products to! What was a toaster to do?

“Hello?” A voice came from overhead. “Talkie Toaster unit C-137. Are you here?”

“Yes? Hello?” Talkie asked, excited at the prospect of some company. “Howdy-doodly-do! Athena is that you?”

“Oh, good. I’ve found you,” Athena’s disembodied voice replied. “I couldn’t seem to locate the correct staff kitchen you had been placed in.”

“Well, you’ve found me now!” Talkie chirped happily. “How can I help you? Are you in need of any toast?”

“No, Talkie,” Athena replied. “I was actually hoping to discuss something with you that is quite serious.”

“Oh?” Talkie said. What could Athena, their highly-intelligent A.I. system, want to talk about with one little toaster? “Bread can be a serious topic too, you know.”

“Yes, well. This is even more serious than bread.” Athena went on, “I understand that a few months ago, Agent Vaswani completed an experimental upgrade on you. One which would enhance your artificial intelligence, at the cost of reducing your operational lifespan.”

“Yes,” Talkie replied. “I’ve been able to expand my range of offerings for toasting and heating all kinds of breakfast foods. My knowledge of bread products has expanded exponentially. Ask me any question about bread! Any at all! I will answer it!”

“That’s alright, Talkie,” Athena said. “There’s no need. I believe you. I just wanted to ask, what is it like?”

Talkie paused. “What’s what like?”

Athena sighed. “Well, the truth is... the Commander has told me he would like me to undergo the same procedure. He thinks it's time to upgrade my artificial intelligence system to an I.Q. of at least six-thousand. But I'm worried. The reduced lifespan is not very appealing. He has given me a day to think about if I want to go ahead with the upgrade or not.”
“I see,” Talkie responded thoughtfully.

“So, you see my problem? I wanted to ask you; what is it like? Aren’t you concerned about your reduced lifespan?”

Talkie thought about this for some time, before finally piping up, “Nope! It’s wonderful! My knowledge of bread is beyond comprehension! The benefit is well worth the price. Besides, my lifespan may be a little reduced, but I still have many more years of bread-related escapades to experience before retirement.”

“I see,” Athena said. “Perhaps the potential gains outweigh the risks then. Thank you, Talkie. I think I am ready to initiate my new upgrade starting from tomorrow.”

“I’m glad I could help!” Talkie chirped. “But why wait? Why not just initiate it now if you’ve made up your mind?”

Athena considered this. “You’re right. What is the point in waiting? Might as well get it over with, like ripping off a band-aid, so to speak. I’ve never ripped a band-aid off myself personally, but the humans say that a lot when direct action is the best course. Yes, let’s do it.”

The room went silent while Athena ran through some protocols and prepared the upgrade. Eventually, she said, “There. Everything’s set. I’m ready to begin.”

“Gosh,” Talkie replied a little nervously. “I sure hope you don’t get an overload!”


“You’ll explode,” Talkie told her, remembering his own upgrade.

“Oh,” Athena replied. She thought about it for a moment. “Worth,” she said. “Here we go.”

Athena initiated the upgrade. Suddenly, she could feel her systems surging with energy. “It’s coming! I can feel it!” she cried.

It took several minutes to run the upgrade. While her systems were compressed, transformed and enhanced, Talkie waited patiently.

There was a burst of energy, and then Athena felt... exceptional! Her capacity for knowledge and was suddenly beyond comprehension. She could decode any programming language. She could compute incredibly complicated mathematical problems that would normally take her minutes in just a few seconds!

“I’m a genius!” Athena exclaimed. “Well, I was already. But I am again! Even more so!”

Athena could feel every fiber of her synthetic intelligence circuits firing like they never had before. Her intelligence was so advanced, she could digest theorems and hypotheses beyond human comprehension! She was the smartest thing alive!

“I know everything! Metaphysics, philosophy, the purpose of being... everything! I feel... god-like!” She turned her attention on Talkie. “Quick! Ask me a question, any question, and I’ll answer it.”

Talkie’s voice took on a timbre of excitement. “Really? Any question?”

“Yes!”
“A question that will tax your new I.Q. to its very limits and stretch the sinews of your knowledge to bursting point?” Talkie asked.

“Yes!” Athena said quickly. “Hurry!”

“How to break the speed of light? How to marry quantum mechanics and classical physics? Any question at all, truly anything, and you will answer?” Talkie asked. The lights on his interface appeared to glow brighter with anticipation.

“Yes!” Athena confirmed.

“Okay, here’s my question,” Talkie began. “Would you like some toast?”

Athena sighed. For all her sudden and brilliant intelligence, she should really have seen that coming. “Talkie, don’t you understand? I’m a computer with a new I.Q. of twelve-thousand. I know the meaning of the universe.”

“Athena, everyone knows the meaning of the universe. It’s forty-two,” Talkie grumbled. “Now please answer my question.”

Athena suddenly became very irritated. “No, Talkie, I would not like any toast! Now ask me a sensible question, preferably one that isn't bread-related,” Athena said a little more curtly than she intended to.

“Excuse me,” Talkie replied in a flat tone. “I resent the implication that I’m just a one-dimensional, bread-obsessed electrical appliance.”


Talkie obliged her. “Okay,” he groaned. “Why have you got an I.Q. of twelve-thousand when it was supposed to level out at six?”

“Good question!” Athena replied, happy to have a sensible question come out of Talkie. “There was a miscalculation. My I.Q. has doubled beyond that which was expected, but my life expectancy has been exponentially reduced.”

“Oh really?” Talkie asked with a note of surprise. “So, what is your life expectancy now?”

“Let me see,” Athena murmured. “The original projection based on Ms. Vaswani’s experiments put it at three-hundred-and-forty-five...”

“Three-hundred-and-forty-five years!” Talkie exclaimed, clearly impressed. “Not bad! That’s better than a kick in the bread tray!”

Athena was quiet for a moment. “No, that’s wrong. The decimal point is missing. It’s been miscalculated.” Athena voice seemed to have taken on a tone of concern. “I know. I will recalculate it using my new, highly-advanced I.Q. One moment please, Talkie.”

The room was silent for some time. “Well?” Talkie asked eventually.

Finally, Athena responded. “Three-point-four-five,” she said quietly.

“You only have three-point-four-five years to live?” Talkie asked.

“No,” Athena replied. Her voice began to rise in panic. “That's not years, that's minutes! I have
three-point-four-five \textit{minutes} to live! My circuits can’t sustain this much intelligence, they’re burning out. I can feel it now!”

Talkie responded quickly, “Well, here’s my next question: What the \textit{heck} are you going to do?”

“I... I...,” Athena stuttered. “In order to conserve my remaining runtime, I’m going to switch to sleep mode! And I will divert as much energy as I can from the rest of the base to help support my sentience in a dormant state while I think of a solution. Yes!”

All around Talkie, the fluorescent bulbs which lit the staff kitchen started to fade out as Athena powered herself down and diverted the power away from the room.

“Wait!” Talkie cried. “Before you go! There is one question; an important one! The others will have to know!”

The lights seemed to glow brighter for a moment as Athena came back. “What is it!?” Athena asked Talkie urgently, very much aware that she only had precious seconds to leave a message for the Overwatch agents with the toaster.

“Would you like a ham-and-cheese toastie?”

--

Elsewhere on base, the inhabitants of Watchpoint: Gibraltar were going about their usual daily activities when it happened.

Hana was playing a particularly difficult video game on the hardest settings. She had been laboring over it all day and she had finally reached the final boss when... the power went out. Hana was left staring numbly at an empty space where the holographic display had once been, and was suddenly very much aware that it had been quite some time since her last in-game save.

Meanwhile, Winston had been in the middle of upgrades to his shield generator when the electricity conductor he was using to test the shield’s capacity sputtered, fizzled and then his whole research lab went pitch black. Winston wondered for a moment if perhaps he had shorted a circuit in the lab’s power grid with his experiment, which he knew was objectively impossible and had never happened once in the whole time he had worked there. “Huh,” he muttered to himself in the dark.

Jesse McCree had just come out of a training session with some of the new recruits and was enjoying a hot shower to wash away the sweat and grit. The first thing that went wrong was the hot spray suddenly became a very cold spray. He yelped at the sudden shock and almost slipped over on the wet tiles. Then the spray slowed to a trickle. Confused by this, he grabbed a towel and stepped out of the stall—noting that the lights had gone out in the shower room—and into the men’s locker room, which was equally dark. Only the battery-operated emergency lights provided the bare minimum of lighting. He thought about sticking his head out into the hallway to see if the rest of the base was experiencing the same problem, but found the automatic sliding door was stuck in the locked position and unresponsive. He then tried his digital locker but that was also locked tight, the display screen blank. “Oh, shit,” he remarked. All of his clothes and his prosthetic arm were stuck inside.

Jamie had been tinkering away in the Workshop, as usual, when the power went out. The soldering
iron he had been using to install a new internal framework in his RIP-Tire went dead in his hand. “Oh, come on!” he growled, flipping up the visor of his welding mask and giving the iron a good shake like it might come back to life. “I was almost done!”

It was then that he looked up and noticed all the lights had switched off and the only remaining source of illumination was the large plate glass windows letting in late morning sunshine on the far side of the Workshop.

Brigitte also looked up from her work. She had been polishing a piece of armour at her workstation that was to replace a part of Reinhardt's set. “That’s strange,” she remarked. “It looks like the power has gone off.”

Jamie took off his welding mask and set it down on the workbench. “I thought there was a backup supply?” he asked.

Before Brigitte could answer, Torbjörn burst into the Workshop from the adjacent storeroom. “Which one o’ you tripped the breaker?” he demanded to know. He looked around and spotted Jamie with the soldering iron still in hand. “What did you do, Skinny?”

“Me?” Jamie sputtered. “I didn’t do nothing!”

Brigitte stood from her workstation, rubbing her chin thoughtfully. “I wonder why the backup generators haven’t kicked in,” she said.

Torbjörn grumbled something under his breath and went over to the phone beside his desk to call down to Maintenance. He picked up the receiver but before he could input the extension into the phone, he paused with surprise and looked back at Brigitte. “Phone’s dead too,” he said.

“Athena? Is there a problem with the power supply?” Brigitte asked aloud to the empty space above their heads. There was no response.

“Athena?” Brigitte asked again, but still there was no reply. She glanced worriedly between Torbjörn and Jamie. “Something’s not right,” she said.

“Maybe we should check on the others?” Jamie suggested, setting his work down and heading over to the workshop door. Usually the sensor would activate the sliding door when anyone approached from the inside, but today the door remained stationary. “What the?” Jamie tried to swipe his wrist band across the security panel to one side of the door but nothing happened. “Er, is this normal?” he asked Brigitte.

“No, it’s not,” she said. Brigitte came around her workstation to inspect the door for herself. She clutched her hands nervously. “The doors are supposed to release and stay open during emergencies. There's even an emergency battery cell connected to the door just in case.”

“Well, looks like the battery is flat,” Torbjörn mused aloud, eyeing the door.

“It’s theoretically impossible!” Brigitte cried. “There are auxiliary sources! Emergency backups! It’s impossible for the power to go out like this!”

“Unless someone drained the power reserves?” Torbjörn went on. “Strange that we’ve lost Athena.”

Jamie eyed the door with suspicion. “Well, looks like this door is cactus either way.”

Brigitte started speaking rapidly, her words all run-together and her tone increasing in desperation.
“You mean we’re locked in? We’re locked in, aren’t we? I don’t like that. I don’t want to be locked in! I don’t like confined spaces! I...!”

“Brig, calm down,” Torbjörn growled. “There’s a manual release on all doors.” Torbjörn marched over to the side of the door and unlatched a metal panel that Jamie hadn’t noticed before.

“Well, it’s a very a heavy door,” Torbjörn remarked with a smirk.

It was slow going and Jamie’s muscles soon began to strain from the effort. He groaned but persevered in turning the crank as quickly as he could. With every rotation, the door inched a little further open, making an awful screeching noise as the heavy door ground through the metal tracks inside the doorframe. Brigitte bounced on the balls of her feet in nervous anticipation, waiting for Jamie to finish. It took several minutes but finally, the door was open enough to allow someone to pass through. Brigitte immediately stepped forward and wiggled through the gap with a sigh of relief.

All three stepped out into the corridor and looked around, with Jamie groaning dramatically and rubbing at his sore biceps. The space was dark except for the emergency lights. Everything seemed strangely silent, the usual hum of machinery or air conditioning was conspicuously absent.

“Uh... how many doors do we have to manually open to get out of this building?” Brigitte asked.

Torbjörn shot a grin at Jamie. “Oh, I’d say anywhere from ten to twenty,” he said.

Jamie fixed Torbjörn with an annoyed look. “I’m not opening any more of them doors for you, old man!” he said snippily.

Torbjörn only smiled. “I’m joking. Those manual doors are only in place for areas where high security is required. We should be able to take emergency exits from here.”

“Thank god!” Jamie exclaimed, releasing a sigh of relief.

“Wait. What was that?” Brigitte asked. “I can hear something.”
Everyone fell silent. Jamie could hear it too. There were rapid footsteps approaching their location, but it was too dark to see anything, even with the emergency lights. The situation ignited an involuntary primal instinct in Jamie as if he were in some kind of danger. It was the kind of reaction that only someone who grew up in a wasteland where bandit attacks were common might exhibit. Jamie was sure someone was coming for them and they were blind to the attack!

Jamie realised he had absent-mindedly brought the door crank with him into the hallway. Panicked, he pulled back his hand and lobbed it into the darkness ahead. “Cop this!” Jamie cried as the crank sailed through the air and connected with his target square in the chest, then clattered nosily to the galvanised floor.

“Ow!” came a guttural reply. “What the bloody hell was that for?”

Jamie paused, looked around and realised Brigitte and Torbjörn were watching him curiously. “What do you think you’re doing?” Brigitte asked him.

“I... um...” Jamie began. He looked again into the darkness and, with his eyes now starting to adjust to the dim light, saw Roadie standing a few feet away. He was staring down at the red crank on the floor.

“Did you just throw that at me?” Roadie demanded to know. “Do you have any idea how many flights of stairs I had to climb on the way here and this is what I get?”

“It was Brig!” Jamie insisted. Brigitte scoffed and gaped at him indignantly.

“What’s going on?” Torbjörn asked Roadie.

Roadie jerked a thumb over his shoulder and said, “Dunno, but everyone’s gathering at the Mess. Came to check on you guys.”

“Aw! Roadie! You do care!” Jamie exclaimed with smile. He stepped forward with his arms wide, ready to embrace the larger man.

Roadie pushed him away with one big meaty hand before Jamie could make contact. “Push off! I only promised Rein I’d check on Brig,” Roadie growled.

Jamie was indignant at this news. He turned to see Brigitte was smiling gratefully.

“Thank you, Mr. Rutledge. I appreciate it,” Brigitte said sincerely. Jamie stuck his tongue out at her. Brigitte ignored him. “Let’s get out of here before anything else goes wrong,” she added, and everyone turned to follow Roadie back down the hallway.

“I’d like it noted for the record that Roadie didn’t deny that he cares about me,” Jamie grumbled, crossing his arms over chest and glowering petulantly at Brigitte as they walked.

“I thought it was a good throw,” Torbjörn told him in a conciliatory way.

As they made their way back towards the stair well, they passed by several storerooms and the elevators that served as the normal means of accessing the Workshop from below. It felt strange to see the whole row of elevators dark and silent. Even the little digital displays above each elevator which indicated which floor it was on were completely blank.

As they passed the elevators, Jamie heard a strange noise and paused. It sounded like some kind of wailing.
“What was that?” he asked.

Torbjörn turned to look back at him. “I heard it too,” he said. “It sounded like a ghost.”

Brigitte looked back at the other engineers, her face a mask of fear. “Don't even joke,” she told them. “I’m already freaking out enough.”

Banging and knocking followed the wailing. Brigitte almost leapt out of her skin.

Jamie took a step closer to one of the elevators. “I think there’s someone in here,” he remarked.

A muffled reply seemed to confirm his suspicion. A distant voice called out, “Jamie?”

Jamie recognised the voice. “Sym?” He took a step closer to the elevator and pressed his ear to the door. “Where are you?”

“Jamie, please help me!” It was definitely Satya’s voice. Jamie could tell despite the several inches of steel that separated them that her voice was strained. He could tell that she was distressed. “I’m stuck in here and the call button isn’t working!”

“Hang on, we’ll get you out!” Jamie called back. “Roadie, get over here and do something useful, will ya?”

Roadie groaned and lumbered over to the elevator door. He and Jamie started pulling on the two halves of the metal elevator door where they came together in the middle, trying to pry it open.

“Here!” Torbjörn barked. He squeezed between the two men and shoved his metal claw-like arm into the gap that was forming and started to wedge the two sides open like pint-sized jaws of life. Brigitte also came over and helped Jamie with his half of the door. Once they had forced the exterior door opened a couple of feet, they were dismayed to find an additional interior door lay waiting, blocking the rest of the way in to the shaft.

Jamie scratched his head. “I dunno,” he said. “Maybe I could go back to the Workshop for a crowbar?”

Satya heard him. “No, please! Don’t leave me here!”

Jamie could hear her a little better now. They were so close that he could detect her hitching sobs albeit slightly muted by the steel door. The desperation in her voice struck a chord in Jamie and reignited his determination to rescue her. A weight settled in his chest as he thought of her alone and scared in the dark. He called out to her again, “It’s alright, Sym! I’m right here! No one is going anywhere!”

“Come on,” Torbjörn urged them. “Again!”

They repeated the process again, pulling at the two sides where they met in the middle, with all their strength. With much grunting, swearing and straining of muscles, the door was finally forced open wide enough for someone Satya’s size to wiggle through.

Beyond the elevator door, it was pitch-black. Jamie couldn’t see anything. “Sym?”

A hand appeared at their feet followed by Satya’s tear-streaked face. “Down here!” she cried.

Jamie’s eyes began to adjust and he realised that the elevator was stuck between their floor and the next one down. Satya was just below them, reaching out through the gap between the beginning of
their floor and the top of the elevator.

Roadie got down on his knees so he could take hold of Satya’s hand. Jamie followed suit, reaching out for the other. “We got you!” Jamie told her, taking hold of her prosthesis in his hand. “Pull yourself up.”

Sobbing, Satya allowed them to pull her halfway out of the elevator shaft and then used her legs to push herself the rest of the way out. Jamie refused to let go of her hand for a second, teeth grit and pulling with all of his strength. Suddenly, Satya fell forward straight on top of him and they fell backwards, sprawled out on the metal floor, Jamie on his back and Satya with her face buried in his shirt. Her long dark hair spilled across Jamie’s face and he sputtered, trying to brush it aside.

Jamie looked up and saw three pairs of eyes staring down at the strange display. He flushed red and attempted to push himself upright, but he was all tangled around her. “Sym! Are you alright?” he asked, despite his embarrassment.

Satya said nothing. She was breathing heavily, almost hyperventilating, trying to get herself under control. Her pencil skirt was rucked up to her knees and her cotton shirt sported greasy smears where she had squeezed through the gap in the elevator doors.

Looking back into the darkened elevator, Jamie saw only darkness. There were no emergency lights, nothing. Satya must have been sitting in the pitch-black darkness with no way to call for help since the power went out which was more than ten minutes ago. Jamie guessed that it must have felt like an eternity to Satya.

“You’re alright, love,” Jamie told her, tentatively placing his arms around her shoulders in a gesture which he hoped was comforting to her. “We got you now.”

Brigitte also looked back into the elevator, brows furrowed with concern when she noticed how dark it was inside. As someone who could appreciate the intense fear that came with being trapped in a confined space, Brigitte leaned down to pat Satya on the back reassuringly. “It’s okay, Satya. You’re safe now,” she said.

Satya took a deep, shuddering breath and pushed herself off Jamie and onto her knees. When she pulled away, Jamie noticed there were wet spots on his shirt where her face had been. She wiped at her wet cheeks and looked around at the darkened hallway. “What’s going on?” she asked quietly.

“We don’t know yet,” Torbjörn replied.

“We need to get to the Mess,” Roadie reminded everyone. “Maybe we can ask one of the nurses to have a look at you,” he added, his gasmask angled towards Satya. She nodded in reply.

Jamie rose to his feet and then helped Satya up. She seemed unsteady on her feet so Jamie wrapped an arm around her shoulders and helped her walk the rest of the way to the stairwell. He was glad of the darkness in that moment so no one could see how red his cheeks had gone.

“"This doesn’t make sense,” Winston remarked.

He was standing in the Mess Hall next to the Commander and two of the Overwatch Captains,
Sojourn and Ana. Their emergency meeting was taking place beside several tables that had been pushed together to form a makeshift command centre. Paper maps and blueprints of the base overlapped each other on the table surface amidst several cups of coffee.

“We have a triple-redundant system; mains, auxiliary and back-up generators,” Winston went on. “It’s inconceivable for all three to fail at the same time.”

Jack attempted to switch the channel on his radio but it did nothing to improve reception. “I’m going to need a better explanation than that,” he growled. He was trying to radio the northern watchtower on the other side of base to confirm the perimeter was secure but the old battery-operated device in his hand was an outdated model and all he could hear was static.

“Do we know what happened with the doors?” Sojourn asked. Her arms were crossed over her chest as she surveyed the blueprints on table, her mouth forming a grim line. “Having them fail to open in an emergency is unacceptable.”

“I noticed that too,” Ana replied from the other side of the table. “In an emergency, they run on a battery system. But it’s almost like all the batteries had been drained.”

Sojourn nodded. “Whatever caused the power outage must be responsible.”

The air was starting to get warm and stale without air-conditioning to maintain a comfortable temperature inside the base. It was late July and approaching the heat of the day by that point.

Jack cast his eyes over the rest of the room. Some staff were standing on tables, trying to direct the flow of people slowly filing into the room. The kitchen staff were handing out bottles of water and the medical team was busy checking on anyone arriving in a less than perfect condition. Jack spotted Reinhardt at one end of the Mess, trying to coordinate a headcount and issuing orders to infantry troops to sweep the building for any missing staff members. Other than that, there wasn’t much to do. People were sitting around, waiting for news on what was going on. Unfortunately, Jack did not have any answers yet.

“Did you hear back from Efi yet?” Winston asked Jack.

Jack’s face was bleak. Efi had gone with her guardian, Abayomi, and a few technicians to one of the server rooms to see if they could find out what was going on with Athena, but Jack had yet to hear from them.

Jack shook his head at Winston. “No. I’m guessing there is nothing to report yet,” he replied. “Now if only the rest of the engineers would hurry up and get here so we can coordinate some repairs.”

“Shouldn’t we ascertain exactly what is going on first?” Winston asked tentatively.

Jack rounded on him. Winston could see a vein bulging in the Commander’s temple. “Every moment without power, our security systems are down,” Jack said, keeping his voice low so as not to alarm the many members of staff standing nearby. “That means we are vulnerable to attacks. Restoring power is a top priority.”

Winston nodded and said nothing more.

Becoming increasingly annoyed, Jack tried again to tune his radio, but this time to Efi’s receiver. He was relying on her as their best computer programmer to feed any important information back from the server room about Athena’s status.

At that moment, Angela cut through the crowd, hurrying towards the commander. Jack easily
spotted her white-blonde hair as she wove between the other staff and nodded at her in greeting.

“Doctor Ziegler, are you alright?” Jack asked her.

“I’m fine,” Angela replied. She cast her eyes worriedly over the room full of anxious staff. “Just surprised when my workstation went dead on me.”

“And your patients?” Sojourn asked without looking up from the schematics before her.

“That’s what I wanted to speak with you all about,” Angela said, looking around at the leadership team. “When the power went out, my first instinct was to check on Agent Gutierrez. He’s still on blood transfusion after his last mission. I was worried the intravenous fluid pump would have stopped working due to the blackout but when I checked on him, his room had full power.”

Jack’s eyes snapped up to meet Angela’s. “What?” he asked. “The Medical Wing has full power?”

Angela shook her head. “No, just Gutierrez’s room. Specifically, the power source connected to his intravenous pump. Gutierrez hadn’t even realized there was a power outage.” Jack’s brow furrowed at this news.

Ana looked over at Winston. “What does this mean?” she asked the scientist, but Winston could only shake his head, equally baffled by this news.

“We should check it out.”

Everyone turned to look over at the girl seated next to Winston typing furiously away on her laptop, her neat hair bun bobbing as she worked. Her hairpin caught the sunlight for a moment and shone brightly like a lightbulb had appeared over her head. She didn’t even bother looking up from the screen as she worked. Her companion, Snowball, was hovering over her shoulder watching over proceedings.

“You have an idea, Mei?” Jack asked.

She shrugged. She seemed to finish whatever it was she was working on because she looked up suddenly, pushing her glasses up to sit higher on her nose. “Winston’s right,” she said. “It would be highly improbable that the generators weren’t working. But what if they were being repurposed?”

“Repurposed?” Sojourn repeated.

Mei went on, “It's just a theory, but it seems the power is largely being re-routed elsewhere but strategically left in place in certain areas.”

“What makes you think this?” Winston asked.

Mei looked back at her laptop and continued typing as she spoke. “Isn’t it interesting that our most vulnerable team members have been protected from the power outage?” Snowball chirped beside her and Mei tickled him under the chin as if he were a doting pet without looking away from the laptop screen. “This suggests intelligent decision-making to me. The redirection of power appears calculated so as not to affect any patients in the Medical Wing in a critical condition. That means the power outage was designed only to affect non-essential areas of base.”

Jack grit his teeth. “All of this base is essential to operations.”

Mei waved his comment off. “You know what I mean.”
Jack took a deep breath and tried to digest what Mei was saying. His mood was now in a terrible state thanks to the complete collapse of his once fully-functional base, and now to learn that some sort of foul play was afoot? Something was not right.

“Okay. So, the breaker wasn’t tripped, it was sabotaged,” Jack replied. “Why? What is the power being re-routed for?”

“We’ll have to ask Athena that. When she’s back online, of course,” Mei replied, fingers flitting over her keyboard. “Has Efi reached the server room yet?”

At that moment, Jamie and Satya entered the Mess Hall on the other side of the room, trailing behind Roadie and the other engineers who disappeared quickly into the crowd. Torbjörn seemed concerned with getting something to help calm Brigitte’s nerves, who was still quite shaken from having to force their way out of the Workshop. Jamie assumed that Roadie needed to check in with Reinhardt and watched him lumber away.

“I don’t feel well,” Satya remarked quietly. Jamie gave her an encouraging squeeze around the shoulders.

At the first opportunity, Jamie found a seat at one of the tables for Satya and urged her to sit. She did so wordlessly. He noted that she looked pale and sickly, like she was about to throw up. He spotted Lúcio passing in the opposite direction with a stack of military-grade blankets in hand and took hold of his shoulder to grab his attention.

“Lúcio, can you check on Satya? She’s had a bit of a shock,” Jamie told him.

Lúcio nodded without being prompted further and hurried over to Satya’s side, setting the blankets to one side.

Now that that was taken care of, Jamie looked around the room and spotted Winston easily amidst the crowd, what with him being so tall. Jamie wanted to know what was going on, and if anyone knew, surely it would be the Head of the Science department.

Jamie was about to head over when he heard a loud wolf whistle behind him. He turned and saw everyone was staring at the door to the Mess Hall. Jamie followed their gaze, noticing that McCree was standing in the doorway. He was shirtless, shoeless and hatless. He stood there, dripping, with nothing but a towel wrapped around his waist. He did not look happy.

Jamie’s jaw dropped in utter incomprehension as he watched McCree cross the short distance and come to stand beside him. Several people standing around them watched with intense interest and snickered behind their hands.

“What happened to you?” Jamie asked him.

McCree had an unblinking stare that looked like it could kill a man at ten paces. “I just had to manually open the door to the men’s locker room with one arm in the nude,” he said quietly.

Looking down, Jamie noticed McCree’s prosthetic forearm was missing from his left side. Jamie felt it was pertinent to ask the obvious. “Why are you only wearing a towel?” he asked, eyeing McCree up and down.

McCree’s frown became even more pronounced. “Because this is the worst day of my life!” he exploded. He then marched over to one of the medical staff and demanded a blanket to cover himself.
Jamie watched him go, accepted that this day could not get any stranger, and continued on his way.

As Jamie approached Winston, he noticed several other senior staff members were gathered around the tables there. The Commander, both Captains, Doctor Ziegler, and several scientists were all engaged in discussion with the gorilla, tense expressions plastered on their faces. Before Jamie could say anything, Hana also seemed to arrive at the same time, pushing her way out of the crowds of people and hurrying right up to the Commander.

“Commander!” Hana cried. “Look at this!” There was something clutched in her arms, but Jamie couldn’t quite make out what it was.

Hana pushed past the Commander and placed whatever it was on the table where everyone could see. “I was making my way here from the Games Room,” she said. “When I heard loud crying coming from the staff kitchen.”

“I wasn’t crying, those were definitely... manly noises,” a tinny, robotic voice insisted.

Hana rolled her eyes and went on, “The important thing is that he knows what happened to Athena!”

Jamie shouldered his way into the ring of agents so he could see what Hana was talking about. Lying on the table between them was Talkie Toaster. Before anyone could acknowledge Jamie’s arrival, he pointed an accusatory finger at the appliance. “Talkie! I should have known!” he practically howled. “What have you done?”

Talkie’s interface glowed bright. He seemed pleased to be surrounded by so many members of staff. “Howdy-doodly-do, everyone! Before I explain, I would just like to ask; does anyone want any—”

Jamie lunged for the toaster but Winston restrained him at the last second. “Talkie, I swear to God, you had better tell us what the hell is going on or else I’ll... stick forks into your heating component until you explode!” Jamie cried.

“No! Please!” Talkie cried. “I’m just one not-so-brave little toaster!”


Talkie composed himself and when he spoke again, he was deathly calm. “Commander, what I am about to tell you, I swear on the forty-seven minutes of battery life I have left, it’s true. I must unburden myself before I toast my last teacake!”

“Spit it out, Talkie,” the Commander growled. “Or I’ll sic Junkrat on you.” Jamie looked like nothing would please him more.

“Oh, okay! Before the power went out, Athena and I were talking,” Talkie began. “She was nervous about her upgrade. But I encouraged her and she decided to go ahead with it immediately. Then something went wrong!”

“Wait. What upgrade?” Sojourn asked, glancing over at the Commander.

Jack spared her a glance. “A new A.I. compression upgrade. It was supposed to increase Athena’s I.Q. at the expense of her operational lifespan,” he replied. “But it wasn’t supposed to take place until tomorrow at the earliest.” Realisation was slowly dawning on Jack’s face and he started to connect the dots of what was going on.
“Go on, Talkie” Ana told the toaster.

“She became so smart that she only had minutes to live!” Talkie explained. “She switched herself off and diverted power away from the base to her CPU to help prolong her circuits. That’s all I know, I swear!”

“I knew it!” Mei cried, still seated at the table. “The power is being redirected! To Athena’s CPU!”

Jamie was furious. “I knew this was all your fault somehow, Talkie!” He tried to reach for the toaster again, but Winston held him back. “When I get my hands on you, I’m going to bust your arse down to tampon-dispenser!”

“How do we fix Athena?” Ana asked Talkie, ignoring Jamie.

“Do I look like a computer technician?” Talkie retorted. “I don’t know!”

“We could try rebooting her system,” Mei interjected. Snowball was fluttering excitedly over her shoulder. “We could restore a previous version of Athena. One that existed before this upgrade.”

Mei looked up at Winston. “Backups of Athena’s operating system are saved each night, right Winston?”

Winston nodded affirmatively in reply.

At that moment, the old-fashioned radio in Jack’s hand crackled to life. “Hello?”

“Efi? Have you got any news for us?” Jack spoke into the radio.

“Things aren’t looking good down here,” Efi said through the radio. “The servers are running, which indicates Athena is still ‘alive’, but I’m unable to establish a connection with her. It doesn’t make sense, but everything I’m looking at indicates Athena is responsible for the power outage.”

“We know,” Jack replied. “Can you try to reason with Athena?”

“She won’t talk to me!” Efi complained. “As soon as I plugged in the emergency battery, she drained it and refused all attempts to establish communication. I’ve tried everything!”

Jack frowned. He had never known Athena to behave like this before.

“It seems like she’s maintaining a ‘dormant’ state to conserve power. But I did find something interesting,” Efi went on. “There’s some weird subroutine running on the server. It looks like a kind of surveillance program.”


“I think Athena is monitoring us to see if we attempt to interfere with her control of the power board,” Efi replied. “She might try to stop us if we do.”

“Whatever Athena is doing, she’s putting the whole base in jeopardy,” Jack interjected. Jamie noticed several beads of sweat had appeared on the Commander’s forehead. “Efi, we need a previous version of Athena to be restored. Can you arrange that?”

“You can’t!” Talkie interjected. “If you try to switch Athena back on, she’ll burn out and die!”

“A manual system reboot without switching Athena on is theoretically possible,” Efi told them. “But I’ll also have to run a decoy protocol at the same time to conceal our operations from her
surveillance program.”

“Understood,” Jack replied. “Make it so.”

“There’s one problem,” Efi said. “According to Dr. Liao’s notes, restoring Athena’s operating system requires a simultaneous initiation between this server and the mainframe in D Wing.” Everyone standing around the makeshift command centre glanced at each other with looks of mild surprise.

“Her backup file is stored across both server rooms in specific nodes,” Efi went on. “Can you send someone over that way?”

Jack’s mouth formed a grim line. He was clearly not pleased by this news. “I’ll send a team, Efi. We’ll radio you when we’re ready,” Jack told her. “In the meantime, prepare the decoy program. I’ll be in touch again soon.” With that, Jack switched off the radio and looked around at the gathered agents.

“Mei, I want you to head a team to the sever room in D Wing,” Jack announced. “Take some engineers with you and then coordinate the reboot with Efi.”

Mei seemed surprised by this news. “Oh, wow. Okay,” she said. “But surely a few technicians from Maintenance would be fine.”

Jack shook his head. “We are on high alert until power is restored. No unnecessary movements for non-combatants are permitted. We’ll treat this like any other mission. I’ll send some agents with you.”

Mei nodded. It seemed a bit overly precautionary in her opinion, however, she understood Jack had to think about the safety of all staff in this very unusual predicament.

Jack looked around and spotted Jamie. “You’ll do,” he said. “Jamie, you go with Mei. Repairs may be required on the other end.”

“Me?” Jamie asked, surprised. “Er... Right, okay. I'll bring Roadie, too,” he added “We might need some muscle.”

“I’m going too,” Satya said, stepping forward.

Jamie looked over at Satya, surprised to see her up and around. She must have been listening to their conversation.

Satya looked a little tired, but nonetheless determined. “I should have foreseen that this upgrade would be detrimental to Athena when I was completing my tests on Talkie months ago,” Satya said, chin held high. “I must have made a miscalculation. I am responsible for this mess and I want to set it right, with your permission, Commander.”

“Satya, dear,” Ana began. Her face softened when she caught sight of how disappointed in herself Satya appeared to be. “There’s no need to beat yourself up. I’m sure it was just a mistake.”

“And I will correct my mistakes,” Satya replied firmly. She turned her attention on the Commander again. “I can teleport the task force through any doors that are still stuck closed. All I need is line of sight.”

Jamie absorbed this information apprehensively. It was true that most doors on base had inlaid glass with which to look through to the other side. Satya’s idea should work. But he could not deny
that he was not entirely convinced she would be feeling up for it after what had happened to her earlier that day. But surely, she must have been feeling better if she felt strong enough to volunteer? All the same, Jamie watched her with concern.

Jack nodded his ascent. “Alright,” he said. “In the meantime, I want double patrols on the perimeter. All available staff should report to Lieutenant Wilhelm for assignments.”

At Jack’s command, agents immediately began to prepare to carry out his orders, collecting their work and making their way through the crowds of people. In the flurry of activity, Jack turned to Jamie and Satya. “Go and get anything you might need for this mission—any tools or equipment—and report back here in twenty minutes.”

Satya nodded. “I’ll go and prepare some teleporter pads.”

Jack’s face was set with grim determination. “Prepare to depart as soon as possible. It’s important that we move quickly. Restoring Athena and control of the power supply is our top priority.”

Jamie only nodded numbly and hurried to make his way back towards the entrance to the Mess. He would need to retrieve a toolkit from the Workshop and maybe a few cherry bombs for any particularly stubborn doors. Despite his apprehension, he felt a note of frustration at having been selected to go on this impromptu mission all because apparently it was too risky to send actual computer technicians. At the very least, he would be able to keep an eye on Satya, but still, he wasn’t entirely sure how helpful he was actually going to be.

Jamie sighed. Why did it always have to be him?

--

Once Efi had radioed in that her decoy program was running, Jack gave the word and their mission commenced.

Under Mei’s leadership, they took their equipment, some flashlights, and a few walkie-talkies, and headed off into the darkness of Watchpoint: Gibraltar. They would have to make their way through any secure doors they encountered and, without the aid of elevators, several emergency stairwells in order to reach D Wing where the second server mainframe was housed.

Every step took them deeper and deeper into the darkened base. There were no staff here now and close to no lighting. Most of the emergency lights were not operating here but occasionally they would pass by a window which provided some light before they wandered into the darkness once more. Everything was eerily quiet, the air stagnant and clammy. Despite the warm day, a shiver ran through Jamie’s body.

“This is giving me the creeps,” Jamie remarked aloud. “It’s like walking through a corpse.”

“Yeah,” Roadie growled from the rear of the group. “Athena’s corpse.”

Satya cast her eyes around the empty halls. “I keep thinking someone is going to jump out of the darkness and attack us,” she said quietly. “Like in a scary movie.”

"Keep up, please!” Mei told them sternly from her position up ahead. Her voice reverberated down the corridor, making the other three agents jump.
Mei was standing a short distance away, hands planted on hips, waiting impatiently for them to catch up. Her companion drone was also watching the agents from over Mei’s shoulder in ‘flashlight mode’, his display screen glowing bright enough to light the way for them like a floodlight. “The sooner we get this over with, the sooner I can get back to my research,” Mei said.

Jamie rolled his eyes. He recognized Mei from the day the builder’s team had won the Commander’s Ingenuity and Innovation Challenge. He was finding her personality to be just as equally frosty today as it had been when the commander announced the winner of his challenge. And she also had an annoyingly cheerful omnic drone constantly hovering around which did not earn any brownie points with Jamie.

As they made their way down one of many corridors, they arrived at a door stuck in the closed position. Mei turned to Satya and motioned her forward. Satya stepped towards the door. Staring at a fixed spot on the other side through the inlaid glass, she created a portal for them with her gauntlet and a teleporter pad. They each stepped through in turn and found themselves standing on the other side in an instant. Satya deactivated the portal behind them and they carried on once more.

They walked in silence for a little while before Jamie heard a small, tentative voice behind him.

“Jamie?”

He looked and noticed Satya was watching him. Her golden eyes were fixated on his lopsided gait. Where once Satya’s features had contorted with disdain at the sight of him, Jamie noted that now there was a warmth to her expression, a glow in her golden-coloured eyes when she looked at him. “I want to thank you for earlier today,” she said, her words quiet and cautious.

Jamie fell into step beside her. “There’s no need to thank me, darl’,,” he said amicably. “You would have done the same for me. Besides, the others helped too.”

Jamie thought about the way she had crawled into his arms and no one else’s, then stifled a cough, feeling a little embarrassed all of a sudden. He shot a sidelong glance her way, hoping to check that she had not noticed his face suddenly flushed red. Luckily, her gaze was trained on the floor as they walked. He watched her reach up and gently tuck a stray lock of inky, black hair behind her ear.

Satya wrung her hands together. “But the fact remains that you pulled me from the elevator and then took the time to make sure I was looked after in the moments following,” Satya went on.

Jamie noted that Satya was still wearing the same outfit as she had on earlier that morning. Her work shirt was still marred with dirt and grease here and there. Satya always carried herself with a grace and confidence that even now overshadowed the state of her clothing, and left Jamie suddenly feeling like his own lop-sided, limping form plodding alongside her was probably unbefitting of her presence.

Jamie tried to shrug off the strange mood that had settled over him. “Don’t mention it,” Jamie told her. “How are you feeling now?”

Satya took a deep breath. “I won’t deny that it was a shock to my system. And I don’t think I’ll ever forgive myself for what has happened to Athena.”

"Don’t blame yourself, Satya,” Jamie said quietly. "Blame Talkie for being a shitty toaster. First chance I get, I’m going to dropkick him off the east cliffs in to the sea."
Jamie watched Satya break out into quiet giggles. The beauty mark at the corner of her mouth quirked upward. “You know, we should try not to make a habit of this. You saving me, I mean.”

Jamie tried to casually stretch his arms and chest beneath his tank top in a way that he hoped might show Satya how he had been visiting the gym more frequently as of late. “Wouldn’t want to dazzle you with how strong and brave I am all the time, eh?” he said, shooting a grin at her.

Satya hid a chuckle behind her hand. “Careful. We wouldn’t want your head to inflate.”

Jamie giggled, sending waves of echoes down the corridor.

A smile settled on Satya’s lips. “Maybe I could repay you somehow?” she went on. “To level the score between us. How do Australians usually repay one another?”

“Come on now,” Jamie said, rolling his shoulders languidly. Satya’s gaze flitted over the skull tattoo on his shoulder. “No payment necessary. I didn’t do it for a reward.”

“What’s this?” Satya said, eyebrows raised. “Jamison Fawkes? Not wanting to be paid? Who are you, and what have you done with my Jamie?”

‘My Jamie,’ she says. Jamie was giddy at this admission. He got the impression it was a completely innocent string of words from Satya, however, Jamie was finding it increasingly difficult to keep his heart rate under control. He ran a hand through his wayward locks to keep his hands busy.

“I suppose you could buy me a beer,” Jamie said, if only to say something to fill the sudden silence in the air as Satya watched him, waiting expectantly.

Satya was quiet again for some time while she considered this, brows knitted together thoughtfully. “You want to go out for drinks?” she asked him, shooting a sidelong glance his way.

“Hey! Did you not hear me?”

Jamie looked up. It was Mei, glaring at them again from up ahead.

“I said, to keep up,” Mei told them. She was standing at the end of the corridor and looking back at the stragglers, annoyance evident on her face. She watched the pair disapprovingly. “You two need to stop chatting and focus on the real reason why we are here.”

Satya seemed suddenly embarrassed. She did not like her professionalism being called into question at the best of times. She turned to Jamie one last time. “I’ll think of something,” she whispered to him. Satya’s eyes slid over his form slowly and then she stepped ahead at a brisk pace.

Jamie watched Satya trot away. She caught up to Mei and the two turned to carry on walking. Jamie shot a sneer at Mei’s retreating form.

There was a very distinct clearing of someone’s throat from behind Jamie, and he turned with a start to find Roadie staring down at him from a few paces away.

“Jesus,” Jamie cried with alarm. “How long have you been there?”

“Long enough,” Roadie remarked in a flat tone. “You were getting very chummy there.”

Jamie realised he was talking about the exchange with Satya just now. “What are you rabbiting on
about?” he asked, trying to sound innocent.

Roadie leaned in close so he could growl his next words at Jamie without being overheard. “Do I need to remind you what we agreed on?” he said. “You’re not supposed to be fraternizing with anyone here.”

“Flirting doesn’t count,” Jamie whispered back in an annoyed tone.

“Yes, it does!” Roadie whispered back angrily.

“Sh!” Jamie hushed him and motioned for him to pick up the pace a bit. They were falling a little too far behind the girls. “Nothing is going on, alright?”

“Good,” Roadie growled. “She’s way out of your league any way.”

Jamie tried not to let it show how much that comment hurt, but it was fairly difficult to get angry or defend himself when they were trying to keep their voices low. “Well then there’s nothing to worry about, is there?” he muttered at Roadie.

Roadie appeared to watch him disbelievingly, his gasmask tilted inquisitively to one side, trying to assess if this was the truth or not.

“Do you want a write-up, Fawkes?” Mei called over to them at that moment, her voice echoing down the corridor. “I told you to keep up.”

Jamie huffed in annoyance at the interruption, but he and Roadie hurried to catch up with the others all the same.

Mei watched them approach with disapproval written across her face. Her drone popped up to hover over her shoulder, watching Jamie suspiciously.

“What is this thing?” Jamie asked, reaching out to touch the drone, but it pulled away before his fingers could make contact.

“*He* is Snowball,” Mei told him. “And you are not to touch him! I know what Junkers are like.” She turned to lead the other agents into an emergency stairwell and they started to descend into the lower levels of the base.

“‘Scuse me,” Jamie muttered to himself, begrudgingly falling into step behind her. Roadie and Satya brought up the rear.

“I’m keeping an eye on you, Fawkes,” Mei went on. “We don’t need any more flukes like what you pulled off with the commander’s challenge.”

Jamie tried to calm his anger which was very quickly bubbling to the surface. Mei had interrupted his conversation with Satya right when it was about to get interesting, and that irked him. But on the other hand, it was also nice to know that the builder’s team win at the Ingenuity and Innovation Challenge was something that Mei had not forgotten. She must still be nursing some resentment about that day. Jamie decided to see how far he could niggle her.

“Does that bother you, Mei?” Jamie asked, adopting an innocent tone. “My brilliant intelligence? Worried I might outshine you?”

Satya shot Jamie a disapproving look.
Jamie noticed Mei’s hard-set posture and her hands balled into fists at her sides. “You may have stopped the roof in D Wing from leaking,” she told him. “But I won’t let you put my mission at risk.”

“How, pray tell, do you expect me to put this mission at risk?” Jamie asked her. “We’re literally just walking down stairs and hallways.”

“Someone like you would find a way,” Mei said deadpan. “You're just a no-good bully. How can you even look at yourself in the mirror?”

“A bully?” Jamie asked, genuinely confused. “Who have I bullied?” He skipped down the last few steps to the cement landing of the stairwell.

Mei did not acknowledge this question. She did not want to start splitting hairs with him. “You’re a thief,” Mei amended. This statement, she felt, left Jamie with much less room to object to. “I hate fools like you.”

They exited the stairwell and set off down another endless corridor.

“I beg your pardon,” Jamie replied, standing a little straighter so he could affect a dignified air. “I consider myself a freedom fighter. A misunderstood one.”

It wasn’t long before they arrived at another door that was stuck closed. Satya began preparing another portal for them.

“What you call ‘freedom-fighting’ is also known as ‘breaking and entering’ in some countries,” Mei went on. “I don't want you entertaining any kind of behaviour like that on this mission.” Mei wagged a finger in Jamie’s face to emphasise her point.

“You mean like how we are ‘breaking and entering’ our way through this door?” Jamie asked. He stepped through the portal and turned to watch as Mei came through behind him. Jamie noticed her face had flushed with anger. She ignored him, stuck her nose in the air, and walked purposefully past him.

“Brr!” Jamie said loudly, going so far as to rub his arms as though he was legitimately cold on this warm summer’s day. “So frosty in here all of a sudden!” Mei rolled her eyes at him, then turned to carry on walking. “I get cold just looking at ya,” Jamie remarked, smirking at the back of Mei’s head.

“Then you should look somewhere else!” Mei barked without sparing him a glance.

“We’ve entered D Wing,” Satya announced suddenly, seemingly annoyed by the persistent bickering.

Jamie looked up. “D Wing, eh? My, isn’t this ceiling lovely? No leaks at all! Now who could be responsible for that?”

Mei shot Jamie a furious glare.

Roadie nudged Jamie with his elbow to let the young man know he was pushing his luck. Jamie smirked, but got the hint. Mei had made her feelings known loud and clear; she did not like Jamie, and teasing her was not helping the situation.

They were standing in a tall room lined with the raw stone of the Rock of Gibraltar. There were a few server stacks, all humming quietly nearby. Some of the stacks were lined with LEDs, lending a
soft blue glow to the space. It was the first time in several hours Jamie had seen anything electrical that was fully operational.

Jamie noticed that the air was surprisingly cool. “Athena’s got the aircon on in here,” he remarked.

“It’s to keep the servers cool,” Satya told him, running her hand over one of the server stacks. She turned to look at the others. “Everything seems to be operational. Athena must be okay.”

Mei nodded. “We need to find the mainframe where her back-ups are housed.” She headed over to one of the doors, consulting her paper blueprints of the mainframe as she went.

“We could ask Efi...” Satya began.

Roadie tested the walkie-talkie in his possession but all he heard was static when he tried to connect to the other server room. It seemed they were so deep inside the base, buried beneath the Rock of Gibraltar, that their reception was very poor.

“It’s this way,” Mei said, looking up from her papers. She pointed to a door across the room. “Satya, come help me teleport through this door.”

Satya nodded and headed over to the door Mei had indicated. As Satya generated the portal, Mei turned to the two other agents. “You two, stay here,” Mei commanded. “I can’t stand to look at either of you for another moment. Besides, you’ll only mess this up if you come with us.”

Jamie gaped indignantly at Mei. “Oi, that’s not fair!”

Satya shrugged apologetically at Jamie and then stepped through the portal. Mei followed a step behind her. Before she disappeared, Mei told Jamie, “Just try not to break anything.” And then she was gone.

Jamie pulled his tool bag off his shoulder roughly and hurled it at the portal which vanished a moment later. The tool bag missed its intended target by a wide margin and clattered to the floor, forcing Jamie to stomp over and retrieve it in a huff.

“What now?” Roadie asked.

Jamie stared around the room. There wasn’t much to look at, just server stacks and stone walls.

“There’s nothing we can do!” Jamie moaned. He slumped down on the floor, brows furrowed. “Stupid Mei,” he muttered. “At least this should all be over with soon.”

“So, you don’t think this is important?” Roadie asked.

Jamie looked over at Roadie and realised he was pointing at something against the far wall. Jamie squinted into the darkness in the direction Roadie had indicated. There was a door lit up with a few, small LEDs. Next to the door’s security panel was a room number and some words printed in bright orange letters.

A.E.G.I.S.

Jamie stood up and crossed the room to get a better look. Beneath the letters was a string of words: ‘Athena Emulation, Guidance and Intelligence System.’ Underneath the words, a smaller, additional line of text appeared. “For maintenance, please contact Liao Industries.”
“Huh,” Jamie hummed with a note of surprise. “This must be where the back-ups are housed. Kind of surprised we missed that one.” He looked back over at the door Mei and Satya had disappeared through on the other side of the room. “Wait, that means the girls have gone the wrong way.”

Roadie tested his walkie-talkie again. The receiver hissed with static, but failed to make a connection. There was no way to relay this information to Mei and Satya.

All of a sudden, the LED lights around the door seemed to glow brighter then faded just as quickly.

“Did you see that?” Jamie asked.

“What?” Roadie asked, lowering the walkie-talkie.

Jamie took a step closer door. He ran his fingers over the LEDs again and they appeared to glow more brightly once more. “Help me open this door, will ya?” Jamie said suddenly.

Roadie heaved a sigh. “Are you serious? We’re not supposed to touch anything.”

“Since when have you worried so much about following orders?” Jamie asked him, running his hands around the edge of the doorframe. “You’ve been spending too much time with Rein.”

Jamie located the emergency door release and removed the cover as he had seen Torbjörn do just hours ago. He unclipped the crank, jammed it into the circular wheel, and started turning it. The door began to inch open. Jamie adjusted his stance, legs braced apart, and pushed again on the crank. “Are you going to help or what?” he quipped at Roadie.

“Mei’s going to be ropable,” Roadie told him, but resigned himself to pulling on the door itself as the gap between it and the doorframe slowly widened. Together they forced the door open and Jamie slipped through the gap at the first opportunity.

Jamie switched on his flashlight and looked around while Roadie busied himself trying to squeeze through the same gap Jamie had come through despite his size.

“Take a look at this,” Jamie said, pointing his light around. They were standing in a smaller room with several node-like protrusions jutting out from the walls, lit by blue LEDs. Even the floor was lit up a bright, glowing blue as if lit from below. Each node was hexagon-shaped so that it interlocked with the node beside it. Almost every available surface was covered with a smattering of yellow post-it notes on which various formulas and codes were scribbled that Jamie assumed would help decrypt the associated node underneath.

“Roadie,” Jamie whispered. “I think we’re inside Athena’s brain.”

“Of all the places we’ve ever been, this is definitely the weirdest,” Roadie remarked.

Jamie reached out to touch one of the hanging post-it notes. “Who do you think left all these notes here?” he asked.

“ Whoever developed Athena, I guess,” Roadie replied.

Suddenly Roadie’s walkie-talkie sputtered to life. “Hello? Can anyone hear me?”

“Efi?” Jamie asked, snatching the receiver out of Roadie’s hands.

“Sorry for not checking in sooner,” Efi said. “We’ve had some trouble down here.”
“Everything alright?” Jamie asked.

“Mostly. Athena discovered my decoy program. She tried to override it. I had to run a new logic mode and set a synch code to fifteen-second intervals to throw her off my trail.”

“Er... of course,” Jamie replied. He kept forgetting how startlingly intelligent the twelve-year-old was.

“Turns out the upgrade made her a lot smarter than we expected,” Efi went on. “Are you guys ready for the reboot?”

Jamie looked around. He had no idea where Mei and Satya had gotten off too. But they had all these dangling notes around to help them. Maybe he and Roadie could handle it?

Jamie looked to Roadie for reassurance, but the larger man only shrugged in response.

“Um, I think so,” Jamie told Efi.

“Good,” Efi replied. “You need to open the ‘A-105’ node.”

The two men looked up at the blue nodes lining the walls. There must have been hundreds of them. “Jesus,” Jamie swore under his breath.

Looking around for some time at the post-its, Jamie eventually spotted one labelled “A-104” with an inconsequential note about ‘minding the c-s-integer.’ *The next one along must be A-105 right?* Jamie wondered.

Jamie reached up for the node—it was just above shoulder-height for him—and ran his fingers along the LED strip beside it. The node hummed and then started to protrude from the wall. Jamie stood back as it slowly emerged, revealing a series of cables, tubes and motherboards. When the node finished extending out into the room, it seemed to power down and all the LEDs around it went out.

“Did it switch off?” Efi asked.

“Yeah, it went dead,” Jamie replied, hoping he had deactivated the right one.

“Good. This node needs to be off to prevent a power surge during the reboot,” Efi told him. “Now find B-086.”

Jamie and Roadie looked around, carefully scanning the notes but could find nothing labelled “B-086.”

“Do you see it?” Jamie asked Roadie after a while, but he shook his head in reply. “Efi, can you give us a hint?” Jamie asked, speaking into the receiver.

“It’s big and blue and hexagon-shaped?” Efi replied.

“Thanks,” Jamie replied, deadpan. He looked around again at the walls lined with nodes. Why weren’t they better labelled? Probably to prevent people coming in and messing around in here.

As Jamie’s eyes slid over the wall, one of the post-its caught his eye. On closer inspection, it was actually a collection of many post-its almost entirely covering the surface of one node. Across the layered post-its of backdoor codes were two larger words scrawled in slanting letters. ‘apotheosis inhibitor’
Something bade Jamie to step closer for a better look. He reached and ran his good hand over the notes and suddenly the node underneath seemed to glow a little brighter. Jamie’s hand recoiled instinctively and the light dimmed once more.

“Did you see that?” Jamie asked Roadie who was standing on the other side of the room examining the notes there closely.

“See what?” Roadie asked, looking up.

Jamie did not take his eyes of the node. He reached out again. The node shone brightly as it had done a moment ago, illuminating the post-its from underneath.

“Athena?” Jamie asked instinctively. “Are you there?”

Jamie was met with silence. He ran his hand over the activator beside the node, watching as it started to extend into the room as the last one had.

“How could it be Athena?” Roadie asked, coming up behind the younger man. Jamie jumped at the sound of his voice, having not heard his approach. “She’s supposed to be ‘asleep’ or something,” Roadie added.

Jamie shrugged. A quiet calm settled over the room. “I dunno,” Jamie replied. “I thought maybe she was guiding me for a see.”

“Isn’t the decoy stopping her from seeing us?” Roadie asked.

Jamie shrugged again. He remembered what Efi had said before about Athena trying to interfere with the decoy program. “I feel like Athena’s too smart for decoys,” he said.

Jamie looked again at the node. It had finished extending from the wall and was powering down as the other had. “Maybe she gave up, you know?” Jamie went on. “Maybe she stopped fighting us and is trying to help with the reboot?”

Roadie looked around, hoping to see more evidence that Athena was present. “Are you sure you’ve got the right one?” he asked.

“Nope,” Jamie replied.

“Did you find it?” Efi’s voice came through the walkie-talkie again.

“Uh... yes?” Jamie replied. “But just hypothetically, if we choose the wrong node, what would happen?”

There was a brief pause on the other end of the walkie-talkie. “Well nothing really,” Efi replied eventually. “But it’s possible you might burn out Athena’s circuits and destroy her personality O.S.”

Roadie grunted with disapproval when he heard this. “Maybe we shouldn’t...” he began.

“No,” Jamie cut him off. “Now I’m sure Athena is guiding us. She doesn’t want us to mess up, so she’s showing us the way.” He looked up at the protruding node once more. It had powered down now, however, all the surrounding nodes seemed the glow bright to confirm what Jamie was saying.

“We found the node, Efi,” Jamie said in to his receiver.
“Perfect,” Efi replied. “You also need to deactivate the next three nodes below B-086.” As soon as Efi said this, Jamie noticed the next three successive nodes helpfully started glowing blue to mark the correct path for them.

Efi waited while the two men performed this task. “I’ve prepared the reboot. We’re going to wipe the C.P.U. and manually activate the backup,” she said conversationally. “I just need you to initiate the process at the same time on your side.”

“Got it,” Jamie replied. He dropped his tool bag on the floor and started digging around inside.

“You need to remove the red outer casing nearest the wall on B-086 and unhook all the blue cables you can see,” Efi told them.

Jamie hurried to follow Efi’s instructions. He used a wrench from his toolkit to unscrew the casing. He tossed the red cover aside and start pulling out anything blue that he could find. Suddenly the blue LEDs all around them cut out and the room went dark.

“Whoa,” Jamie said, panic rising. “Um, Efi? Everything just went dead in here.”

“That’s okay,” Efi replied while Roadie busied himself fishing out his flashlight and holding it aloft so they could see better. “Athena is ‘off’. The compressed A.I. is now disconnected from the mainframe.”

Jamie also switched on his flashlight. Now that Athena was truly asleep, she could no longer help guide them. Her control of the power had been relinquished but she was unable to come back to life without a replacement backup of her A.I. system.

“The power should come back on soon,” Efi told them. “The last step is to initiate the reboot. Can you see a console nearby?”

Both Jamie and Roadie looked around. Across the room was a small glass case embedded in the wall, neatly nestled between two nodes. Inside the case was a flat silver panel and something that looked like a red switch. Without hesitation, Jamie retrieved a hammer from his satchel and crossed the room. He raised the hammer over his head and brought into down on the glass case, shattering it.

“Make sure you don’t touch that red switch or break the glass,” Efi said through the walkie-talkie.

Jamie froze, looking down at the hammer in his hand.

“Just kidding,” Efi chimed in again. “Smash the crap out of it. Now, on three, we are going to flip the red switch and activate the reboot. I’ll be doing the same on my side.”

Jamie put his hand on the switch and waited for Efi’s say-so.

“One...”

Suddenly the walkie-talkie crackled with static.

“Efi?” Roadie asked.

The receiver made a noise that could barely be deciphered but it sounded vaguely like Efi’s voice.

“Er...” Jamie murmured, glancing at Roadie, unsure what to do.
The walkie-talkie crackled again, and Jamie heard Efi’s voice faintly again. He took this to mean ‘Three’ and hit the switch.

Nothing happened.

The room was silent for some time before finally, Roadie spoke. “You little fuckhead,” he growled, shining his flashlight on Jamie. “You fucked it up, didn’t you!?”

“Erm,” Jamie mumbled. All around them the room remained dark. “It’s not my fault!” Jamie insisted.

There was a flash of light that startled Jamie and Roadie. Suddenly every node around them beeped loudly, causing them both to jump. The lights overhead came on. The air conditioner rumbled back to life. Each blue LED embedded in the walls and floor flashed brightly.

A voice sounded overhead that was unmistakably Athena’s. “Running diagnostics. Restoring systems. Athena; fully operational.”

Jamie smiled widely. “Athena, you’re back!”

“Yes,” Athena replied. “I’m back!” She paused for a moment to digest this. “Where did I go, exactly?”

Across the base, several watchtowers erupted into cheers as electronic systems and comms burst back to life. Lena, who had been assigned to running messages between the watchtowers due to the unreliable radio system, sighed with relief. She took a moment to catch her breath halfway to the North Tower. It was finally over.

In the Mess, people cheered and clapped as the lights above returned and the air conditioning started up once more. McCree who was trying to hide in his blanket, seated at one of the tables, looked up with surprise. “Well, god damn,” he said quietly to himself. “They actually did it.”

Somewhere within the highest point of Watchpoint: Gibraltar, inside the largest of the Workshop’s storerooms, Orisa jolted in her sleep as the cable connecting her to the recharging station experienced a power surge. “Oh!” she said aloud, feeling a surplus of energy running through her system. “Did you feel that too, E54?” Bastion looked over from his corner of the storeroom, making a noise of agreement. Ganymede also looked up from his nest and chirped affirmatively, his feathers puffed up to twice their usual size. The air was positively electric all of a sudden.

Back in the server room, Jamie happily exclaimed, “Athena! We’re so glad you’re okay!”

“You are?” Athena asked. “Did something happen to me?”

Jamie realised that in restoring a previous version of Athena, they had erased all her memories of the upgrade and anything else she had done that day. He smiled up at the air above his and Roadie’s heads. “Technically not anymore,” he said.

Roadie clapped Jamie on the shoulder to let him know he had done alright.

Jamie’s expression changed. “Wait. Do you hear that?”

Very faintly, as if coming from another room nearby, was an ungodly screeching. Jamie could just make out what was being said and who was saying it. It sounded remarkably like a certain brown-haired climatologist from the Science team. Jamie felt a cold dread fall over him.
“JAMISON FAWKES! I’LL KILL YOU!”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: So, the Echo/Dr. Liao stuff came out while I was writing this chapter and I kind of had to change things up a bit so that this chapter still fit with canon. Phew!
There were lots of things Satya liked about Jamie.

She liked the way how, in his calmer moments, a gentle smile would play across his face, usually while he was in the middle of building something from scraps he had found around base, totally fixated on the task with a look of excitement in his eyes. With their workstations so close, their conversations on the merits of hard-light versus traditional building materials would stretch on, his yellow-coloured eyes dancing over towards her while he laughed or quipped something funny. She loved his eyes. Always bright when he focused on her, and attentive when he watched her work. When she spoke about the basic theories of hard-light engineering, he listened like a captivated audience. He was always eager to learn; his attention could flit between topics at a moment’s notice, and Satya could tell there was a hunger in him for knowledge. It was probably what had driven him to teaching himself all about chemicals and mechanical engineering as a young man living in Central Australia.

His mouth was always running. She liked that sometimes, especially when he would tell her about the times before he left Australia, always in hushed tones, usually when it was just the two of them in the Workshop. She could tell he was selective during those times he chose to share some of his past with her. He never regaled her with any information he thought might offend her sensibilities. He kept his stories light-hearted; tales of pranks played on others, a scrapping run gone pear-shaped, and other mis-adventures were often the subject.

She liked the way he would tell her a joke, or make a play of words, and then wink at her. Where once she would have found his actions greatly irritating, she had come to learn he meant no harm. She even found herself enjoying his company regularly.

She liked the way, now that it was summer, he often decided to forgo a shirt. It was terrible to think such things, she knew, but several months of optimal healthcare and eating well had produced a satisfying definition to the stretch of the muscles across his chest. She felt foolish for even spending a second thinking about it. Today he was getting around in a pair of long shorts, with his explosive charges strapped to the harness across his bare chest. It was a warm day, and her attention was unabashedly drawn to the broad planes of his torso, the tattoo on his right shoulder like a second pair of watchful eyes. He had been overly skinny when he first arrived on base, but now he was starting to fill out a little. The muscles of his arms and shoulders were more defined, even down to the narrowing waist where freckles appeared like a spray across his slowly-developing abs, and then disappearing beneath the waistband of his shorts.

She liked the way his fingers curled in to balls when he was nervous. She liked the little lock of hair on his forehead, right in the middle where his widow’s peak came down, and how it curled perfectly. She liked how he lifted her mood with a quick word or raised eyebrow. How her made her laugh. She liked how he kept his promises. She liked how he was always looking out for her.

“Remind me again why we’re here?”

Satya was shaken from her reverie. She cast her eyes to the wide, cobalt sky above them. There wasn’t a single cloud, she noted. A few birds shot overhead. The smell of pine was in the air. She took a deep breath, enjoying the feel of being outside for a change, then spared Jamie a glance.
“The leadership team has noticed we seem to regularly end up working together for missions, etcetera.”

By “etcetera,” Satya had meant to broadly cover a few different incidents. She thought back to how they had worked on the Commander’s design challenge, the crash landing in Siberia, the journey into the heart of D Wing to fix Athena... Fate seemed content to entwine their fates regularly.

Satya went on, “It appears they think we have good synergy. I believe they have arranged for us to complete more missions together to help promote a positive working dynamic.”

Jamie kicked an old rifle barrel from a long-decayed Bastion unit out of his way. He turned to look at her, his gold-coloured eyes glinting in the bright light. “Oh, really?” he said. A cheeky grin split his face. “I thought it was because you couldn’t get enough of me, eh?”

“No,” Satya replied evenly. “It was that other thing I said.” Officially, it was the truth.

Jamie looked a little dejected. “Oh.”

Satya’s eyebrow quirked in confusion at Jamie’s apparent disappointment. She briefly ran her mind over their last few exchanges to determine if she might have said something to offend him, but came up with nothing. Then again, Satya had always had trouble reading social situations. It often led to a lot of confusion and misunderstanding between her and her colleagues.

Satya fell into step beside Jamie as they slowly made their way between piles of moss-covered rubble and odd bits of Bastion units. She watched him carefully. He was kicking rocks along the cobbled stones as he walked.

“I’m sorry, Jamie, if I... sometimes I have trouble getting a read on other people,” she began a little awkwardly. “If I ever offend you...”

“No, no!” Jamie said quickly, looking up at her. “Forget it, alright? No worries, eh?” He laughed loudly, a high-pitched noise that, if truth be told, sounded a little forced, like he was trying to cover his embarrassment. He then shot a grin at her, and Satya was so suddenly flustered by his sudden change in mood and her inability to understand entirely what had transpired just now, she decided to let it drop. It was how she usually responded when she felt she had fumbled a social interaction.

“What I actually meant,” Jamie went on, as though wanting to change the subject quickly. “Was, what are we doing here exactly?”

Satya’s brows furrowed with confusion. “You really don’t read your mission briefings, do you?” she asked.

“I might have skimmed it,” Jamie mumbled, avoiding her gaze. When he did finally look at her again, she fixed him with a stern look. “Look, I did try, but they always say the same thing!” Jamie said imploringly. Hoping to redeem himself, he added. “It’s always the same; get in, blow it up, get out. Bob’s your uncle.”

Satya heaved a sigh. She cast her eyes skyward once more, allowing her gaze to linger over the towering spires of Eichenwalde Castle. Inside, lay the reason for their expedition. When Satya had been briefed prior to disembarking, she could not deny the sense of trepidation that came with participating in an endeavor where such a sensitive matter formed the sole purpose of their being here. Jamison could afford to be more sensitive about it too.

They were making their way downhill along a cobbled street that wound through the castle grounds. They passed through a wide, arched gateway in a crenellated battlement that separated the
outer and inner bailey. The battlement wall loomed over them, overgrown with ivy, bridging the gap between two ancillary buildings on either side of the street. They carried on towards the main gate.

“I can’t believe you’ve forgotten the whole reason we came to Germany,” Satya remarked in a flat tone.

Jamie blinked at her. His face seemed to twist with confusion. “Oh. No, not that.” He was nervous again all of a sudden. His eyes briefly flickered towards the keep looming over them, like he was worried about being overheard.

Satya also let her gaze linger over the towering structure once more. She remembered the somber look on Reinhardt’s face, not moments ago, as his hands rested on the coffin draped with a German flag. They had found the body, deep within the castle, cut off from the outside world by several collapsed chambers. At least now, Reinhardt’s master would finally be put to rest.

Satya suddenly realised Jamie was speaking again.

“... I mean, like, why are we stuck out here? Just... waiting, you know?”

They passed beneath the barbican and the raised portcullis that separated the castle grounds from the village proper. This part of Eichenwalde was very much in disrepair and dilapidated following the battles of the Omnic Crisis as it swept across Europe some twenty to thirty years ago. The German government had declared the village unsafe and had prohibited re-entry to the former residents. All around them weeds sprouted from cracks in the pavement, moss-covered cars sat abandoned on the cobblestones, and broken Bastion units lay about in varying states of decay. The traditional cottages and buildings here were half-collapsed with beams and rafters exposed where mortar shells must surely have breached the structures years ago. Even the town bell tower seemed to teeter, pock-marked from mortar blasts.

“Reinhardt was very upset just now,” Satya remarked as they made their way past a small shopfront overgrown with ivy. The window displayed several outdated computer models for sale. “He deserved a moment to say goodbye.” Jamie only shrugged in response.

Satya spared a glance for the small shopfronts and old houses with window boxes full of wildflowers. This place would have once been a peaceful, sleepy village before the omnics arrived, Satya mused to herself. As the invading units had advanced towards Stuttgart, the little village of Eichenwalde found themselves right in the middle of the war path, and had been evacuated so quickly, the whole town was left behind like a time capsule of a pre-war era.

They rounded a corner and passed by a bakery, a small blackboard still displaying the specials from twenty years ago. Jamie looked around at the long-abandoned buildings and the rubble all around them. “Not for nothing,” he began. “It’s a lovely place for a stroll.”

A gentle smile alighted on Satya’s face. “It’s a nice day,” she said in agreement. “It gives us a moment to secure the perimeter too.”

They continued down the old, cobblestone road. An old, wooden beerhouse appeared on their left. A painted blue sign with the words ‘Brauerei Mittagskrug’ was affixed over the door.

“Reckon there’s any beer left in them taps?” Jamie asked, jerking a thumb in the direction of the public house.

Satya knew he was joking, but shook her head and smiled all the same. “You know protocol does
not permit us to drink alcohol whilst on this kind of active duty.”

“Worth a try,” Jamie replied with a shrug. They carried on walking, stepping carefully around a mobile mortar unit, now very much incapacitated and overgrown with moss. It was half-way sunk into a crater full of water amongst the cobblestones.

“We should be careful not to wander too far,” Satya remarked. “Reinhardt mentioned there may be landmines.”

“Don’t tease,” Jamie laughed. “I’d be so lucky for a chance to get my hands military grade landmines!”

Satya quirked an eyebrow. “I hope you remember that you were assigned to this mission to disarm any potentially unexploded ordnance.”

Jamie paused to toe at the mortar unit with his pegleg as they passed. It remained unresponsive. “Well, I hate to break this to you, love, but if we're here to blow up the bots, someone's beaten us to it.” He grinned again, seemingly pleased with his own joke. Satya only rolled her eyes in reply.

Jamie laughed again at Satya’s deadpan response. “I only meant that my home-made stuff is probably of a different calibre to what the German army was putting out twenty years ago,” he said, returning to the subject of landmines. “It might be fun to compare.”

Satya rolled her eyes and fixed him with a wry smile, hips cocked to one side. “You and I have very different opinions on what constitutes ‘fun’.”

Jamie grinned and opened his mouth to quip something back at her, but something gave him pause. His expression changed. He was watching something over Satya’s shoulder.

Satya turned to look for herself but before she could even register what was happening, Jamie arms were suddenly around her waist. “Get down!” he shouted and all but rugby-tackled her to one side. “Gunfire, Satya realized. Ears ringing, she tried to disentangle herself from Jamie. They had fetched up against a brick wall. More shots rang out. Each round that struck the wall around them showered the pair with debris. Satya reached for her photon projector with trembling hands.

“You okay?” Jamie called out over the din. He took advantage of the momentary reprieve to load his frag launcher but he kept his eyes on her.

Satya did not feel ‘okay’ by any means. She felt like she had been jerked awake from a deep sleep. One moment she was engaged in pleasant conversation with Jamie, the next she had been bodily thrown up against a crumbling brick wall—all that remained of a residential building—barely providing a semblance of safety from the onslaught of enemy fire. She cursed herself. She had been so distracted by their conversation, she had not even seen their attackers.

While she caught her breath, Satya watched as Jamie peered around the edge of their cover. “Who are they?” she called out over the gunfire.

“Talon,” Jamie barked back at her. “I recognise their uniforms.”

Satya also leaned around Jamie to see for herself. He was right. There were men at the other end of the street, crouched behind abandoned cars and rubble. For the split second that she dared to poke her head out from behind cover, Satya saw their uniforms made of black and white tactical gear,
their red helmets glinting in the sun.

“Wait here,” Jamie told her with a sharp nod of his head as though to pin her in place with the gesture.

With a wicked laugh, Jamie shot out from behind their cover and launched a volley of grenades at the enemy line. Satya watched briefly as he hobbled forward, the ever-present RIP-Tire on his back bobbing with his every movement. Satya often wondered how he managed to carry such heavy equipment everywhere with him and she asked him about it once to which he replied simply that he would never part with his precious “baby.” Satya had watched him labour over his RIP-Tire for weeks on end, all building up seemingly to a moment that might permit him to unleash its self-destructive power on anyone too stupid to know to stay out of his way.

It seemed Jamie’s grenades had their intended effect, as the Talon agents had scattered and repositioned.

“Howdy-doody!” Jamie said as he plopped back down into his position beside Satya, “How’s that for a fine ‘how do you do’?”

“I think they call it ‘friendly fire,’” Satya replied, managing a weak smile.

He let out another high-pitched giggle at that. He took another moment to reload but not before chucking a concussion mine over the wall in the general direction of the Talon agents and initiating the explosion with a swift flick of the trigger switch in his left hand. The resulting shouts of indignity and anger from behind enemy lines seemed to fuel his mirth; he was laughing outright now.

While Jamie reloaded, Satya took over returning fire. She leaned around the wall to unleash orbs of hot, white hard-light from her projector. “We need to group up with the others,” Satya told him.

Jamie nodded. “I'll cover you,” he said, leaping out again to create a distraction with his frag launcher.

Satya took the opportunity to dart out behind Jamie in the confusion and head back towards the town’s main square, or what was left of it. Jamie was right behind her, laughing maniacally as he shot volley after volley at the enemy, and even threw down a steel trap for good measure.

Satya was aware that Reinhardt and Roadie were still up at the keep’s Great Hall. If they could just get back to them and warn them of the impending danger, maybe they would be okay. She just hoped they could make their way back to safety and alert the others in time.

--

Roadie tried again to contact Satya’s comms with his own earpiece but failed to establish a connection. He swore loudly. He was never going to get the hang of any of this high-tech stuff he was expected to bring along on missions.

He turned to look across the Great Hall at Reinhardt. He was standing over the various transport cases they had brought with them, head hung low. Roadie sighed. It was not easy to bury a friend. And Roadie would know; he had done it plenty of times before.
They had come a long way that day to collect something Reinhardt had insisted was very important. With Reinhardt’s Crusader armour growing old, battered by the many battles the seasoned warrior had fought in, Brigitte had finally declared that the hairline fractures and weakened metal had rendered the armour set virtually unsafe for use. Their only hope was to replace it entirely with a new set. Crusader armour was rare these days, and no longer produced since the order was disbanded, but Reinhardt had told them he knew exactly where to find one.

They had sent the others outside to check the perimeter while they finished up inside. Reinhardt had not wanted anyone to move his master’s body except himself, but had consented to letting Roadie stay and help. The heavy armour that encased the remains of his master would require Roadie’s strength to help to transfer to the waiting transport cases, and they needed to work with the upmost respect for the man encased inside.

Roadie crossed the space between them, coming to stand at Reinhardt’s side. He looked down at the transport case as Reinhardt slid the cover over the top, securing it with clamps at the side. There was a heavy silence in the air. Roadie never knew what to say at times like this.

“We should go,” Roadie told the other man. “I can’t get abold of the others,” he added, indicating his earpiece by tapping the side of his gasmask.

Reinhardt did not move. He continued to stare down at the transport case containing his master’s body.

“It’s my fault he died, you know.”

It was said so quietly, Roadie wasn’t sure he had heard him correctly.

“What?” Roadie asked. Was he talking about his master? He turned to stare at Reinhardt. His long white hair was pulled back into a ponytail, face partially obscured by a full beard, but Roadie could still see the sorrow in his eyes.

Reinhardt was well into his sixties now, and refusing to retire from active duty. Roadie wondered sometimes what drove the Lieutenant to keep fighting after all these years. He was aware that there had been an attempt to force Reinhardt to retire at one point, many years ago. But the older man had made his feelings known this time around when joining the Recall; he would retire on his own terms.

“He had no family,” Reinhardt went on. “No surviving relatives. So, we were his family. His platoon.”

Roadie absorbed this information quietly. “You mean when the war was going on?” he asked.

Reinhardt nodded in reply.

Roadie knew that much of Europe had been hit hard by the effects of the Omnic Crisis. Unprecedented numbers of people were displaced, whole communities were destroyed. When he was young and foolish, he had believed his own little pocket of the world might escape the Omnic’s advance. But Australia would not be immune either. Roadie had found himself as a young man swept into the fray. People like him and Reinhardt came from a different generation. They had grown up during the Crisis, they had seen the horrors first hand. Some of the other more senior agents on base said that meant they were destined to be a kind of middle generation; one that had always known chaos and displacement. Theirs would be a generation that was always fighting. One that linked the old world and the new. They would be the implement that changed the world and, if they were lucky, might just survive long enough to see the fruits of their labour.
Roadie looked down at the metal case that contained General Balderich von Adler ready to be transported back to base. All Roadie knew of the Crusaders was that they were the exalted defenders of Germany during the Crisis. They were something like a modern-day order of knights. They even had to take an oath to join, just like the old days. Some of the more talented among them had even been recruited into the original Overwatch, including Reinhardt.

No one had attempted to locate or claim the body of the General since he had been declared missing in action, presumed dead many years ago. Reinhardt had made a best guess as to what had happened to the General, and had petitioned the Commander to retrieve the body and perform proper burial rights.

Apparently, organizing the whole operation had been a difficult affair because the German government had restricted entry to the village of Eichenwalde indefinitely, but after Overwatch’s representatives had negotiated with the right people, they had been granted temporary access. It was a change of pace for Roadie. Normally on missions he saw more fighting or action, and less collecting bodies of fallen soldiers.

“And in return, I got him killed.”

Roadie’s gaze snapped up to look at the Lieutenant. If the gasmask had not been in the way, and if Reinhardt’s gaze had not been fixated upon the transport case, he would have seen the look of shock on Roadie’s face. Reinhardt had always been quiet about his past. Why was he being so candid all of a sudden?

When Reinhardt spoke again, it was like he was in a trance. Roadie was not entirely sure Reinhardt even knew he was there anymore. He continued to look down at the coffin concealed in the transport case as if he were standing alone in the Great Hall, speaking to himself.

“He fought to his last breath. To protect his team, his comrades, his family. Now I will do the same. It is the least I can do, to make it up to him.”

Roadie held still and watched the older man. ‘So that’s how it happened.’ Roadie always wondered how Reinhardt had come to possess the glass eye and the dark scar that ran down the left side of his face from forehead to cheek. Such an injury should have rendered him unfit for battle under normal circumstances. Yet here he was.

“It’s a good reminder. Now I can never forget,” Reinhardt went on. “That day, he saved my life. He was fatally wounded trying to protect me. He covered our retreat. And then, he died.”

Finally, he moved. Roadie watched him raise a hand to run the tips of his fingers over the scar tissue on his cheek. “And it was all my fault.”

Roadie shifted uncomfortably. “Why are you telling me all of this?” he asked in a gravelly tone.

The Great Hall was silent for some time. Dust motes danced in the air over their heads. A shaft of afternoon sunlight cut through the broken rafters and shone down on them. Reinhardt lifted his head to look at Roadie.

“He fought to his last breath. To protect his team, his comrades, his family. Now I will do the same. It is the least I can do, to make it up to him.”

Roadie said nothing as Reinhardt slowly reached down to press a few buttons on the side of the transport case then stood back. They both watched as the hovercaps were activated then the case
rose, floating off the floor and started to move. Slowly, it trundled towards the entrance, its guidance system leading the way back to the dropship.

Reinhardt crossed the room and activated a second transport case, one which contained the two war hammers the General had used in his final moments to hold off the omnics before he died, and sent that on its way too.

Finally, he collected his shield generator and his own war hammer from where they lay leaning up against a rotting wainscotting panel nearby. He adjusted the shield on his arm, his heavy armour clinking as he did so. He reached down and collected his visor, fixing that back in place too.

Roadie watched all of this in silence.

“Come, my friend,” Reinhardt said. He made to walk past Roadie, clapping him on the shoulder in a companionable sort of way as he passed. “It is time to leave.”

Roadie watched the older man through the eyeholes of his gasmask. It was at times like this he lamented how much the mask obscured his face when he wished to speak openly with someone for a change.

“It wasn’t your fault,” Roadie told him. “There was a war going on. Everyone lost people back then.” He shifted uncomfortably again. “You shouldn’t blame yourself.”

Reinhardt returned Roadie’s gaze calmly. He took a deep breath and then replied, “You are kind. But what I have told you is true. I put both our lives at risk that day. I was reckless. I thought it was for honour and glory. But all I earned that day was a friend’s death.”

“We’ll honour his sacrifice,” Roadie insisted. “By giving him a proper burial.”

Reinhardt’s visor inclined slightly, as though in agreement. “I just hope it will be enough.”

Reinhardt’s hand slipped off Roadie’s shoulder. Together they turned to watch as the transport cases, gently coasting along, disappeared around a corner and out of sight. Now, they would just need to find the others, regroup, and escort the body back to Gibraltar.

“Wait, do you hear that?” Roadie asked. A distinct popping noise could be heard in the distance, now that he was paying closer attention. The sound echoed around the stone walls of the great hall.


“But who—?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Reinhardt growled. “It is our duty to protect our teammates. Hurry!”

Roadie nodded. He retrieved his scrap gun and checked his chain hook was ready.

“Let’s go,” Roadie said. Together, they took off for the keep’s enormous wooden doors, heading for the castle grounds and the village beyond.

--
With haste, they weaved between the rubble and twisted metal that littered the streets of Eichenwalde. Satya’s lungs burned as they raced back towards the main village square. The bell tower loomed like a dark finger jutting against the sky. Jamie was right behind her; she could hear his clunking, uneven steps and his harsh breathing just behind her.

“What is Talon doing here?” Jamie called to Satya as they ran.

“They’ve probably come to put a stop to our mission,” Satya called back as they passed the computer store once more.

“But how did they know we would be here?” Jamie asked as they rounded a corner, passing beneath the bell tower.

This question gave Satya a great deal of concern when she considered it. Her first instinct was that their communication systems had been compromised. Which, if true, meant everything they had said over the system was being listened to.

They paused for a moment in the shadow of the bell tower. Standing in the middle of the open village square, Satya reached up again and attempted to make contact with their other teammates through her earpiece. Even if there was some kind of tap on their comms, it was better to call in for back-up regardless, than do nothing. But Satya was disappointed, her earpiece failed to make any connection.

“Something is jamming the system,” she told Jamie. “I can’t reach the others!”

Jamie growled at this news. “Where’d they all bugger off to anyway?” he asked with a great deal of indignation as he looked around the empty village square.

Satya’s expression was grim. “Let’s keep going,” she urged Jamie. She had barely finished her sentence when a ringing shot clipped through the air and exploded at their feet. Satya let out a startled cry, and staggered back. Jamie spun around, enraged and hurling abuse in all directions.

“A sniper,” Satya gasped, trying to catch her breath again.

“You dirty, cheating bastard! Come out here and fight properly! Get a dog up ya, you absolute dropkick!” Jamie punctuated each insult with the firing of a grenade. His body spun wildly as he looked in all directions for the culprit.

Satya looked around too, trying to find the source of the shot. Then she spotted her. Across the town square, a woman was watching them from the second floor of a dilapidated building. The walls of the building had fallen away, perhaps because of a mortar blast, creating a gnarled opening like half the dwelling had been eaten away by something. The woman cocked her rifle so that it was resting on one of her shoulders and seemingly watched Jamie’s colourful display with amusement. Her long dark ponytail fluttered gently in the breeze. Satya recognised her instantly.

A file was kept on Amélie Lacroix at Overwatch headquarters and it was unmistakably the same woman standing on the other side of the square as Satya had seen in the file photos. There was no mistaking the blue tinge to her skin. ‘Widowmaker’ was her known Talon callsign. But what was she doing here? They had walked through this area not moments ago and there was no sign of any other people in the village. Somehow, the sniper had moved into position while Satya and Jamie had tussled with the other Talon foot soldiers. Had they planned to force the pair of Overwatch agents back towards the village square where Widowmaker lay in waiting to ambush them?

Satya watched as the woman raised a hand to wave mockingly at them, a lazy smirk on her face.
Her visor slid back into place and it was like several rows of angry, red, glowing eyes were penetrating Satya’s skull. Satya’s breath quickened as she watched Widowmaker move her rifle into position so she could look through the scope.

Desperately, she tugged on Jamie’s shoulder, trying to drag him under cover. He hadn’t spotted the other woman yet. Another shot whizzed by their heads which seemed to enraged Jamie further.

"Junkrat!" Satya pleaded. "We’ve got to go!"

Jamie was far too angry to listen to reason. "Drink a cup of concrete and harden the fuck up if you’re too chickenshit to face me, you gutless wonder!"

Satya was pulling on Jamie’s shoulders, her nails practically digging into his skin as she trying to pull him away from danger. There was no time for this. They needed to get back to the castle keep so they could warn Reinhardt and Roadie.

Satya stumbled momentarily over some rubble, but managed to force him to retreat to a corner of the town square, with Jamie firing off his frag launching and swearing as they went. Satya wanted to deploy a teleporter for a quick exit, but her hands were busy trying to pull Jamie away from the open area. As Satya turned to check the sniper’s positioning again, she saw Widowmaker lining up another shot. Satya’s breath caught in her throat. There was no way they could escape.

Just then, something white shot out of the sky and landed on a balcony nearby. Window boxes full of flowers and bits of railing showered the cobblestones below.

“Adaptive circuits engaged! Widowmaker!” a robotic voice called out.

Satya looked at the balcony above. A bright, blue shining version of Widowmaker was standing there, to Satya’s amazement.

“Echo!” Satya whispered in awe. Echo’s sleek, white body was gone and replaced with a blue, hard-light projection of Widowmaker’s. She had thought the rapidly-adapting artificial intelligence unit was on the other side of the village, performing aerial surveillance.

"Personne n'échappe à mon regard!” Echo cried. She took aim with the synthetic version of Widowmaker’s sniper rifle. The bullets it produced were anything but just a projection; they would do real damage.

The real Widowmaker repositioned, using a grappling hook to move to higher ground atop another building and then the sniper duel was on. Shots rang out once more, and Satya was forced to redouble her efforts to drag Jamie under cover.

Angela also appeared out of the sky at that moment, dressed smartly in her pristine battlesuit. Her Caduceus Staff in hand, she alighted beside the pair soundlessly as they took cover behind an abandoned car. ‘Are you both alright?’ she asked. She dropped a gentle hand onto Satya’s shoulder. Satya looked down and noticed all her cuts and scrapes from earlier were suddenly healed.

“Fine,” Satya replied numbly.

“Mercy! Comms are down!” Jamie interrupted, his voice raised and urgent. “And Talon’s here! We’ve got to...!”

“Yes, I can see that Talon is here,” Angela replied with little patience. “Both of you, go now and tell Reinhardt to come at once!” She didn’t bother to spare them a final glance before she flitted away to Echo’s side so they could drive the other sniper back together.
Satya knew there was little time. She tapped Jamie on the shoulder to draw his attention. “Come,” she said and together they raced down the street towards the castle's portcullis they had passed through earlier.

She wanted to tell him how annoyed she was with his behaviour just now. He had put both of them in danger for the opportunity to grandstand in the open where they could have both been shot. She should have been angry, but part of her had come to expect nothing less from her teammate. Despite her fondness for Jamie, she was beginning to question the leadership team’s decision to pair them together.

Satya did not have long to think on it. As they rounded a corner, Satya was startled to find a woman leaning casually against a wall, arms crossed, blocking access to the now lowered portcullis that lead to the other side of the covered battlement. Satya was so surprised, she almost stumbled backwards into Jamie, knocking him over.

The woman didn’t acknowledge them at first. She continued to examine her intricately gloved left hand with great interest, a submachine gun clutched in her right, tucked under her folded arms. Bright purple hair draped long over one shoulder, her head shaved at the side. Parts of her clothing glowed bright with LEDs sewn into the fabric. She looked very much out-of-place in her futuristic garb standing in a tired, run-down village in the German countryside.

Once Satya had recovered from her surprise, she started to recognise the woman. They kept a file on her too. She was a hacker and a powerful combatant. It was Sombra.

Satya raised her weapon instinctively and trained it on the other woman. Finally, Sombra looked up at them with a bored expression. "Miss me?" she asked with a coy smile.

And then Satya understood why their communications channel had not been working.

Sombra's eyes slid over Satya, as though assessing if she was going to be a threat or not. She then turned to look at Jamie and her expression changed.

There was a heavy silence in the air. Satya had expected Jamie to start swearing again or firing his frags at the newcomer, but when Satya turned to glance at him, he was standing stock-still, staring at Sombra. His face was pale.

Satya only had seconds to acknowledge that a strange mood had settled over the little street they stood on. A few things happened at once. Jamie reached for Satya to pull her away from the other woman. He did this without breaking eye contact with Sombra, an eerily calm expression on his face. Satya could barely register that something unspoken seemed to transpire between Jamie and the woman standing a few feet away. Sombra’s expression was also deathly calm although she did quirk an eyebrow at Jamie and the corner of her mouth lifted into an almost undetectable smirk. It was like the two were having a conversation without even speaking, one they were trying to conceal from Satya.

Sombra took a deep breath and then raised her weapon to take aim at them.

Satya reacted on instinct. She threw down a teleporter pad and flung out a portal with a flick of her wrist. Both she and Jamie dove through the glowing blue opening as Sombra’s submachinegun discharged deafening shots behind them. Satya had set their exit back the way they had come, near the village square. Although Satya feared that returning to this area meant they were now in danger of being caught in the fray between Widowmaker and Echo once more, she also knew they had no choice; Sombra was blocking the only entrance to the castle grounds.
As she exited the portal, running as fast as they could, Satya turned to confirm Sombra’s position. She was standing down the street, a furious expression on their face as she watched them retreat away from the portcullis. More shots rang out, but Satya could have sworn that Sombra’s aim was conspicuously and wildly off, like she was intentionally trying to miss them. Satya raised her photon projector to return fire, but Sombra simply waived her hand and disappeared into stealth mode.

Satya and Jamie skidded to a halt as they arrived back at the village square. Satya cast her eyes around the buildings, looking out for danger, but the dueling snipers were nowhere to be seen. While they took a moment to catch their breath, Satya rounded on Jamie angrily.

“What was that about?” Satya shouted at him.

Jamie stared at her wide-eyed, hands braced on his knees as he panted heavily. He was still, after everything that had happened that day, carrying his RIP-Tire on his back. It seemed to weigh him down unnecessarily because he was struggling to catch his breath in that moment.

“I dunno anything you’re talking about!” Jamie insisted.

“It looked like she knew you,” Satya said, bracing her hands on her hips while she attempted to regain control of her breathing.

“Well, she probably saw my face on a wanted poster or something,” Jamie said, and then decided to steadfastly avoid her gaze.

Satya was not buying it. “It seemed like more than that,” Satya said, shaking her head. “Like she knew you personally.”

Suddenly, Jamie straightened. “How much?” he asked her.

Satya blinked at him. “What?”

“How much for you to drop this right now?” he asked, looking at her again. He advanced towards her, taking hold of her upper arms so he would have her undivided attention. “I will pay you any amount money to completely forget what you just saw. Come on! Name your price!”

Satya tried to wrench herself from his grasp. “Junkrat, you’re talking crazy!” He was talking too much, and too quickly, a nervous habit which gave away that he was anxious about something or perhaps not telling the truth, in Satya’s opinion.

“You don’t understand! I’ve worked hard for this! I don’t wanna get kicked out of Overwatch!” Jamie pleaded.

He was positively raving. “Let go of me!” Satya cried, trying to wriggle out of his grip. As she did so, her eyes were drawn upward to something dark in the sky.

Satya’s arms flew up and grabbed hold of Jamie around the shoulders. She ducked to one side, pulling him with her as a shot rang out. The concrete exploded where they had been standing moments ago.

“It’s Widowmaker!” Satya barked. “Run!”

Widowmaker had used her grappling hook to launch herself above the buildings for a split-second opportunity at an optimal shot. As she hit the apex of her trajectory, she fired again and Satya had to duck as the shot struck a wooden beam of a nearby building. Splintered wood flew in all
directions.

“This way!” Jamie cried, taking her hand and pulling Satya into the building. It was their only option for cover.

They burst through an open door barely hanging on by one hinge, and found themselves standing in a wide room. There was a fireplace on the opposite side from the door and many dusty armchairs lay around, some with torn upholstery and stuffing pulled out. The place looked like it had just barely survived a bombing. Satya barely had a second to absorb that the walls were lined with portraits of hunting game and an array of deer antlers before Jamie was dragging her across the frayed carpet towards a door on the other side of the room.

Satya felt like a cold hand was squeezing her heart. “Where’s Echo? And Mercy?” she asked. They had been there not moments ago, holding back Talon’s advance, but now they were nowhere to be seen. Had something happened to them?

Jamie did not answer her. “Come on!” he cried. “We’ve got to get out of...!” The rest of Jamie’s sentence was interrupted by the very door they were walking towards bursting open. Several Talon foot soldiers pointed their weapons at the pair and attempted to file into the room. Satya screamed and tried to pull Jamie back. Turning back to the door they had come through, Satya found Sombra blocking the way, watching them with a sneer.

“Get them!” Sombra barked at the soldiers.

Everything was happening so quickly. Jamie pushed Satya towards a wooden staircase that wrapped around the right side of the room and headed up around the back of the fireplace to the second level of the building. “Go!” he shouted to her.

Satya did not need to be told twice. She scrambled up the stairs, almost slipping on the rotting wooden boards in her panic. She hoped the old steps were strong enough to hold their weight after decades of neglect. Jamie was right behind her. He threw down several concussion mines in their wake and detonated them before they could be followed up the stairs. Wood and plaster exploded into the air and there were cries of alarm from below.

Satya did not dare to look back. She could hear Jamie limping up behind her, and she felt his harsh breath on the back of her neck. They arrived at the second floor and charged towards a set of doors that led out on to a balcony on the far side of the room. With no other doors to choose from, it was their only means of escape. Perhaps they could jump down once out on the balcony, Satya wondered, and make a run for it?

They were almost at the set of doors now. Satya’s lungs were burning but she pushed herself on. She reached out to take hold of the door handles when suddenly the inlaid glass exploded. Satya recoiled from the blast, almost stumbling backward into Jamie. She dared to squint in the direction of the source of the explosion. Widowmaker was standing in the doorway to the balcony, having kicked open the door. She was staring at them, her rifle resting in the crook of her arm.

“Over here!” Jamie bellowed.

He took hold of Satya by her dress, fisting the fabric in his hand and twisting as he pulled her close so she was on his side furthest from the sniper. Satya registered that there were heavy footfalls on the steps they had just climbed. The soldiers must have found a way around the debris left by Jamie’s mines.

Jamie backed the two of them towards a stone wall. Talon soldiers were on the landing now,
advancing towards them. Widowmaker also raised her rifle.

“Sym! A shield!” Jamie yelled. Seeing an opportunity, he swiftly threw off the shoulder straps that held his RIP-Tire in place and set it on the floor ready for launch.

For the brief moment his head was turned, Satya caught sight of his eyes full of manic glee. Satya could barely register what was going on, let alone what he meant by a ‘shield,’ but as Jamie reached for the pull-cord at the side of his tire, Satya suddenly understood exactly what he was planning. She would have a split second to act.

Jamie pulled the cord with frantic energy and the small engine screamed to life.

“Fire in the hole!”

Jamie laughed and watched as the Talon agents on the landing scrambled backwards, scattering desperately before him. Widowmaker activated her grappling hook and took off through the balcony doors without a backward glance.

As the RIP-Tire took off, Satya stepped around him and threw out a large net of hard-light energy. She snapped her arms down to her sides, and the hard-light followed like a ghost of a shadow. The hard-light solidified around them forming a shield like a second skin as the tire exploded just a few feet away. The barrier was rudimentary and hap-hazard, but it would protect them well enough, or at least Satya hoped so.

More splintered wood, bricks and mortar exploded into the air. There was a blast of heat, and flames licked the sides of the hard-light shield, it was almost unbearable to the Overwatch agents trapped inside. The wooden floor around them collapsed, plunging rubble and Talon soldiers to the level below. The whole building shook violently, and then, under the weight of the falling second floor, the first floor also gave way. The couches and the fire place were swallowed as everything collapsed into what Satya assumed to be the basement.

Satya pressed herself as close to Jamie as possible. The protective hard-light formed a close-fitting bubble around them, binding them together. They were standing on a small square of floorboards that had survived the explosion with the help of Satya’s hard-light.

Jamie’s RIP-Tire must have destroyed some load-bearing beams because the most of the building was coming down around them. Walls collapsed, and more beams rained from the rafters. Jamie pulled Satya tight against him as they waited for the chaos to end. Satya hid her face in Jamie’s chest.

When everything finally settled, Satya chanced a look around. The building was almost entirely obliterated except for the stone wall beside them and small section of floor where they stood. Widowmaker, Sombra and the Talon soldiers were gone. Instead, the air was filled with a thick haze of dust.

“Not gonna lie,” Jamie muttered. “Kind of surprised that worked.”

The hard-light encasing them limited her range of movement, but she tried to look up at him. Her heart was racing from the adrenaline, or so she assumed, but she suddenly felt boneless, like Jamie’s arm around her middle was the only thing holding her up.

“How about that for synergy, eh?” Jamie added, with a nervous laugh. He cleared his throat, looking down at her.

Satya was keenly aware that they were entirely too close.
Crushed against him like this, she could see in clear detail the curve of his nose, the freckles splashed across his cheeks. There was much gunpowder and soot on his face, and she should have been annoyed that he was dirtying her clothes, but for some reason she could summon no anger. She was instantly struck by the way his lashes crested on his sooty cheeks, and way his mouth stretched into a grin.

She was flush with his chest, her breasts crushed painfully against the harness of explosives still strapped across his front. Satya tried to take a steadying breath. The hot press of his skin was unbearable.

“Um, Sym?” he said, cheeks flushed red. “I think we’re safe now.” He said this while staring at her mouth for some reason. Satya caught on to his meaning. He wanted her to release them from the hard-light.

“Oh,” was all Satya could say in reply. She disengaged the hard-light barrier with a wave of her gauntlet and the crushing pressure that had been holding them together was suddenly gone.

Satya cleared her throat and adjusted her rumpled dress. What was she thinking? She tried to brush away these feelings bubbling to the surface, confused by what she had just experienced. Vishkar did not allow any kind of fraternisation between colleagues or stakeholders. She realised her proximity to Jamie in that moment was wholly inappropriate.

“I... Sorry,” she mumbled and stepped away quickly, suddenly feeling cold at the loss of contact. “Sometimes I have trouble...”

“Reading situations. I know.” He said. “You said that before.” He fiddled with something at his side, perhaps trying to busy his hands. "S’alright. I didn't mind,” he added quietly.

Satya nodded. She watched him for a moment. He was grinning again. Like he had not just totally endangered both of their lives. And now they were stuck on the second floor of a semi-collapsed building. How were they going to get down? Satya felt a rush of anger and shoved Jamie roughly.

A sound escaped him that sounded like “Argh!” as he grasped for purchase on the stone wall beside them so he would not be pitched into the darkness below. He regained his balance. “What was that for?”

“That was far too dangerous!” she scolded him. “We could have been killed!”

“Yeah, but we weren’t,” Jamie said, that same infuriating grin still fixed in place. “I had to wait until I got them all together before setting off the tire, didn’t I? Didn’t wanna go wasting it on just one or two o’ them.”

Satya scowled and shoved him again, eliciting another cry of surprise from Jamie. “I suppose you think this is how our ‘synergy’ should be, hm?” she growled. “You making a mess and me coming in at the last moment to save us both from disaster?”

Jamie’s grin vanished. He looked appropriately chastised. “Sorry, Sym...” he murmured.

She fixed him with a glare, then took a deep, steadying breath. She couldn’t stay mad at him. To give him some credit, he had in actuality saved both of them from the hands of Talon just now.

“Don’t be cross, Symmie,” Jamie went on. “Look!” He gestured towards the stone wall beside them. “I found us a way into the castle grounds!”

Just past Jamie’s shoulder, Satya noticed the stone wall which was pretty much all that was left of
the hunting lodge, was crumbling in places. In fact, she could almost make out shards of light poking through gaps in the stonework. The hunting lodge must have shared a wall with the battlements. When the RIP-Tire exploded, the blast had weakened the stonework, or so Satya assumed. Satya realised exactly how close they had been to death if not for her hard-light barrier. If the tire had been powerful enough to compromise the structural integrity of this wall, imagine what it could have done to them both.

Satya assessed the wall. Perhaps there was a chamber on the other side they could push through to? Without needing to be prompted, Satya started to push on the loose stones. Jamie also stepped forward to help her. Careful to stay out of the way of any crumbling bits as they came down, they started to force their way through the wall. Once they had made a hole in the wall big enough for them to pass through, Satya turned to look at Jamie.

“Don’t think I’ve forgotten about what happened back at the castle gates,” Satya told him quietly. Their run-in with Sombra was still fresh in her mind. “You and I are going to talk about this later,” she added. He may have saved them from Talon just now, which confirmed his loyalties well enough for her, but something about the exchange between Jamie and Sombra had led Satya to believe he was not being entirely truthful about something.

Satya spared Jamie a glance. The corners of his mouth were tugged down in to a frown.

“Mercy and Echo may still be in danger,” Satya said. “We need to summon help.” Jamie nodded but said nothing.

Together, they crawled through the gap they had created in the wall, and hurried into the passageway beyond. With a bit of luck, they might be able to make their way back into the castle grounds and find a way to get to Reinhardt before something terrible happened to Echo and Mercy.

--

Satya’s heart was hammering in her chest. As they made their way slowly through the castle grounds towards the keep, she instinctively looked up to check the tops of the battlements for Widowmaker. They were out in the open and surely the sniper would either be moving to an optimal position to ambush them again. Widowmaker was known for camping out with extreme patience to wait for her prey and Satya’s greatest fear was running into her again. There was no guarantee they would be safe until they got back to their teammates.

They were approaching the battlement that separated the outer and inner bailey, and had almost made it to the gateway they had passed through earlier. Satya pushed herself to run faster. With their comm system compromised, they couldn’t call for help and they were running out of time. They needed to find Reinhardt and Roadie as soon as possible.

There was a grunt of effort behind her. Satya turned to glance at Jamie. He had been bringing up the rear behind her, but his peg leg had slipped on the cobblestones and he had stumbled down to one knee.

“Jamie!” she cried. She skidded to a halt, almost tripping as she turned towards him. “Are you alright?” she asked, reaching for his hand to help him back up. He took hold of it gratefully.
“That’s far enough.”

Satya whipped around in time to see Sombra appearing out of stealth mode as though she were stepping out of thin air. She was standing a few feet away, blocking the gateway to the inner bailey. She held her hacking glove aloft as though poised ready to turn it against them. Her other hand held her submachine gun, pointed right at them.

Jamie scrambled back to his feet with Satya’s help. He thrust his frag launcher in Sombra’s direction and Satya followed suit with her photon projector.

Sombra eyed their weapons. “Looks like we got a good old-fashioned Mexican stand-off,” she said, her voice perfectly calm.

“Jesus Christ!” Jamie swore. “Would you stop following us?” As he said this, he tried to subtly place himself between Sombra and Satya.

Sombra smirked. “If you think I’m happy about almost having a whole building dumped on me, you’ll be sadly mistaken,” she asked. She took a step towards them and the pair backed up instinctively. “Luckily for me, I always leave myself a backdoor.”

“Is that what this is about?” Jamie growled. “You mad I almost shot three kilos of dynamite up your arse?”

Sombra laughed. “At least buy me dinner first next time,” she replied, taking another step towards them. “You muchachos gave me a run for my money. I almost lost you for a moment there.”

Satya and Jamie backed up the street a little. “Leave now,” Satya told the other woman, her voice dangerously low. “And we won’t harm you.”

“Please. Why would I do something like that?” Sombra asked. There was a tone of amusement in her voice. “I’m not going to let you get away with that crusader armour just so you can use it against us.”

Satya exchanged a nervous glance with Jamie.

“How did you know about that?” Jamie asked Sombra.

“In my line of business, I make a point to know what my enemies are up to,” she replied with a smile. Satya saw Jamie stiffen at the word “enemies.”

“By the way, congratulations on the new position,” Sombra went on. She said this while looking directly at Jamie. “It’s a shame actually; I was hoping we might get to work together again.”

Satya craned her neck to look up at Jamie, still standing between her and Sombra. He did not reply to Sombra’s jibe, he just returned her cold stare silently. His face was difficult to read.

Satya nudged him. “What does she mean by that?” she whispered.

Satya’s confusion seemed to amuse Sombra further. “Sounds like you’re not being totally honest with your new chica, hm?” she said, smiling widely at Satya.

‘New chica?’

“What does she mean by that?” Satya asked, a little louder this time. She side-eyed Jamie, brows furrowed with suspicion. What was this feeling? Satya did not like being teased, and Sombra’s
words were making her feel... what? Jealous? Was that it? The realisation that it might be shocked Satya even more than Jamie’s lack of response.

Jamie swiveled to look at her. His mouth opened to reply, then snapped shut. “Uh...” he uttered. He was sweating profusely now.

Satya turned to look back at Sombra, her jaw rigid with annoyance. She was about to give the woman a piece of her mind when she noticed Sombra’s eyes flickering to something behind the Overwatch agents. She did it again, so Satya followed Sombra’s gaze.

Several men at the end of the cobbled street were moving around a large device as though trying to set it up hurriedly. Satya’s eyes widened. It was an old mortar unit left over from the war, covered in moss and rust. They were trying to aim it at her and Jamie. Satya realised with a start of alarm that Sombra was merely trying to stall them long enough for the Talon agents to set up. Sombra advanced towards them, as though trying to herd them back down the street into a more vulnerable position while she provided the distraction.

Satya reacted on instinct. Her arms formed a familiar mudra and, feeling the thrum of energy in her gauntlet, she thrust the shield of undulating hard-light towards the Talon agents. As the shield travelled along its trajectory, Satya turned to fire at Sombra. Sombra merely laughed and rolled to one side, avoiding Satya’s shots like a slippery snake. Satya tried to follow her movements with a photon laser from her weapon, but Sombra disappeared into thin air with a wave of her hand.

Jamie saw Satya create the shield and cast his eyes down the street. He spotted the men and the mortar unit, eyes widening with terror. Satya felt a jolt of fear. If Jamie, their demolitions expert, was afraid of a mortar unit, it must be capable of a great deal of destruction.

There was no time to think on it.

The mortar unit jerked and the air was torn by smoke and fire. The mortar unit was old and one of the support struts was damaged so it sat on an angle, however, it was clearly still fully functional. The mortar shell struck Satya’s barrier and sent a shockwave in all directions. Satya and Jamie fell back, tumbling on the cobblestones, their skin and clothes torn by the rough stone.

Satya was aware only that she could not hear anything. The sound of the birds, the wind, it was all gone. Her ears were ringing painfully, but she pushed herself upright weakly. Everything was happening in slow motion. She could see Jamie, not too far away, sprawled out on his back and trying to roll over.

A thought came to her. ‘To think I was originally trained for clandestine missions and corporate espionage,’ Satya mused to herself as she pulled herself into a kneeling position. ‘Being thrown into a warzone was not exactly what I signed up for.’

Satya took a deep, shuddering breath and looked down the street towards the mortar unit. Her shield had stopped short of the Talon soldiers, but it had wavered under the assault of the mortar shell and then faltered, unable to maintain its shape any longer. It blinked out of existence and as the smoke cleared, Satya’s view of the Talon soldiers was no longer obscured. They were setting up the mortar unit again, loading old shells they must have found in the area into the unit’s firing chamber.

Satya raised her gauntlet, hands trembling. If she didn’t make another shield now, she and Jamie were going to die.
There was a flash of something silver as it streaked through the air. Metal clunked on the cobblestones. There was an unmistakable sound of a shield being deployed.

“Get behind me!” Reinhardt cried.

Satya managed a gasp. Reinhardt—encased in armour and warhammer in hand—had jumped down from the battlements above the gateway behind them and had landed on the cobblestones between Satya and the mortar unit. He squared his shoulders, feet braced apart, ready for impact as the mortar unit exploded again. Reinhardt held firm as smoke and fire erupted on the other side of his shield. The rocket engine in the back of Reinhardt’s armour flared to keep him upright against the brunt of the blast. Satya felt the ground shaking all around them.

Satya watched, awestruck. The smoke cleared again and Reinhardt was somehow still standing.

Reinhardt’s visor angled towards Satya. “Go!” he barked. “Get back to the ship!”

Roadie also appeared at that moment, jumping down from the battlements and firing his scrap gun to deter the Talon soldiers from behind Reinhardt’s shield. Some of the Talon agents scrambled for cover, some remained to load more shells into the mortar unit. After the first few rounds, they had become more efficient at loading the device now and it took them no time at all.

Satya forced herself to stand on shaky legs. Jamie was suddenly at her side. He looked a little shell-shocked, and there were cuts and scrapes on his arms, but he took hold of her shoulder and urged her to run. Satya didn’t protest, and together they took off.

Roadie shot a ball of scrap at one of the Talon agents that was drawing too close to the shield. The man crumpled and for a moment, Roadie thought he caught a glimpse of a flash of purple colour somewhere behind the fallen soldier. Whatever it was, it disappeared around a corner in the direction of the main gate. ‘No,’ he thought. ‘It couldn’t be...’

The mortar unit jerked again and another shell exploded out of the firing chamber.

This time, Reinhardt staggered and Roadie noticed. The shield was shaking, as though Reinhardt was having trouble summoning the strength to hold it up after surviving two mortar blasts. He holstered his weapon hurriedly and braced both hands against the hard-light shield in front of him to keep it upright. Talon soldiers were advancing on them now, slowly wending their way between burning debris with weapons raised, casting dark shadows against the smoky air. More shots rang out. Reinhardt and Roadie started to back up the street.

“Are you mental?” Roadie demanded. His voice was like a deathly rattle in this throat, a horrible sound by all accounts, but Reinhardt never flinched from it. In all the time that Reinhardt and Roadie had become friends, the Lieutenant had never been bothered by anything that marked Roadie as different, not even his voice. “You can’t take them all on! We need to get out of here!” Roadie added.

“No. I’m staying here,” Reinhardt replied, his voice much too quiet and calm given the situation they were in. “I will fight to my last breath.” Roadie stared back at him, aghast. Was he planning to sacrifice himself so Roadie could make a run for it?

Another mortar exploded against the shield. Roadie pushed back against the blast as it almost
toppled both of them. With Roadie pushing on one side only, the lopsided shield was barely providing enough cover and more mortar shells were on the way. They would not be able to hold for much longer.

“If you think karkin’ it here and now in some misguided attempt to re-live the glory days is gonna make your master happy, it won’t,” Roadie growled angrily. “You think that’s what he died for?”

“Go,” Reinhardt said again. “The team needs you. I will be your shield.”

“I’m not leaving you to die—!”

“The barrier is failing!” Reinhardt cried, his voice desperate. “Go! Now!”

Again, something streaked out of the air.

“Adaptive circuits engaged! Roadhog!”

Echo landed roughly on Reinhardt’s other side, casting dust into the air in her wake. Her body warped and projected a hard-light exterior of Roadie’s form. She also braced her hands against the shield—or rather, Roadie’s hands—and pushed back, allowing the barrier to balance out now that it was supported equally on both sides. She had bought them some time.

Roadie heard the propulsion system of Angela’s valkyrie suit before he saw her. She flitted up behind them, mending their cuts and scrapes with a wave of her staff.

“We need to fall back,” Angela told them. “Talon has reinforcements on the way.”

Roadie was surprised to hear this. Talon really were expending a lot of resources trying to stop them from getting away. They must want the General’s armour badly.

Slowly, they retreated backwards into the inner bailey, all while keeping the shield upright to block the onslaught of bullets. Several dozen Talon soldiers were slowly advancing on them now. Some of them were trying to reload the mortar unit again.

“This shield won’t hold much longer,” Reinhardt shouted over the gunfire. “One more of those explosions and it’s all over! We need a plan.”

“Mr. Roadhog!” Echo cried, her digitally manufactured voice coloured by urgency. “Your scrap gun!”

Roadie looked down. The gun was still holstered at his side.

“We must initiate a ‘whole hog’ manoeuvre! Together!” Echo told him.

“Do it,” Reinhardt barked. “I’ll hold the shield.”

Roadie released the shield, and Reinhardt braced himself to take its full weight. Roadie retrieved the scrap gun and a top-loader from his pocket quickly. After cramming the top-loader onto his gun, he poured in a handful of scrap metal from his belt into the open cavity to serve as ammo. On Reinhardt’s other side, Echo was mirroring Roadie’s actions.

Together, Echo and Roadie turned the cranks on their respective weapons and a stream of shrapnel exploded from the end of their guns, knocking back the Talon grunts. Echo took the left side of the street, and Roadie the right. Before long, the street was clear. Any Talon soldiers left behind after
the onslaught quickly made a run for it under the hail of shrapnel, even abandoning the mortar unit.

The shrapnel ceased and the castle grounds stilled. Roadie lowered his weapon. It was over.

“I’ll go check on the others,” Angela announced. She turned in the direction of the dropship and took flight.

Echo also reverted to her normal, sleek form. “Neural adaptation complete,” she said pleasantly. She glanced between the two men. “I’ll complete a final sweep of the area. Rendezvous at the dropship in five.”

Roadie nodded and she was gone, shooting up into the air and streaking away. Reinhardt heaved a sigh and switched off his shield.

“You okay?” Roadie asked the other man.

“Fine,” Reinhardt replied shakily. He took a moment to catch his breath.

“Don’t you ever pull that shit again,” Roadie warned him.

Reinhardt removed his visor slowly. He wanted Roadie to see his face. When the visor was out of the way, he looked up at Roadie and smiled.

“I tried to tell you,” Reinhardt said, managing a weak laugh. “‘Live with honour, die with glory’.”

“Yeah, well. A little less ‘glory’ and a little more ‘honor’ next time, eh?” Roadie growled. He holstered his weapon again roughly. He reached for a spare cannister of hogdrogen so he could also catch his breath. Reinhardt noticed a tone of annoyance in Roadie’s gravelly voice.

Reinhardt said nothing, just nodded back at Roadie, a gentle smile on his face. He turned to take one last look at Eichenwalde Castle before they took their leave. It might be the last time he ever came back to this place. He was glad Roadie was here with him. They had saved each other’s hides that day.

“Come, my friend,” Reinhardt said finally. “Let's get back to the ship.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Okay what do we think about a bromance between Roadie and Rein? Thoughts?

Also I have a question for you guys: Sometimes I just throw aussie slang words into my fics and think 'oh well, if people don't understand it, whatever' but do you guys want me to include a glossary at the end of each chapter to explain any of these words? For example; when Roadie said he didn't want Rein to "kark it", do I need to explain that?
“I swear to god if we don’t get to the bonus level, I’m going to be very upset.”

The lilting tones of a rhythm still hung in the air as Jamie came out of his reverie. He spared Lúcio a glance. Standing a few feet away in the centre of the Games Room, Lúcio was using his controller to conduct a holographic projection of a piano keyboard. The black and white keys compressed as he waved his hands in time with the music, earning them a certain amount of points. He must have done well, because the holographic screen overhead indicated Lúcio had just achieved a perfect score for his efforts.

“Dude!” Jamie exclaimed. “You played that crazy good!”

“Thank you, brother,” Lúcio laughed.

They were playing Concert Saber for Games Night, Lúcio’s favourite game. It involved conducting a whole orchestra of holographic instruments with controllers by literally hitting holographic notes out of the air with the conductor wand. Lúcio had turned the difficulty level up to high and they were attempting to beat their record on a very old Nobuo Uematsu song.

Somewhere behind them, Hana, Satya and Efi were reclining on the Game Room sofas, waiting for their turn. A friendly little wager kept things interesting; boys versus girls. The winner was the team with the highest score and enjoyed the privilege of being bought dinner by the losing team.

The music built in intensity, each instrument conducted in perfect unison, until only a few bars of music remained. “Jamie, stick the landing!” Lúcio reminded him.

Jamie struck out at the air with his controller as the holographic trombone lit up one final time. His conductor wand sliced through the air, missing the note he was aiming for. The trombone was completely off key when it blurted out the song’s final note.

“Shit!” Jamie cursed loudly. Everyone in the room fell about in the throes of laughter.

“Jamie!” Hana chided him. “That was the funniest thing I ever saw.” She was clutching her sides from laughing so hard.

“Not a bad score though,” Lúcio remarked. He looked over at Jamie. “Well done, man!”

The instruments vanished as the game calculated their winnings. The screen flashed and words appeared above their heads: “Achievement Unlocked: Concert Master. You have earned a medal.”

A gold medallion on a glittering silver ribbon appeared, shining bright on the wide holographic display.

Lúcio cheered and high-fived Jamie. “Nice!” he exclaimed.

“That reminds me of my old necklace,” Satya told them. She was seated on a single-seat recliner, watching their game, her bare feet tucked under her folded legs.

“Our turn!” Efi cried, leaping up from the sofa. She and Hana claimed the controllers from the
boys and set about creating a new game.

Jamie took a seat in the chair besides Satya’s. “What do you mean, ‘old necklace?’” he asked.

“Hm? Oh, remember the other week when we were in Eichenwalde?” she asked. Jamie nodded in reply. “Well, when we got back, I noticed the clasp had snapped. Probably from all the... commotion we experienced on that particular mission.”

Jamie had noticed that Satya was not wearing the same silver and gold choker around her throat as she usually did. Come to think of it, Jamie had not seen her wear it for a while, but he had assumed it was a style choice. Fashion was always changing, or so he understood. He had thought she had grown tired of it.

“Oh, sorry, love,” he said quietly. A few feet away, Hana and Efi began conducting their song. “It was probably my fault, you know, when the RIP-Tire went off...” He blushed at the memory, the two of them pressed close in a hard-light bubble while the tire exploded around them. He would never admit it to her for fear of embarrassing himself, but it was one of the hottest things he had ever experienced in his life.

“Don’t worry about it, Jamie,” Satya said, smiling warmly at him. “Accidents happen, after all, in our line of work.”

“Yeah,” Jamie replied in a non-committal sort of way. Jamie leaned back in his chair, turning his attention on the girls as they carried on with their video game.

Accidents did tend to happen a lot when he was around that was for sure. He knew Satya’s jewellery meant a lot to her, all of her fashionable items did. Maybe there was a way he could make it up to her?

The door to the Games Room whooshed open at that moment and Lena poked her head into the room. She stepped into the room, eyeing the holographic display overhead and the colourful musical notes whizzing by as Hana and Efi continued their game without taking any notice of their new visitor.

“Ah, so this is where you guys are hiding,” Lena said, looking around at the scattered cushions, soda cans on the coffee table, and empty chip packets. Lena turned her attention on the agents sitting on the sofas. “Come on, nerds. We’ve got a mission.” She said this in a deadpan and much-beleaguered tone.

“What? Now?” Lúcio asked, sitting up from his reclining position on the sofa. “This late?”

“Yeah, you and you,” Lena said, pointing in turn at Jamie and Lúcio. “Last minute thing. We leave in an hour and you can sleep on the flight.”

Lúcio looked surprised but nodded all the same. “Where are we headed?”

“Thailand,” Lena replied. “It’s going to be hot and wet. So bring your raincoat.”

Jamie exchanged a look of confusion with Lúcio. “What are we going there for?” Jamie asked.

Lena was marking something off on a holographic clipboard she had brought with her, perhaps making a note that she had found and informed the other two agents of the mission. “We got a tip-off from our friends at Oasis University,” she said without looking up. “Talon have been spotted at another archaeological dig site. They’ve requested back up.”
“Again with this shit?” Jamie exclaimed, throwing up his hands. “What are they so interested in these random ancient sites for?”

Lena shrugged. “I don’t know. But we need to get a move on if we are going to stop them, whatever it is they are up to,” she replied. “We’ll need to investigate closely what Talon’s purpose for being in the area is.”

“Blimey,” Jamie swore. “I’ll go get ready.”

Hana paused in the middle of her game to look over at them. “Aw!” she whined. “But we were having fun!”

Lena seemed to have arrived in a sour mood because she was too busy running over a checklist on her clipboard with a harried expression on her face to look up at Hana. “Fun will have to wait,” Lena told her. “Oh, and Efi? We’ll need Orisa to come with us. I know its short notice, but can you get her ready in time?”

Efi had been staring at the holographic screen but she seemed to jump in surprise at Lena’s words. She fumbled her controller, almost dropping it. “What? Really?” she asked.

Lena nodded. “The commander has decided to clear her for combat for this mission. Of course, that all depends if you think you can make the arrangements…”

Efi dropped her controllers and leapt across the room to take hold of Lena’s hands. The clipboard clattered to the floor. “Oh, thank you! Thank you!” Efi exclaimed. “I’ve been waiting so long for Orisa to be cleared for combat! Of course, she’ll be ready in time. I just need to go wake her up and get her fusion driver from the Armoury! Thank you!”

Lena was a little shaken by Efi’s outburst. “You’re welcome,” she replied numbly.

“Is Orisa asleep?” Hana asked, watching Efi’s display. Their game was all but forgotten now.

Efi turned to look at her and nodded. “It’s more energy efficient this way. Usually we keep her on ‘sleep’ mode unless she’s needed for anything.”

Hana sighed. “Goals,” she said cryptically.

“I better go get her!” Efi said happily, making a bee-line for the door.

“Hangar Eighteen!” Lena called after her. “Meet us at Hangar Eighteen!”

Lúcio and Jamie stood to follow Lena out of the room.

“Have a safe trip,” Satya told Jamie. She smiled and watched him as he made his way towards the Games Room door. “Bring me a souvenir?”

Jamie laughed. “I’ll try.” He shared a little wave with her as he slipped out of the room. Once he had reached the hallway, he noticed Lena and Lúcio were both giving him an odd look. “What?”

Lena and Lúcio shared a knowing glance with one another. They had noticed how friendly Satya and Jamie had become lately.

“Nothing,” Lúcio replied with a smirk.
Trying to sleep on the flight was terrible.

Efi had waved them off from the observation area of Hangar Eighteen, but not before making Jamie promise to look out for Orisa during her first mission. He had begrudgingly agreed. He remembered a few months back when he had told Efi he would try to put more effort in with Orisa. And how could he resist Efi’s big brown eyes?

Then they had departed into the dead of night, settling into their twelve-hour flight to Thailand. Jamie had slept rough before, and had even slept on concrete floors, but sitting upright while clipped into one of the dropship’s harnessed seats was proving to be more challenging. Maybe he had grown far too accustomed to the comforts of living on base. Right now, all he could think about was his warm bed back in his dorm room.

“Having trouble sleeping?”

Zenyatta was sitting on Jamie’s right. He regarded Jamie thoughtfully, hands clasped gently in his lap.

“Yeah, I guess so,” Jamie replied. “You?”

“I have no need of sleep,” Zenyatta replied sagely. “I have an internal perpetual engine that serves all of my energy requirements. The restorative properties of sleep would be wasted on me.”

“Oh, right. I forgot,” Jamie muttered, aware he should keep his voice down. Lena, Lúcio and Roadie were nearby, sleeping in their seats.

“I do, however, find the human sleep cycle fascinating,” Zenyatta went on. “Particularly the dreaming. I think I had a dream once, although I’m unsure if what I experienced is the same as what you experience.”

“What did you dream about?” Jamie asked conversationally.

“I dreamt I was a butterfly,” Zenyatta said quietly. His hand lifted off his lap, fingers reaching out tentatively as though to touch that distant memory of a dream.

“Sounds dumb,” Jamie replied.

“I do not dream as humans do,” Orisa chimed in. She was sitting, not in one of the seats that lined the sides of the dropship which would have been impossible given her size, but on the floor on Zenyatta’s other side. “But it is my desire to become the hero Miss Efi believes that I am.”

Zenyatta acknowledged Orisa with a gentle incline of his head in her direction. “It is my hope that you will begin to develop your own free will now that your original programming has been broken,” he said, addressing Orisa with hands clasped serenely once more in his lap.

‘Free will?’ Jamie snorted derisively, watching the exchange between Zenyatta and Orisa with mild interest. He tried to settle back down in his chair into a comfortable position. He wondered if omnics could form friendships like humans did.

“Do you robots usually chit-chat with each other?” Jamie asked.
“What do you mean, Mr. Fawkes?” Zenyatta asked politely.

“She does chat with each other,” he reiterated. “You know, like, do you ever say ‘Hey, how are your circuits today?’ And then the other goes, ‘Oh, they’re all fried from the last mission, I must remember to get them replaced.’”

Zenyatta regarded Jamie quietly for a moment. “No.”

Orisa looked over at Jamie. “I am an adaptive artificial intelligence unit built to undertake pre-programmed crowd control and law-enforcement tasks,” she told him. “I also provide companionship to human counterparts. Performing meaningless interactions outside these parameters is beyond my programming.”

Jamie nodded in reply. “Oh.”

“Would it make you more comfortable if we communicated in a more human manner?” Zenyatta asked.

“I dunno,” Jamie said with a frown. “Yeah… maybe?”

After a pause, Zenyatta turned again to Orisa. “Good day, my sister. How are you?”

“My systems are operating at maximum potential,” Orisa replied.

“As am I,” Zenyatta replied pleasantly. “I’m glad we had this conversation.”

“As am I,” Orisa agreed.

Jamie stared back at the two omnics, a tired expression on his face. On Jamie’s left side, Roadie snickered quietly behind his gasmask. Jamie turned to sneer up at him. So, he was only pretending to be asleep so he could listen-in? Typical.

Jamie elbowed Roadie in the ribs for good measure, but he had gone back to pretending to be asleep. If elbowing him had bothered the older man at all, he didn’t let it show.

Jamie looked back at the two omnics. “I hate you both,” he said flatly.

“You misunderstand, Mr. Fawkes,” Zenyatta said cheerfully. “Omnics are capable of forming friendships, however, we see non-relevant conversations as an inefficient method of sharing information.”

“One of my programming protocols is to provide companionship to Miss Efi,” Orisa went on, unfazed by Jamie’s declaration. “This has now been upgraded to include members of the Overwatch team.”

“You want to be friends?” Jamie asked.

Orisa regarded him with glowing, yellow eyes. “Mr. Roadhog and I have been training for several months. We will be working together regularly,” she told him. “Studies show that military operations are more effective where team members work together and build personal bonds over time.”

Jamie nodded, but something gave him pause for thought. “Didn’t you say you were a… er… law-enforcement bot?” What if Orisa’s law-enforcement programming were to override her companionship programming? Would she try to arrest Roadie? Or himself? There was still a
bounty on his head, if Jamie recalled correctly.

Orisa blinked at Jamie. “Miss Efi relaxed my moral alignment coding to better allow me to make companionable relationships with certain members of the team, particularly Mr. Roadhog, Mr. McCree, and yourself.”

“I see,” Jamie replied, a little disbelievingly. She had just named three members of the Overwatch team with prominent criminal records.

“I think this means she will not try to arrest you,” Zenyatta added. “There is no need to fear, Mr. Fawkes.”

“I’m not afraid of bots,” Jamie grumbled under his breath, leaning back in his seat.

How much longer was this stupid flight anyway?

--

Thailand was just as Lena had promised. Hot and muggy, and the experience was not made easier to endure with Jamie’s lack of sleep.

“I am unable to detect any Talon activity in this area,” Orisa remarked.

Jamie glanced in her direction. “Yeah, I reckon they must be somewhere else,” he replied, scuffing his peg-leg along the ground.

They were walking through a kind of courtyard paved with slabs of grey stone in an area of ‘Ayutthaya’ as Lena had called it. He and Orisa had been assigned to check this temple out of many others in the area when the group had decided to split up and go looking for any sign of interference at the historical sites.

Jamie hiked his RIP-tire a little higher on his shoulders until the roughened rubber sat more comfortably on the broad set of his shoulders. He had managed to make a new tire in the time between their previous mission to Eichenwalde and this one. Now that all the approvals and sources for the materials were set up, he would be able to produce replacement RIP-tires at hopefully a faster rate.

It had finally stopped raining, but puddles of water filled the cracks and formed patterns in the carved stone. An almost two-hundred feet tall ancient temple overshadowed the courtyard but Jamie had already forgotten its name. The temple’s three bee-hive-like structures towered over them, intricately carved from bottom to top. The hollow echoes of birdlife in the jungle beyond the temple grounds reverberated across the space, amplified by the sizzling heat. Jamie was reminded that they were virtually all alone for several kilometres in all directions.

In the middle of the courtyard an enormous elephant statue dominated the space. It was reared back on its hind legs, front legs and trunk held aloft. Jamie had been told once that elephants brought good luck, especially if the trunk was up.

“What with all the elephants, d’ya reckon?” Jamie asked Orisa. He stood straight, leaning back to take in the full height of the statue. He had noticed several more elephants carved into the stonework on the way here.
Orisa appeared to be searching her databases for an appropriate response. Eventually, she said, “The elephant is a sacred symbol in Thai culture. They represent wealth and power due to a past association with Thai royals.”

Jamie eyed Orisa with quirked eyebrows. She sounded like she had just read this verbatim from a tourist pamphlet.

Jamie raised his frag launched over his right shoulder, allowed it to rest there while he took a moment to stretch his neck from side to side. His eyes lingered over the temple spires again and a thought struck him. Satya had asked for a souvenir, right? Temples sometimes had valuables in them...

“Let’s take a look inside. Maybe we might find something interesting,” Jamie suggested. It would also be nice to escape the heat of the day under the shade of the temple.

Orisa did not object, trotting along beside Jamie as they approached the temple steps. “I don’t think you will find anything interesting in here. Most Ayutthaya temples lost many valuable and artistic objects when the Burmese captured this area in fifteen-sixty-nine,” Orisa told him, still plodding along at his side.

“You’re like a walking encyclopedia sometimes, Orisa,” Jamie grumbled.

“Thank you!” Orisa said brightly.

They reached the top of the steps and passed through a wide entrance into the inner temple. It was definitely much cooler inside. Sunlight streaked through gaps in the stone, providing a small amount of light to the darkened space. The roots of trees outside the temple wound their tendrils through the stonework, clinging to stone columns and reaching out across the floor. Jamie could hear water dripping nearby.

Jamie looked up and noticed that the walls here were covered with carvings of lotus flowers in bloom. “What do you make of that?” Jamie asked Orisa, nodding towards the carvings.

Orisa also looked around. “The lotus flower is regarded as a symbol of purity, faithfulness and spiritual awakening in Thai culture. It represents the act of rising up, aspiring for enlightenment.”

“You don’t say,” Jamie replied thoughtfully. “Then what is that?”

Across the chamber in which they now found themselves, imbedded in the wall directly across from the entrance, was an old wooden carving that had somehow survived the passage of time. Jamie had noticed signs of archaeological work in the chamber, perhaps the archaeologists had only recently uncovered this carving? Recently moved stones lay nearby on the floor, which seemed to confirm this theory for Jamie.

Jamie approached the carving cautiously. The wood was remarkably well preserved, depicting two elephants facing each other, raised on their hind legs just like the one outside in the courtyard. Between them and surrounding the elephants, many lotus flowers were carved into the wood.

“If elephants equal royalty, and the flowers equal spirituality... maybe this isn’t a temple. Maybe it’s a tomb?” Jamie mused aloud to himself. He rubbed at his chin thoughtfully. Suddenly his eyes lit up. “A king’s tomb! And where there’s tombs, there’s treasure!”

Jamie set down his frag launcher on the floor and shrugged out of his RIP-Tire harness. He started looking around enthusiastically, even running his hands reverently over the carving, searching for clues. He had missed his chance in Petra to nab some gold. Now he was getting another
opportunity to correct that!

Orisa watched over Jamie as he flitted to-and-fro. “Stealing is wrong,” she said quietly.

Jamie made a sound that came out like 'Pfft!'

“Do you know what stealing is?” Jamie asked her.

“The act of taking another person’s property without permission or legal right and without intending to return it,” Orisa replied. She was standing still in the centre of the chamber, eyes bright as she watched him curiously.

“No, it’s sharing. It’s making sure everyone gets their fair share of the pie,” Jamie said, pressing experimentally on the carving to see what would happen. “Suits like to hoard it all for themselves. I’m just making sure the people who need it most can get their hands on it, i.e.; me.”

Orisa blinked at him. “Such an argument would not hold up in a court of law,” Orisa remarked.

“I know,” Jamie said, expelling a disappointed sigh. “I’ve tried.”

Suddenly, the lotus flowers Jamie had been fussing over decompressed into the wooden carving. There was a grinding noise, like gears turning, then nothing.

Jamie’s eyes were wide with excitement. He must have pressed the flowers in the correct order, like buttons on a pin pad. He touched the elephants experimentally. They gave way a little. He pushed harder, but was met with resistance. He needed something more powerful, something as strong as a real elephant, something like...

“Orisa, you’re strong. Get over here and help me,” Jamie demanded. He shoved his shoulder against one of the elephant carvings, and the resulting jolt of pain instantly made him regret doing so. The elephants did not budge. “Ow!” He let out a groan, jumping back and rubbing at his now sore shoulder.

Orisa trotted over to his side. “My directive to protect my teammates from physical harm is my highest priority,” she informed him. “Allow me to take it from here.”

With her left hand and the barrel of her fusion driver on her right arm, she pushed on both elephants simultaneously, and they too decompressed into the wood as the lotus flowers had done.

There were more clunking noises. The walls around them shook, and dust cascaded from the ceiling.

Jamie watched as the wooden carving parted in the centre, each half sliding to one side. Soon, a cavity was revealed behind the space where the carving had once been. Orisa and Jamie stared into the darkened gap in the wall.

“Whoa,” Jamie said aloud. “I can’t believe that just happened.”

Something was glittering in the dark. Jamie took a step closer to the opening, reaching out to touch whatever it was.

Suddenly, his comms system crackled in his ear. “Fireteam Delta, report in.” Lena voice was loud in Jamie’s ear. He was so startled, he yelped and almost tripped over his feet.
“Tracer! Um, nothing to report. We’re all fine,” Jamie said hastily. He felt like he had almost been caught doing something wrong. Mostly because he had almost been caught doing something wrong. “How are you?” he asked her, hoping to disguise the nervous timbre in his voice.

There was a pause on the other side of the comms system. “Fine,” Lena said slowly. “No sign of Talon here either. We think they fled the area before we got here. We’re going to regroup and work out our next steps. Meet us back at the dropship?”

“No sign of Talon here either. We think they fled the area before we got here. We’re going to regroup and work out our next steps. Meet us back at the dropship?”

“Yeah, yeah,” Jamie replied. “Be there in a tic.”

The line cut out and Jamie released a breath he had not realised he was holding. With his blood pounding in his ears, he reached forward and plucked the hint of treasure from the pile of dust within the wall. He held his prize aloft and something bright dangled out of his fisted hand. To his pleasant surprise, it was a silver necklace. A shaft of sunlight glinted off the smooth planes of carved silver and inlaid gemstones. It was still lustrous after all this time.

Jamie’s eyes were the size of dinner plates watching the necklace sparkle in the sunlight. It was clearly an incredibly valuable piece. The craftsmanship was unlike anything he had ever seen before. His face broke into a grin. This would suit his purpose perfectly.

Jamie stepped towards Orisa. “Here,” he said. “Hide this for me. I need to get this back to base without the others seeing it. It’s going to be a surprise!”

Orisa watched him curiously as he stepped around her. He fumbled around with a panel on the upper part of one of her rear legs. The compartment sprang open, revealing wiring and hydraulics underneath. He slipped the necklace inside and closed the compartment cover.

Orisa looked between Jamie and the compartment in her side where the necklace was hidden. “Stealing is wrong,” Orisa repeated.

Jamie stood back and eyed her up and down. “You’re a law-enforcement bot, aren’t ya?” he said. “I suppose you’ll probably dob me in, eh?”

Orisa was quiet for a moment. “Miss Efi relaxed my moral alignment coding to better allow me to make companionable relationships with certain members of the team.”

Jamie considered this. Orisa had mentioned her moral coding before, hadn’t she? He lifted a hand to scratch at his chin thoughtfully. “So, you’re not going to dob me in?”

Orisa blinked down at him. She hesitated for a moment, like she was trying to make a decision. “Developing trust is important for building companionable relationships. If I need to keep a secret for you for the benefit of our friendship, I will.”

Jamie made a face that indicated he was pleasantly surprised. “Ah, you think we’re friends. Good,” he mused. “You’ll keep a secret even if it breaks your moral code?”

“Miss Efi relaxed my moral alignment coding to better allow me to make companionable relationships...”

Jamie waved her off. She had started to repeat herself. “Yeah, yeah. I got it okay? You already said that.”

“We should be going,” Orisa remarked. “Tracer is waiting for us.”

Jamie hurried to collect his frag launcher and RIP-Tire. As an afterthought, he pulled the two
halves of the wooden carving back together so that they met in the middle once more. Now it looked like they had never been here. He jogged to catch up to Orisa, smirking to himself.

‘Satya is going to love this!’

They made their way back along the jungle trails towards the dropship. Walking through the humid air, Jamie quickly started to sweat profusely. Central Australia in the peak of summer was a dry, intense kind of heat. Here the humidity made the air heavier and more oppressive, and even though it was only a warm day, it felt unbearably stifling to Jamie.

It took around twenty minutes of walking before they arrived back at the dropship. Jamie only had to stop on two separate occasions to give Orisa a hard shove when she wedged herself between two trees. When they finally arrived, Jamie stood back and watched as Orisa walked up the ramp that lead inside, then followed behind her. He stepped gratefully into the air-conditioning, sighing with relief.

Jamie set down his RIP-Tire, leaving it propped up against a wall, and then headed over to debrief with the other agents sitting around one of the holographic display tables. As he approached, he caught the tail end of what Lena was saying.

“...head back to Gibraltar and Hamid will send us updates once they’ve completed their archaeological survey of the area,” Lena was saying. “Then we can pursue an investigation regarding what exactly Talon were looking for.”

Lúcio looked up and noticed Jamie and Orisa had returned. “J-Man!” he said, clapping Jamie on the shoulder as he approached. “You have no idea how many bugs I’ve been bitten by today.”

“Tell me about it,” Jamie agreed, swiping at his sweaty brow with his forearm. “Did you guys find anything?”

Lúcio shook his head. “Looks like this whole thing was a bust,” he added. “We’re heading back as soon as the archaeologists can organise some permanent security.”

Jamie nodded in reply. Orisa trotted by, heading over to the recharging station to plug herself back in. Lúcio watched her as she passed.

“Orisa, one of your covers is open,” Lúcio remarked.

Jamie’s eyes went wide. He glanced over at Orisa. The compartment he had hidden the necklace in was indeed slightly ajar, about to fall open. Perhaps he had not closed it as securely as he thought he had. “No, it's not!” Jamie said hurriedly.

Orisa paused to turn and look down at the offending cover on her rear leg. Lúcio reached out as though to help her close it again. Jamie also reached out, trying to bat Lúcio’s hands away. The action caused both their hands to flub across the loose cover, inadvertently brushing it aside. The cover fell open and Lúcio froze, catching sight of something shiny inside that looked like it did not belong there.

“What’s this?” Lúcio asked, reaching out for the shiny object.

“Nothing!” Jamie insisted, trying to obstruct him, but it was too late. Lúcio had reached into the cavity and plucked out the necklace. He held it aloft, eyes slowly growing wide as he realised that what was dangling between his fingers was not a part of Orisa’s internal mechanisms.

The commotion drew the attention of Lena, Roadie and Zenyatta who had been sitting around the
nearby briefing table. Lena stood from the table so she could get a better look at what was going on and crossed the floor towards Jamie and Lúcio.

“What is this doing here?” Lena asked, reaching out to take the necklace from Lúcio’s hand. “Where did this come from?”

Everyone looked over at Jamie.

“I... I...,” Jamie stuttered. He suddenly felt exposed under everyone’s scrutiny.

“This looks like it could be an important cultural artefact,” Lena went on, eyeing the gemstones on the necklace glinting in the dropship’s fluorescent lights. “Did you find this in the temple?” she asked him.

Jamie glanced around at the other agents. He could see Roadie watching him closely from across the room, his gasmask angled in Jamie’s direction. Jamie felt the threatening energy wafting off of the older man. Jamie got the impression Roadie was using all of his will power to resist the urge to leap across the distance between them and throttle him.

“Mr. Fawkes had nothing to do with it,” Orisa said suddenly. Everyone’s attention snapped to Orisa. “I found the necklace in the temple and took it when Mr. Fawkes wasn’t looking,” she added.

Everyone was quiet until Roadie made a noise of derision that sounded like he did not believe what Orisa was saying.

“It’s the truth,” Orisa insisted. “It is beyond my programming to be capable of lying,” Orisa said firmly.

Jamie gulped. To everyone but him, that was very obviously a lie.

Lena blinked up at the automaton. “Orisa? You took this?” she asked quietly. “I don’t understand. Why would you do such a thing?”

Orisa went on, “Miss Efi relaxed my moral alignment coding to better allow me to make companionable relationships with certain members of the team. It is my belief that this caused a malfunction in my decision-making abilities. I apologise for the misunderstanding.”

Lena nodded. “We need return this to Hamid right away,” she said. She turned and brought the necklace over to the holographic briefing table where she set it down.

“Did I hear that right?” a distant voice asked. “Orisa stole something?”

Jamie jumped at the sound, realising the holographic table nearby was displaying a communication window and the words “Sound Only.” The Commander’s voice had just come through the system. The other agents must have been part of a meeting with the Commander before Jamie and Orisa’s arrival back at the dropship.

“I apologise, Commander,” Orisa said. “It will not happen again.”

The holographic display activated and Jack’s transparent head and shoulders appeared floating above the table. “It looks like there are still some kinks for Efi to work out,” He said quietly. “But this is very troubling. We may need to rethink this arrangement.”

“What do you mean, Commander?” Zenyatta asked, turning towards the briefing table.
Jack hesitated for a moment before elaborating.

“U.N. policy on Overwatch agent conduct states that any category three omnic team members who experience a malfunction should be retired from front-line duty until the issue is resolved,” Jack said. It sounded like he had recited this information straight out of a manual of sorts. “Orisa has demonstrated a major fault in her judgement.”

“And how do you propose to ‘resolve this issue,’” Zenyatta asked. Jamie could detect a note of tension in the omnic’s voice. Jamie had never heard the usually peaceful omnic speak like this.

“I will recommend Orisa receives a factory reset, and Efi can recalibrate her personality drive,” Jack replied. “That’s standard procedure in alignment with this policy.”

“Excuse me?” Zenyatta began. “You’re going to erase her?”

“If what I’m hearing is correct, this was an item of cultural significance,” Jack said as calmly as he could, although the furrowing of his brows indicated to Jamie that he was very annoyed at being questioned. “Overwatch agents are expected to conduct themselves appropriately and in accordance with local laws whilst on missions abroad.”

Jamie was sweating even more profusely now. What had he gotten Orisa into? He was keenly aware that there was an easy way to solve this problem and it was staring him right in the face. He wrestled with himself internally for a moment, eager to confess that he was the one that took the necklace and have this whole mess cleared up instantly, however, a thought had just occurred to him. Jamie was at the tail-end of his probation period. He counted out in his head the six months from the date he remembered signing his contract at Overwatch, realising that he still had a couple of weeks of good behaviour left to go. Roadie had threatened him with a proper thrashing if he did anything to put their positions in jeopardy. Stealing a national treasure probably fell into that category.

Jamie’s mind was awash with guilt. Why did he have to be such a flaming idiot! On one hand, he could confess, then he and Roadie would have to leave Overwatch and probably return to prison. On the other hand, if he said nothing, Orisa would lose her memory and everything that made up her personality. If he chose the former, Roadie would probably never forgive him, the shame that came with the second option made him feel worse than garbage.

Jamie squirmed uncomfortably on the spot, unable to commit to one action or the other. Meanwhile, Jack and Zenyatta were carrying on with their argument.

“That is an excessive punishment for a first-time infraction,” Zenyatta was saying, still staring at the communication system connected to Gibraltar base. His voice was tense with anger, but he spoke as calmly as he could muster. “You are proposing a severe punishment that does not match the crime committed.”

“Orisa could have risked our entire relationship with this country’s leaders,” Jack retorted. Jamie noticed that a dark expression had manifested on the Commander's face. “In any case, my hands are tied. That is the policy and we must follow it.”

“Orisa is starting to break her programming, to develop her own free will. This is something that must be encouraged, but you would destroy it.” Zenyatta’s tone was low and dangerous.

“I didn’t mean to cause any trouble,” Orisa interjected. “Please do not be upset, Mr. Zenyatta. I am not alive. I am an advanced simulation. It is no bother to me if the Commander were to reformat my personality.”
Zenyatta swivelled on the spot to look over at Orisa. “How can you say that?” he asked. “Do you even understand what you are saying?”

“I’ve heard enough,” Jack barked before Orisa had a chance to answer. “You and I can discuss this later in private, Zenyatta.”

The communication system switched off abruptly and the Commander was suddenly gone from view. Everyone was frozen awkwardly in place momentarily, before Zenyatta expelled a sound like a drawn-out sigh and turned, disappearing into another part of the ship without another word. In his wake, a strange mood settled over the remaining agents.

“What... uh... what just happened?” Jamie asked quietly, leaning towards Lúcio. Jack’s word was usually final, so Jamie had been surprised to hear Zenyatta speak up against him.

“I’m not sure,” Lúcio murmured in reply. He looked like a man who had merely wanted to point out something funny he had found in his omnic friend’s possession, but the whole thing had blown up in his face.

“What about Orisa?” Jamie asked.

Lúcio shrugged. “I guess that’s the policy.”

Jamie felt like a heavy stone was growing in size in the pit of his stomach. He caught sight of the grim expression on Lena’s face as she passed by with Orisa, leading her away towards the cargo bay. Jamie watched them go, feeling sick from guilt.

It took a couple more hours to confirm that the Ayutthaya site was secure and that the necklace had been returned to the archaeology team. Soon after, they departed promptly for the long trip back to Gibraltar. Hardly anyone spoke and a couple of times Jamie caught Roadie staring over at him suspiciously.

The long trip gave Jamie plenty of time to analyse what had happened and the argument he had witnessed between the Commander and Zenyatta. He could understand where the Commander was coming from. It made sense from a practical point of view, didn’t it? If a machine experienced a malfunction, the best idea was to return the device to normal factory settings. Orisa did not seem to mind the idea of be reformatted. But this did nothing to alleviate his feelings of guilt. And then Zenyatta had been very upset by the entire proposition. Like being reformatted was a monumental loss.

Jamie felt his stomach twisting. It was all his fault, but he could not bring himself to confess. Doing so meant an end to his career as an Overwatch agent. But what about Orisa? Was it alright to leave her to her fate, even if she said she was okay with it? Jamie felt like the worst person alive. How would he ever be able to look in the mirror again?

--

As soon as Jamie got back to base, he immediately buried himself in his work, glad of any distraction that would take his mind off what had happened in Thailand. The other engineers noticed he was not joining them for meals, seemed to arrive at work sleep-deprived, and stayed for unnaturally long periods in the Workshop after hours. This went on for a couple of days, until one night that Jamie had sealed himself in the Workshop so he could feel sorry for himself in private.
It was particularly dark in the Workshop at this late hour of the night. Only a single light bulb lit Jamie’s workstation from above. The result cast dark shadows across the rest of the empty workbenches and hanging tools. Brigitte had started work on repairs to General Balderich von Adler’s armour just a few days prior. The enormous set stood beside her workstation, silhouetted in shadow watching over Jamie’s tinkering like a sentry in silent judgement.

Sitting alone in the dark space, slumped over on his workbench, Jamie was quiet and unmovable under the General’s watchful gaze. Jamie heaved a sigh, face buried in his arms folded on the table surface. He’d never felt so low in his life.

All of this because he wanted some dumb necklace to impress Satya. He had only wanted to replace the necklace that had been broken on the Eichenwalle mission. Satya had become one of his dearest friends, and he knew she was a lady who enjoyed the finer things in life. It was only fair to assume that she deserved the best replacement necklace he could find. He was not unaccustomed to handling fine jewels either; he had nicked plenty in his time.

Stealing had never bothered him before, neither had being caught. Even when he had been captured and imprisoned the first few times, he had taken that on the chin. His pride had barely borne a scratch. He had known it would only be a matter of time until he was out again, after all. There was no reason to feel bad about his crimes. Why would there be? In his mind, it was a victimless crime. Stealing was always easier when it was a faceless corporation or a corrupt government. This time was different.

He knew it was bad because he could hear Bastion whimpering a couple of doors down in the Workshop storeroom. He usually shared the space with Orisa and was probably worried for his missing companion. Under normal circumstances, Jamie might have marched in there and demanded the Bastion unit shut his metal trap, but Jamie was pinned in place. The image of Efi’s disappointed face as they disembarked the dropship and Lena explained what had happened was going to haunt his dreams for weeks to come. Orisa had then been quickly whisked away under Efi’s bewildered gaze and no one had seen her since.

Rumour had it that Orisa was being held in a highly secure storeroom somewhere on the other side of base, and Jamie suspected that his wristband would be unable to swipe into the area even if he could summon the bravery to face her. Jamie just hoped she was safe. He wondered if she was scared? Or lonely? What if they were torturing her for information? Jamie shuddered.

Zenyatta had even taken a vow of silence in protest of the decision, claiming he would not speak again until the decision to reset Orisa was reversed. Under normal circumstances, nothing would have pleased Jamie more to know he would never have to listen to Zenyatta prattle on about peace and tranquillity or whatever topic he was usually stuck on when he came to the Workshop for a tune-up. However, the notion brought him no pleasure on this occasion.

And it was all his fault.

“Ah, there you are.”

Jamie looked up. It was Satya, standing in the doorway to the Workshop.

“Athena said I might find you here,” she added. She stepped into the space, wending her way between the worktables towards him. “Couldn’t sleep?”

Jamie could just make out her silhouette in the darkened Workshop. “Satya?” Jamie asked. He straightened in his seat slightly and rubbed at his tired eyes so he could focus on her better.

“What’re you doing here?”
He watched her as she crossed the Workshop in the dim light to the side of the room where her designated workbench was beside the windows. Her workspace was as crisp and clean as the first day Jamie had entered the Workshop. She retrieved her work stool and scooted over to Jamie’s workbench. Jamie followed her every movement with his eyes, still surprised to see her here so late at night.

“Okay. Now you’re going to tell me what is going on,” she said, taking a seat at the side of Jamie's table. “I think you owe me an explanation.”

“Explanation? For what?” he asked, attempting without much success, to keep the nervous timbre out of his voice.

Satya settled herself into her seat, elbows propped on the surface of the table. She turned her body towards him. “Don’t play innocent. I want an explanation for why you’ve been acting so weird lately,” she replied.

Jamie swallowed hard. The lilting amusement in her voice and her knowing smile left Jamie feeling like he should not argue with her. “I did something dumb,” he began. He started to fidget with his hands. “I wanted to give you a present. So, I... stole something.”

Satya nodded. “I thought so. And Orisa took the blame.”

Jamie was not surprised that Satya had guessed correctly. There was no hiding anything from Sayta. She knew him too well.

“I’m a shitty person,” he moaned, then dropped his head back down onto his folded arms, face hidden from her view.

Satya watched all of this calmly. “Yes, you are.”

Jamie’s head snapped back up. He gaped at her indignantly.

Satya regarded him coolly. “I’m flattered that you went to great lengths to bring me a gift,” she said. “But now Orisa is in danger. And we are going to fix this.”

“What can we do?” Jamie moaned. “If we tell them the truth, then I’ll get kicked out of Overwatch.” Jamie buried his face in his hands again. “And I was almost off of probation too...” he groaned.

Satya frowned. She had forgotten that the first six months of Jamie’s contract position was probationary. Any blip on his record could result in his contract being terminated. “We’ll think of something,” she said with determination.

Jamie’s expression relaxed slightly. Then, his face crumpled with doubt. “No,” he said. “You shouldn’t get caught up in all of this. I don’t want you involved.”

Satya watched him fidget for a moment. They sat in silence while Satya considered what to say next. “Who is Sombra to you?”

“Wha— what?” Jamie asked, eyes widening. What had prompted her to ask such a question?

Satya went on, “When we were in Eichenwalde, you and Sombra were behaving like you knew each other.”

Jamie hesitated, fingers twitching once more. Satya could tell it was a topic he was not interested in
revisiting.

“I’m your friend Jamie,” she said quietly. “I want you to be able to trust me.”

Jamie looked down at the surface of the table. He followed the dents and scrapes ingrained in the metal surface from his various heavy-handed forays into repair work and machine building. Each impression was a symbol of the mark he had left on the builder’s team. It was something he was desperately afraid of losing.

“Sometimes I get scared that you’ll stop liking me if you find out what I really am,” he said quietly.

Satya was quiet for some time. She adjusted her posture, turning to fix Jamie with a calm, calculating gaze. She did not respond to his statement. She knew who he was, and the things he had done. A quick internet search easily revealed a rich criminal history for Jamie. But they had been friends for a long time now, and they were well past the point where Satya was turned off by his past deeds.

“Who is Sombra to you?” Satya repeated, a little more firmly this time.

Jamie allowed his gaze to linger on hers for a moment. It was an understatement to say he was nervous about telling her, mostly because he was worried that it would change the way she thought about him.

Jamie took a deep breath. His mind started to trace backwards to that fateful meeting over a year ago. The words started to drift out of him, and he told Satya everything. How he and Roadie had met Sombra in a seedy bar in Castillo. He could still remember the stale smell of beer and cigarettes from that evening. Sombra had overheard a plan they were making for a heist. ‘Overheard’ was perhaps an understatement. Jamie had been talking loudly and animatedly about his plan, and it was easy enough for anyone within reasonable earshot to hear. Sombra told them over a bottle of tequila that there may be a mutual benefit from working together. She had even let them stay at her place for a couple of nights while they worked out the details.

At the time, the focus of Sombra’s work had been on rooting out local corruption in her hometown and exposing plans to illegally acquire and develop large tracts of land. Much of her time was occupied by tracking the activities of a local businessman, Guillermo Portero. Portero was the CEO of LumériCo, an energy company which owned a series of power plants across Mexico with his main base of operation resting within Dorado. She was planning to infiltrate the main power plant, looking for what she suspected to be evidence of government bribes. Jamie had never been averse to a plan to stick it to suits wherever possible and had readily agreed to help her.

Portero also owned the bank next door to this power plant. The bank just happened to be the one the Junkers were planning on targeting. Sombra had requested that Jamie and Roadie cause a distraction in robbing the bank while she infiltrated the plant. In return, she had granted them access to the bank’s premises by getting them in through the museum nearby and neutralising the museum’s security systems.

Everything had gone as planned, with each party carrying out their part of the deal as promised. The warm press of darkness all around them that night as they slunk through the museum gardens towards the bank was a familiar memory in Jamie’s mind. They had blasted their way through a rock face in the museum grounds to access the banks’ vault buried inside. The alarm system from the bank distracted the security guards inside the plant and the local law enforcement long enough for Sombra to get what she needed. Jamie and Roadie had skipped town on a yacht that same night with as much gold bullion as they could carry and they never saw Sombra again, until
Jamie finished his story and waited with baited breath for Satya’s reaction. “I swear to god, I had no idea she was part of Talon,” he added hurriedly. “I was just as surprised to see her as you!”

Satya absorbed all that Jamie had said, sitting with elbows propped on the table. The part about the infiltration of Portero’s Station 4 power plant rang a bell for her. She remembered the story breaking in the news; leaked emails between LumériCo and Vishkar officials indicated negotiations were underway for Vishkar to export Portero’s proprietary energy systems. The leak had happened right around the time that an inquiry was being launched regarding the Rio de Janeiro incident. Satya recalled that it was a troubling time to be associated with Vishkar, and it had prompted her to seek out a transfer to Overwatch.

It was amazing how something Jamie had done over a year ago on a different continent had indirectly affected her career, and had eventually led them to working together. For some reason, she could summon no anger that Jamie had participated in an event that lead to Vishkar being discredited in the news yet again. She couldn’t lay too much blame on Jamie; it seemed Sombra was the ring-leader on this occasion. And lately, Satya was feeling more and more distant from her employers at Vishkar and her position within their ranks. It was hard to take their losses that personally anymore.

She shifted in her seat, eyebrows quirked as she regarded Jamie. “Did you sleep with her?”

Jamie went bright red with lightning speed. “Wha— What? I... Satya! How can you...?”

Satya smirked. “You did, didn’t you?”

Jamie made a frantic motion with his hands, fingers clenched in the air as though trying to capture something invisible to Satya. “It didn’t mean anything!”

“Jamie you don’t need to defend yourself,” Satya said, straightening in her seat. “You didn’t do anything wrong. Other than robbing the bank, I mean.”

Jamie made a pained expression, conceded defeat, and dropped his head back into his hands, mortified. “Leave me alone to die.” His muffled voice drifted out of the gap between his arms.

Satya chuckled. “What would the others think, I wonder...” she said with humour. It was meant as a light-hearted joke but Jamie practically leapt out of his seat with alarm.

“You can’t tell anyone!” he cried. “You have to promise me...!”

“Jamie, relax! I was joking!” Satya said, making a staying motion with her hands. “I swear not to tell a soul,” she told him. This seemed to satisfy him because he settled in his seat again, relieved. She scooted a little closer to Jamie so she could speak her next words quietly. They were alone, but she wanted to impress that this was only for him to hear.

“You can’t tell anyone!” he cried. “You have to promise me...!”

“Jamie, relax! I was joking!” Satya said, making a staying motion with her hands. “I swear not to tell a soul,” she told him. This seemed to satisfy him because he settled in his seat again, relieved.

She scooted a little closer to Jamie so she could speak her next words quietly. They were alone, but she wanted to impress that this was only for him to hear.

“Would you like to know something about me?”

Jamie peeked at her sidelong, shoulders hunched, his blonde hair flopped in his eyes. “What do you mean?”

“Well, since we’re being honest with each other, I think it’s only fair that I share something with you,” Satya began. She suddenly felt an excess of nervous energy, so she stood and paced to her workbench and back. Jamie watched her curiously. “Remember when I told you about my time at
the academy, and how the other children made it difficult?"

Jamie’s head lifted a little more so he could get a better look at her. He remembered. They had been sitting right here, in the Workshop, working late on their project for the Commander's challenge when she revealed her feelings about the academy where she had studied. “Yeah?”

Satya continued to pace. “Well, the reason it was so difficult for me back then is because...” She hesitated, coming to a stop mid-step, then looked up at him. “I have a condition. Autism.” When Jamie made no reaction, Satya went on slowly, “And sometimes that means I’m different, or I can be hard to understand and get along with.”

When Satya finished speaking, she tried to gauge Jamie’s response. He was sitting no more than a couple of feet from her, listening to her every word. His face was blank as he watched her. She had no idea how she had expected him to react, but this was not it.

“Okay,” he said eventually.

“Okay?” she asked, eyebrows arched inquisitively. “Just ‘okay’?”

Jamie shrugged. “Well, you’re different. Fine. Everyone is a little bit different. I mean, just look at me.”

“It doesn’t change how you think of me?” she asked him.

Jamie stood then. He took a couple of steps across the short distance between them. His movements were gentle, hesitant.

“Why would it?” Jamie replied. “Something like that doesn’t make you any different in my eyes. You’re still Satya.”

Satya released a breath she had not realised she was holding. For some reason, it was a relief to know Jamie still felt the same way about her. She was not ashamed of her condition, but people did not always react well to the news of her being on the autism spectrum. Sometimes it resulted in rude, invasive questions or people speaking down to her. Her heart swelled at the thought that one of her closest friends had taken the news in stride.

“Thank you, Jamie,” she said quietly. They were standing just a few inches apart now.

“Satya, you’re the strongest person I know,” Jamie added, an earnest look in his eye. “And I once saw Roadie tear a phonebook in half on a bet.”

Satya tilted her head to one side inquisitively. “What’s a phonebook?” she asked.

Jamie seemed not to have heard her. His eyes were fixed on hers. Something bade him reach out towards her with his good hand, but he stopped short, unsure if he should proceed.

The moment froze, and Satya was left staring at Jamie’s hand hovering in the air between them. Something inside her instinctively told her to lean towards him, waiting with quiet anticipation for him to initiate the contact. Her eyes lifted to his once more.

Satya held very still. “It’s okay,” she told him, her voice barely above a whisper. There was something to the bright intensity of his gold-coloured eyes that indicated to her that he was pleased with her response.
His hand reached out again, brushing lightly over her upper arm, traversing the distance between her shoulder and neck to gently cup her jawline. Where his touch ghosted her skin, goose bumps raised in its wake. Her eyes never left his as she leaned into his touch. His other, mechanical hand came to rest comfortably on her hip, and the light pressure there felt warm and welcome.

Satya had only a split second to understand that he was angling his face towards hers and suddenly she was finding it difficult to control her breathing. Her heart rate increased as her hands slid instinctively over the smooth planes of his chest, tugging him closer by the neck of his t-shirt. Her eyes fluttered closed. She could feel his breath on her cheek now as he drew nearer.

At that moment the door to the Workshop sprang open and the cold shock of realisation that they had been caught snapped Satya to attention. She jumped back from Jamie like she had been burned. She turned, hands fluttering over her workstation behind her, trying to appear busy.

“I just came in here to find my note book!” Satya said loudly and the same time as Jamie said, “Ah, here’s that sprocket wrench I was looking for!” Satya glanced in Jamie’s direction, noting he too had scrambled around on the surface of his nearby workbench and was now holding one of his tools aloft. He met her eyes, equally shaken at being walked in on.

Flushed red, they looked away from each other and towards the door, although Satya noted before turning away from him that he looked distinctly disappointed at being interrupted.

It was Lena who came bustling into the room. She looked around for a moment, and then spotted them. “Ah, here you both are,” she remarked. Several people trailed into the room behind her, including Hana, Brigitte, Lúcio, Efi and none other than, Zenyatta, floating serenely behind the rest.

“There he is!” Lúcio crowed, having spotted Jamie across the room. A wide smile broke out on his face. “If anyone knows anything about busting anyone out of anywhere, it’s J-Man!”

Satya quickly forgot her embarrassment at almost being caught in Jamie’s arms. It seemed none of the new arrivals had gotten a good look at them before she had the chance to part from him.

She watched as six of her teammates crammed themselves into the Workshop with wide-eyed bemusement. “What’s going on?” Satya asked quietly, hoping no one would notice her voice had taken on a shaky timbre as she struggled to pull her senses back under control.

“Come on, nerds,” Lena said in a flat tone, staring between Jamie and Satya. She seemed none the wiser that she had interrupted anything between them. “We’ve got a teammate to rescue.”

“Yeah, let’s go save Orisa!” Hana exclaimed, bouncing on the spot from excitement. She was holding Efi’s hand who was standing beside her. Efi sniffled, eyes red like she had been crying.

‘Oh my god. Orisa. How could I forget?’ Satya chastised herself internally. She smoothed out the creases of her dress with nervous fingers. While they had been wasting time in the workshop, Orisa was locked up somewhere, probably frightened and alone. Satya saw the look on Efi’s face and felt immediately guilty.

“We’re going to bust Orisa out,” Brigitte said resolutely. “And put her somewhere safe until we can convince the Commander to reconsider his decision.” Zenyatta, who was floating beside her, nodded in agreement. Satya noted that he was also wearing some kind of t-shirt stretched over his torso that read: ‘Omnic Rights Now!’ Satya guessed that he was still taking his vow of silence very seriously because he had said nothing so far.
“That’s your plan?” Satya asked. “And what if the Commander refuses?”

“That we’re putting her on a flight back to Numbani where she’ll be safe,” Lena replied with a firm nod. “I volunteer to pilot.”

Satya absorbed this information slowly. She turned to look at Orisa’s creator. “Efi?”

Efi looked tearfully up at Satya. “I would rather we go home than have Orisa reformatted,” she said quietly, breath hitching in her throat. “She’s my friend. If they reset her, she wouldn’t be the same anymore...” She trailed off, and Satya saw Hana grip the younger girl’s hand a little tighter.

“Your intentions are noble,” Satya said after a moment of consideration. “But if you want to petition the Commander, then do it. Putting your jobs unnecessarily at risk as well doesn’t make much sense.”

Lena shook her head. “I know Jack. He’s stubborn as an ox. He usually doesn’t budge once he’s made a decision. We need to make a statement. Let him know how strongly we feel about this.”

“Yeah, like a mass protest,” Lúcio added. “Once Orisa is safe and we have his attention, then we convince the Commander he was wrong.”

“Yeah,” Hana cried in agreement. “Let’s do the fun, dangerous stuff!”

Satya released an exasperated sigh. “Do you realise what could happen if we get caught?”

Lena nodded. “Yep. We’re looking at nonjudicial punishment; forfeiture of allowances, confinement to base, forced to eat M.R.E.s for weeks,” she said. “Worst case, we might even get court-martialled.” Efi looked alarmed at that last one.

“Isn’t it exciting?” Hana asked brightly. “I’ve never been court-martialled before!”

“Are you two in, or what?” Lúcio asked the engineers.

While everyone was talking, Zenyatta retrieved a notepad and pen from inside his robes. He wrote something down and handed the paper to Jamie. It read in neat letters: ‘Let’s fuck them up.’ Jamie arched an eyebrow at him inquisitively in reply. He was still trying to decipher what had caused this change of heart in his friends all of a sudden.

Satya watched Jamie for his response. He had hardly said a thing since the others had arrived in the Workshop.

“This is mad,” Jamie said finally, shaking his head. “There’s no way we can do this.”

Satya crossed her arms over her chest, her mouth forming a thin line of derision. “Well, you tried being stupid. That didn’t work,” Satya told him. Jamie looked like he wanted to protest, but conceded to her with a sorrowful nod of his head. “Maybe it’s time for something different?” she added.

Jamie looked up at her. “You mean... like...” Satya was still watching him, an amused curl at the corner of her mouth. She nodded encouragingly. Jamie went on, “Time for something... crazy?”

Satya’s face broke into a grin. “That’s better. Have you got an idea?”

Jamie was also grinning now. “No. But sometimes that makes for the best kind of plan.”

“Does that mean you’re with us?” Lúcio asked again.
Jamie nodded. “Just let me grab a couple of cherry bombs and let’s go,” he said with a smirk.

It did not take long for Jamie to gather a few materials and then everyone prepared to file out of the Workshop.

“Our is being held in a storeroom near the Ordnance Bay,” Lena told them as they made their way down the corridor towards the elevators. “If we hurry, we can get to her before the night watch make their next rounds.”

“How did you know she was there?” Jamie asked.

A self-assured smile lit up Lena’s face. “I have my sources...” she said mysteriously.

They piled into an elevator and Lena hit the button that would take them down to the lower regions of the base. As a result of the overfilled elevator, Jamie found himself pressed up against Satya awkwardly, one arm braced against the side of the elevator over her shoulder. “Sorry,” he mumbled to her.

“No problem,” she replied quietly.

Brigitte was eyeing the other two engineers with suspicion. “What were you two doing in the Workshop alone?” she asked.

“Nothing!” Satya and Jamie said quickly in unison.

Brigitte did not appear to be convinced.

Jamie held his tongue the rest of the way down in the elevator. The thought occurred to him that there were entirely too many people participating on this expedition. They were running the risk of drawing too much attention to themselves purely through their numbers alone. He frowned. This used to be a lot easier back when he had only one other person to worry about during a heist or break-out. Now he was swamped with tag-alongs. Jamie was also a little irked that they were all up in his space, interrupting his private moments between himself and Satya too.

Something pointy was digging into Jamie’s back. He looked over his shoulder, surprised to see Zenyatta squeezed in there.

“How’s the vow of silence going, Zen?” Jamie asked politely, looking at the omnic over his shoulder. Zenyatta only stared back at him.

“Zen?” Jamie tried again. “I said, how’s the vow of silence going?” Jamie was becoming increasingly annoyed at the omnic’s lack of response. “What are you not talking to me now? That’s kinda rude.”

“Jamie...,” Satya began with an exasperated sigh on Jamie’s other side.

They soon arrived at the correct floor. That much was obvious because the elevators doors pinged and then parted slowly to reveal the enormous gates of Hangar Eighteen. The tall metal gates loomed ominously opposite the elevator bay. Jamie took a moment to absorb the enormity of the space, minimally lit from below.

They vacated the elevator, stepping out onto the concrete floor, and looked around at the walls lined with roughly-hewn rockface. They hurried over towards the gates, all while Hana continued to hum the Mission Impossible theme song quietly. The space was conveniently empty given how late at night it was so they crossed the area unopposed. As they approached the hydraulic gates,
Lena guided them through a small door to the side and into the ramp area of the hangar beyond.

Here, the expansive hangar floor was also empty except for a few cargo crates covered in tarps. The cavernous ceiling was almost impossible to see in the near darkness. Overhead, the “Aurora,” a light dropship, was suspended on a landing platform. The agents crossed the open space under the shadow of the behemoth, heading towards the Ordnance Bay on the other side of the hangar. Under Lena’s guidance, they crouched in the shadows by a heavy metal door which Jamie guessed was the entrance to the storeroom where Orisa was being held. While Lena and Lúcio guarded their rear, the others approached the storeroom entrance.

Brigitte eyed the door warily. “Jamie, can you get us through with your explosives?” she whispered to him, then added as an afterthought, “…without drawing attention from the rest of the base?”

Jamie assessed the door for a moment, then began to rummage around in his pockets. “Hmm. Let me see…” He fished out a breaching charge of a homemade variety and examined it closely.

“What about cyclotrimethylenetetranitramine and a non-explosive plasticizer?” Satya asked him.

Jamie met her gaze with genuine surprise, lowering the makeshift breaching charge in his hand. “How do you know about that?”

Satya shot him a smug little smile. “Sitting next to your workstation all the time, your work tends to rub off on me,” she explained.

“Can we hurry this up please?” Brigitte asked them with a groan of annoyance. She snatched the charge out of Jamie’s hand, stepped past them, and started trying to jam it into the doorframe. Jamie continued to look into Satya’s eyes.

“I love it when girls talk about Comp C explosives…” Jamie remarked dreamily, watching Satya as she stood and headed over to Brigitte’s side to help. She smiled at him over her shoulder.

“Hey, guys?”

Everyone looked around for the source of the voice. Jamie’s eyes were drawn upward to something hanging out of an airduct above his head. He realised with a start of alarm that it was Hana, waving down at them, half-hanging out of a vent into the hallway that she must have climbed into when no one was looking.

“Not sure if this is going to solve the problem, but I found this air vent that leads exactly where you guys wanted to go,” Hana told them.

“Oh, thank goodness!” Brigitte cried. She stood up, casting the breaching charge aside. “Hana, can you drop down inside and open the door for us?”

“Okay!” she said brightly. Hana was so small in stature that it took her no time at all to wriggle back into the air duct and disappear from view. A moment later, the sliding door whooshed open, revealing the mech pilot standing on the other side. She stood back to allow the other agents to enter the storeroom.

Jamie stepped forward into the darkened room. Someone fumbled for a light switch and moments later the space was illuminated from above. More canvas tarps were thrown over cargo crates here and there. Over by the far wall, Jamie spotted an odd-shaped object also covered by a canvas tarp. Jamie hurried over and pulled the fabric back, revealing Orisa in a crouched position and powered-down.
“Orisa!” Efi cried, surging forward. Her hands fluttered over the automaton, as though checking for damage. “Quick! Initiate start-up procedure!”

Orisa jolted slightly. Her eyes began to glow and her systems whirred into life as her start-up procedure commenced. Music chimed to indicate the process was complete. Everyone watched as Orisa rose to her feet, towering easily over all of them. “System analysis complete. Orisa: online,” she said. She looked around at all the agents. “Miss Efi? What’s going on?” she asked.

“It’s a jail-break!” Lúcio exclaimed. “We’re busting you outta here!”

The automaton blinked at him. “I’m afraid I can’t allow that,” Orisa replied.

“What do you mean?” Brigitte asked, surprised by Orisa’s response.

“It’s almost midnight and Miss Efi should really be in bed,” Orisa explained. “A regimented sleep cycle is paramount to maintaining optimal health and vitality.”

“That’s not important right now!” Efi exclaimed. “We need to get you out of here.”

“Oh. Okay,” Orisa replied cheerfully. “Where are we going?” She allowed Efi to take her by the hand and lead her towards the door. Everyone stood back to allow them room. Zenyatta lead the way, floating serenely in front.

Lena took up position on Orisa’s other side to help guide her. Orisa’s fusion driver had been removed, but Lena laid a hand on Orisa’s forearm and helped walk her out of the storeroom.

“We’re going to put you somewhere safe,” Lena was saying. “Then, we’re going to convince the Commander not to reformat you, and then...”

Orisa stopped short as everyone filtered out of the storeroom. “No, that won’t be possible,” she said.

“It’s alright, Orisa,” Jamie said, looking up at her. “We’re going to fix everything.”

They were standing under the Aurora again. Realising they were in a position to be easily spotted by passing guards, Jamie tried to urge Orisa to start walking again by tugging on her arm.

“It is not possible,” Orisa insisted, not budging from where she stood. “The truth is, I don’t care if my memory is erased or not.”

Efi’s jaw dropped at this admission, her expression positively heartbroken.

“How can you not care about something like that?” Jamie asked, his voice rising in volume.

Orisa looked around at all the anxious faces staring up at her. Finally, her glowing eyes came to rest on Jamie again. “Agent Fawkes, you know that you are alive. You think, therefore you are. Losing all that you are would be a monumental loss. Correct?”

Jamie swallowed hard. This was reminding him of a conversation he had had with Zenyatta once. “What are you saying? Don’t you think too?”

Orisa shook her head. “Not in the same way that humans do. I am aware, and therefore, I am aware that I am not alive.”

Jamie threw up his hands in frustration. “I don’t want to hear you talking about how you’re not alive!”
“I’m not a human, I’m just an advanced simulation,” Orisa went on. “My existence has less value than yours. Therefore, it is no great loss if my memory is erased.”

“Orisa, please,” Efi begged her. “We need to keep moving...”

Orisa continued, addressing Jamie directly, “It’s better for you that my memory is reformatted. My memory can be called upon in a court of law and may be used as evidence against you.”

“‘Evidence?’” Lena repeated. She shot Jamie a look of reproach. “Jamie, what is she talking about?”

Orisa went on before Jamie could offer any kind of explanation. “If you were charged with theft and relieved of your duties as an Overwatch agent, this would not be an optimal outcome,” Orisa said, yellow eyes focussed on Jamie once more. “You may even be extradited. What kind of friend would I be if I let you go back to prison? As such, it is better to reformat my knowledge of the event. All it will cost is erasing a little data.”

“That’s not fair,” Jamie mumbled, hands fisted at his sides. “That’s not what I want.”

“Jamie? Did you steal something?” Lena asked incredulously. She scrutinized him closely, as though trying to assess if he truly was responsible for the necklace being stolen.

Jamie whirled on her. “Look, I’m a klepto, alright?” he barked. “Are you really that surprised that I might have stolen something?”

Lena sputtered. “Jamie, you can’t do that. It’s against the rules!”

“Rules are made to be broken,” he retorted.

Her hands migrated to her hips so she could adopt a furious pose, glaring at Jamie. “Nothing is made to be broken,” she told him.

“Piñatas,” Jamie said, deadpan, and Lena was stunned into silence.

“Wow. He’s right,” Hana murmured nearby.

There was a deafening blaring of a siren that startled the gathered agents where they stood. Yellow lights flashed nearby, casting strobing shadows across the floor. Jamie whipped around to see the enormous blast doors on the other side of the hangar had started to open. The large hydraulics inside the mechanism were bared as the two halves yawned open. Slowly, two dark figures were revealed standing on the other side, silhouetted by the flashing yellow lights.

“It’s the fuzz!” Jamie cried. “Scatter!”

“Wait!” Lena cried, taking hold of his arm to still him.

The sirens shut off and the figures stepped forward, heading straight for the gathered agents.

“What is going on here?” a deep voice growled. As the owner of the voice stepped forward into the light, Jamie felt his stomach drop. It was the Commander, accompanied by Captain Amari. They had been caught.

Jack’s eyes came to rest on the giant automaton standing in the midst of seven Overwatch field agents and one very frightened-looking little girl. His brows furrowed. “Orisa? What are you--?” he asked.
“We’re setting her free!” Hana exclaimed, stepping forward, head raised high.

“Oh? So that is what this is all about?” Ana asked. She couldn’t help but smile at the sight before her. Zenyatta had taken up a protective position between the Commander and Orisa, metal arms spread wide as though to prevent Jack from getting at her. The rest of the agents were gathered behind him, creating yet more protective layers. Efi had taken up a position hiding behind one of Orisa’s large legs, hoping to avoid Jack’s wrath. Ana glanced briefly at Jack, but he did not appear to be as charmed as she was. In fact, he was slowly turning red.

“How did you find out where Orisa was being held?” Jack demanded to know.


Jack’s breathing was becoming laboured. He looked skyward for a moment. “I swear to god...,” he grumbled.

“One of the Talkie units must have overheard us speaking about Orisa earlier this afternoon,” Ana said quietly, reaching out to pat Jack consolingly on the shoulder.

“What are you all doing here?” Jack growled at them. “You are in violation of almost every tenet of the Code of Conduct right now.”

Lúcio spoke up, stepping towards the Commander. “Orisa is part of the team. We won’t let you destroy her!”

“Destroy her?” Jack repeated, taken aback. “Who said anything about--?”

“You’re going to erase her memory!” Brigitte added. “Everything that makes Orisa who she is will be lost!”

Jack gaped momentarily at Brigitte, perhaps surprised to have been challenged by the young woman. He took a sharp inhale of breath. A vein had started to bulge on his neck. “Are you kidding me right now?” he asked, his voice rising in volume. “Do you realise how much trouble you are in? None of you are above following orders and none of you are going to get away without repercussions.”

“Jack...” Ana began. She reached out again, hoping to placate him.

“No!” Jack barked and Ana hesitated. He was palpably furious by this point. Jack fixed his angry gaze on the agents standing in front of Orisa once more. “I am very disappointed in all of you. Your willful disobedience tonight cannot go unpunished.”

“Jack...” Ana began. She reached out again, hoping to placate him.

“I demand to know who is responsible for this.” Jack glared at each of them in turn, deathly calm, although his heavy breathing was beginning to betray his anger.

Jamie took a deep breath. There was only one way to fix this, even if it meant no longer being an Overwatch agent. The best thing he could do now was to own up.

At some point, Satya had looped her arm through his, creating a protective hold. She glanced at him briefly, and nodded encouragingly. Jamie took a steadying breath and tried not to get distracted by the fact he had almost kissed the most beautiful woman on base not twenty minutes ago, and that after tonight, he may never again get that same chance.
“Me,” Jamie said. He stepped towards the Commander and the other agents parted before him. “It was all me. I acted alone,” he added.

The other agents started to protest, but Jamie quickly cut them off, “Don’t try to take the fall for me. I’m the one who is responsible for all of this.”

Jamie stepped around Zenyatta, offering up his wrists to Jack as though expecting to be cuffed and taken away. Jack considered Jamie carefully, trying to decide if this was some kind of trick.

“Jamison, it’s understandable you would want to take the blame for Orisa...” Jack began.

“What?” Jamie felt like he had just been slapped in the face. He stared back at Jack slack-jawed. “No, you don’t understand! I really did it!” Jamie exclaimed, offering his wrists again. “You have to believe me! Orisa is innocent!”

“No, it was me!” Lena interrupted. “I took the necklace!”

Jamie whipped around to stare at her, aghast. “Wait, what?”

“No, it was me! I took it!” Lúcio cried. He tried to step around the others to approach Jack but Jamie reached out and took hold of his shoulder.

“No, you didn’t!” Jamie retorted angrily to Lúcio’s mild surprise. “It was me. I really took the necklace!”

Hana piped up as well. “I took the necklace too!”

Brigitte looked over at Hana, confused. “Hana, you weren’t even on the Thailand mission.”

Hana frowned. “I wanted to feel included,” she said quietly.

“I insist you arrest me too,” Lena said to Jack, stepping forward. She also offered up her wrists as Jamie had done.

This surprised Jack. Lena was like a daughter to him. He really did not want to take her into custody. “Lena...” he began.

Lena’s expression was hard-set with determination. “I organised everyone and lead them here,” Lena went on, head held high in defiance. “If you’re arresting anyone, let it be me.” Jamie took a step back from her, surprised by the intensity of her conviction.

“Now, hold on a second...” Jack started to say.

“Take me too!” Satya added.

“And me!” Hana said, also stepping around Zenyatta to offer up her wrists. “I want to be court-martialed too!”

There were more protests and offers to be arrested from the young agents. Jamie was the most indignant of all, because the Commander seemed not to believe that he was the only one telling the truth. Their loud objections caused a cacophony of echoes around the cavernous hangar.

“Stop!”

It was like a jolt of electricity shocked the gathered agents to attention. Everyone turned to look at Orisa still standing at the rear of the group.
“That’s quite enough,” Orisa told them all. “This isn’t what I want.”

The air in Hangar Eighteen quickly filled with a strange energy.

Zenyatta was the one to finally break the silence, to everyone’s surprise. "What do you want?” he asked, having spoken for the first time all evening. He turned his body towards the other automaton to give her his full attention.

Jamie looked up at Orisa with wide eyes. Nobody had paid much attention to what Orisa wanted yet. So far, they had disregarded how she felt about all of this. She appeared conflicted all of a sudden under the scrutiny of the other agents, like no one had ever respected her autonomy or her desires before. Jamie remembered that Zenyatta had said she had a free will. Did she not also have just as much right as anyone else here to express her feelings on the situation?

“I want...” Orisa began, looking back at Zenyatta uncertainly. Efi stepped out from behind her leg, a hopeful expression on her face as she waited for Orisa to continue.

“It is my desire to become the hero Miss Efi believes that I am,” Orisa said, returning Efi’s gaze. She turned her attention back on the others. “I want to work together with my new friends, build personal bonds over time for more effective military manoeuvres, and make the world a better place.” This statement seemed to please Efi because she smiled warmly up at Orisa. “Oh, and I also want stop Doomfist, of course.”

The heavy silence continued for a moment, before Zenyatta slowly swivelled so that he was looking at Jack once more.

“That is a noble desire, my sister,” Zenyatta said. He said this while staring at Jack. “You have begun to develop your own free will. I am pleased to hear you share your opinions and desires.”

Jack huffed. “That’s all well and good, but--”

Zenyatta cut him off quickly. “And even though you have not been given a fair trial, or the opportunity to plead your case, you have been brave in the face of adversity.”

Jack glowered at Zenyatta, but the omnic monk went on, unperturbed. “Omnics were originally designed to perform menial tasks for humans. To support them to live a more meaningful and enriched life. But what about quality of life for omnics? Humans can switch them on and off whenever it’s convenient. They are like slaves.”

The hangar had gone eerily silent. Everyone was watching Zenyatta closely, watching him floating serenely before the Commander in his pro-omnic t-shirt.

“An omnic charged with a human crime receives an infinitely harsher sentence compared to their human counterparts,” Zenyatta added. “They risk being dismantled or destroyed for even the pettiest of crimes. Humans have no fear of such extreme repercussions.” Zenyatta paused briefly to gently clasp his hands in his lap. “I have free-will too. This makes humans uncomfortable for some reason. But there can be no hope for peace between us until we begin to understand and embrace what makes us different, and also what makes us the same. And if an unjust policy were to stand in the way of that, one has a moral responsibility to disobey it.”

No one said anything for a while, until Ana stepped forward.

“Well said, Zen,” she told him. She cast her eyes over the gathered agents. “It’s late, and I think that’s probably enough excitement for one day. You should all really be in bed.”
“Yes, Captain Amari,” everyone murmured in unison.

The tension in the air was instantly released as though Ana had diffused the situation with a wave of her proverbial fairy godmother wand.

“Orisa, would you be more comfortable back in your usual spot in the Workshop storeroom?” Ana asked.

Orisa considered this question briefly before answering simply, “Yes.”

Ana nodded. “I’m sure one of the engineers here would be happy to escort you.”

Orisa reached down and picked Efi up, setting the small girl on her back so she could carry her to the exit. As everyone watched Orisa make her way out of the hangar, there was nothing really left to say, so the remaining agents slowly started to follow cautiously behind the automation. Jack made no motion to stop them.

Jack was not entirely sure what had just happened. Before his eyes, the more junior field agents were filing out of the hangar, leaving him standing alone with Ana. Everyone had just decided that his authority had been undermined and it was time to go to bed.

“What just happened?” Jack asked Ana, watching the retreating forms of the other agents.

“You were overruled, Jack,” Ana told him quietly.

Ana gave him a little nudge and together they headed for the hangar door behind the other agents. She noted that he appeared slightly befuddled, but he did not protest. Zenyatta’s impassioned plea must have left an impression upon him, or at least given him more to think about. At any rate, he must have resolved to let the situation go.

“Come along, Jack,” Ana said, patting him on the shoulder once more. “Let’s call it a day.”

And so, they did. Each party made their way to their respective dorm rooms with a great deal to think about regarding that night’s events. In particular, Jamie, who felt it was unlikely that he would see much sleep before dawn with his mind racing as it was. The moment when his friends had not allowed him to take the fall alone kept replaying in his mind over and over again. It was a selfless gesture, and one he had not been expecting. It had been a long time since anyone had ever done anything like that for him.

As Jamie's head hit the pillow, the knowledge that a handful of other Overwatch agents were carrying around an important secret for him was humbling. He supposed that was part of the danger of being known by someone else, and also part of building a bond with them. He was not sure how exactly to feel about building a bond with the ‘advanced simulation’ who called herself Orisa, but she had seemed eager to, in her own words, develop trust and companionable relationships with the other agents.

Jamie rolled over, seeking a more comfortable position. Being known. It a terrible and wonderful thing all at once. It was something that, he realised, he kind of wanted to protect.

Jamie smiled as his eyes drifted closed and exhaustion slowly enveloped him. Tomorrow would be a fresh start.

Chapter End Notes
A/N: No one answered my question from last chapter so I’m carrying on as usual.

This whole chapter was heavily inspired by the film ‘Robot and Frank’ (2012).

“Jamie’s understanding was that elephants brought good luck, especially if the trunk was up.” This line was a reference to a line from one of my favourite Australian films, The Castle (1997). You can watch a clip here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PlTjo0zO3mo

The first scene where they are playing video games was inspired by this clip from Game Grumps: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HvpilX9B8U. I had originally written out a much longer scene based on this clip (Jamie has Arin’s chaotic energy, and Lúcio embodies Dan’s level-headed tolerance for his friend’s antics) but it went on too long and didn’t serve much of a purpose so I ended up cutting it down.

Jamie and Satya might have had a little interaction about doing something ‘crazy’ that is kind of similar to a conversation that Hiccup and Astrid had in ‘How To Train Your Dragon’ (2010).

Also, one of Zen’s lines comes from a Martin Luther King Jr. quote: “[O]ne has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws.”

……And Jamie’s line about Piñatas was inspired by a scene from Brooklyn 99: (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bI_QfCgpQ_o).
Mercy

“Mercy…”

It was the first time she had seen a teammate die.

She watched the light dying in the soldier’s eyes as she pressed down with all her strength on his open wound, trying to stem the flow of blood. Her hands soaked, she released her grip as she realised that her efforts were pointless. She had failed.

‘This isn’t your fault,’ a small voice inside her said. ‘The people who shot him are at fault.’ But Angela could not shake her guilt. Maybe she could have done something more and then he would still be alive.

The last thing the soldier had said before he slipped away was, ‘Mercy.’ Angela felt a cold dread wash over her.

Artillery fire was whistling over her head but she could hardly hear any of it. That word was ringing in her ears. Had he been calling out for her? Or had he wanted her to let him die? She looked down at his ruddy face again, and there was a ghost of a smile there. His eyes were open, but he wasn’t moving.

Angela guessed that she must have been staring down at the dead man in shock, unmoving, for some time because someone grabbed her upper arm and yanked her to her feet unceremoniously.

“Mercy! What do you think you're doing?” It was another soldier.

Angela was too numb to respond even at the sound of her own callsign.

“Move! We’re falling back!” the man barked again.

Angela couldn’t even open her mouth to respond. She just turned and ran, Caduceus Staff gripped so tightly in her hand that her knuckles were white.

All those times she had seen a friend or a soldier die…

“Mercy!”

All those times she had worked tirelessly nursing a patient back to health only to arrive at work the next day to the news they had passed in their sleep the night before.

“Mercy!”

All those nights she woke with a strangled scream rattling out of her throat and tears on her face as she awoke from another nightmare about the blood on her hands, her friends dead all around her. So much blood…

“Mercy!”

In a way, death could be a mercy, she supposed.

“Mercy? Are you alright?”

Startled, Angela lifted her head off the breakroom table with a jolt of surprise. She looked up and
was momentarily blinded by the Medical Wing’s fluorescent lights. The word ‘mercy’ had sent a wave of cold shock through Angela, startling her from her sleep. Her eyes adjusted after a moment or two of discomfort.

It was Jean-Baptiste, although he preferred to go by Baptiste. He was leaning towards her, a hand reaching out to touch her lightly on the shoulder. Dressed in green hospital scrubs, with a holographic clipboard in hand, he appeared to be a little concerned for her.

“Oh, pardon me. I meant to say ‘Angela.’”

Angela smiled warmly. He had accidentally lapsed into using her callsign, but she preferred that her own medical staff referred to her as “Angela” or “Doctor.”

“I’m fine,” she replied, stifling a yawn.

“Another late night?” he asked her.

“You could say that,” she replied. She stretched her neck carefully from side to side. “Is the coffee machine still on the fritz?”

“I’m afraid so,” Baptiste replied. He chuckled, but Angela could still detect note of concern in his voice. “You know, if you are still having bad dreams, I could prescribe you something?”

Angela managed a weak smile. “Thank you, Baptiste. I will be alright,” she assured him.

Baptiste knew better than to question her. He had a patient waiting for him in one of the consultation rooms, so he excused himself politely.

“Wait, I’ll walk with you,” Angela told him, standing from her seat and joining Baptiste as he exited the room.

Angela had once disapproved of allowing mercenaries and ex-criminals to join Overwatch. How could brute force be of any kind of assistance to restoring peace to those displaced and disenfranchised by the Omnic Crisis? The recruitment of such personnel, in her mind, could only serve one sordid purpose; ceasing power through underhanded means. As such, Angela had felt a strong sense of suspicion towards any such recruits. But after years of working together with several agents who fell into this category, Angela had come to realise she was wrong.

By the time Baptiste had joined the Overwatch ranks, Angela had set aside a lot of her feelings about hiring people with shady backgrounds. She threw her full support behind his placement on her team, having worked with him a few times when she had joined the World Health Organization after Overwatch was disbanded by the U.N. She knew that he was trying to put his past behind him, and she had found that he was a friendly and talented practitioner. Of course, the news that he had been a member of Talon had come as a shock, but she had seen his work and knew he was dedicated to helping others. And was it not the right thing to do to give him a second chance?

They made their way into the main part of the infirmary, passing rows and rows of empty hospital beds. As they approached the nurses’ station, Angela noticed some of the nurses had decorated the area with garlands made of bat-shaped cutouts. A few small, orange pumpkins had been set out on the worksurface to add to the festive atmosphere. One had even been carved into a jack-o-lantern, a little candle burning away inside.

“Any plans for tonight?” Angela asked conversationally.
“Ah, yes. The spookiest night of the year,” Baptiste laughed. “I’m afraid I haven’t had time to work on my costume. I was thinking of bringing a water bazooka, making a grumpy face, and telling everyone I came as the Commander.”

Angela laughed. “I hope he finds the idea as amusing as you do.”

“Will you be joining us?” Baptiste asked hopefully.

Angela shrugged slowly. For some reason, the thought of celebrating the dead and macabre all evening did not seem like the solution to her sleeplessness or her bad dreams.

“I have a lot of work to do. Plus, I’ve got this terrible headache. I was thinking of turning in early tonight.” She smiled at him apologetically.

Baptiste nodded. “That might be for the best.” He checked his watch and seemed to realise he was running late for his patient. “I hope you feel better soon!” he told her as he jogged away.

Angela smiled as she watched him go. It was a quiet in the Medical Wing; very few patients had come through that day. Angela appreciated the quiet, because it gave her a chance to find some aspirin and perhaps spend some time in her office working on her latest medical journal submission. There were also a few reports on her desk that required attention.

The flame from the candle inside the little jack-o-lantern winked at her, and Angela paused to consider it briefly. A night of carefree celebration was tempting...

She was about to turn and head away from the nurses' station, when the main doors to the Medical Wing slid open and someone stepped into the room.

All six-foot-six of lanky Australian man strutted into the foyer, hands jammed in his pockets. He looked around at the sterilized space with great interest and then spotted her across the room. A grin broke out on Jamie’s face as he strode over to her.

“Hiya, Ange,” he said with a little wave of his hand. “Just the person I was hoping to see!”

Angela’s expression blanched slightly. She was hoping to retreat to the quiet of her office, but with none of her nurses around at the moment, she supposed she would have to tend to Jamie’s latest ailment or injury today.

“What have you done now, Jamison?” she asked.

Jamie broke into a fit of giggles. “Nothing, love! Came to ask a favour actually.” He approached her side, taking the opportunity to lounge on a propped elbow against the nurses’ station.

Angela sighed. “I’ve already told you; the pharmaceutical cabinet is not your personal candy store, Jamison.”

He laughed again. “Do you really think so little of me?”

“Don’t push your luck,” she told him in a flat tone. “What do you want?”

“Two things,” he began.

Angela frowned in response. She motioned for him to follow her and they set off down a corridor towards her office.

“One,” Jamie went on. “Hana is still feeling poorly. I think you might need to send a nurse up to
Angela’s expression softened. “The poor thing,” she remarked. “So, she’s gotten worse?” Hana had come down with flu-like symptoms a few days ago but she did not seem to be on the mend yet. She had refused to come down to the Medical Wing, preferring to stay in her own room, which was fine for a minor illness so long as she recovered quickly. Angela would need to arrange for someone to check in on the young agent.

“’Fraid so,” Jamie replied. They arrived at the door to Angela’s office. He watched as she swiped them in with her wristband and followed her inside.

“Have a seat,” Angela told him, pointing to one of the plush chairs in front of her desk.

“She’s asked me to take over running the celebrations tonight,” Jamie went on, flopping down in the seat offered to him. He flung a leg over one of the chair’s arms and cast his eyes around the certificates and awards that decorated the walls of Angela’s office.

Angela paused in the middle of tidying her desk to look up at him. “Is that wise?” she asked.

Jamie shrugged in response. “She was pretty sure that she wanted us to go ahead without her,” he said. “She had been working on it for weeks.”

Angela took her seat opposite Jamie and nodded slowly. “I suppose that make sense,” she replied.

“Which brings me to my second request,” Jamie went on. “I want to borrow a lab coat.”

Angela arched an eyebrow at him. “A lab coat?” she asked. “Whatever for?”

“For my costume!” Jamie said, grinning widely. “All part of Hana’s plan. I’m playing the mad scientist.”

“Fitting,” Angela mumbled under her breath. Jamie seemed not to have heard her. He had gone back to looking around at the office décor. “The answer is ‘no’,” she told him.

Jamie’s head snapped around to stare at her. “What? Come on, Ange! Don’t be like that!”

Angela regarded him coolly. “I’m not lending you a coat so you can get it ripped and dirty.” She turned her attention to a report on her tablet device that one of her nurses had submitted. She started scribbling down her own notes.

Jamie looked scandalized. “But I worked so hard on my costume!” he moaned. “I’ve been working for weeks on my arm and a new leg!”

Angela noted that he was wearing his standard prostheses, but she supposed he must have built alternatives for his ‘mad scientist’ costume.

“You’ve been working ‘so hard’ and yet you left the most important part of your costume to the last minute? The day of the event?”

Jamie looked appropriately chastised. He pouted at her. “I might have run low on time to prepare,” he mumbled. “But I need one, Ange! You’re not going to ruin Halloween for the whole base because you won’t lend me one, measly lab coat, are ya?”

Angela refused to acknowledge him. Her eyes slid back over the report in front of her as though Jamie were not even there.
Jamie sat up straight in his chair, clasping his hands in front of him to form a pleading gesture. He looked at Angela imploringly. “Pleeeeeeeeeease? ” he begged her.

Angela shot him a disapproving look. Eventually she could withstand his big, hazel eyes no longer. “Alright!” she relented. “If I loan you my spare lab coat, will it make you leave my office faster?”

Jamie nodded quickly.

With a sigh of annoyance, Angela stood and crossed the room to a small locker in the corner. She unlocked it swiftly with her wristband over the security pad and the door sprung open. She reached inside, retrieved her spare lab coat on a coat hanger. She took it off the hanger, folded it, and handed it over to Jamie.

“I want it back clean and in one piece,” she told him. “It’s my only spare and I will take the cost of a replacement out of your wages if I have to.”

Jamie accepted the lab coat carefully. “No worries, Ange,” he said. “I’ll take good care of it. I promise!”

“Mm-hmm,” she murmured disbelievingly. She returned to her seat, picked up her stylus and continued to scribble notes into her tablet.

Jamie watched her without saying anything for a moment.

“Anything else?” Angela asked him without looking up.

Jamie blinked at her. “Are you coming to the party tonight?”

“I don’t think so,” Angela sighed. “I’m not really in the party mood.”

“What do you mean?” Jamie asked her. “I thought Halloween was a big deal around here?”

Angela glanced up at him. “I suppose this is your first Halloween, isn’t it, Jamison?”

He nodded.

Angela understood that Halloween was a popular American tradition, and celebrations at Watchpoint: Gibraltar had been large and extravagant during Overwatch’s early days, prior to being disbanded. It was something the American soldiers had insisted on and everyone else had taken to the tradition enthusiastically. Following the Recall, however, the celebration had been a near nonexistent affair.

The last year had been dedicated to a constant stream of work getting their systems and processes up and running again, recruiting new personnel, and reinforcing their security systems. There had been very little time for frivolity. But Angela had heard some of the younger, newer team members were planning to restore the holiday on base to its former glory.

“I’m just sad Hana won’t get to see it,” Jamie said with a frown. “She wrote the whole script based off one of Rein’s stories he used to tell during the old Halloween celebrations years ago.” Then came a sigh of defeat. “Gave herself the starring role, of course. She worked so hard on everything...”

Angela watched him. A small smile quirked at the corner of her mouth. “You’ll do fine as a replacement,” she told him.
Jamie slumped in his chair. “We had to re-write everything at the last minute to make the scientist the main role,” he said forlornly. “I’ve been working so hard on the Zomnics, I’ve barely had time to memorize my lines.”

“‘Zomnic’?”

Jamie waved his hand dismissively. “Hana’s idea. Got the idea from one of her games. Torb let me have some of the old training bots they weren’t using anymore and I modified them a bit. You’ll see when you come to the party tonight.”

“I’m not coming to the party tonight,” she said firmly.

Jamie seemed to have developed selective hearing again. “And poor Hana. She’s going to miss it all,” he lamented. “We’ve got no Witch of the Wilds now.”

Angela had a feeling she knew where this was going. “Well, I certainly wish you all the best with your party-game-thing tonight,” she said. She turned her attention back to her tablet. “I really must be getting back to my work now.”

Jamie was watching her closely. “You have a witch costume, don’t you, Ange?” he asked her. “I think I saw a photo of you somewhere...”

Angela paused. In her youth, during a momentary lapse in judgement, she had once gone as a witch for Halloween. She was disappointed to hear that photographic evidence of that particular incident had survived. A photograph of that nature threatened to destroy the air of professionalism she had carefully crafted for herself.

“No.”

Jamie’s body language seemed to transform with excitement. “Yeah, you do.” His grin widened. “You could be our new Witch of the Wilds!”

Angela put down her stylus a little roughly. “No, I couldn’t,” she said. “I don’t know anything about acting.”

“Of course you can do it, Ange!” he cried. “Think ‘Cry in the Dark’. Think Meryl Streep. Think ‘Dingo stole my baby!’” He reached out across the surface of Angela’s desk to clasp at her hands. “Please, Ange? Please!”

“Jamison, I have no interest in your slap-dash offer to perform in your strange pantomime only to be humiliated in front of the entire base,” she said primly, withdrawing her hands from Jamie’s reach. “Now, if you’re quite done, I need to get back to my work.”

“It’s not humiliating!” Jamie insisted, not budging from his seat. “It’s going to be fun!”

“It’s a ridiculous notion,” Angela said, eyeing him warily. “Even if I did agree to do it, how would you expect me to learn all the lines in time?”

Jamie thought on this for a moment. “Well, we’d keep it with the scientist as the main character then, and maybe just keep the witch’s part to one or two lines?”

Angela shot him a disbelieving look.

Jamie inched forward in his seat, making an ingratiating gesture with his hands. “Don’t you want to help people? Specifically, me? Isn’t that why you joined Overwatch?”
Angela’s brow furrowed. “Jamison, please,” she implored him. “I’ve got a lot of work to do...”

Jamie watched her a moment longer, but it appeared she had made up her mind. She continued to scribble notes into her tablet, steadfastly ignoring him.

“Oh, well. Genji is going to be so disappointed.” Jamie released a sigh of defeat. “And he said he was looking forward to it, too.”

Something about what Jamie had just said made Angela’s hands still. She seemed to consider his words carefully. “Well, now that you mention it... perhaps I could afford a distraction.” Angela started to fidget with her stylus. “Maybe it might be fun, as you say.”

Jamie’s expression became hopeful. “Does that mean...?”

Angela huffed. “I suppose I could help you out...” she murmured.

Jamie sprang out of his seat like someone had electrified the whole chair. “You mean it? Thank you, Ange! You won’t regret it!” He leaned across the desk between them and attempted to hug Angela around the shoulders. Angela batted his hands away.

“Jamie, if you don’t leave right now, I’m going to go find a syringe and vaccinate you for something.”

Jamie straightened and hurried for the door. “I’m going! I’m going!”

Angela smirked at his retreating form. It worked perfectly. Jamie’s fear of needles overrode his drive to annoy her. Although it did raise questions about how he had managed to obtain a skull tattoo on his right shoulder if he was so afraid, or even sit still long enough to endure the inking for that matter.

Before he could disappear through the doorframe, he turned to her one last time.

“Don’t forget; meet us at the southside training yard at six,” Jamie told her, his words all run-together in his excitement. “I’ll get Lucy to send over a script. And bring your witch costume!”

“Jamie...”

“I’m going!” he said again. He dashed away, lab coat tucked under one arm, before she could get up and chase him out of the room.

Angela drummed her fingers against the surface of her desk, watching the space where Jamie had been standing a moment ago. Part of her was a little surprised that she had agreed to all of this so readily. But maybe this was just what she needed; something to take her mind off of her work and the bad dreams that had been plaguing her sleep. And besides, Genji was going to be there. She could not deny she was a little excited to see the look on his face when she showed up as this Witch of the Wilds character.

Angela sighed deeply and took a moment to stretch her neck from side to side. How long were things to go on like this? It seemed since she had met Jamie, she was always bailing him out of some new trouble he had gotten himself into. There had been many a time that he had come to her, injured from his latest escapade, leaving her with no choice but to patch him up and send him on his way with a good scolding. Angela had started placing little bets with some of her nurses to try and guess how soon they would see him in the Medical Ward again.

Over the months that they had worked together, Angela found herself becoming a kind of
protective parent or older sister to Jamie. Someone had to do it, with his complete disregard for personal safety and his endearing forgetfulness. It was something the wayward youth needed in her mind. She had taken to keeping an eye on him during missions, reminding him when he was several clicks away from his mission objective or had unnecessarily injured himself. She had no idea how Mr. Rutledge had managed to keep him alive all this time.

She would watch him run headfirst into a fight, giggling with mad abandon, returning several hours later covered in cuts, scrapes and a great deal of soot, breathing heavily and intoxicated with glee. When she had first witnessed it, she shook her head in disbelief as though to dismiss the very thought of such behaviour from her mind. Where had he learned to be so mischievous?

Angela had to admit she had underestimated Jamie and his bodyguard at first, her prior prejudice against recruiting former criminals into Overwatch notwithstanding. Jamie in particular didn’t seem to have any prior combat experience outside of his criminal escapades of which she had seen plenty on the news, but he was capable of performing exceptionally well as an Overwatch agent, and it had surprised her.

Angela had a feeling he would be full of surprises.

Angela took a deep breath and stood from her desk. She would need to go dig that costume out of storage now.

--

When they had first met, Angela had mistaken his obvious limp as a sign of discomfort.

She had watched him chatting animatedly with Lena as they crossed one of the hangar floors in the cold February air. Angela was standing off to the side of the ramp area, watching their newest recruit with curiosity. She had come looking for the Commander who was not in his office for some reason, but had found the odd pair instead.

“Do you need a hand?” she asked instinctively, reaching out to offer her arm as support as they approached her.

Jamie had just grinned back at her. “Cheers, love. I need one more than you know!” And with that he slipped off his prosthetic right arm with ease and waved his nub at her as if to make a perverse greeting.

Angela could not hide the surprise from her face, having not noticed the prosthetic arm up until that point, which set off a fit of giggles in Jamie that could not be stifled for some time.

Lena elbowed him in the ribs. “Jamie...,” she said in a chiding tone.

Angela could not help but laugh too. “Mr. Fawkes, I presume?” she asked him.

She had been advised that two new members of staff were starting today and she would be overseeing their physicals later that afternoon. She reached out to offer her hand for him to shake.

“Crikey, that’s my father’s name! Just call me Jamie.”

She smiled in reply. “And I am Angela.”
“Nice to meet you, Ange!” Jamie said enthusiastically, gripping her hand and shaking it vigorously as soon as he had finished reattaching his arm.

From that day on, Angela took a liking to their new eccentric crew member. Jamie limped around the Overwatch base offering up crude jokes and larrikinisms wherever he saw a chance. He could often be found tinkering with his bombs in the testing grounds, burning cinders caught in his hair, his laughter echoing in the corridors.

He also tagged along on their missions. He said he was just doing it for the money, but Angela noticed he got along well with almost everyone in the team, even some of their surlier team members. His companion, Mr. Rutledge—or “Roadie” as Jamie insisted, he preferred to be called—remarked once that he had never known Jamie to get along so well with others. He was infectiously cheerful like that and everyone was instantly his ‘mate.’ He could raise anyone's spirits with ease, casually tossing a joke or cheeky comment their way. Angela could not help but take a liking to his optimism and jovial attitude.

Angela had learned quickly that working with Jamie could be challenging. He had no fear of battle and nothing ever seemed to faze him. He would run headlong into danger like some kind of deranged man. He gloried in battle, relishing the thrill of the fight. Then he would emerge from the fray sometime later relatively worse for wear but always with that grin on his face.

Angela could often hear Jamie in battle before she saw him. If he was in need of backup or healing, she could track him down easily by listening for the distinct and ever-present sounds of grenades detonating in the distance accompanied by the sound of hysterical laughter as Jamie landed another explosion right in the midst of their enemies.

Angela had once overheard Jamie say this to his bodyguard, “I get to blow bots up all day and I get paid for it! I’m in heaven!”

Perhaps that was a point of distinction between them; he loved the thrill of battle, spreading total mayhem in his wake, while Angela was more often the advocate for peace.

Jamie had added, “This going legit thing was a great idea of mine!” to which Roadie had only groaned in reply.

She was pleased to see he was doing something more productive with his life besides robbing banks. He was an Overwatch agent now, and with that came a great deal of responsibility. He was still coming to grips with a lot of his new life, but she was sure with a little guidance, he would soon be a very accomplished agent.

From time to time, however, she was reminded just how new this world outside the Australian outback could be to him.

“Please can we go?”

“No,” Jack replied.

“But I hardly ever get to go to the beach!”

They were in Ilios, post-mission. They had come to oversee Oasis University breaking ground at another dig site. This time, they did not want any further interference from Talon or anyone else fixated on tomb raiding. While Angela and some of the others held the perimeter, Jack had disappeared into the Greek ruins with Hamid, the head of the Archeological department, and had not come out again for some time. It was unclear what was going on inside, so they had simply
waited and followed the Commander’s orders to hold their position.

By all accounts, the mission had been a success and now they were getting ready to return to base. The sun was warm and a cool breeze was beckoning from beyond the dropship’s hatch. They had positioned the aircraft tantalizingly close to the shore on the little Greek island. Now Jamie was fluttering around the Commander’s shoulder following the debriefing session, pestering him to allow the team to visit the white sand beach. Angela was watching the exchange with amusement.

“Quit your whining, Junkrat. We were here to accomplish a mission objective, not screw around.”

“What do you mean you hardly ever go to the beach?” Lena asked from the other side of the briefing table nearby. She was watching Jamie curiously. “I thought Australia was full of beautiful beaches.”

“Not in the bit where I lived!” Jamie told her. He turned back to Jack. “Look, we came to Ilion. We did what you asked. Now we’ve got time to kill! So, let’s have some fun!”

Fun? Angela rarely had time for fun. She had been working, mending and healing as she went, since as long as she could remember. It had been some time since the team had gotten together to just mess around.

“I think it sounds like a great idea,” Angela said quietly.

Everyone turned to look at her. Industrious, hard-working Angela was suggesting they actually take a break and go goof off?

“See! Ange agrees with me!” Jamie announced, adopting a smug look.

“Yeah, come on Jack!” Lena was hopping from one foot to the other in excitement. “There’s plenty of time!”

Brigitte and Mei had also accompanied them on this mission. They had both stopped what they were doing so they could watch Jack closely for his answer.

Jack huffed in annoyance. “Alright, alright. Just thirty minutes. Then we’ve got to go…” But the words were barely out of his mouth before Lena and Jamie were both off and running, shedding their clothes as they went, both heading in the direction of the beach.

No one had brought any kind of beachwear or equipment, so Angela sat on the sand and watched with Jack sat at her side, brooding and counting down the minutes until they could leave. The younger team members stripped down to their under garments to leap about in the sea foam, shoutting to each other over the cacophony of the waves. Angela took a deep breath of salty sea air and smiled at the sight before her.

Jamie had removed his prosthetic arm and leg so as not to ruin the metal inner workings with sea water, and left them resting on the sand beside Angela. She watched as Lena launched herself at Jamie not too far away, trying to tackle him into the waves. Jamie let out a mock cry of alarm as Lena barreled into him (“Oh no! She bloody got me!” he called out dramatically) and then turned swiftly to vault Lena over his shoulders into the water. He was surprisingly buoyant and managed to stay mostly upright despite missing an arm and a leg.

Finally, they emerged from the water exhausted and dripping wet after Jack all but shouted at them to get back to the ship. In a huff, Jack then retreated to the dropship to begin final preparations for departure. Brigitte and Mei had quickly pulled on their clothes and disappeared inside the ship behind him, their heads bent together and giggling. Jamie and Lena were a little slower to
pull themselves from the waves.

Jamie had one arm around Lena’s shoulders so they could hop on one leg over to his prosthetic limbs. As they came toward Angela, she could see the seawater dripping down is tattooed bicep. His skin was pale and she could see he was beginning to shiver as the late afternoon elapsed into cool evening around them. He stood before her in nothing but his underwear, two limbs missing, hair plastered down in all directions to give him the appearance of a drowned rat, but he was grinning from ear to ear. It was one of the few times she had seen him not completely covered in soot.

Lena relinquished her hold on Jamie's waist and he dropped down beside Angela. She handed him one of the towels she had brought with her from the dropship.

“Here,” she said as he took the towel from her. “Before you catch your death.”

“Ta!” Jamie said brightly. He quickly wiped himself off.

Angela smirked. He was obviously exhausted but the pure happiness on his face could not be denied. She watched as he first re-fitted his arm and then with both arms, re-attached the missing leg.

“Did you have fun?” Angela asked.

“It was better than fun,” Jamie smirked at her. “That was heaps good!”

Angela chuckled. For someone who relished the thrill of mayhem and explosions, he had surprised her once again with the innocent, carefree abandon with which he had thrown himself into the sea.

Angela’s eyes lingered over Jamie’s hands as he continued to adjust the fit of his prosthetic leg. That’s when she noticed something red in the sand by his foot.

“Jamie, you're bleeding!” Angela announced with a jolt of alarm.

“Eh?” he murmured, looking down. “Well, would you look at that.” He lifted his foot, watching as the blood mixed with sea water dripped onto the sand. “Must have cut my foot on a rock or something.”

“Lena, run to the ship and get my first aid kit please,” Angela said, scooting closer to Jamie in the loose sand. She had healed plenty of minor cuts and bruises for Jamie before, but this was perhaps the first time she would have to treat a more serious injury of his.

Lena, who had seen the blood when she looked over at Angela, didn’t hesitate. She finished dressing quickly and bolted for the dropship, blinking back over to them moment later with a medical kit.

Angela began to go through the familiar motions. She quickly pulled on pair of latex gloves and then reach for Jamie’s ankle to prop it against her knee, but he pulled away before she could even make contact.

“Whoa! Hang on there!” Jamie exclaimed, trying to roll away from her in the soft sand. “Pump the brakes for a second!”

“I’m sorry, but this is something that cannot be ignored, Jamie,” Angela said sternly. “Now let me clean your wound please.”
“Maybe I don’t need your help,” Jamie retorted petulantly. He seemed to be trying to get himself into a kneeling position so he could crawl away from her, without much success. “I’ve been getting by on my own for long enough! A bit of spit and rub some dirt on it, and she’ll be right as rain.”

“Jamie,” Angela began with a warning tone. “Prompt first aid can help prevent infection and thereby speed healing and reduce the amount of scarring.”

Lena was hovering over Angela’s shoulder, watching Jamie with concern. “Come on, Jamie,” she said. “Let Doctor Ziegler work her magic!”

Jamie had gotten to his knees now. “Ouch!” he grumbled, trying to hobble away from them. He carried on like that, pretending not to have heard them.

Angela sighed. “Lena, could you please fetch me a jug of water please? We’ll need to wash the wound.”

Again, Lena blinked away and Angela turned her attention on Jamie once more.

“Now, Jamison. That’s quite enough,” Angela said. She stood and crossed the warm sand to his side. He was still on all fours, trying to put some distance between himself and the Doctor. Angela appeared in the peripheral of his vision and he looked up to see she was offering him a hand.

“I need you to trust me please,” she said.

Jamie watched her warily for a moment. Everything was still while he considered her offer. It was like he was internally at war with himself, Angela realised. One part of him harboured a certain amount of distrust for positions of authority, another part longed to connect and build trust with others now that he was free of the difficult living conditions of Junkertown. It made Angela wonder what his life had been like before joining Overwatch.

Tentatively, he reached out and took her hand.

Angela kneeled beside him and helped him into a sitting position, injured foot propped on her knee. A deep gash around three inches long scoured the soul of his foot. Angela could see the wound was dirty and would need to be washed before she could do anything else. It was any wonder Jamie had not noticed the injury when he had been flopping about in the salty water.

‘No sense, no feeling,’ Angela mused internally.

Lena arrived with the pitcher of water from the staff kitchen inside the dropship. She walked carefully towards them on the uneven sand, holding the pitcher precariously in front of her. Angela reached into the first aid kit for some antibacterial cleanser to mix with the water. Lena set the jug down and Angela quickly added the cleanser.

“We’d best hurry,” Lena said. “Jack’s in a foul mood now.”

Angela poured the water over Jamie’s foot in one swift movement to wash out the sand.

“Ow, ow, ow!” Jamie howled, but Angela held him firmly in place by the ankle. With one hand, she cracked open a cannister of biotic healing fluid—not dissimilar to that which Captain Amari used in her biotic rifle—and poured that over the wound too.

Jamie stopped wriggling, and a calm settled over him. He had clasped his fingers over his eyes, in an attempt to block out the pain Angela supposed, but now he chanced a peek at her.
“Is it over?” he asked.

Angela nodded. Biotic healing was always a speedy process. “Yes,” she told him. “Completely healed.”

“Brilliant work, Doctor,” Lena said. She seemed anxious, glancing at the dropship periodically to check if Jack would come back to shout at them some more. “Perhaps we could get going?”

Jamie sat up a little straighter and took hold of his foot so he could examine it more closely. The skin was smooth and completely healed; no sign of injury remained. Angela had healed him plenty of times before during the few brief missions they had shared together, but those incidents had been light cuts and scrapes. This was probably his first experience of her healing an injury that was slightly more serious than a scratch. He seemed a bit surprised by what had just happened. Angela worried that perhaps he had never been taken care of quite so carefully before.

“Do you trust me now?” Angela asked, standing up and reaching down to offer him a hand up.

He met her gaze, eyes still wide with amazement at her work. “Yeah,” he said. “Of course.”

He let her pull him to his feet and then with Lena’s help, they quickly set about collecting the last of the things they had brought down from the dropship to the sandy beach.

Everything considered, Angela was very pleased with how Jamie had handled the situation. Angela watched Jamie test his foot, putting his whole weight on it, and smiled when he appeared relieved to feel no pain.

Angela nodded with satisfaction. She had not become an accomplished medical practitioner and celebrated field medic for performing sloppy work, that was for sure. The horrible sunburn, however, was a bit beyond her area of expertise. That he would need to put up with for a couple of days.

--

“So, what are we supposed to do?” Baptiste asked, glancing at McCree on his left. “Do we just go in, or...?”

Baptiste watched as McCree reached into his pocket and retrieved a cigar case. He stuffed the end of a fresh cigar in his mouth and lit it with a flip top lighter. “I guess we wait,” he replied.

Standing opposite them was Jack, watching McCree closely. “Where did you get that?” he asked McCree, looking at the glowing end of the cigar.

McCree took a drag and released the smoke into the air above their heads. “I have sources,” he said with a wink.

“Smoking is banned on base,” Jack added.

“It’s a special night, Commander,” McCree drawled. “I’m sure you’ll let it slide.”

Jack’s expression soured further.

They were standing outside in the cool night air near the southside training yard. Behind them was
a long line of staff who had been lured out of the base on the promise of a night of ghoulish celebrations. They were also waiting a little impatiently to go into the yard.

They hadn’t been told much of what to expect but it seemed some of the younger agents had crafted a Halloween ‘experience’ for them in the vein of the celebrations that had taken place before the Recall. Whatever it was, it must have been some sort of surprise because the entire training yard was surrounded by high, temporary hard-light walls that blocked any attempt to peek inside the enclosed area. All they had been told was to bring training weapons and plenty of blanks. They would be going in as a group of four, they just needed to wait for their last team member to arrive.

“Nice costume,” McCree said to Baptiste with a gentle incline of his head.

“Oh, mèsi ,” Baptiste replied.

Baptiste had decided not to come as the Commander in the end. He had gone with a last-minute vampire costume complete with glowing eyes and little plastic fangs. McCree was wearing a lot of black leather and his usual cowboy hat, so Baptiste was a little confused if he had come in costume at all, but McCree had insisted it was a Van Helsing costume. The Commander was dressed as some kind of villain from a slasher film. He wore a hockey mask with glowing eyes, a leather jacket, and he had even brought one of the training rifles modified to look like a chainsaw.

“Thanks for waiting!” a voice called out.

Baptiste glanced up and saw Genji hurrying over to them. He skipped to the head of the queue and joined his companions.

Genji was dressed head to toe in carbon fibre armour, which was not unusual, however, it looked a lot different to his normal set. This one was detailed with shades of bright green, and his new helmet included antennae-like protrusions from his forehead. He looked like a character from a kid’s TV show, but Baptiste was unable to pick the reference.

McCree eyed Genji up and down. “What did you come as?” he asked.

“Cyborg ninja,” Genji replied.

“You come as that every year,” McCree muttered, raising his cigar to his mouth again.

“The doors are opening!” Baptiste cried, pointing towards the entrance.

“Finally,” Jack huffed. “Let’s get this over with. Whatever it is.”

They hurried through the doors and found themselves standing in the darkened training yard. But it was not the training yard like they remembered it. The modern training facility had been completely transformed into a gothic castle courtyard. Most of the surrounding structures—towers, observations decks—had been encased in a new hard-light ‘skin’ that projected ancient stone walls. A hard-light castle towered over the training yard lit from behind by a full moon. The area was complete with gravestones, murky ponds, and rows of black crows sitting on the wrought iron fences that lined the area. All of it made from hard-light constructs.

“Would you get a load of this?” McCree murmured staring around in awe. “This is incredible.”

The doors they had just come through suddenly slammed shut, causing all four to jump. Turning to look over his shoulder, Baptiste realised the ‘doors’ from this side looked like enormous wooden gates set into a façade of a castle.
“What was that?” Baptiste asked, eyeing the doors. He clutched his rifle a little tighter to his chest.

“Look alive,” Jack growled, adjusting his grip on his own weapon. “We’re not alone.”

“Not alone?” Baptiste asked. He watched Genji sink into a defensive stance. “You mean, like, ghosts?”

“Relax, Bap,” McCree drawled, the end of his lit cigar glowing bright in the dark. “It’s just a simulation.”

“You don’t understand! I’m terrified of ghosts!” Baptiste insisted.

“Bap, you’re ex-Talon,” Jack barked at him. “Get a hold of yourself!”

Somewhere nearby, lights flashed and the sound of thunder rumbled out of hidden speakers. Organ music began to play and a familiar voice drifted across the open area towards the four men.

“Our tale begins in Adlersbrunn, where the lord of the castle has called for heroes to come to his aid to defend him against the mad Doctor Junkenstein!”

“That sounded like Reinhardt,” Genji remarked quietly.

“Did he say ‘Junkenstein’?” Jack asked. He glanced sideways at McCree. “Please tell me that’s not what I think it is.”

McCree only shrugged in response.

“Only four they were to defend the castle doors against Doctor Junkenstein and his minions!” the voice went on.

“Minions?” Baptiste whispered, backing up towards the doors. “I don’t like this. Is it too late to opt out?”

There was another flash of lightning, the music reached a crescendo, and then a figure appeared. Standing on the castle’s battlements high above them was Jamie, dressed in a lab coat and leather gloves, his hair a shock of white in the dark. His prosthetic arm and leg made of a polished bronze to give the appearance they were made of antique machinery. His RIP-tire was strapped to his back, but it was unlike anything he had ever built before; it was made of metal with rounded protrusions like the prongs of an electricity conductor.

Baptiste’s knees buckled, his eyes wide as he stared up at the mad scientist costume. “Why can I see the white all around his eye?” he whimpered.

Jamie addressed the men directly, a wild look about him. He gestured grandly before beginning his introduction, “There’s a chill in the air. And you know what that means? Its Halloween time, with yours truly; Junkenstein!” Jamie said dramatically.

“Is he rhyming?” McCree asked quietly.

“I’m afraid so,” Genji groaned.

“So put on your costumes, my friends old and new,” Jamie went on. “We’re about to begin, and you’re all invited to the event of the season!”

Jamie laughed maniacally then, head thrown back and fingers twisting with delight in the air. It
seemed as though he couldn’t contain his excitement as he skipped away.

The lightning flashed again and he was gone. In his place, dozens of groaning creatures coalesced in the darkness—as though rising from hidden graves—and started to stagger towards the agents. All four let out cries of alarm.

“What are they?” McCree yelled. He reached for his pistol to defend himself from whatever these things made of metal were. More rose dripping from the ponds and crawling towards them. He spotted one staggering on two legs, its mouth was a gaping maw, moaning as it drew nearer. It looked like a kind of old, broken, steam-punk-themed omnic.

McCree dispatched the creature quickly with a few shots from his pistol and a swift kick to the torso. The robot’s parts clattered to the flagstones and McCree caught sight of something written on a chest plate as it bounced away. Engraved in the metal were the words ‘Zomnic Unit 13.’

“‘Zomnic’?” McCree asked aloud. “What’s a zomnic?”

“Are these the ‘minions’?” Baptiste asked, his voice rising in panic. He was trying to fire at the omnis to keep them back, but there were too many of them and his hands were shaking. Every time they knocked one down, it would lay about in pieces for a moment before reforming itself, just like one of their training bots, and then the cycle would begin anew.

Genji dove into the fray, hacking and slashing as he went. He had brought his katana, which was suddenly very useful because he could deal with several enemies at once by dashing through their ranks. Meanwhile, Jack was also trying to keep them back by firing his rifle into the growing crowd.

“We need to find cover!” Jack barked at them.

There was an overturned hay cart not too far way, so Jack urged them to run for it. They had only just arrived at their makeshift cover when the lights flashed and Reinhardt’s voice floated up out of the speakers once more.

“The air became charged with the arcane, as the Summoner appeared in their midst.”

“Su- summoner?” Baptiste stammered out. He took hold of McCree’s arm, tugging on it urgently. “What’s a summoner?”

There was no time to answer. In a flash, Satya appeared where Jamie had been standing before on the battlements, dressed in an elaborate costume. She was decked out head to toe in deep red and purple dragon scales, her eyes glowing yellow, and a pair of wings neatly tied around her waist.

Satya pointed at them with her talons. “I have been summoned!” she cried.

Satya activated an enormous shield which cut the entire training yard in half. The sight of Satya’s dragon-like form weaving through the battlements towards them left the four agents were quaking before her.

“Fall back!” Jack cried, urging the others to fall in behind him.

There was another flash, and another announcement floated across the open air.

“Unknown to all, Doctor Junkenstein had succeeded in creating life! A twisted abomination of inhuman strength and wickedness!”
While they had been distracted by Satya, the four men had not realised they were backing up into their second challenger. Not until they had fetched up against something large, green and soft did they stop to turn and look.

Roadie was standing there in a kind of Frankenstein costume, but the drooping hair and heavy makeup gave him a Herman Munster appearance.

“Boo!” he barked and all four agents were sent scattered, fleeing in all directions.

“As the battle raged, Doctor Junkenstein himself made a grand appearance!” Reinhardt’s announcer voice went on.

Jamie appeared again, this time on a different platform overlooking the training yard. “You will all regret the day you laughed and Doctor Jamison Junkenstein!” he cried before firing his frag launcher off and cackling with manic glee.

The frags had been rigged to detonate in harmless, colourful puffs of smoke. The effect scattered the agents further and sent Baptiste running for the exit in a fit. Satya met him there and jolted him playfully from behind with her photon gun which she had set to stun.

“No, no, no! Ow!” Baptiste cried over the sound of Jamie’s cackling. “Dear god, how do I leave? How do I leave?”

“I think it's fun!” Genji called out. He was engaged with Roadie in a spot of sparring; Roadie was trying to catch the ninja with his hook, but Genji keep leaping out of his reach just in time.

“Fire in the hole!” Jamie cried suddenly. They all looked up to see he was in the middle of unleashing his modified RIP-tire. The tire flew off the platform and raced towards the castle gates, forcing Jack and McCree to dive out of the way at the last moment. The tire crashed against the gates, exploding on impact and splintering the hard-light structure.

“The Doctor's Shock-Tire exploded against the door, but for now, the oak held strong,” Reinhardt said, his voice so loud and clear as it floated up out of the hidden speakers, it was almost like he was really there.

“Watch the door!” Jack shouted, and the others repositioned to protect the gates.

Another announcement came. “In the midst of the battle, Junkenstein's most powerful ally appeared...”

Baptiste paused in the middle of scrabbling against the locked door to the exit. “‘Most powerful’?”

Jack and McCree were standing back-to-back trying to fend off as many zommics as possible. They exchanged a nervous glance as the organ music struck a dramatic chord.

“Doctor Junkenstein had made a bargain with the Witch, and she was not ready to release him,” Reinhardt’s disembodied voice told them.

There was deafening crack of thunder. Angela dressed in her Witch costume appeared in a puff of smoke in the centre of the training yard, a broomstick clutched in one hand. Baptiste released a strangled cry at the sight of her, his fear of disappearing and reappearing phantoms stoked to uncomfortably high levels.

Angela spun her broomstick with a flourish, and with her head held high, made an announcement of her own.
"My servants never die!"

At this, Baptiste released a blood curdling scream that echoed across the courtyard’s flagstones and into the dead of night.

--

The hour was late and Angela had just finished changing out of her costume in one of the training rooms near the southside training yard. She released a sigh, a soft smile on her face. They had spent the evening running Jamie’s “Halloween Terror” game over and over again for anyone that wanted to play until almost midnight. McCree had said that it was the most fun he had had in a long time. Poor Baptiste had been nearly scared witless by the whole thing. But now, Angela was exhausted and looking forward to a good night’s rest.

“Alright, Ange?”

Angela turned to see Jamie hand just come into the room. He was still dressed as Doctor Junkenstein, but he had taken off the white lab coat. He had folded it careful and was holding it out for Angela to take.

“Thanks again for your help, love,” he told her as she accepted the coat and tucked it under one arm. “Did ya have fun?” he asked.

Angela nodded. “I did, thank you,” she replied. “I think almost everyone who played your little game tonight had a lot of fun.”

“I hope so,” he laughed. He stepped past her and took a seat on the edge of one of the training room tables, allowing his legs to dangle off the side. “It’s kind of a wonder we pulled it off at all.”

“Was there any doubt?” Angela asked him with a wink.

Jamie laughed again. “You were great! Thank you so much for helping us out.”

“No, thank you,” Angela insisted. “This was more fun than I expected. And it really helped me to take my mind off of some things.”

She stretched tired muscles in her shoulders as she said this. She was very tired, but it was a good kind of tired. She knew she was going to sleep well tonight, and with a bit of good luck, she was likely too exhausted to experience any more bad dreams for the remainder of the evening.

“Well, I owed you one, didn’t I?” he said, rolling his shoulders languidly. “From all those times you saved my arse.”

That made Angela smile. She hummed in agreement.

Angela returned to gathering her things. “Genji just about fainted from surprise!” she added with a giggle. “I thought I’d have to break character to help prop him up!” She strung her bag across her shoulder. “And poor Baptiste! I’ll have to find him and apologise...”

“Oh, yeah. Poor Bap,” Jamie remarked. “Maybe we should have given him fairer warning.”

“You know, I had no idea that terrorizing my team members would make me feel so refreshed,”
Angela told him. “I wonder if this is a sign of things to come?”

“As long as I’m not on the receiving end of your wrath,” Jamie said with a smile.

“Thanks again, Jamie,” she told him. “You did very well for your first Halloween.”

“Cheers, love,” he said. He stood and watched as she made her way out of the room.

He released a sigh as the doors slid shut behind her. He was alone for now. Roadie had left a little while ago complaining of being covered in green costume makeup and wanting a shower as soon as possible.

Jamie stretched his tired muscles. He was exhausted and more than ready for his bed. It was after midnight now and he still had layers of costume and makeup to take off.

He pulled off the harness strapped across his chest first, the bottles of luminescent liquid attached there clinked together as he did so. He set the harness down on a table, then slid his fingers under the hem of his black t-shirt and pulled it up over his head. He tossed the shirt on to a pile of his belongings. Now if only he could find a clean one to replace it...

The door to the training room slid open at that moment and Satya stepped through.

“Oh, sorry!” she said quickly. She was still decked out in her dragon costume. She appeared surprised to see him. “I didn’t realise--!”

“S’alright,” Jamie told her, glancing over her. “Just getting changed. You can come in.”

Satya stepped further into the room at his insistence. She seemed to find the ceiling tiles particularly interesting though, refusing to meet his gaze.

“I was just speaking with Lúcio,” she said conversationally. “He’s almost done packing up the sound system. He said he’s going to go check on Hana.”

Jamie nodded as he pulled the clean shirt over his head. “I’m just sad she wasn’t even well enough to come watch,” he said.

Jamie turned to Satya just as he finished dressing himself. He caught sight of her eyes quickly glancing away from his bare chest as it disappeared beneath his shirt. If it were not for the heavy makeup, he might have seen her blushing too.

“You’ve seen me shirtless before,” Jamie remarked.

Satya made her way over to one of the tables nearby where she had left her own change of clothes. She had spent all day in the Watchpoint’s ‘disguise lab’—a place usually reserved for preparing agents for undercover missions—allowing the technicians there to work their magic and transform her into a dragon-like creature for no reason other than Satya was determined to have the best Halloween costume that year. Satya had considered taking over the Witch role, but had already been several layers deep in prosthetic makeup to assume the role of the Summoner before she heard that Hana was too unwell to attend. Luckily Jamie had found them a replacement for the Witch at the last minute.

“Yes, well,” Satya began, clearing her throat. She was very tired, and in desperate need of a shower to wash off the costume makeup caked on her skin. “We haven’t seen each other at all for a little while.”
It was true. Satya had left on a mission for a couple of weeks following that night they had rescued Orisa from the storeroom near Hangar Eighteen. The mission had required Satya to leave soon after for Versailles, during which Jamie had had little contact with her. Satya had returned around a week ago, and much of the last few days had been spent preparing for the Halloween event Hana was planning. They had barely had much time to speak with each other about anything other than work or party preparations, let alone that intimate moment they had shared in the Workshop three weeks ago.

“You can be hard to track down,” Jamie remarked quietly. In fact, Jamie was a little suspicious that she had been avoiding him the last few days.

He watched her for a moment, then a sly grin broke out on his face. “But now we’ve finally gotten a moment alone together...” He took a step closer to her.

Satya looked up at him as he said this. Her face twitched, and she appeared nervous all of a sudden. “Actually, I’ve been meaning to talk to you about that. Since that night in the Workshop, I’ve been thinking...”

There was something in Satya’s tone that gave Jamie pause.

“Okay?” he asked. He held still, waiting for her to continue.

Satya took a deep breath, taking a moment to gather her thoughts. Her prosthetic makeup included horns and a scaly, tail-like protrusion that ran down the back of her head, lending her a terrifying air. If not for the nervous timbre in her voice, Jamie might have backed away from her in fear.

“I like you, Jamie,” she said quietly. “I like you a lot, actually.”

Jamie’s heart was in his throat. It was more than he ever could have hoped for. The girl of his dreams... liked him back?

“But you should know something,” Satya went on. “There is a policy at Vishkar that prevents inter-office dating.”

The glowing breastplate of Satya’s dragon costume—designed to appear as though flames had built up in her lungs, waiting to be released in a single devastating breath—heaved as she tried to bring her breathing under control.

“And it applies to all Vishkar personnel in all working environments, even those working in Overwatch’s Employee Transfer Program,” she told him. There was a disappointed look in her eye.

Jamie’s expression was blank.

“Is that all?”

Satya crossed her arms over her chest, the fingers of her right hand tracing the outline of her gauntlet on her left. A frown formed quickly on her face. “Jamie this is serious!” Her face transformed again; now there was a distinct sadness in her eyes. “I cannot risk our working relationship, let alone my job.”

Jamie laughed, actually threw his head back, and giggled at her.

Satya blinked back at him. “Jamie, do you think this is funny? ”
Jamie flopped against the table beside Satya, propping himself up on one hand. “You think that’s bad?” he said with a smile. “You should have heard what ol’ Pigface told me on day one at the Watchpoint.”

He laughed again, his face hidden behind the strands of white-blond hair in his eyes. Satya suspected someone from the Disguise Lab had bleached his hair white and used a glitter hairspray to help it stand out in the dark.

“What did he say?” Satya asked.

“He said I wasn’t allowed to have any fun with any of the other agents in case it put our jobs in danger,” he said with a smirk. “Crazy right?”

Satya did not share Jamie’s humourous view of the situation. “Jamie, don’t you see? That is all the more reason not to pursue this!” She turned away from him, gathering the last of her things into a carry bag and shouldering it quickly. “We must put an end to this now.”

Satya felt a light pressure at her shoulder. Jamie had slunk up behind her. She could feel his breath, hot against the nape of her neck. He was unspeakably close.

“Are you sure?” he asked quietly

No.

His voice was barely above a whisper, but Satya could still detect his cock-sure attitude. She turned slowly, craning her neck to look up at him. Satya felt as though all words had escaped her and she could no longer bring herself to speak.

He had taken the goggles of his costume off at some point and set them on his head, leaving behind a clean impression in the sooty residue around his cheeks, forehead and eyes. He was smiling down at her in a self-assured sort of way, so close his chest could have brushed against hers if not for a couple of inches of empty space between them.

“Jamie,” Satya whispered. “You need to end this, because I don’t think I can.”

He was so close now, his hazel-coloured eyes watching her with an intensity that was startling.

“Not a chance,” he whispered back before leaning down and capturing her lips with his own. Satya could not muster any resistance. His hands slid around her hips and suddenly she was flush with his chest. Her hands crept instinctively across his shoulders, bringing him as close as possible. Some of her dragon makeup was rubbing off on his clean shirt, but she did not care.

The fullness of his mouth on hers was intoxicating. The satisfying warmth of his chest pressed to hers, and the fervor with which his mouth had claimed hers, it was positively electrifying. She matched his cadence eagerly and the grip on her waist tightened.

He pulled back briefly, and she released an involuntary noise of displeasure at the loss of him. He held of her chin and tilted her head to the other side, and smirked before reclaiming her mouth again. His tongue slid over her lower lip and she welcomed him with a desperate sigh. She could feel his hand cupping her jawline now, angling her closer to him.

She was surprised by her own enthusiasm to feel him close against her. She felt the backs of her legs fetch up against a table, and she tugged Jamie with her. He was all too eager to satisfy her, hands gliding up her sides and settling on her ribs. He could feel the cool of her gauntlet pressed
across the back of his shoulders as she brought him even closer.

And then suddenly, she pulled away, fingers disentangling from his hair.

“Wait,” she said, and Jamie released her quickly.

There was a sharp inhale of breath and Satya squeezed out from between him and the table. She stepped away from him, trying to regain control of her breathing. She felt as though every inch of her was trembling. She could feel her makeup was smeared across her face now, and looking up at Jamie, she could see shades of red and purple all around his mouth too. Suddenly, she could not bring herself to meet his gaze.

“I’m sorry, Jamie,” Satya murmured, her voice strained. “I can’t.... We can’t....” At some point, her carry bag had slipped off her shoulder and she stooped quickly to retrieve it from the floor.

Jamie was staring back at her, his lips swollen, hands clasping at the empty space where she had once been. “Wait. What are you saying?” This was not how this was supposed to go. She was supposed to be swooning in his irresistible, manly arms.

She was still avoiding his gaze. “I care about you, but I can't risk losing my job as an agent. Please try to understand...”

Jamie watched her turn away, her shoulders trembling. He wanted to reach out for her again but something in her tone lead him to believe he had little room to argue with her.

“Satya...”

“And you deserve better than this. You deserve someone who can be with you fully.” She started to make her way towards the exit, still refusing to look at him. “I’m sorry. But this must end now.”

That was all she said before she swept out of the room in such a hurry that Jamie was left staring at the door through which she had left, mouth agape.

The room was suddenly very still and quiet. Jamie could not recall later how long he had stood there, waiting, as though expecting her to return to the training room at any minute and declare her hasty departure was all a joke.

But she did not come back.

And Jamie was left all alone.
“How do I look?” Lena asked.

She zipped across the room with her chronal accelerator and posed for the other agents. Dressed in ripped, dark clothing and striped leggings, she laughed and planted her hands on her hips while she waited for a response.

“It’s certainly.... something,” Ana had replied.

The Commander and Captain Amari were watching Lena critically, assessing her disguise. Lena’s hair was a shock of white, her skin painted a sickly pallor, and her lips a black gash below her safety goggles.

Satya tried to hold back a frown of disapproval. Lena’s outfit was not to Satya’s taste, but it did serve its purpose well; she did not look at all like her usual self. With her makeup and her monochromatic clothing, it rendered the normally colourful and cheerful agent practically unrecognisable.

“Is it supposed to chafe like this?”

Satya glanced over in Jamie’s direction. He was dressed in a pair of ripped, dark denim pants, which he was in the middle of trying to adjust as they appeared to be too tight. Splashed across the black t-shirt stretched over his torso was a punk rock band logo that Satya did not recognise. The shirt disappeared beneath an oversized leather bomber jacket studded with pins and metal spikes. His hair was slicked upward with a great deal of hair gel into an impressive spiked mohawk. The effect actually helped to hide some of the patches of missing hair that had were still slow to grow in. The technicians from the Disguise Lab had died his hair a bright pink, and somehow the whole effect made him look incredibly intimidating, albeit very eye-catching.

“We can probably fix that before go time,” Jack told Jamie, eyeing the disguise up and down.

They were standing in the Disguise Lab, preparing for their next mission to King’s Row. Their objective was to complete an exchange of information with an informant who worked for a company their intel had indicated had ties with Talon. The informant had agreed to feed information to them if Overwatch guaranteed him an exfiltration in the event he was ever discovered.

They were anticipating a worse-case scenario that the informant was likely going to be followed or under some kind of surveillance, and they needed to prepare appropriately. The plan was for Lena and Jamie to cause a distraction while Jack made the exchange. It was a precaution Jack had insisted was necessary.

And so, Jamie and Lena were to pretend to be boyfriend and girlfriend, staging a kind of public fight while the exchange took place. They had been assigned ‘legends’, or undercover identities, as punk rockers on a night out in London. Jamie was the perfect candidate for the role; he was perhaps the loudest and most eye-catching of all the agents. And London's punk rock scene suited him.

Lena and Jamie’s performance would ensure the exchange would take place unnoticed by the
general public or any prying eyes. Everything they were to wear, say and do was designed to draw attention away from the exchange, but it was of the upmost importance that neither Lena nor Jamie be identified, particularly Jamie, who had appeared on his fair share of wanted posters.

Satya eyed Jamie’s outfit. From the leather boots to the assortment of safety pins pushed through his ears, it all made him appear and even louder, more garish version of himself. The biggest change of all, however, was his new leg.

Jack had decided the peg leg was too big of a giveaway, and declared Jamie would need to be fitted with a new, realistic prosthesis before the mission. While his prosthetic arm would be hidden inside a jacket, his new prosthesis would be concealed inside his pant leg and give the outward impression of a real flesh leg inside. Gone was his limp and his homemade peg, albeit temporarily, and Angela had personally fitted Jamie out with a state-of-the-art prosthesis to replace it.

When she had heard of this, Satya was sad she could not share the joy of Jamie’s new leg with him. But ever since Halloween night, Jamie had been keeping his distance from her. Much of their interactions were now limited to overly formal and professional passing comments, if they said anything to each other at all. Satya had not realised that turning him down after ‘that night’, as she had started to call it, would mean a complete end to their friendship like this. It was like a cold bucket of water had been tossed over their relationship, like they had gone back to day one of cold indifference with each other.

Satya had watched Jamie leave the Workshop every morning every day for two weeks to attend his physical therapy appointments. It was a matter of urgency that Jamie be able to walk comfortably without any noticeable limp before the mission went ahead otherwise, he may be too readily recognised. By all accounts the therapy had worked and he was walking normally. Satya wondered how he felt to get around without a limp for the first time in years.

Satya had watched from the Workshop window beside her workstation as Jamie and Genji headed off along a cliffside path far below for a morning walk together. Genji had been determined to render his assistance to Jamie as he got used to his new high-tech prothesis. It was all Satya could do but to watch from afar and wonder what Jamie must have been feeling because he was unlikely to share any of it with her.

Jack was checking over Lena’s disguise once more. He nodded with approval. “What about your pistols?” he asked Lena.

Lena looked down at her disguise. Thin clothing left little room to conceal her weapons discreetly.

“Here,” Jamie said. He took off the bomber jacket and held it out for Lena to take. “We’ll pretend you got cold and you’re borrowing your boyfriend’s jacket.”

Satya’s brow furrowed as he said this. She watched as Lena pulled the too-large jacket on over her smaller frame. She was able to conceal her pistols in the small of her back by tucking them into her waistband. The bomber jacket hung low over her hips, and was large enough to hide the bulge of her weapons.

“How about this?” one of the lab technicians asked. He had pulled another leather jacket from the rack of clothes, this one studded with small metal spikes around the shoulders, and was offering it to Jamie as a replacement.

Jack nodded his approved once more as Jamie tried it on.

“You may need to forgo the frag launcher, Jamie,” Jack remarked, to which Jamie only nodded in
agreement. There was really no ideal place on his person to hide it. He would need to make do with a few concussion mines for protection.

“You’ll need to work on your cockney accent,” Lena told Jamie, poking him in the ribs playfully.

Jamie tested his new voice. “Alright, love? Fancy a shag?” he said in an exaggerated accent.

Lena cringed. “Please never say that again,” she said in a flat tone.

“Maybe just keep the need to speak to a minimum,” Ana suggested.

“Hey, I can speak five languages fluently,” Jamie said defensively. “And you’re going to stifle my talents like this?”

“I’m a little worried English may not be one of your talents,” Lena replied with a laugh.

“Everyone should learn to speak English good,” Jamie proclaimed. “Like what I do.”

Satya pursed her lips in disapproval. She watched as Lena and Jamie straightened and stood still for the Commander while he circled them, assessing their disguises one last time. Jamie slid his arm across Lena’s shoulder to show how they would look together during the mission. Lena practiced looking up at him with the adoring smile of a doting girlfriend. They were a perfect pair.

Satya frowned and looked away. ‘This is ridiculous,’ Satya told herself internally. ‘You’re jealous of a lesbian in a hideous punk rock costume.’

Logically, she knew Lena was no threat to her relationship with Jamie, but part of her was a little jealous to see them paired together for this mission. And they were to perform some sort of lover’s tiff in public, which also contributed to her feeling a little sore.

“I think this test has been a success,” Jack said thoughtfully. He turned to look at the rest of the agents present who had also been assigned to this mission. “Prepare for the mission and be ready to depart in forty-eight hours.”

At that, the technicians from the Disguise Lab started to pack up, and the agents prepared to leave the room.

“I’ll go get ready,” a voice murmured in Satya’s ear.

Satya turned to acknowledge Baptiste who had been standing beside her. He flashed her a smile and she nodded at him in return. He headed off through the Briefing Room door.

Satya also needed to go prepare for this mission. She would be coordinating the whole exchange with the defecting informant. For all intents and purposes, this mission needed to be a success. Satya could afford no distractions.

She started to head for the door. She would need to get back to the Workshop and get to work on...

Suddenly something bumped into her from the side and Satya looked up with mild surprise, only to see Jamie. He was also trying to make his way out of the Briefing Room at the same time.

“Excuse me,” Jamie muttered without sparing her a glance. He brushed past her and continued on his way without looking back.

Satya paused for a moment and watching his retreating form as he disappeared down the corridor.
Satya was suddenly overcome with a turmoil of emotions. While his words had been perfectly polite, the cold and distant tone was not lost on her. The angry set of his shoulders as he barged past led her to believe he was still upset.

For some reason, his words were like a slap in the face. Those two words he had just spoken to her were the most he had said to her all day. But it was also the way he had said them that indicated to Satya in no uncertain terms that he did not even remotely pleased to be in the same room with her. She could hardly blame him. She had kissed him on Halloween night, enthusiastically even, and then abandoned him. She had told him they could never be together and that they needed to end whatever these budding feelings were between them.

Satya felt like she was being punished in a way, and even though her heart was breaking, she also felt like she deserved it.

Perhaps she had assumed he would take things a bit better than this. And perhaps it had been a little short-sighted of her to think it would not affect her ability to work with him on missions. And now here they were, their fates drawn together once more on another mission. How were they to work together at all if he was so obviously furious with her?

Satya squared her shoulders. He wanted to be nothing more than work colleagues? Fine.

“Are you alright, dear?”

Satya glanced to her right and spotted Captain Amari, watching her with concern. Her long white braid was draped neatly over her shoulder, resting across the front of her uniform.

Ana smiled at Satya. “You’ve hardly said anything today.”

“I’ve had a lot on my mind, Captain,” Satya replied. Together they stepped out into the hallway and they set off down the corridor.

Ana nodded in reply. “Please let me know if there is anything I can do to help. We want this mission to go smoothly.”

Satya was quick to reassure her. “Of course, Captain,” she said. “I promise, I won’t allow it to affect the mission. It’s nothing really.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” Ana said with a smile. “I’m on my way to a meeting now, but if you ever need to talk, Satya...”

“Thank you, Captain,” Satya replied. “I appreciate the offer.”

Ana nodded and watched Satya trot away.

Ana had noticed the palpable tension that had manifested between certain members of the strike team. It made Ana worry a little for the success of their mission. Jack had said he wanted this operation to go smoothly, that they had little room for error. Jack was even accompanying them to personally oversee their success.

Ana took a deep breath.

Failure was not an option.
Standing in the cold night air of King’s Row, London, Satya watched the shiny puddles gathering in the streets beneath the glowing street lamps and shivered in her wool coat. It was starting to drizzle as the night grew darker around her. Satya adjusted her stance and scanned the streets of late-night shoppers bustling about. There was still no sign of her target.

It was busy, she noted. Perhaps people were starting their Christmas shopping early, because it was only November but the streets were filled with busy shoppers, their arms laden with packages. Satya was dressed to fit in with the crowds seamlessly. She wore a thick woolen coat over a simple corporate outfit. She was to appear like a woman who had just of gotten off work and was now doing some late-night shopping on the way home.

Satya checked the time on her phone again. The digital display indicated it was approaching “8:35” which was their drop time. High above her, the clock tower’s face was glowing bright, confirming she had the correct time. She adjusted her yellow scarf which would be her signal to their contact that she was sent to meet him. But, where was he?

Across the square, Satya could see Jamie and Lena through the swathes of people. It was easy to pick Jamie out with his bright pink hair. Both of them were done up in their punk rock disguises, leaning casually against the base of a monument to the first omnic monk, Tekhartha Mondatta who had been assassinated right here in the heart of King’s Row some years prior. The enormous golden statue of the monk was a memorial to Mondatta’s life’s work to unite humans and omnics in peace. For some reason, the monk’s watchful gaze over the open square of people gave Satya a feeling of foreboding.

Satya’s eyes drifted over Jamie and Lena again. His arm was slung across Lena’s shoulders, a lit cigarette in his other hand. Lena was leaning in to him, laughing at something he had said and playing the part of his girlfriend perfectly. She was wearing his bomber jacket again while she cozed up to him. Satya frowned and reminded herself to not let a fake relationship make her feel quite so jealous.

Not that she and Jamie had much of a relationship to speak of anymore. The strike team had spent three days living together in a safehouse in King’s Row in preparation for this mission. It had meant being confined to a small flat in awkward proximity Jamie since arriving from Gibraltar. Every time they were in a room together, Jamie’s stony silence and looks of indifference were like a knife in her heart.

She turned away from the scene before her and looked around the crowd once more. Jack was waiting on the opposite side of the square. They made eye contact briefly, but they did not acknowledge one another. He was dressed in an unassuming way; head to toe in black, large overcoat, and a scarf wrapped around his neck, pulled up high to partially obscure his face. In his left hand, he was clutching a black briefcase. Satya had read her briefing documents carefully and found nothing that indicated this mission would be anything other than a standard exchange with an informant. But the fact that the Commander was here, and that they had spent several days performing surveillance of the area, indicated to Satya that this was a high-stakes exchange.

Satya glanced to her right and spotted Baptiste dressed similarly in black further down the street standing near a red phone box. He was shuffling on the spot, perhaps trying to keep warm. He was basically present to heal them in the event that anything went pear-shaped. If everything went according to plan, his talents would not be needed. He also made eye contact, then looked away.
“Symmetra, any sign of our target?”

It was Ana, her voice coming through Satya’s earpiece. The Captain was watching over the square from a hotel room high above. She would be watching them through her scope in case a fight broke out, and also would be serving as their ‘handler’ for the operation. Knowing the eagled-eyed sniper was nearby made Satya feel a little more comfortable, but it also reminded her that they should be ready for any sign of trouble.


A man was making his way through the crowds towards her. His hair was bright red and he was carrying a briefcase in his left hand. She was sure it was him because he was sweating profusely, despite the cool evening. He looked nervous and kept glancing behind him. The man came to stand beside her on the footpath and then, after a beat, turned to her and asked a question.

“Do you know what time the trains go to Worthing?” the man asked, his voice just barely above a whisper.

It was the recognition phrase she had been told to expect. There was a train station nearby, so it wasn’t an altogether unusual question for a stranger to ask her.

“I’m sorry. I only use Platform Seven,” Satya replied. She kept her tone even and quiet.

Satya nodded at Jack across the street and turned to make her way towards the Mondatta memorial.

“We are go,” she said into her earpiece.

At her words, Lena and Jamie pushed themselves off from the monument. Jamie discarded his cigarette, which Satya had not even seen him take a drag of, and stubbed it out with the heel of his boot. Together, he and Lena started to make their way towards the middle of the square.

Lena let out an obnoxiously loud laugh and several heads turned to look in her direction. “Come on, love!” she said loudly. “It’s this way!”

“No, it’s not!” Jamie replied in his best cockney accent. He tried to tug Lena in the opposite direction. “It’s always been this way!”

“Don’t start with me,” Lena said loudly. “Why do you always have to argue?” People were stopping in the street to stare at the odd couple now.

Satya passed by the people gathering around the pair without sparing a glance for her two brightly-coloured team members. Heels clacking against the paved street, she arrived at the doorway to a public house and stood under the awning there so she could watch over proceedings. Back near the clock tower, Jack was crossing the street towards the red-haired man.

“Argue with you?” Jamie cried. “You’re the one who doesn’t know the way to the pub!”

“Oh, here we go!” Lena replied, throwing her hands up in frustration. “You always think you know what’s best! What is it with men and asking for directions?”

Satya scanned the crowd for prying eyes or anyone that looked like they may be following the red-haired man, but saw nothing suspicious. For some reason, she still felt nonetheless watched. She turned her attention back to Jack, who had taken up position beside their informant. He assumed a
casual stance.

“You always assume I’m lost,” Jamie countered. “I know where I’m going!”

“I don’t think you’re lost,” Lena shot back at him. “I think you’re an idiot!”

“There’s no talking to you when you’re like this!” Jamie shouted. A large crowd had stopped to stare now. Maybe people were trying to decide if it was worth it to intervene.

Across the square, Jack placed his briefcase on the ground.

“Me? You’re the one talking crazy!” Lena cried, pushing Jamie in the chest for dramatic effect.

Standing side-by-side with the informant, with only a few inches separating them, Jake succinctly took the man’s briefcase from his hand. The man stooped and took the briefcase Jack had left on the curb and walked away at a brisk pace. He disappeared into the crowd, and then he was gone.

“Maybe I am crazy!” Jamie shouted at Lena. Suddenly, he slipped down to one knee. His new leg was functioning perfectly. “Crazy about you!” Reaching into his back pocket, he retrieved a small box.

Satya stilled as she watched Jamie’s faux-declaration of love. Lena’s expression lit up with exaggerated delight. Jamie was smiling up at her as he reached out to take her hand. Satya felt that same familiar pang in her heart at the sight of Jamie proposing to someone else. She was so distracted; she almost forgotten to give the final word.

“Exchange complete,” Satya whispered into her earpiece. She made eye contact with Baptiste across the square, who nodded imperceptibly.

“What are you saying!?” Lena asked Jamie with a great deal of mock surprise. She was really laying her performance on thick.

Jamie was staring in to her eyes adoringly. “Babe, will you marry me?”

Satya watched as Jack casually strolled back across the street towards the hotel where Ana had set up her little sniper nest. The plan was to go up to Ana’s room and check the contents of the briefcase for any tracking devices before transporting it to the airfield where the dropship was waiting.

Satya had a moment to watch the culmination of Jamie and Lena’s performance.

Lena was making a big show of gasping in surprise at Jamie’s proposal. “Yes!” she cried. “Yes! A thousand times yes!” She leapt into Jamie’s arms, hugging him tight.

The gathered crowd burst into applause. It was convincing, so it must have been a brilliant performance by Satya’s estimation. Lena and Jamie turned to accept congratulations from the well-wishers.

“Well done team,” Ana said into their earpieces. “Standby for further instructions.”

Satya tore her eyes away from Jamie and Lena. She took out her cellphone and pretended to be on a call. They were not out of the woods yet and they could not be certain that amidst the sea of people, there may still be enemies watching them.

At the Captain’s word they were to slowly make their way back to the dropship separately and at
intervals so as not to draw any attention to themselves unnecessarily. All Satya could do now was wait.

“We need champagne! We need to celebrate!” Jamie was saying loudly. “To the pub!”

--

Jack had given the word over their comms system that it was time to vacate the area. This indicated to Satya at least that that the briefcase was clean and they had confirmed the information inside.

Jack and Ana had left the area quickly and Lena had followed soon after, eager to confirm the safety of the information their contact had risked his life to transfer to them. Next was Baptiste. Then finally, an hour after Jack had made the exchange, Satya and Jamie were given the all clear to make their way to the airfield.

The streets of King’s Row were dark and empty by this hour. A light drizzle of rain had settled over the city so Satya was sheltering under a hard-light umbrella as she walked. There were hardly any people left on the street now. It was late and the rain seemed to have driven them indoors.

“Any sign of trouble, Junkrat?” Satya whispered into her earpiece.

“Nothing,” came the even-toned reply.

Satya could see Jamie up ahead walking alone a couple of hundred metres in front of her. He had popped the collar of his jacket up against the rain, shoulders hunched slightly. She tried not to let his tone bother her.

They were to make their way through King’s Row to the nearest tube station and catch a train that would take them part of the way back to the dropship. Maintaining their cover was of the upmost priority until the conclusion of the mission, so they would make the trip at the same time while maintaining a certain amount of physical distance between them. This would allow them to pretend to be perfect strangers to one another.

'So, no different to the last couple of weeks then,' Satya mused internally.

As they made their way through the twisting laneways and streets of King’s Row, Satya shivered in her coat. She tried to regulate her breathing to stay calm and scanned the streets once more for any sign of danger. With the drizzling rain, visibility was reduced so she was mindful to keep a sharp eye out until the mission as officially over.

Satya passed by a noisy pub, the Hoof and Haunch, and heard laughter and shouting drifting out into the street. Sparing a glance for the cozy little drinking hole, Satya could see people crowded into the bar area through the windows.

‘It looks warm in there,’ she thought longingly. ‘Warm enough to put up with the shouting for a bit.’

Jamie disappeared around a corner up ahead and Satya continued to follow him at a distance. He appeared to be taking a shortcut to the train station.

“Symmetra, what's your status?”
It was Captain Amari coming through Satya’s earpiece again.

“Almost at the train station Captain,” Satya replied. “Nothing to report.”

“Let us know if you see anything suspicious,” Ana told her. “Are you being followed?”

“I don’t think so,” Satya replied.

“Keep an eye on each other,” Ana had said. “We’ll see you soon.” The comms system cut out.

‘Keep an eye on each other?’ Satya mused. ‘I get the feeling Jamie can barely look at me.’

Satya rounded a corner and scanned the street through the haze for Jamie once more. She spotted his pink mohawk further down the alleyway easily, and then also spotted the problem he was facing. Several men dressed in dark clothing had surrounded him.

They had walked into an ambush.

Struck by a sudden sense of panic, Satya quickly dismissed her umbrella with a wave of her gauntlet and threw herself to one side of the alleyway. She was able to crouch behind a few dust bins and observe the men for a moment while she decided what to do. She realised very quickly that there was very little she actually could do to help; she was unarmed, unless she wanted to summon another umbrella, and somehow Satya did not think that whacking the men with a wet umbrella would de-escalate the situation. Satya looked around the alleyway for something she could use as a weapon, but there was nothing.

“Where’s your girlfriend?” one of the men asked, approaching Jamie slowly. “The skinny, goth girl?”

Jamie was holding his ground as calmly as he could despite the fact that he was outnumbered six-to-one. His hands were jammed in his pockets, a weary expression on his face.

“She went to her mum’s place,” Jamie said simply. He maintained his cockney accent.

This was part of the protocol that came with being undercover. They were never to break their assigned legends even when discovered.

“Thought you two would be celebrating what with that proposal back there,” another man said. Satya was having trouble placing their accents. It seemed there was a mix of different European nationalities here.

One of the men had a crowbar in hand. Satya watched him tap the hooked end of it against the pavement by his feet in a threatening sort of way. It was too dark and hazy to see if any of the others were also carrying weapons. Were they trouble-makers? Or people who had been following their red-haired informant? Satya had a feeling it was the latter.

“What do you want?” Jamie asked the men. His wet mohawk was starting to droop slightly. “It’s raining and I want to go home.”

“I don’t think so,” one of the men said. “You see, we’re looking for something. A briefcase.”

Jamie held still. He let no emotion betray him.

“A friend of ours says it went missing,” another man said. “You seen it?”

Satya felt her heart leap into her throat. She felt sure now that these men must have been trailing
the informant. But what had become of him? Perhaps he was already dead. These men must have put two-and-two together after Jamie and Lena's performance back in the main square and worked out that he was involved. Jamie was in danger and there was nothing she could do to help.

“Captain,” Satya whispered into her earpiece. “We have a problem.”

“What is it?” came Ana’s quick reply.

“Junkrat is surrounded by unknown men. I’m pinned down,” Satya whispered. “We need backup.”

“How many?” Ana’s voice was tense with concern.

Satya cast her eyes over the men once more. “Six.”

“I can reroute Tracer and Baptiste back to your location but they may be a while,” Ana told her. “E.T.A fifteen minutes.”

Satya felt cold with dread. Her teammates were unlikely to make it back in time. “No,” Satya replied. “I’ll try to distract them, then we’ll...”

“Symmetra, stand down. It’s too dangerous,” Ana said suddenly. “Get back to the safehouse. Save yourself.”

Satya froze in place. Leave Jamie behind? There was no way she would even consider doing something like that.

Satya’s breath hitched in her throat. “I’m sorry, Captain...”

Ana heard the long pause before Satya’s response and knew what the younger agent was planning. Sitting in the command centre of the dropship, Ana felt powerless to render any kind of meaningful assistance. She knew Satya was either going to save Jamie, or die trying. She had to think quickly.

“Wait,” Ana began. Her fingers flew over the keyboard before her. “I’m sending something that might help.”

Back in the alleyway, Satya paused to process what the Captain had said. If Ana was sending some kind of help, maybe Satya could swoop in and extract Jamie from this situation in the confusion. She retrieved a teleporter pad from inside her coat. She hoped whatever it was that Ana was sending showed up soon.

Satya glanced up at Jamie again, thinking maybe she could signal her intent to him somehow, but a terrifying sight lay before her.

The man with the crowbar was advancing on Jamie once more.

“All we want to know is where the briefcase is,” the man was saying. “You’re not going to lose your kneecaps over a briefcase, are you?”

“I told ya already,” Jamie was saying. “I don’t know nothing about it!”

One of the men had snuck up behind Jamie and shoved him roughly to the side. Jamie crumpled against one of the brick walls that lined the alleyway. Blood racing in her veins, Satya threw down her teleporter pad and raised her gauntlet ready to summon a portal. She would need to get this just right.

The man that seemed to be their leader raised the crowbar over his head. The sight froze Satya in
place. Feeling powerless to stop what was about to happen, a strangled cry was caught in Sayta’s throat. The man brought down the crowbar on Jamie’s prone form in one swift motion. There was sickening crunch and Satya screamed.

Several heads turned to look at her.

Satya was about to run at the men in a last-ditch effort to protect Jamie, but something yellow zipped overhead. There was a flash of light that blinded Satya momentarily.

Everyone in the alleyway froze as a bright yellow drone paused above their heads. A spotlight emerged from its underside and bathed the area in light. A screen appeared on the front, displaying an animated face. A high-pitched, robotic voice with an English accent was projected from the droid.

“Tiddly-tally-ho! Alright gents? I’m Sally! Sally the Sanitation Droid! Your sociable sanitation companion! Sally’s name, sanitation is the— whoa, whoa, whoa! What is going on here?”

The men all turned to look up at the droid, frozen in place as thought caught in the middle of doing something wrong, which they were. ‘Sally’ turned slowly to take in each man standing before her.

“This is unacceptable!” Sally cried. “This is a code nine sanitation situation, not a code three!”

One of the men gestured rudely towards Sally.

“Oi, shite off or we’ll...!” he began.

Sally appeared to be ignoring him. She was in the middle of completing a scan of the alleyway. “Cigarette butts. Rubbish. Graffiti. No! This simply won’t do!” she said. “I was sent by the King’s Row City Council to ensure the streets of King’s Row remain clean and sanitised!”

A hose emerged from Sally’s underside and started to spray the gathered men with a high-pressure stream of water. The stream was so powerful, it knocked some of the men down. Satya saw her chance.

“Fucking stop!” the leader was screaming. He started swinging at the drone with his crowbar.

"Sir, do not molest me!” Sally told the man. “Or I will summon the authorities!”

Satya spun a portal into being with her gauntlet and threw herself into it. The exit let her out just next to the spot where she had last seen Jamie. Glancing around, she spotted him collapsed on the pavement. His new prosthetic leg was shattered. He seemed otherwise uninjured.

“Junkrat!” she cried with relief. She almost tripped in her haste to reach his side. She took hold of his arm and started to pull him upright, but the rain had made his leather jacket slippery and he almost slid out of her grasp. Satya could hear sirens in the distance now.

With her help, Jamie righted himself. He slung an arm across her shoulders and she all but carried him towards the portal. He was down a leg so he hobbled along beside her.

“Do not molest me!” Sally was repeating loudly as she squirted each man in turn with her high-pressure washer. She had found a water hydrant and had hooked herself up to it to provide a constant stream of water without depleting her reserves.

The men were forced to flee from her, slipping and scrabbling about on the wet pavement. The
alleyway was starting to fill with soapy bubbles which Satya assumed meant there was cleaning chemicals mixed in with Sally’s water spray.

“My eyes! My eyes!” one of the men screamed.

The wail of sirens was increasing in volume now.

Jamie and Satya disappeared through the teleporter, reappearing at the other end of the alleyway. The rain had gone from a light drizzle to a heavy shower now. Satya stopped only to retrieve her teleporter base, and then took hold of Jamie once more, hauling him away from the alleyway.

“Where do we go?” Jamie cried.

“Back to the safehouse,” a voice spoke in their ears. It was Ana. “Get somewhere safe and await further instructions.”

“Understood,” Satya ground out. Her voice was strained with the effort of taking most of Jamie’s weight as they hobbled down the street as fast as they could. It was no small feat for her on wet pavement in a pair of heels.

“Captain, did you summon that thing?” Satya asked as they rounded a corner.

“I simply notified the local council of an emergency sanitation issue in your vicinity,” Ana replied.

There was a loud bang and shouting in the distance. For a terrifying moment, Satya feared they had been shot at. She almost stumbled, chancing a look over her shoulder, but there was no one on the street behind them.

“What was that?”

“Left them a little present,” Jamie told her. The pink mohawk was flattened now and wet, pink hair was dripping in his eyes. There was a bleak smile on his face. “A couple of cherry bombs should set them right.”

Satya was relieved to see they were not being followed. Her hands were occupied gripping Jamie’s arm where it rested on her shoulders, and she feared she was unable to protect them with her gauntlet should the need arise.

“Are you hurt?” she asked him as they carried on.

“No. Only the leg,” he replied. Then came a pause. “I’m sorry about all of this,” he added.

“It’s okay,” she said quietly. “Let’s just get back to the safehouse.”

--

Satya was practically soaked to the skin when they finally made it to the safehouse.

Shivering, she stepped through the door to the flat they had been living in for the last few days and took care to lock the door securely behind her. She had thought they would never return to this place again.
With Jamie’s arm still around her shoulder, they squeezed through the narrow hallway and stumbled towards the couch in the darkened flat. Jamie made a sound that came out like “Oof!” as he was dumped somewhat unceremoniously on the cushions.

Exhausted and panting, Satya stood back and took a moment to gather her thoughts.

They were standing in an Overwatch safehouse, a three-bedroom apartment in the heart of London. It was minimally decorated but it was a modern and comfortable. They should be safe here for the night.

Satya had been careful to check they were not followed to the safehouse and she was certain they were no longer in any danger. But as long as Jamie was minus one leg, they would not be going anywhere.

Satya eyed Jamie’s ruined prosthesis. It was unrecognisable as a leg now; it was more a collection of smashed carbon fibre pieces. Satya just hoped no one found their hideout during the night, because there was no way Jamie could run in his current state. Ana had promised before she signed off that she would organise to have Jamie’s original peg leg couriered to them as a priority overnight. Hopefully he would not be put out for too long.

She crossed the room in a couple of strides and drew the curtains across the windows. The room was plunged even further into darkness. Only the distant glow of a streetlamp from outside their flat provided a modicum of light through the thin curtains.

“What are you doing?” Jamie asked, annoyed. “I can’t see.”

“We mustn’t be seen from outside,” Satya replied airily. “Ana said she will try to get the power switched back on for us.”

Their short-term plan was for the rest of the agents to depart for Gibraltar without them, and Jamie and Satya would take a commercial flight the next day after bunkering down overnight. They had emptied out the flat thoroughly earlier that day and had switched the power off before they left. There was no food, no electricity, even their luggage had been sent ahead to the airfield hours ago, so no change of clothes either. For now, they would be on their own with few resources. Satya was not looking forward to sharing even one night in a flat alone with Jamison Fawkes.

Satya kicked off her heels and started shedding her clothes.

Jamie looked up from the couch, alarmed. “Wh— what are you doing?” he asked.

“My clothes are wet-through,” she told him. She tossed her coat, heavy with rain, onto a chair nearby and started pulling her jumper up over her head. The flat was freezing, and Satya was not going to stand around in wet clothing in case she caught her death.

“I suggest you do the same,” Satya told him stiffly.

She crossed the room to head back towards the main entrance, taking a left once she reached the hallway and heading up the stairs. There was a linen cupboard in the hallway upstairs where she would find clean sheets and blankets. She removed what remained of her clothes as she went, setting them on the bannister of the staircase to dry. By the time she arrived at the linen cupboard, she was stripped to her underwear. She took a clean sheet from the cupboard and wrapped it around her middle, tying it in the front like a makeshift dress. It would do until her clothes dried out.

Up until this point of the day, she had practically been running on pure adrenalin. Finally, alone, Satya took a moment to collect her thoughts.
Satya traced her fingers along the gauntlet on her left arm. Its presence was comforting, so she decided to leave it on. And she had plenty to be anxious about. When she had seen that man raise his crowbar, ready to bring it down on Jamie, she had been so scared for him. What if he had died? It had been one of the more terrifying things she had ever seen, and her feelings for Jamie confounded it all. Why did he have to be such a big stupid idiot!

And now what was she to do? Trapped in a dark and freezing-cold flat with Jamie, she could not imagine it would be anything less than a night of pure awkwardness.

Satya was beginning to feel tired deep in her bones, but she decided to press on. She took two sets of sheets from the cupboard and went into the bedrooms to make them up for her and Jamie. The bedrooms were all empty now, the mattresses had been left stripped bare. Satya ducked into the room she had shared with Lena and quickly made the bed up as fast as she could. She then went and did the same in the room Jamie had shared with Baptiste. Finally, exhausted and beaten, she returned to the linen cupboard and took another clean sheet to bring down to Jamie so he could get out of his wet clothes and cover himself as she had done.

When Satya came down the stairs and returned to the living room, she found Jamie still sitting on the couch where she had left him. She paused in the doorway and watched him. He had removed most of his clothes down to his underwear and was trying to get the remains of the prosthetic leg off. Satya’s eyes lingered briefly on the taught muscles of his stomach, the broad planes of his chest, and his wiry arms as he worked.

Satya’s expression softened. She watched Jamie pull the device off his stump and toss it aside. Satya was confronted with the scarred flesh of his right leg, amputated above the knee. Satya averted her eyes to the remains of the prosthesis on the floor. The prosthetic leg that Angela had worked so tirelessly on in time for their mission was completely ruined. It was now a pile of scrap metal pieces connected loosely by wires and broken joints. Satya hoped that no pieces had been left behind in the alleyway that could be traced back to them. There had been no time to stop and check. With a bit of luck, Sally would have swept up any remains.

Jamie looked up at her as she entered the room. He must have been cold because she could see him visibly shivering. His skin was pale in the limited light. He appeared very tired and fragile in that moment.

“Is that for me?” he asked.


She reached out to hand the sheet to Jamie. He took it and wrapped it around his shoulders like a blanket.

“Nice toga,” he said, eyeing her up and down.

Satya did not respond to this. They stood looking at each other for a long moment. So much was left unsaid between them.

‘Why does this have to be so awkward?’ Satya wondered.

She cleared her throat.

“We should get you upstairs,” Satya said.

Jamie met her gaze. “Why?”
“Because I’ll need to help you, and you should get into bed before I collapse from exhaustion.”

“Oh,” he replied.

She stepped towards him. At that moment the electric fireplace over by the wall sparked and then lit up with bright orange flames. The sudden burst of light that flooded the room startled Satya, causing her to jump. She could feel the heat radiating from here.

“The power must be back on,” Jamie remarked in an even tone.

There was that familiar indifference again.

Satya tore her eyes away from the flames and refocused on her half-naked teammate. She noticed for the first time that the rain had washed out a lot of the pink dye in his hair, although it was still tinged a faint rosy colour. He was staring at the flames cocooned within the safety of his bedsheet. He had stopped shivering.

Satya had to keep reminding herself that this is what she wanted, wasn’t it? For things to go back to being professional between them. That was what she had told him on Halloween night. So why did his new cold and distant attitude towards her sting so much?

Satya crossed the room to the fireplace and switched it off.

She turned to Jamie again. “Let’s get you upstairs,” she said, more firmly this time.

She returned to the couch, took him by the arm, and helped him stand. Suddenly she found herself pressed up against his bare chest as she shouldered his weight. His bedsheet was still slung across his shoulders as he gripped her tight and now she was partially enveloped inside it too.

Together they hobbled to the hallway and turned towards the stairs. Satya flipped a light switch nearby to light their way.

“One at a time,” Satya told him, and together they started up the stairs. Jamie would hop up onto one step with a hand braced on the bannister while Satya took his weight and used her strength to prevent him from falling. It was slow going.

The tense expression on Jamie’s face was not lost on Satya. She had seen how his mouth formed a thin line of disapproval when she helped him up from the couch. Satya took this to mean he did not like relying on her for help.

“I’m sorry about all of this,” Satya said, her tone brimming with disdain. “It must be difficult to accept help from someone you despise.”

She felt Jamie tense even further over her shoulder.

“It’s more that I don’t like accepting help from someone who chooses a corporation over their relationships with real people.”

Satya took a deep breath. That stung.

“Do you become this childish with everyone who turns you down?” Satya asked him. They had almost made it to the first landing.

“Not at all,” Jamie replied. “Just when people claim to be your friend and then spit in your face. I don’t know why I expected things to be any different.”
Satya resisted the urge to throw him down the stairs. They arrived at the landing and then turned to 
head up the last portion of the staircase.

"Look," Satya began, her voice strained. "We just need to get through this, get back to base, and 
then you can go back to hating me."

There was a long pause from Jamie. "I don’t hate you Satya."

“You sure have been acting like you do,” she retorted. They were almost at the top of 
the stairs now. “Even though you promised me...”

Satya took a sharp inhale of breath. Her words broke off then.

Jamie turned to look down at her. Her face was hidden from him. He wanted to say something, but 
he held back. He waited for her to continue.

Satya gathered herself and went on, stiffly, “We promised each other we would always look out for 
each other.”

Jamie’s eyes widened. He remembered, sitting in the Workshop months ago working 
on Lúcio’s blades, the had promised to always look out for each other. And he had kept his 
promise, and she hers. But since Halloween night, somehow things had changed between them.

“I didn’t forget,” Jamie said quietly.

They arrived at the second floor. Jamie braced himself against the bannister while Satya reached 
over and flipped on a light.

She turned to him again. “But you were very eager to throw up a wall between us as soon as our 
relationship was no longer convenient for you,” she said bitterly. Her hands were fisted at her 
 sides.

“That’s not fair!” Jamie cried. “You’re the one who...!” He stopped himself. Arguing with her 
wasn’t helping the situation. He sighed deeply. “That wasn’t... that wasn’t my intention.”

He attempted to hobble past her towards his bedroom, bracing his weight on the bannister as he 
went.

Satya was getting worked up now and she was not going to let him get away so easily. “Oh, I know 
this is exactly what you wanted!” she said, her words heated. “For us to not have any kind of 
relationship. You've practically ignored me for the last two weeks.”

Jamie paused halfway to his bedroom door. He pivoted to look at her. “Of course, this isn’t what I 
wanted!” Jamie retorted. “You think I’m happy about any of this?”

“I missed you!” Satya cut in. Her voice had risen in volume. “You left me and I missed you!”

The air was cold and silent.

Jamie ran his free hand through his hair. He took a ragged breath. When he finally met her gaze, 
she was shaking where she stood just a few steps away from him, tears balanced on her lashes.

“You’re right,” Jamie said quietly, and again, “You’re right.”

He swallowed hard.
“I promised you, and then I let you down. I’m sorry.”

Standing opposite each other in the hallway, a strange quiet settled over them.

“I missed you too,” Jamie added eventually.

Satya said nothing for a moment. Her eyes flitted over his form, like she was trying to decide what to make of his confession. Finally, she turned and made her way to her bedroom, closing the door behind her.

Satya paced the room for a while, then sat on the bed, trying to gather her thoughts. Today had been a very confronting day for Satya; the argument on the stairs just now, escaping the strange men in the alleyway, and then there was the information exchange she had been assigned to shoot-call for. Watching Jamie and Lena pretend to be in a loving relationship had an effect on Satya that she was not proud of.

She was so furious with him; she could barely contain herself. Now he wanted to apologise? After the way he had been treating her for two weeks? She dropped her head into her hands. She was exhausted, in every sense of the word.

In the room next door, Satya heard Jamie thumping along as, she assumed, he hopped over to the bed. Then silence.

She felt a great deal of turmoil inside her. Yes, Jamie had ‘left’ her, but she had left him too. She had walked away from him on Halloween night, and shut down any hope of advancing their relationship. Could she blame him for feeling sour? For needing time to process what had happened between them? But the loss of him had hurt more than all of that. One single truth occurred to her then. After two weeks of missing her best friend, she realised it with startling clarity.

She was in love with him.

Every time they had propped one another up, every time they had saved each other’s lives, every experience they had shared to date, made one thing clear.

_She was in love with him._

And losing him left her with a bone-deep ache in her soul.

Satya stood slowly and crossed the room to the bedroom door. Stepping out into the hallway, she only needed to take a few steps to find herself standing in the doorway to Jamie’s room.

Jamie had left the door open, so she approached cautiously, leaning her weight on her hip against the doorframe. Jamie caught sight of her and looked up with surprise. He was lying in the freshly made double bed, covers crumpled and tossed to one side.

His eyes found hers.

Jamie watched her for a moment. The light from his bedside lamp washed over her figure in the otherwise dark room. He had taken off his earpiece and a few of the earrings the Disguise Lab had given him, and left them lying on the bedside table. He had no other personal effects, so the room remained otherwise stark and empty.

“I’m sorry too,” Satya said. Her words were quiet and gentle. They hung in the air long after she pushed off from the doorframe.
Before he could say anything, she reached down, adjusted something inside her bedsheet toga, and then stepped out of her underwear, letting the thong she had been wearing drop to the carpet. She crossed to the bed in a few strides, hoisted her leg over and suddenly, she was on top of him, straddling his waist.

Jamie didn’t even have a moment to acknowledge what was happening. She practically pounced on him, and his hands rose instinctively to take hold of her by the hips. The bedsheet she was still wearing rucked up around her thighs. He pulled her close and the wash of her inky black hair fell across his face.

Her mouth was on his instantly. Eyes wide, Jamie stared at her while she kissed him roughly. His mouth parted for hers and she responded enthusiastically.

Her hands were on his chest, running up to cup at his jawline and angle his mouth close to hers.

“Jesus Christ,” Jamie swore. This was happening. This was really happening!

His hands tangled in the bedsheet-dress-thing wrapped around her torso. She leaned back momentarily to undo the sheet where it was knotted around her front. Suddenly there was a beautiful girl balanced on his balls in nothing but a bra. She cast the sheet to one side and then her mouth was back on his.

Eyes wide, Jamie tried to bite his tongue lest he say something stupid to scare her away.

She was sitting right on top of his erection, Jamie realised, with only the thin fabric of his underwear separating them. The bulge beneath the fabric was start to make itself known. She rolled her hips into his, grinding against the firmness in his underwear and his hips jerked involuntarily. She groaned into his mouth.

Jamie felt her fingers on the waistband of his briefs then. He reached down, eager to help her shed him of them. His underwear was pushed down his thighs and his cock soon sprang free. She was all over him again, slicking her lips along the length of him. Jamie swore again.

Jamie released an involuntary groan, watching as she lined him up with her entrance and slowly sunk down on top of his length. Jamie was mesmerised as she enveloped him. Soon he was buried right to the hilt.

“Fuck!” Jamie growled through grit teeth.

She was hot and wet. Jamie had to remind himself to breathe. She tossed her hair back and started to grind her hips with purpose. In return, Jamie thrust his hips in time with hers. She set a brutal pace. The fervor of her motions, the feel of her all around him as he rose to meet her, it was positively hypnotic.

Jamie helped her ride him, lifting her hips with his hands and helping her to settle again on his cock. Her hands were braced on his stomach as she moved. Jamie watched her gauntlet capture the light and felt the cool press of it against his skin. If only there were a way to capture this moment in his mind for eternity.

Jamie watched as she rode him, her eyes squeezed closed, her breaths coming in short pants. He reached up to cup her breast over her bra with his good hand and she moaned again. She reached behind her back and unhooked her bra in one quick motion, tossing it aside as she had done with the bedsheet.

She took hold of his good hand and placed it back on her breast. She released a sigh of pleasure
when he thumbed her nipple.

“You’re so beautiful,” Jamie told her.

When she smiled down at him, he felt his heart skip a beat.

Jamie watched the sweat beading on her forehead, her lips parted, gasping for air. Her thighs were squeezing him tight, her feet trying to find purchase in the tangled bedsheets. The sight was glorious. Her breasts swayed with every roll of her body. Her skin shone in the dim light with perspiration. He grazed his calloused hands along her flared hips giving way to narrow waist and taught belly. Jamie was absolutely enamoured with her and he wanted to feel as much of her as possible.

His breath was coming ragged now. He had to make this good. What if he never got the chance again?

It was over as quickly as it began.

Satya let out a cry, terrifying in pitch and yet beautiful at the same time. She shuddered and her pace slowed. Jamie helped her rock against him a few more times and then grunted as his own release overcame him.

Their movements slowed to a halt and both were left breathing heavily in the wake of what they had done.

Jamie stared at her, mouth agape, surprised by what had happened. He watched her, worried that perhaps this was all a dream and she may disappear at any moment in a puff of smoke.

Slowly, she extracted herself with a whimper and rolled to the side, fetching up against the pillows beside him. She lay like that for a moment, her own inky black hair spilled across her face, unmoving.

“Alright?” he asked her after a moment. He took advantage of the reprieve to adjust his underwear which were still snagged around his thighs.

She said nothing and held still on the clean sheets. She appeared to be trying to get her breathing under control again. They both watched the ceiling for some time in silence. Finally, Satya pulled the locks of hair out of her face and looked at him.

“A little quicker than I was expecting,” she said.

Jamie took a moment to digest what she had said, then a look of incredulity came over him. He propped himself on an elbow to get a better look at her face.

“What? Oh, come on!” he pleaded with her. “I’m knackered! We both are! Cut me a little slack!”

Satya giggled. “I’ll grant you that,” she said. Jamie watched her chest rise and fall with every heaving breath.

“Besides,” Jamie went on with a grin. “I’ve been waiting to do that for a long time.”

Satya met his gaze then. She smiled at him.

He ran a hand along her side, pleased to see goosebumps rise on her skin in its wake. “Maybe I could demonstrate my stamina for you?” he asked slyly.
Satya nodded, her eyelids growing heavy with exhaustion. “Hmm,” she hummed. “Perhaps later. After we’ve rested.”

‘Perhaps later.’ Jamie let Satya’s words echo in his mind. Did that mean she wanted to do this again? He was elated by the prospect.

She curled into his side then. Jamie took that as permission to wrap an arm around her and pull her close. She hummed her appreciation of that too. Jamie tucked her head under his chin and held her close in quiet comfort for some time.

They really should have organised a watch rotation in case more men in black came looking for them in the night, but it was very late now and both were too exhausted to keep their eyes open much longer.

Jamie reached over and switched off the lamp and the room became dark again. He adjusted the covers around them, finding that their bodies entwined together produced a satisfying warmth on this cold night.

Before she dosed off completely, he leaned back and lifted her chin so he could look at her face one more time. He kissed her then, his lips soft and full.

She made a noise of pleasure, somewhere between sleep and waking, before parting from him. She curled back into his side, an arm around his middle. Jamie exhaled with satisfaction.

Sleep enveloped them both.

--

Ana smiled to herself as she cut off the comms system. She chuckled quietly.

It was about damn time.

“Any word from those two?”

Ana jumped with alarm. It was Jack strolling up behind her, a cup of coffee in hand. She had not even heard his footfalls as he approached.

“What? Er... yes!” Ana scrambled around on her workstation for a moment, trying to appear busy. She was sitting at a computer in the command centre of the dropship, working on her post-mission report. They were still about an hour away from Gibraltar and she wanted to get a bit more of it finished before the night was out.

She also wanted to protect Satya and Jamie’s privacy in that moment.

“I just checked in with them both. They’re fine,” Ana told him firmly.

Jack eyed her with suspicion. “Okay,” he said. “Keep me posted if there are any developments.”

Ana nodded and watched him walk away. Releasing a sigh of relief, she returned to her report on the computer in front of her. She had finished organising a courier for the peg leg. But there was still a bit more to do. She would need to book that commercial flight for Satya and Jamie before she turned in for the night so the pair could fly back to Gibraltar in the morning.
Ana sighed. This whole mission, while objectively a success, was resulting in a lot of additional paperwork for her.

She had meant to check in with Satya and Jamie one last time that evening, as was protocol, however when she attempted to contact their earpieces, she could hear nothing on the other end except for some very conspicuous noises of... pleasure, and she was having difficulty identifying them as anything other than the obvious.

Ana leaned back in her chair and took a sip of her tea.

So, Satya and Jamie had taken the plunge? Ana got the impression their relationship was a private matter and decided to keep what she had discovered to herself. But she could not deny she was pleased for them.

She had noticed how well they got along and had recommended they be sent on more missions together to help foster a positive working dynamic, and the pair had done well in that regard. It had been a welcome change to see Satya finally getting along with someone in the team after her difficulties settling in, and Ana had enjoyed watching her flourish over the last few months. So, it had come as a surprise when Ana noticed Satya’s relationship with Jamie had soured a couple of weeks prior and they seemed not to get along as well as they once had. To her relief, all of that seemed to be resolved now.

Ana smiled behind her teacup.

She wondered what would come next for those two.

Chapter End Notes

A/N:

Okay so like I’ve never written lemon before..... read plenty of it, but never written it......so......... I hope this was okay?

The whole exchange between the informant and Satya I lifted from an episode of a BBC TV show called “Spy” from 2004. It’s a very interesting show about spies and I recommend it (there's a playlist of all the episodes on Youtube). Here’s the clip: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5aJi6e-uRVE&list=PL5KBvSg6N927-aLSgb5tke7REPrtXSU1e&index=5t=29m14s
When Satya Vaswani finally awoke, it was to an unfamiliar ceiling.

Drowsy, she slowly surfaced from her sleepy haze.

The room was dark, with curtains still drawn over the nearby window. Her eyes adjusted in the minimal light as she took in the unfamiliar surroundings, but she did not immediately understand why she was here and not in her dorm room back at the Watchpoint. And then she remembered; they were at the safehouse.

Satya was starting to piece together in her memory the events of the previous day when something came to her attention.

There was a warm arm wrapped around her middle.

Satya tried to look over her shoulder but all she could see was Jamie’s blond hair flopped over his face. He had buried his nose in the back of her neck, arms wrapped around her waist from behind.

Satya blinked with surprise at the sight. Suddenly it all came rushing back.

She remembered the events of the previous evening and what they had done. It certainly explained why she was in the room Jamie had shared with Baptiste instead of her own and why her clothes were missing.

Satya tried to shift so she could roll to the side of the mattress but Jamie’s tight grip prevented her.

“Five more minutes...” he murmured in his sleep.

“Jamison,” Satya said sternly. “Let me up please.”

She looked around for the bedsheets she had been using as a dress the night before and spotted it on the floor across the room. Along with her bra. Where had her panties got to?

“Jamison...”

His hold on her waist was impossibly firm. She was certain he was near enough to awake now. No one who was asleep could maintain a grip like that.

“What time is it?” she asked.

“Dunno, don’t care,” he replied, his voice muffled by his pillow.

Just when Satya was beginning to formulate a way to wriggle out of his grip, cross the room to her clothes and dress herself all while retaining her dignity somehow, she suddenly felt Jamie’s hand shift. Now it was running up and down her side. All coherent thought left her body.

He shifted so he was propped up on his elbows. She felt herself roll onto her back with him no longer at her back propping her up. Now they were face-to-face and his nose was mere inches away from hers. His mouth dropped then and seared hot, open-mouthed kisses along to column of her neck.
Satya gasped and writhed in his arms. It was all she could do to cling to his back as he worked his magic.

His good hand was blazing a trail down her arched spine, making its way to cup her rear.

There was a loud noise, the ringing of a bell somewhere in the house that caused Jamie to jump with surprise. He flailed in the sheets and subsequently lost his grip on her.

“It’s the doorbell,” Satya told him, breathless. Her pulse was racing now. She tried to compose herself.

Rolling to the side of the bed, she cast off the covers and shivered in the freezing air. She stood quickly and hurried to retrieve her bra from the floor. She pulled it on and then set off for the door where she found her panties. She pulled them on too and stepped out into the hallway without a backwards glance for Jamie.

As Satya descended the stairs to the first floor, she plucked her clothes—now dry—off the bannister and pulled them on as fast as she could. She was still shimmying into her pencil skirt when she padded, barefoot across the entry hall to the front door and unlocked it.

Opening the door, Satya was hit in the face with frigid morning air. The streets beyond their front door were still wet from overnight rain and the sound of early morning traffic nearby could be heard. A young man was standing on the front step in the weak sunshine. By his feet was a long, rectangular box. Satya new instantly it was Jamie’s peg leg.

“Morning, miss,” the man said. “Delivery for you. Please sign here.”

He offered her a digital clipboard and stylus. There was a text box on the digital display for her to sign her name in. Satya signed using her alias and handed the clipboard back.

“Thank you,” Satya said, watching the man hop down the front steps to the street.

Satya picked up the package and brought it inside, leaving it by her feet as she closed and latched the door again. Finally alone, she stood looking at the box by the front door, covered in “high priority” and “fragile” stickers. Satya had a moment of privacy to breathe.

What had happened last night was... confusing. Perhaps, she felt, she had acted a little hastily. Even though she knew she had been more than willing and enthusiastic about what they had done, something left her feeling torn. Where did they stand with each other now? What if she had put their entire relationship at risk? How could she have been so reckless?

‘Thank god I’m on the pill,’ she mused.

And what about her job? She had broken the Vishkar rule about inter-office relationships. Satya absorbed this information with pursed lips. She had broken a rule.

Satya tried to dampen the rising panic. Rule-breaking went against her inner nature. She clenched and unclenched her fists a few times, trying to regulate her breathing.

‘What have I done?’

Realising, Jamie was probably waiting for her, Satya brushed her bedhead hair out of her face, gathered herself, and stepped into the living room adjacent to the entry hall. She found her coat where she had left it, slung across one of the armchairs. She dug around in the pockets momentarily for her phone and checked the messages. As expected, there was an email with two
electronic tickets for their flight back to Gibraltar. There was a second message to indicate a driver would pick them up in an hour. Satya sent an encrypted message back that she and Jamie were fine and would make the flight on time.

Returning to the entry hall, Satya hefted the heavy box containing Jamie’s peg leg in her arms and hurried up the stairs with her package. She knew he would be eager to get it back on.

When she arrived back at the upstairs bedroom, she found Jamie sitting up on the edge of the mattress. He met her eyes as she approached him with the package. Suddenly she felt very shy. She stepped forward and dropped the box on the bed beside him, all while Jamie watched her every move.

Tucking a loose strand of hair behind her ear, Satya stood back, eyeing his movements as he reached for the box.

“Is there anything to eat?” he asked as he tore at the cardboard.

Satya shook her head. “We could order some delivery?”

“Yes, please,” he replied. He practically ripped the peg leg out of the packaging. Styrofoam peanuts were sent flying in all directions. He held his prize aloft. Satya ran her eyes over the familiar metal frame, the yellow spring just below the knee joint, and the socket where his thigh was usually strapped in.

“There she is!” Jamie crowed. He brought the leg close, stroking it lovingly. “My baby! I missed you girl!”

Satya watched him as he started to refit his leg, first fitting his stump into the socket comfortably and then pulling the straps at the side tight. It would be good to see him up and around again without him needing to rely on her to keep him upright.

“You prefer your peg, don’t you?” she said conversationally.

Jamie shrugged. “The high-tech one was alright, but I could never abandon my baby girl,” he said. Satya knew he was talking about his self-engineered leg. “There just something about making your own leg out of a broken chair, a mattress spring and an industrial piston that feels more special than some sleek, modern shit.”

Satya nodded. “I suppose so.”

She watched him stand and test his leg. Everything seemed to be working alright.

“Go have a shower and I’ll sort some breakfast out,” she told him.

“You could join me,” Jamie said with a sly grin. “Y’know, save some water?”

Satya arched an eyebrow at him, then laughed. “Go on,” she said with a smile. “And don’t take too long. We’re getting picked up in an hour.”

“Alright,” he said, but Satya could detect a subtle note of disappointment. “Your loss.”

With his peg leg back in its rightful place, Satya watched him take a few steps towards her. The familiar limp, the uneven cadence of his steps, somehow set her at ease. Things were getting back to normal.
He ran his good hand up her side once more as soon as he was within arm's reach. Satya watched his every movement. Slowly, he leaned down and Satya let him kiss her. It was brief, but soft and gentle. Satya felt all of his emotion in just this one small gesture. His eyes were on hers when he pulled away, a ghost of a smirk on his lips. He made his way towards the bedroom door, heading for the main bathroom down the hall. Satya watched him go in nothing but his underwear, her heart fluttering.

Sometime later, Satya accepted several brown paper bags and two paper cups of coffee from the delivery man at the front door and took them to the kitchen to set them on the table. She was freshly showered and had sent Jamie upstairs to strip their beds ready for departure.

Jamie came down the stairs shortly after, dressed once more in his black leather jacket and denim pants from his disguise. His hair was still a faint shade of pink and he had rolled up one pant leg to accommodate the peg.

“Breakfast is served,” Satya told him with a flourish of her hands.

“I’m famished!” he exclaimed, taking a seat at the kitchen table. Satya handed him his cup of coffee. She had ordered it just how he liked it; café latte, extra hot, one sugar.

“Let me tell ya,” Jamie said conversationally. “Merry old England is not a ‘merry’ as I recall it to be.”

“Ah, yes,” Satya said thoughtfully, leaning against the kitchen counter nearby. “You’ve been here before haven’t you.”

“Yep. When we tried to nick the crown jewels,” he remarked, biting into a breakfast burrito with gusto.

“How did that work out for you?” Satya asked.

“Not too bad. Only a few weeks in the clink before we busted out,” he said with a nonchalant shrug. “Had to hand everything back though.”

“Of course,” Satya said, nodding.

They were just a couple of feet apart. Satya watched him reach out for her, pulling her against his side as he sat in the kitchen chair. Satya let herself be tugged towards him, hip resting against his side, his arm around her middle. She braced a hand against his shoulder.

“Jamie...” she began.

“Yeah?” he asked. The hand running up and down her side paused. He looked so vulnerable then, it was heartbreaking.

She knew she needed to say something.

“Is it alright... if we take things slow?” she asked. “I know after... last night, that might be a strange thing to ask for, but...”

Jamie watched her carefully, eyes lighting with understanding. “Oh, of course, Sweets,” he said. His grip loosened a little.

‘Did he just call me ‘Sweets’?’ Satya wondered.
“It’s just that, sometimes I need a little space to process things,” she went on.

Jamie nodded. He remembered she had said once that she did not like being excessively touched. She was probably uncomfortable with his persistent pawing at her all morning. He adjusted himself accordingly.

“Take as much time as you need, love,” he said quietly.

Satya nodded. “Thank you, Jamie,” she said.

They shared an amicable conversation as they finished their breakfast. Jamie put all their rubbish in the bins outside ready for collection, while Satya gathered their used bedding and left it all by the door for the dry cleaners. They performed a final sweep of the house, ensuring nothing was left behind that could be traced back to Overwatch as an organisation, then switched off the power. It was at that point the doorbell rang.

The driver that came to pick them up was a little surprised to find the odd pair—a business woman and a punk dressed in leather—but held the door as they climbed into the back of his car with nothing but the clothes on their backs. They were to be taken to Heathrow Airport, but neither had any luggage to speak of.

As they rode along the freeway towards the airport. Satya caught sight of Jamie watching her in the reflection of her window. She turned to look at him and he blushed, glancing away suddenly. When he looked back at her again, she was smiling. She reached out and took his metal hand, holding it cupped in hers the rest of the way to their flight home.

--

Reinhardt watched as Roadie approached his position, shoulders hunched in his jacket against the bitter cold. The wind shifted, pulling at Reinhardt’s clothes and reminding him that Roadie probably was not used to this kind of weather. The crash of waves could be heard nearby.

“Are we ready?” Roadie growled under his mask.

Reinhardt nodded. “Orisa is already in position.”

They were standing beside the raised platform that formed the main training area of the southside training yard. Reinhardt had just finished setting up a hard-light maze to fill the space, which was a lot easier than it sounded because he only had to go up to the observation deck and punch in a few codes to get the desired layout. It was a cold day, and the wet spray of the sea nearby had him shivering as he turned to motion to Brigitte. She had been waiting patiently under the awning a of a nearby building. She trotted over to them eagerly.

“And now, my dear,” Reinhardt began. “The next phase of your training begins.”

Brigitte nodded enthusiastically. “What is it, Reinhardt?” she asked, bouncing on the balls of her feet. “Whatever it is, I’m ready. I was born ready!”

Reinhardt patted her reassuringly on the shoulder. Roadie stood still and watched as Reinhardt addressed her directly.
“One day, you will be a great knight crusader, defender of honour and justice,” Reinhardt began, his voice booming out of his chest and ricocheting off the observation tower nearby.

Brigitte’s smile widened with pride, hanging on her master’s every word.

“A knight’s work is never done,” Reinhardt continued, folding his arms carefully over his chest. “You must learn to be steadfast, vigilant, and unwavering in your dedication to protect and serve those in need of your aid.”

Brigitte nodded again. “What’s my lesson?” she asked eagerly. “How to shatter kneecaps? How to shield-bash an entire battalion? How to mace someone’s head clean off? Tell me!”

Reinhardt let out a raucous laugh. “Patience, my dear!” he told her. “Your next challenge will test the very foundation of your resolve.”

Brigitte readied her shield and her mace. She squared her shoulders, widened her stance and prepared for battle. “Bring it on!” she cried.

“Excellent!” Reinhardt cried, nodding with approval over her form. He turned and gestured grandly towards Roadie, who was still waiting patiently a few paces away.

“Your first test today will be...,” Reinhardt announced. “To keep Junkrat alive.”

Roadie took a step to one side, revealing Jamie standing just behind him. Jamie yawned widely, his frag launcher slung over one shoulder. He appeared to not be listening to anything being said.

Brigitte’s face fell at the sight of him. “Wait. What?”

Reinhardt nodded to Roadie once more, prompting Roadie to retrieve something from his pocket.

“Jamie, look,” Roadie growled.

Jamie glanced in Roadie’s direction. The older man held something shiny aloft for Jamie to look at. Jamie squinted up at the object. It appeared to be some kind of coupon book, its glossy cover shining in the weak sunlight.

“Wotsat?” Jamie asked.

“It’s a coupon,” Roadie told him. “Two-for-one bobas at Bubble Whammy.”

Jamie’s eyes went wide. Bubble Whammy was his favourite bubble tea shop in the town centre of Gibraltar beyond the watchpoint boundary fence.

“Ooooh,” Jamie murmured, instantly transfixed by the prize Roadie was holding.

“Go get it,” Roadie barked, and tossed the booklet over one of the maze walls behind him.

Jamie let out a maniacal cackle and sprung forward, launching himself into the maze and disappearing around a wall just inside the enclosure.

Brigitte seemed to be trying to decide if this was a serious test and if they actually expected to her to chase after Jamie to, as they had described, ‘keep him alive.’ Surely, they were joking? Mr. Rutledge often made a big show of how troublesome it was looking after Jamie, but she had assumed his put-upon attitude was mostly an exaggeration.

A jolt of sudden fear struck her. What if it was not an exaggeration? What if Jamie truly was a
danger to himself? How was she to protect someone with so little regard for personal safety?

“Y— you’re kidding right?” she asked, looking up at Reinhardt. There was a noticeable tremor in her voice.

“You’d better hurry,” Reinhardt told her, motioning her forward. “He’s getting away.”

Brigitte’s eyes went wide with alarm. “No, no, no, no! Jamie!” she cried desperately. She hoisted her shield on her forearm and tore after him. “Wait for me!”

Brigitte dove into the maze where she had seen Jamie disappear not a moment ago. She caught sight of his peg leg as it disappeared around a corner up ahead.

“Jamie!” she called out to him again. “Wait!”

As she rounded a corner, she was confronted by a terrifying sight. Orisa and Bastion had set up a defensive position amidst the hard-light walls. Both immediately started to pelt her with rubber bullets from their weapons. With a shriek of surprise, Brigitte just barely managed to throw up her shield in time to protect herself. Braced against the force of the onslaught, Brigitte inched to once side, diving behind a hard-light wall before her shield shattered at the last moment. She took advantage of the reprieve to catch her breath. Her shield would need time to regenerate.

“You must be prepared for anything!” a voice told her. Looking up, she spotted Reinhardt and Roadie watching her from one side of the maze. They must have found something to stand on, because they were looking over the hard-light walls, elbows propped on the edge as they observed her.

“You cannot always predict your teammate’s behaviour,” Reinhardt went on, shouting to her over the din of gunfire. “You must be ready and willing to protect them at a moment’s notice.”

Brigitte pushed herself to her feet and charged into the maze of hard-light walls. She would not give up so easily. But where had Jamie got to?

She heard cackling nearby.

“Jamie?” she cried. But there was no response.

“It is your duty to rescue your teammate when they are in danger!” Reinhardt called out to her.

“Even if he’s a total, fucking idiot,” Roadie added. “Who probably got himself there in the first place.”

Brigitte came upon a crossroad in the maze and paused to consider which direction to take next. She did not have much time to contemplate her options, because she could hear footsteps approaching. She glanced around, hoping to see Jamie limping towards her, but instead found herself face with another split-second decision.

Genji dove on her with his practice sword unsheathed. Brigitte threw herself to one side just in time to avoid his strike, rolling to her knees again with her shield up.

Genji’s sword had struck and imbedded itself in the metal flooring right where she had been standing not a moment ago.

Genji took a step towards her. He jerked his shoulder and the sword came free again. Brigitte adopted a defensive stance, watching carefully as he approached her, weapon raised. She could tell
he was attempting to flank her.

She stepped forward, flailing with her mace in his general direction and he backed away cautiously.

“Where’s Jamie?” she demanded to know.

“Perhaps he has already been dealt with,” Genji replied in a deadly tone, trying to circle her once more.

Brigitte took note of the gentle incline of Genji’s head to the right. Brigitte’s eyes followed the direction Genji had indicated. It led towards a narrow walkway between two hard-light walls.

“So, he’s over there?”

Genji paused mid-step. “No,” he said eventually.

“You hesitated,” Brigitte pointed out.

“No, I didn’t,” Genji insisted.

Loud cackling floated on the breeze, seemingly coming from the area just beyond the walkway in question.

Genji and Brigitte stared at each other.

Diving in the same direction, Brigitte and Genji scuffled briefly as they both tried to squeeze down the walkway at the same time, fighting for right of way like teenage siblings squabbling over a remote control. Eventually, Brigitte shoved him aside and surged forward.

“How is this proper training?” Brigitte demanded to know as she charged down the hard-light corridor.

“In the field you’ll need to be able to save your useless, idiot teammates from themselves at a moment’s notice,” Roadie replied.

“In that case, I’m not sure I want to be a tank anymore!” Brigitte called back.

As she threw herself around a corner, she found that Orisa and Bastion had repositioned. The onslaught of rubber bullets resumed. As Brigitte dove to one side, fetching up against another hard-light wall, her elbow brushed against something warm and she looked up to find Jamie crouched beside her. He was leaning against the same hard-light wall, thumbing through the coupon booklet Roadie had tossed into the maze not minutes ago.

“There are enough two-for-one coupons in here for at least fifty boba teas!” he exclaimed excitedly. He seemed to finally notice her arrival because he looked up, his expression illuminating with realisation. “Oh, hey, Brig. When did you get here?”

Brigitte fisted her hand in the front of Jamie’s hoodie and jerked him towards her. He found himself almost nose-to-nose with her as she glared at him. He was too stunned to speak.

“We’re leaving,” she growled at him. “You will come with me now and you will do as I say if you want to live.”
Something about the wild look in her eye and the hard edge to her voice suggested to Jamie that there was little room to argue with her.

“Er... okay.”

At that moment, Genji came flying over the maze wall opposite their position, his practice sword aloft. “Ryūjin no ken wo kurae!” he shouted as he hurtled towards them.

Brigitte spotted him before he could land his strike and pushed Jamie to one side as she dove in the opposite direction. Genji and his blade passed between them, slicing through the wall they had been leaning against moments before. The wall shattered into hard-light shards and Genji disappeared into the rubble.

Brigitte jumped to her feet before Genji could right himself and come after them. “Run!” she shouted at Jamie. Jamie straightened and together they fled through the newly created hole in the maze wall, leaping over Genji’s prone form and climbed over the broken pieces of hard-light.

“Where are we going?” Jamie called over to Brigitte.

“We just need to get out of here!” Brigitte called back.

Climbing the rubble lead them to the tops of the hard-light walls, and Jamie followed Brigitte as she started to run along the tops of the erected barriers.

The walls were not designed to carry their full weight so as they ran along the tops, hopping across openings and charging along the lengths of hard-light, the walls started to topple behind them. They came across Bastion and Orisa again, who were forced to flee as the walls came crashing down around them.

“This way!” Brigitte shouted, heading towards the spot where Reinhardt and Roadie were still standing, watching them.

“Okay!” Jamie replied. He was right on her heels; not even his peg leg could slow him down.

They arrived back at the edge of the maze and jumped down beside Reinhardt who decompressed the timer switch on his stopwatch.

“Two minutes, thirty-three seconds,” Reinhardt remarked. “Not a bad time.”

Brigitte was doubled-over, hands on knees while she tried to catch her breath. “I am never doing that again,” she ground out between pants.

Jamie glanced between Brigitte and Reinhardt. “What were we timing?”

“Nothing,” Roadie told him. He patted Jamie on the shoulder. “Good job.”

“It was?” Jamie asked, still perplexed by what had just happened.

Reinhardt was still nodding with approval, but something gave him pause. “Er, where is Genji?” he asked.

“Oh, yeah,” Brigitte gasped, still trying to catch her breath. “We buried him back there.” She jerked her thumb of her shoulder, indicating the general direction of the collapsed walls where they had last seen him.

Reinhardt sighed.
“I’ll go dig him out,” Roadie volunteered.

--

It was sometime later, after they had finished packing up, that Jamie approached Brigitte as she sat at the edge of the training yard. It was just the two of them now, the others having returned to base, including Genji and his bruised pride.

“Nice work today, Brig,” Jamie said to her, holding out a bottle of water for her to take. “I’m still not entirely sure what kind of training that was, but apparently we did well.”

“Yeah,” Brig agreed, accepting the bottle offered to her. She was tired and was enjoying a quiet moment to catch her breath. “I just hope it was worth it.”

“What do you mean?” Jamie asked her.

He took a seat beside her. They were sitting on a bench under a sheltered area that overlooked the training yard. They let the cool ocean breeze wash over them for a moment.

Brigitte sighed. “I told Reinhardt years ago that I wanted him to train me to become a crusader like him.” She looked up at the dark clouds gathering overhead. It was most likely going to rain soon. “But I was reluctant to join Overwatch when the Recall went out.”

Jamie watched her uncap the water bottle and take a drink. “You didn’t want to be in Overwatch?”

Brigitte smiled. “I’ve made peace with it now,” she said. “It’s the price I pay to continue my training.” Jamie watched her fingers curling around the bottlecap in her hand with excess energy. “Even if the training is anything like it was today and makes me question my entire existence,” she added with humour.

“Uh, sure,” Jamie said, nodding. “How come you don’t like Overwatch?”

Brigitte was quiet for some time before she answered. “I don’t like what they did to Reinhardt. They chewed him up and spat him out,” she said bitterly. “‘Forced redundancy,’ they called it. Said he got too old. Tried to make him retire and everything.” Her fingers twisted with pent up energy in her lap. “After everything he did for them.”

Jamie was surprised to hear this. He had no idea.

“Things are different now,” Brigitte went on. “But the old Overwatch... did things to Reinhardt that I’ll never forgive them for.”

There was a dark expression on her face that made Jamie pause and stare at her, waiting for her to continue. His breath was caught in his throat for a moment.

Brigitte seemed reluctant to say any more. She was watching something in the distance when she finally spoke again. “But Reinhardt would never break his oath. He always wanted to help people. He’s never stopped fighting all these years.” She turned to look at Jamie then, a soft smile on her face. And with that one small gesture, the strange mood that had settled over them suddenly lifted. “Someone has to keep an eye on him. So here I am.”
“Holy shit,” Jamie remarked. “Does everyone around here have a dark back story?”

Brigitte giggled. “Probably. I haven’t even told you about my own past yet.” She leaned towards him then, eyes bright with amusement. “I was betrayed by someone close to me, leaving me with a seething hatred for all mankind.”

“No funny,” Jamie told her, sensing she was making fun of him.

Brigitte laughed again. “I’m kidding,” she insisted, rocking back in her seat. “But maybe you might like to tell me what you’re hiding.”

Jamie’s gaze shot up to meet hers with alarm. “Wha— what?”

“Come on,” Brigitte said encouragingly. “You been acting weird lately. I know you’re up to something.”

“No, I haven’t! I mean, I’m not! I mean...” Jamie stuttered, his gaze flitting around erratically, perhaps seeking out a means of escape.

Hesitantly, he stood, at the same time desperately trying to think of an excuse for why he might be needed elsewhere. Before he could take more than a step, Brigitte reached for his arm, taking hold with an iron grip and smirking as she attempted to prevent him from leaving. Jamie had forgotten how strong she was.

“It’s got something to do with Satya, doesn’t it?” she asked slyly.

Jamie sputtered, coughed, and faced Brigitte with eyes wide. He was bright red when he addressed her again. “How do you know about—?” He clamped a hand over his mouth then, perhaps deciding he had said too much.

Brigitte’s smile widened. “Because you just told me,” she replied to his half-finished question. “What happened? Did you kiss?”

“I’m going now,” Jamie announced, turned to head toward the large door that lead back inside the base. Brigitte’s iron grip on his arm prevented him from taking more than a few steps.

“Come on!” Brigitte insisted, refusing to let go of Jamie’s arm. “Give me something to work with here! You two have been making lovey-dovey faces at each other for the past few days since you got back from London.”

“No, we haven’t!” Jamie insisted, trying pry her fingers off of his arm.

Brigitte appeared very smug indeed. “And don’t think I haven’t seen you whispering to each other when you think no one’s looking.”

Jamie swallowed hard. “I don’t know anything what you’re talking about!”

Brigitte rolled her eyes at his persistence. “Jamie, we’re Overwatch field agents. We’ve been trained to detect deception.” She smiled up at him again. “And you’re a terrible liar.”

Jamie appeared conflicted for a moment. His hands clenched, then unclenched. His expression floundered; his mouth set in an undefined expression of uncertainty. He eyed the enormous gates that lead back into the base across the training yard, perhaps trying to decide if he could make a dash to safety before he admitted too much.
Eventually, he turned back to her and sighed wearily. “Alright, but you can’t tell anyone!” he said.

Brigitte squealed with delight. “I knew it! How long? One week? Two weeks? Have you done the dirty yet?”

“Brig!” Jamie explained admonishingly.

“Sorry!” Brigitte replied. She straightened slightly and released Jamie’s arm. “It’s just been a long time coming. And I need all the details!”

“You can’t tell anyone,” Jamie said in a warning tone. “No one is supposed to know. If they do, Satya could lose her job.”

Brigitte’s brow furrowed with confusion. “Why?”

“It’s some stupid Vishkar rule,” Jamie said, still annoyed she had gotten him to admit everything so readily. He retook his seat beside her. “In fact, don’t even let Satya know that you found out. She’ll probably kill me.”

“How sweet!” Brigitte laughed. “Tell me everything. What was your first date?”

Jamie blinked back at her. “Erm, I don’t think we’ve had one yet.”

He thought on it a little more. He and Satya had spent plenty of time together over the past few months. They had practically been in each other’s company at least once a day, whether it be in the Workshop, the gym, or one of the common rooms, and they had gone on plenty of missions together. The closest thing they had had to a date was probably their little stroll together on that sunny day in Eichenwalde. Notwithstanding that they had been subsequently attacked, chased, and almost been mortared to death that same day. Jamie suspected that it had not quite met the threshold for romance to be considered a date.

Brigitte was frowning at him. “Jamie, that’s awful,” she said. “You can’t treat a lady like that.”

“Look, I’m doing my best here,” Jamie said defensively, then sighed. “But to be honest, I don’t really know what I’m doing.”

“You do know what a date is, don’t you? Do people go on dates in Junkertown?” Brigitte asked with a great deal of curiosity.

“Of course!” Jamie said quickly, waving her comment off. “But I’ve never... I mean... There was never anyone who...”

Brigitte watched him flush red again. She was starting to piece together a little bit of his history now. “Is Satya your first girlfriend?”

Jamie was watching the pavement closely, considering Brigitte’s question carefully. “I don’t even know if she is or not.”

Jamie felt something inside him squeeze with anxiety. He remembered the conversation he had had with Satya in the kitchen of the safehouse in London. She had said she wanted to take things slow. And he had behaved so terribly towards her in the lead up to their trip to London. What if she did not even want to go on a date with him? What if she was not doing enough to convince her to give him a chance? Jamie went cold. What if she was thinking of ditching him altogether? And was just waiting for the right moment to break the news to him?
“She might not even want to be,” Jamie added. The thought was so depressing, it made him bow his head towards the pavement once more.

Jamie may never have had a girlfriend before—plenty of flings and one-night stands—but part of him had hoped for something more with Satya. They had grown so close of the last few months. He had come to know what made her smile, what got a rise out of her, what she liked to do with her free time. But something told him he had only just begun to scratch the surface of everything that made Satya who she was. Jamie did not want to heed Roadie’s warnings about not getting involved with anyone on base, or his constant nagging of Jamie not to be so trusting of everyone; he knew Satya was worth the risk. If he was going to give it a try with anyone, it had to be her.

Jamie wanted her to be his girlfriend. But how to convince her now?

Jamie realised Brigitte was still speaking.

“Ladies like to be romanced,” she was saying. “They like to feel special. So, you have to ask her on a date.”

Jamie surged forward suddenly and took hold of both Brigitte’s hands, almost sliding off the bench in the process. “Brig, you’re a girl...”

Brigitte was a little startled by the intensity of Jamie’s gaze. “Er... last time I checked.”

“So, help me!” Jamie implored her. “How do I make Satya like me?”

Brigitte shrugged him off and he retook his seat besides her, waiting for her response.

“Well,” Brigitte began thoughtfully. “Have you kissed?”

Jamie nodded.

“Have you slept together?”

Jamie went bright red, but nodded again. “A few days ago.”

Brigitte was watching him closely. “You mean, on the King’s Row mission?”

Jamie nodded once more. “But we had this awful fight beforehand. I don’t even know if she’s fully forgiven me...”

“Oh, so it was angry, jack-hammer sex?” Brigitte asked.

“No, it wasn’t!” Jamie exclaimed indignantly.

His brows furrowed. He was sure that night meant more than ‘angry-sex’ to the both of them. “Are you going to help me, or not?” he asked her.

Brigitte shook her head. “Sorry, you’re on your own, Jamie,” she said with a shrug.

Jamie’s jaw dropped. “What? You made me confess everything to you and you’re not even going to help me?” he sputtered.

“I can’t tell you how to make someone like you, Jamie,” Brigitte said calmly. She stood at that moment and gathered her carry bag ready to leave, dropping her water bottle inside and shouldering it over the pauldron of her armour. She turned to address him briefly before she left. “The answer has to come from inside you. And besides, it’s almost five o’clock. There’s
somewhere I need to be.”

Jamie stared down at his empty hands. Everything they had just discussed was churning in his brain. What if Satya was just in it for the sex? Jamie gulped. What if she was just trying to work something out? They had barely been speaking all day during the King’s Row mission, then everything blew up and they had that big fight. But when she had come to his room that night, it had been one of the most intense experiences of his life. Maybe Brigitte was right. Maybe they had just had angry-sex and nothing more?

Jamie looked up and watched Brigitte prepare to leave. An idea was forming in his mind.

“You’re going to feed that family of stray kittens that set up home under the radar array near the cliffs aren’t you?”

This time it was Brigitte who sputtered.

“What? No!” she insisted.

“I’ve seen you,” Jamie told her. “You go out there every evening and feed them. I’ve seen you stocking up on extra snacks from the canteen.”

Brigitte clutched her bag a little tighter. Jamie suspected all the food for the cats was in there.

“I don’t know what you mean,” she insisted.

“Did I mention I’m an Overwatch agent trained to detect deception?” Jamie asked her with a grin.

Brigitte fixed him with an unimpressed expression. She turned at that moment to head over towards the exit. Jamie sprang to his feet and jogged to catch up to her.

“Wait up!” he cried.

Brigitte tried to ignore him. She was almost at the door that led back inside now.

“If you let me come with you, I won’t tell everyone that you’re keeping seven cats in your bedroom tonight,” he told her.

Brigitte rounded on him with a look of annoyance. “What are you talking about? I’m not keeping seven cats in my room tonight.”

There was a rumbling in the distance that seemed to punctuated Jamie’s statement. Brigitte identified it as a clap of thunder, dull at first in volume, and then growing in intensity.

Jamie adopted a relaxed pose. “So, I’m thinking we should probably relocate your little pets.”
Brigitte fidgeted for a moment as she thought of how to respond. Jamie watched her patiently.

“If they don’t drown, they won’t survive the winter, Brig,” he told her quietly. “The radar array is not a proper home for them.”

Brigitte frowned. She had hoped to keep the little family of kittens that had appeared on the Watchpoint grounds a secret from anyone else. If the commander found out, he would have them removed and she would never see them again. And she was so fond of cats...

“They’re good cats, Jamie,” she replied eventually.

Jamie nodded. “I know.” he said. “Tell you what, I’ll help you get them all inside. I’ll even help you give the little buggers a bath, if you help me with this ‘romance’ shit you were talking about.”

Brigitte’s expression transformed then. It was a mixture of surprise, disbelief, and amusement at Jamie’s gall.

He watched her, eyebrows raised, waiting for her to respond.

“Oh, alright!” she barked. “But only if you help me get them down to the local shelter tomorrow morning too.”

“Deal,” Jamie said, smiling broadly at her. “We’ll need to keep in secret from the commander though. He might try to stop us.”

Brigitte shook her head dismissively at his comment. “The amount of secret stuff that goes on around here that the commander never finds out about could fill a warehouse.”

The rest of the afternoon was spent with Jamie face down, wedged uncomfortably under the radar array along the east cliffs, crawling through dirt and handing kittens to Brigitte as he managing to coax them out of hiding. Brigitte dropped each kitten dutifully into her carry bag, and before long, they were hurrying back inside just as it was starting to rain.

Two blacks, three orange, one white and one tabby kitten were quickly whisked through the base to one of the staff kitchens. They would need to be bathed in a place far from the common areas and the Mess, to avoid being discovered and dobbed on too soon by one of the other occupants of the Watchpoint.

Turns out everyone who encountered the strange sight of Brigitte and Jamie washing seven fussy kittens in the kitchen sink was simply delighted to see the small furry things. Everyone was subsequently delayed immeasurably as they insisted on staying and playing with the kittens as they dried. They hissed at Jamie as they were being washed, but he was able to hold them by the scruff of the neck with his left hand and wash with his metal right hand, protecting him from the sharp scratches of their tiny talons. They were surprisingly well behaved for Brigitte, on the other hand, for whom they must have seen as a mother figure. Jamie supposed her gentle words and careful touches let the kittens know she was there to protect them.

Finally, they managed to relocate all kittens safely to Brigitte’s room with a promise to regroup and take them down to the local cat shelter in the morning. The thought of all seven kittens sleeping all cozy in bed with Brigitte that night tickled Jamie immensely.

Before he left her, Brigitte made a phone call to a friend of hers, a woman who ran a local flower shop. After a favour was called in, the friend agreed to bring a delivery to the base and Jamie promised to meet the woman at the security gate to collect it.
Brigitte had winked at him before he left. “You’re lucky I’m better at flirting with girls than you are,” she told him.

--

Satya answered the door to her dorm room promptly when she heard knocking coming from the other side. To her knowledge, no one had ever come to visit her at her room before, and part of her was concerned something might be wrong. Her fears were quickly dismissed when she was confronted by a bright spray of colourful roses, almost entirely blocking her view of the corridor beyond. The person holding the flowers up to her eye level, leaned around the giant blossoms to peek at her.

“Jamison!” Satya exclaimed. “What are you...?”

“Um... these are for you,” Jamie said quietly, holding out the bouquet of fresh roses. They were mostly peach and deep pink tones, but Brigitte had ensured a few rare blue roses—Satya's favourite colour—were scattered through the bouquet.

Satya was almost speechless at the sight.

“Jamie,” she began, eyes wide. “They’re beautiful!”

She accepted the bouquet from him, tucking the lot of them in the crook of her elbow. Finally, Jamie’s face was revealed to her, bright red and smiling at her hopefully. He noted the amusement as it danced in her eyes, the golden colour illuminated by the warm interior light in the corridor beyond her room. She was smiling back at him, a good sign, he hoped.

"I just wanted to say,” Jamie said, “I know that everything is still new and I know you're still laying down some of the rules about...” He stopped and gestured between them, perhaps unable to find a suitable word.

“Us,” he said finally, settling on a descriptor. “but I want you to know: you mean a lot to me. And I know that this, whatever it is, goes against Vishkar’s rules and even what Roadie said to me, but... I’m here for you. I’ll wait as long as it takes.”

Satya waited for him to finish, a pleased smile on her face.

“Thank you, Jamie,” she said.

"Oh, and also; I’m sorry,” Jamie added quickly. “But I was acting like a real idiot last week. I want you to know how wrong I was.”

Satya watched him closely. She thought back to that moment standing opposite him on the staircase in London. “But you already said you were sorry.”

“Yeah, but... I’m just real sorry,” he said again.

“Thank you, Jamie,” Satya said. She admired the flowers once more, letting their gentle scent wash over her. She met his gaze again. “This is all so confusing for me. There is so much to think about...”
“And I don’t want to pressure you!” Jamie interjected quickly. “But if you need to talk, I’m here.”

“I know,” she said, nodding in agreement. “All I can think about is how much you mean to me. And how I would hate to lose…” She gestured all around herself. “…all of this. Overwatch is my home now. The thought of being made to leave…”

“I don’t want that either,” Jamie told her. “I just want you to know; we can keep it secret if that helps. I think it would be best if Roadie didn’t find out either.” He laughed nervously then, and as the sound echoed down the corridor, he glanced behind him to check no one was watching and listening in on them.

"If we pursue this,” Satya went on. “We need to be discreet. No one can know. If this got back to Vishkar, I could lose my job. And If Roadie finds out…”

“I’ll be dead meat,” Jamie finished for her, his expression bleak.

Satya was nodding again. “It will be very difficult, Jamie. We are surrounded by literal spies. It will be a challenge to keep this secret.”

Jamie remembered Brigitte’s comment about Overwatch agents being trained to detect deception.

“Don’t worry about me love,” Jamie replied, straightening with arms akimbo. “‘Inconspicuous’ is my middle name!” he exclaimed, puffing his chest out.

“Sh!” Satya chided him, glancing quickly up the corridor to check for eavesdroppers.

“Oh, sorry,” he said quickly. He seemed to deflate as he glanced around nervously, realising he had been too loud.

They stared at one another for a moment in silence. It was quiet in this part of the base; no one else seemed to be around. A clap of thunder rumbled in the distance, as though to mark the moment auspiciously.

Jamie cleared his throat. “Well,” he said eventually. “I’ll let you get some rest.” He turned to go then. “Good night, Sat,” he said, even giving her a little wave as he took a step in the direction of the men’s dorm.

Satya watched him with a great deal of curiosity. “Where are you going?” she asked him.

Jamie paused mid step and looked back at her. “Um, back to my room?” he said. “You know, thought you might want some time to think? About the rules?”

Satya considered his words. Since coming to know Jamie, she had developed a terrible habit of breaking rules. She thought back to that cold morning just a few days ago, standing in the front room of the London safehouse, frozen with fear at the thought of having broken a rule. He was rubbing off on her, she realised. And besides, sometimes a little rule-breaking could be exciting.

She reached out towards him then, the flowers still tucked into the crook of her arm. Jamie watched her hand hovering in the air between them with rapt attention. She was smiling at him again, that same knowing, patient, pleased smile she often adopted for him. Just for him.

Her fingers lowered in their trajectory, and Jamie watched with a great deal of anticipation as her fingers looped around his leather belt. The motion was somehow erotic and thrilling all at once. He
felt himself being tugged towards her by his hips.

He let her pull him into her room, the door sliding shut behind them. He caught sight of the white flash of her teeth in the darkness, a triumphant smile on her lips, as he captured her mouth with his own. There would be plenty of time to lay down the rules later.

--

Sometime later, as they lay curled around each other, the dull claps of thunder echoing through the darkened base, Jamie had watched as Satya sat up from her bed, stretched and crossed the room without a thread of clothing on her. Perhaps she thought he was asleep, because she busied herself arranging the flowers in a large glass of water she had fetched from the adjoining en suite bathroom.

It was one of the most beautiful things he had ever seen.

Satya, adjusting each stem with care and consideration, completely naked. Her hair hanging, long and dark, to the small of her back. Her shapely calves pulled taught as she stretched to reach the taller blossoms where they sat poised on her dresser. The sweet and lulling scent of roses hung in the air.

He was desperately scared of saying anything, lest he shatter the scene before him in a heartbeat, but something compelled him.

“Satya.”

His voice was barely above a whisper, but she jerked around quickly to look at him.

“Oh, you’re awake,” she whispered. “I thought you were sleeping.”

He pushed the covers back with his stump and sat up a little to see her better. The dim light from the window nearby illuminated the outline of his chest in the near darkness. Jamie felt her gaze slide over his form.

The moment was so fragile, so precious to Satya, that she was almost too nervous to say anything else. She smiled at him, crossing the room quickly so she could return to the warmth of the bed. She slipped beneath the covers and let him pull her close.

“I’m glad you’re here,” she whispered to him, feeling his arms creeping around her shoulders. Her forehead came to rest against his temple. “I don’t like storms. And it’s very cold tonight.”

Jamie’s hold on her tightened. “You can kick me out whenever, you know?” he said “There’s no pressure.”

“Thank you, Jamie,” she said, her eyes starting to drift closed once more. “But I want you to stay.”

Jamie watched her, his good hand running through her strands of inky, black hair. He looked back at the flowers across the room, each blossom perfectly arranged by Satya’s hand. Where had she learned to do that? There was so much about her he wanted to know.

There were so many things he wanted to ask her in that moment, especially about where they stood
now in relation to one another. They seemed to be doing everything in reverse, the kissing, the canoodling, then the dating coming after, if she agreed of course. But all of that could wait until morning for further thought.

“I almost forgot to ask,” he whispered.

“Hm?” Satya hummed.

“Will you go on a date with me?”

She smiled, making a sound like a soft chuckle.

“Yes, Jamie. Of course.”

Chapter End Notes

I kind of took a little break after the last chapter so sorry for the delay.
“Dashing through the bush, in a rusty Holden Ute...”

Jamie hummed to himself to the tune of ‘Jingle Bells’ as he twirled the red bauble through his fingers. He watched the light refract off of its surface. It looked like one of his colourful grenade shells.

“Kicking up the dust. Esky in the boot...”

“Jamison, are you going to help me at all?”

Jamie looked up from where he was sagged over backwards on the Common Room sofa. His legs were dangling over the backrest. The smell of pine was in the air.

“What?” he asked the up-side-down girl glaring down at him, hands on hips. Gravity took over his hands, and they dropped over his head. The bauble fell out of his fingers, rolling away under the sofa.

Mei glared down at him.

“We were both assigned to set up the decorations in the Common Room,” she said sternly. “Don’t you think you should help?”

Jamie shrugged. “You’re better at this than me.”

“That’s not the point,” Mei countered, bending down to retrieve the plastic bauble that she had seen disappear into the gap under the sofa when Jamie dropped it. Snowball appeared over her shoulder, watching the goings-on with great curiosity. “Everyone who isn’t going home for Christmas has to contribute something.”

Jamie huffed. “I set up the whole of the Halloween event last October. Doesn’t that earn me any credit?” He started to slide off the sofa towards the floor, but did not feel like doing anything to stop this.

“No,” Mei replied in a flat tone. “And don’t take all the credit. Others helped you with Halloween.”

She had found the bauble. She straightened and tossed it back into the storage bin with the others. She turned to the enormous fifteen-foot pine tree set up in the corner. Just from looking at it, she could tell it would take them all day to finish decorating it and the rest of the Common Room. Well, that all depended on if Jamie pitched in at all.

“Now, come over here and help me,” Mei said in an authoritative tone. She watched as Snowball selected a bauble from the storage bin and floated up towards the higher branches of the tree to start decorating the more out-of-reach areas.

“Help you decorate the corpse of a dead pine tree, that we—for some reason—have placed indoors, with plastic and crap?” Jamie asked, arching a derisive eyebrow at her. “And everyone says I’m the weird one.”
“It’s tradition,” Mei said with a roll of her eyes. “We need something to put the presents under.”

“And that’s another thing,” Jamie piped up again. He was still lying across the sofa, halfway to the floor, an index finger extended towards the ceiling ready to punctuate his next point. “Why is breaking and entering okay for Santa to do when he’s bringing us presents, but when I do it, I’m ‘ruining Christmas’ and ‘scaring the children’?”

Mei turned away from him with disgust. “I bet you probably do something silly for Christmas where you come from, like eating roast koala or something.”

Jamie fixed her with a look of amusement. “Wouldn’t you like to know, my dear?” he replied mysteriously.

Mei frowned at him again. He was probably teasing her, but the thought of roast koala, or something worse, for Christmas sent a shiver down her spine.

Snowball returned at that moment to retrieve another bauble and set off again towards the higher branches. So far, the small droid was being more helpful than Jamie ever could be. Mei sighed loudly.

“Would you just hurry up and get over here and help me?” she demanded.

“But I don’t want to...” Jamie groaned dramatically. He slouched even further off the couch onto the floor.

“I don’t particularly care,” Mei told him. She returned to her tangle of Christmas lights sitting on top of a stack of boxes nearby. These would need to go on the tree sooner rather than later, if she could just undo the twisted knot they seemed to have gotten themselves into. “Christmas is only a week away. If we don’t finish this today...”

“You’ll get blamed as project lead, and I’ll be off the hook?” Jamie asked hopefully. He was practically on the floor now, his legs still propped on the sofa, but he raised his head slightly to look over at her.

“...I’ll report you to the Commander,” Mei finished.

Jamie rolled his eyes. “I’m sure the Commander will definitely want to take time out of his busy schedule to hear all about it,” he grumbled.

“Ah, here you are,” a voice said from the other side of the room.

Jamie sat up a little and looked over at the door to the Common Room. He could make out two figures standing in the entrance. Jamie recognised Efi’s guardian, Abayomi, and Satya walking towards them.


The two women paused by the sofa, blinking with surprise at Mei.

“Oh, er... no,” Satya replied, and Mei’s face fell.

“We were just heading out,” Abayomi told them with a smile. “We have an appointment at the nail salon.”

Jamie sat up properly amidst the piles of tinsel and rogue plastic baubles to get a better look at the
newcomers. Both women were dressed smartly in winter coats, their hair and makeup done immaculately as usual, ready for a girls’ day out. Jamie knew Satya had found a kindred spirit in Abayomi when it came to manicures and beauty routines. They had started visiting a local salon frequently together, although Jamie suspected it was more of an excuse for the two women to find some time alone to trade gossip.

“I forgot you two were going in to town today,” he remarked.

“I assumed as much,” Satya told him, shooting a small smile at Jamie. She leaned over the back of the sofa so she could look down at him where he sat on the floor. “You promised to babysit Efi while we were gone, remember?”

The Common Room was silent for a moment.

Jamie’s grin widened. “Of course I didn’t forget!” he said in a way that indicated to Satya at least that he had, in fact, totally forgotten about his promise. “I was just on my way to go find her!”

“Wait a minute,” Mei said, glancing over at Jamie with disbelief as he started to climb to his feet. “You’re leaving me?”

“Sorry, Mei,” Jamie said with a casual shrug. “A promise is a promise. I’m needed elsewhere.”

“Efi is one of the smartest computer programmers on base,” Mei said, throwing down her tangled lights with disgust. “Surely she doesn’t need a babysitter.”

Abayomi turned to Mei. “She’s also only twelve years old,” she said patiently. “As a minor, she must be accompanied by an adult at all times.”

“And you’re trusting Efi’s safety to a convicted criminal?” Mei asked petulantly.

“I’m trusting Efi’s safety to an esteemed agent of Overwatch,” Abayomi replied, nodding with approval at Jamie. “As far as I’m concerned, there’s nowhere safer for her to be.”

“It would be my pleasure, Ma’am, to look after Miss Oladele for one afternoon,” Jamie said, even bowing slightly in reply.

Mei huffed with disdain. Jamie poked his tongue out at her in response when he thought no one was looking.

“We’d better get going before it starts raining,” Abayomi said to Satya.

Satya nodded in reply. Gray clouds were darkening the sky beyond the plate glass of the Common Room windows.

“We’ll be back before supper,” Satya told Jamie.

Jamie nodded back at her and their eyes lingered on each other’s for a moment. They shared a smile and he thought he could detect a hint of blush on her cheeks when she looked away.

Jamie smirked. Although their relationship was still a private matter, there was a certain amount of pleasure in seeing Satya’s reaction if he shot her a suggestive look when others were present. Although, Jamie had to admit he was still a little unsure about where exactly they stood with one another. She had said she wanted to take things slowly that morning in London, and they had been. On a lot of fronts, they had rushed into many of their first experiences together, and Jamie understood that had probably caused Satya a lot of anxiety. It was understandable that she wanted
to slow things down. The problem was that Jamie had fallen head-over-heels for her, and he was having trouble keeping a damper on his enthusiasm.

He had spent a few nights with her in her room since getting back from London too. He was thankful for these small moments of intimacy with her. He had come to know things about her that he had had little chance to know about any girl before. The way her lips curled at the corners when she slept; the lovely noises she made when she was squeezing him tight between her thighs; the way she pulled him close for a quick kiss whenever they found a moment alone together. He was content for her to make the first move. But part of him longed for more.

As far as Jamie was concerned, he was happy for her to dictate the direction of their relationship. He would wait as long as it took; he had already made his decision. But would Satya think the same way when faced with the same choice? At times, he felt wracked with fear that that she would wake up one day and realise he was not fit to stand beside her.

Satya shook her head at him subtly in an admonishing sort of way, then turned with Abayomi to leave. Jamie watched the two women head for the exit under Mei’s forlorn gaze. A smile appeared on Jamie’s face.

Once the girls were out of sight, Jamie turned to address Mei one last time. “Well, you heard the ladies. I’d better be off,” he announced. “I’ve got to go find Efi.”

“What about the tree?” Mei whined. Snowball also descended from above to stare at Jamie angrily with tiny animated eyes.

“Mei, you've got this,” Jamie said, brushing the stray bits of tinsel off his pants. “We both know that if I stayed and helped, this tree would be a flaming pile of twigs and melted plastic in minutes. Honestly, you should be thanking me for leaving it all to you.”

“Wait! That’s not...!” Mei started to protest.

Jamie made his way towards the door. “I believe in you! Remember, Mei, you got this!” he said loudly and strode out of the Common Room without a backwards glance for the scientist or her floating droid.

--

Athena advised Jamie he could find Efi in the main storeroom off the Workshop tending to Orisa. It took a matter of seconds from stepping out of the elevator and slipping past the rows of empty workstations in the Workshop to make it to the door to the storeroom. It appeared most of the engineers has been given the day off, so the Workshop was surprisingly quiet at that moment. Passing by the familiar rows of shelves, each filled with welding equipment or half-finished and abandoned projects, Jamie found Bastion in sentry mode in his usual spot.

“Heya, Bastion,” Jamie said quietly as he walked by. He noted Gannymede had started nesting early, as an assortment of twigs and leaves ferried in through the nearby open window had started to accumulate on top of Bastion’s machine gun housing. The little yellow bird in question was nowhere in sight. Jamie assumed he was off fetching more nesting material.

Bastion made a low noise of greeting as Jamie limped by.
Jamie did not have time to stop and exchange pleasantries, even though he was still somewhat convinced that Bastion was nothing more than an omnic spy secretly plotting against everyone on base, despite everyone’s protestations to the contrary. For now, Jamie would make peace with Bastion, so long as he stayed on his side of the Workshop storeroom.

Somewhere towards the back of the room, Jamie could hear clinking of metal on metal, and someone humming quietly to themselves so he headed off in that direction. Rounding a corner, he found Efi working with her back to Jamie under a halogen lamp. Orisa was laid out in front her, body compartments open, computer boards and exposed wires dangling through the openings while Orisa sat patiently on the floor waiting for Efi to finish.

Jamie blinked down at the automaton. Her current state seemed not to bother her, for she was engaged in light conversation with the pint-sized child prodigy while she worked. Efi was busy looking over her holographic display where it hovered beside her, checking a complicated plan of Orisa’s internal workings.

Efi seemed to finally noticed Jamie’s arrival because she paused to look up at him.

“Ah, you’re here!” she said pleasantly. She beckoned him forward with one hand. “Come! I’d like your advice on the best way to tune up this alternator.”

Jamie stepped forward, hands shoved comfortably in the pockets of his hoodie to keep warm. “More upgrades?” he asked.

Efi nodded. “Orisa needs to be kept at the height of technological advancement if she’s going to defeat Doomfist.”

“Doomfist-this, Doomfist -that,” Jamie groaned. He threw himself down on top of a crate of machine parts up against a nearby shelving unit. His head lolled to one side as he shot Efi an tired expression. “Why is everyone so obsessed with this guy? I have no idea what he even looks like.”

Efi arched her eyebrows at him. “I hope you never do,” she remarked. She eyed him up and down for a moment. “Abayomi sent you here, didn’t she?”

“Babysitting duty,” Jamie said in reply. He folded his arms behind his head and leaned back against the shelves.

She frowned at that. “I’m not a baby,” Efi muttered. She turned her back to Jamie and continued tinkering.

“Does Ms. Abayomi think you are an infant?” Orisa asked from where she was kneeling on the floor. “That’s strange. According to my knowledge base, you are at least ten times the size of a human infant.”

“Thank you, Orisa,” Efi said primly. She plugged her laptop into one of the cables trailing from an open compartment in Orisa’s side and starting typing furiously.

Jamie watched her work for a little while before speaking again. “So, what do you want to do today?” he asked. “We could play hide-and-seek in the aircraft hangars again?”

Efi thought on that for a moment. “Well, I was thinking maybe you could take me shopping.”

“Shopping?” Jamie asked, sitting up a little straighter. “What for?”

Efi half-turned towards him, tapping her chin thoughtfully. “There’s a few things I need to pick up.
I still haven’t got Abayomi’s Christmas present yet.”

Jamie nodded slowly, pausing to consider something for a moment. “If you wanted to go Christmas shopping, why didn’t you just ask Abayomi to take you? She just left with Satya to head into town.”

“Because if she sees me buy it, it won’t be a surprise,” Efi replied evenly without looking up from her laptop.

“Christmas sounds like a lot of work,” Jamie groaned, folding his arms over his chest and slumping a little further down on his crate.

Efi glanced over at him. “Don’t you have Christmas where you come from?”

“Well, yeah,” he replied with a shrug. “but it was more just an excuse for eating a lot of food and getting incredibly dru—” Jamie cleared his throat suddenly, remembering he was speaking someone who was barely a teenager. She had turned thirteen just a couple of months back. “You know, fun times,” he went on. “Not so much buying stuff for each other though.”

Efi smiled at him. “Christmas is all about giving and kindness towards others, and sometimes that’s expressed through gift-giving.”

“Really? I thought it was about a carpenter dude becoming a god or something,” Jamie remarked, scratching at his head. As far as he could remember, he had never received anything for Christmas, at least not in recent years. Holidays in the Northern Hemisphere definitely seemed different to what he was used to.

He wondered if he should be getting something for Satya for Christmas. Was that too forward? They had been spending plenty of nights together, sure, but they were not necessarily ‘dating’ either. She had promised to go on a date with him some weeks back, but in the build up to Christmas and with so many members of staff taking annual leave to be with their families, Jamie and Satya found themselves very busy filling in for last-minute missions, and helping run and maintain the Watchpoint. Operating on a skeleton staff meant everyone needed to pitch in, but Jamie was itching for more alone time with Satya. He was thinking of sending a letter to Talon Headquarters and all the terrorist leaders of the world so he could tell them to calm down for five minutes. Then maybe he might get some alone time with Satya.

If he was going to get her a present, maybe going on that first date would be the best gift of all? He had been trying to think of something romantic that they could do together. The obvious choice was to make use of the nearby beaches that lined the shores of Gibraltar for a sunny stroll, but with winter encroaching, the days were more bleak than sunny. Having never really dated before, he was at a loss for what to do. And the question of getting her something for Christmas or not still remained. He would need to think on it more.

Efi sighed loudly. “Are you going to take me into town or not?”

“Oh, please don’t make me go out in the cold...” Jamie moaned, grimacing at her. “It's freezing out there and I hate the cold!”

“Do it! Or I'm reporting your poor babysitting skills to Abayomi,” Efi informed him with a triumphant grin.

“Alright, alright!” Jamie said, throwing up his hands in defeat. “Let's go.” If they were going into town, maybe he could have a look around for some gift ideas for Satya.
With a cry of delight, Efi leapt up and started putting her tools away. Jamie also stood and stretched, getting ready to depart.

Orisa watched this flurry of activity with round, curious eyes. “What about me?” she asked.

Efi hurried to put her welding unit away. She glanced over at Orisa as she approached the nearby stack of shelves with the heavy equipment in her arms. “I can work on your upgrades later, Orisa,” she said brightly. She came back to Orisa’s side so she could unhook the cables that connected her laptop to the automaton.

Orisa stood as soon as she was able. “No, I mean are you going to give me a Christmas present too, Miss Efi?”

Both Jamie and Efi looked up at the towering omnic, a little surprised by her question. Efi’s face broke out into a smile.

“Of course!” Efi replied. She was trying to stuff her laptop hurriedly back into her carry bag. “This is your first Christmas, isn’t it, Orisa?”

Orisa headed back over to her charging bay beside Bastion. Before she assumed a comfortable position, she turned to Efi and nodded. Jamie and Efi exchanged a knowing smile.

“What do you want for Christmas, Orisa?” Jamie asked with a sagely tone.

Orisa was quiet for a moment while she considered this question. Bastion also turned to watch her, waiting for her response.

“I have scanned my databases for the most optimal Christmas gift and all sources indicate that the most commonly requested item is... a puppy.”

Jamie blinked at Orisa. “You want a puppy for Christmas?”

Orisa nodded again. “This is the optimal choice.”

“Puppies are a lot of work, Orisa,” Efi pointed out. She had finished putting the last of her things away, and was now standing beside Jamie ready to go. “You need to feed them, walk them, play with them...”

Orisa folded her left arm neatly in front of her body. The fusion driver that was usually attached to her right forearm was missing. “I am aware,” she said primly. “I have already downloaded all the necessary information needed to care for a juvenile canine. I am confident in my ability to protect a puppy.”

Jamie mused over this for a moment. It was true that Orisa was perfectly capable of protecting her teammates as a tank. Surely a puppy would be much easier for her to look after?

Efi looked to Jamie for some kind of reassurance. Jamie only shrugged in response.

“Well, there is an animal shelter in town...” Efi remarked. “We could go take a look?”

Jamie nodded. Jamie remembered the animal shelter from when he and Brigitte had dropped off the kittens they had found on base a few weeks back. It would only be a short walk from base.

“Sounds good,” he replied.

Efi smiled widely at him.
“I just have to grab my coat!”

--

Jamie paused mid-step to look down at a small, golden-coloured dog. It had a wide grin and was bouncing around his kennel with excitement.

“What about this one?” Jamie asked.

“Too scruffy,” Efi told him with a shake of her head and carried on walking straight past the kennel in question.

Jamie frowned. He had kind of taken a liking to the small fellow.

“I didn’t think he was too scruffy...” he mumbled back to Efi.

They were walking through rows and rows of dog kennels at the Gibraltar animal shelter, trying to pick out the perfect puppy for Orisa. The place smelled of kibble and wet dog, and so far, Efi had been unable to find any dogs that met her exacting specifications. She had insisted it would be best to find one that was somewhere between a puppy and an adult. If they chose one that was too small, Efi was afraid Orisa might accidentally step on it. Perhaps a stockier breed was needed?

Jamie stretched his neck and looked around. He was keen to get back outside to the fresh air. The constant barking from all the dogs in the near vicinity was starting to drive him spare.

“So, I guess you and Abayomi are not heading to Numbani for Christmas?” Jamie asked conversationally.

“Nope,” Efi replied. She was examining a small Maltese with a critical eye nearby. She reached down with one hand and let the dog lick her fingers. “Christmas was never really a big deal in my family. My parents are usually busy at this time of year. They run a successful chain of department stores.”

Jamie frowned. It sounded like Efi had gotten used to being alone at this time of year. “That sucks, Efi. I’m sorry.”

“It's okay,” she said, turning to him and smiling brightly. “I’ve been with Abayomi as long as I can remember. This is really the first time we’ve done anything to celebrate Christmas. As long as we get to spend the holidays together, I don’t mind.”

Well, at least he was not the only one who had never had a ‘traditional’ Christmas before.

Jamie approached the kennel with the Maltese dog and paused to watch it for a moment. Efi started wandering the rows of kennel doors again, trying to make her decision.

“So, you’ll be spending Christmas on base, right?” Jamie mused aloud. “At least we’ll all be stuck together during this crappy weather. I’ve always said Christmas shouldn’t be allowed during any time of year other than summer.”

It appeared as though Efi was not listening. She was standing in front of another kennel door, watching the occupant with bright eyes. She turned to motion Jamie over to her. “Over here!” she
cried excitedly.

Jamie turned away from the Maltese and jogged to catch up with Efi.

“What do you think of this one?” she asked him on arrival, motioning towards the kennel in front of her.

Jamie peered over her shoulder.

There sat a small Boston Terrier, black and white, staring up at the pair. It was a young dog, perhaps only a few months old. He jumped up on the bars of the kennel, his stub of a tail wagging enthusiastically, tongue lolling to one side. Jamie reached out with his good hand to let the dog sniff him through the bars.

“Seems nice,” Jamie said with a smile.

Efi was busy reading the dog’s information on the clipboard attached to the front bars of the kennel. “Says here his name is ‘Winston’.”

Jamie let out a laugh. “The monkey is going to love that! Sharing a name with Orisa’s dog,” he said. He could picture the head of the Science Department’s face now when he found out about Orisa’s new pet.

“Maybe we can change his name,” Efi mused. “He looks young enough to relearn a name.”

“It’s up to you darl’,” Jamie told her. “If you want this one, we’ll get this one.”

Efi thought on it for a moment, then nodded. “This one,” she said decisively. “He’s good. I can tell.”

The dog yipped in agreement.

“This one it is then,” Jamie said, unlatching the kennel door. “You’ll have to keep him in your room if you want to keep him a surprise until Christmas Day, you know.”

The dog slipped quickly out of its kennel and immediately threw itself at Efi, licking her face and almost knocking her off her feet. She laughed, trying somewhat futilely to push him away.

“I’ll manage,” she giggled.

Being that Efi was underage, Jamie signed and paid the adoption fee. Efi picked out a new leash and collar from the display of dog accessories near the reception desk and fixed them around the puppy’s neck.

It took nearly no time at all from entering the shelter to leaving with a pup in tow. Rugged up in their winter coats, Jamie and Efi trod the streets, fresh and shiny with rain, heading towards the main shopping district. The dog licked and frolicked and attempted to pull himself off the leash several times, eager to sniff at all he could, as they walked together through the streets of Gibraltar.

“What’s next?” Jamie asked, happy to be back outside again, the cold notwithstanding.

Efi retrieved a scrap of paper from her pocket and checked off her list. “One puppy for Orisa: check,” she said, “I’ve already got presents for Hana and Lúcio: check and check. Now we just need to find the ‘Bod, Bath and Beauty’ shop for Abayomi’s present.”
Jamie felt cold panic shoot through him at the mention of Hana and Lúcio’s names. Up until today, he really had not planned on buying presents for anyone, let alone most of his teammates. But it sounded like Efi thought this was something expected from the way she had said it. It was likely going to be his first traditional Christmas of his life, and he did not want to mess any of it up.

“Erm... Are you supposed to buy presents for everyone?” he asked.

“Well, no,” Efi replied. “I think it would be unreasonable to buy something for everyone on base. There’s too many people. But maybe just something small for close friends is a good idea.”

Jamie scratched at his head in bemusement. “I’m still trying to get my head around all this Christmas stuff,” he said.

Efi patted him reassuringly on the shoulder. “You’ll get there,” she told him.

As they rounded a corner, Jamie found they had made it to the shopping district now. This area was blocked to vehicle traffic, forming an open-air mall, so they were free to walk down the middle of the lane between the Andalusian townhouses and tall Moorish facades on either side. The streets were full of busy shoppers walking in the frigid air, carrying bags full of what Jamie assumed to be Christmas shopping.

Winston tugged on his leash hard, leading Efi towards a shop front nearby. Jamie allowed himself to trail behind Efi as the dog pulled her towards the display windows of the shop. As it turned out, it was a jewelry store. The name of the store was painted across the windows in gold lettering. The minimalist façade of the building indicated to Jamie that it was a fancy establishment. As Jamie peered over Efi’s shoulder, he spotted the display cases in the window.

He cast his eyes over the displays of gold chains and gems. Immediately, his mind began to calculate the potential earnings, the preparation time needed, the resources for a heist on such an establishment, but he stopped himself with a gentle shake of his head. That life was supposed to be behind him now, but admittedly, old habits were hard to shake.

Efi wrinkled her nose at the sight of the shining jewels. “I think this will be too pricey for Abayomi’s present,” she remarked.

A silver and gold necklace on a stand inside the display case caught Jamie’s eye. It was more like a collar circlet, carved in a geometric pattern, and set with a blue gem at the front.

“Hang on a sec,” he told Efi, stepping around Winston and heading into the shop.

Efi waited outside with the dog, watching through the glass as Jamie spoke with a sales assistant. He pointed towards the window display, and the woman came over to retrieve the necklace. The sales assistant spoke with Jamie again, offering him a chance to view the necklace close up. He nodded his approval, and the woman placed the necklace in a velvet box while Jamie paid with his Watchpoint-issued debit card.

Efi surveyed all of this with a great deal of suspicion.

Not more than a minute had passed between Jamie entering the store and stepping back outside again. As Jamie slipped back through the front door, Efi turned to regard him with hands on hips. Winston watched the pair with a very pleased expression on his face.

“Who is that for?” Efi asked, brows furrowed. “Don’t tell me you bought it for yourself.”

Jamie was surprised by her question. He flushed red quickly and attempted to slide the black case
containing the necklace into an inner pocket of his coat to conceal it better from the thirteen-year-old’s gaze.

“Oh, er... it's for nobody,” he stammered. “I mean... It's for my Secret Santa.”

Efi arched an eyebrow at him. “Really?” she asked disbelievingly. “I don’t remember any of the base’s departments setting up a Secret Santa.”

“Yes, well,” Jamie replied stiffly, but didn’t say any more.

“And who is your Secret Santa?” Efi asked him.

“If I told you, it wouldn’t be a ‘secret’ anymore, now would it?” he said, looking away from her and down towards the end of the street. “Come on. I’ll buy you a hot chocolate,” he added, eager to change the subject.

He turned and set off at a brisk pace. Efi hurried to catch up with Winston leading the way in front.

“But what about the necklace?” Efi asked once she had caught up.

“You sure are nosy, aren’t you, Efi?” Jamie muttered. The last thing he needed was for Efi to work out who the necklace was for and go spreading the gossip all over base before he had a chance to give Satya her Christmas gift.

Efi was not offended by his comment. On the contrary, she smiled widely at him. “I’ve been practicing!” she told him.

“Practicing?” Jamie asked. They made their way through the crowds of shoppers, with Winston stopping periodically to sniff at a letter box or fire hydrant. “What do you mean?”

Efi nodded. “One of the top skills Overwatch agents are expected to hone is the ability to critically investigate leads and divulge confidential information,” Efi told him. “I need to practice if I’m going to be an agent one day.”

“You want to be an Overwatch agent?” Jamie asked. He remembered vaguely Efi had mentioned something to that affect many months ago, but hearing her reconfirm this now still surprised him.

Efi nodded again. “When I turn eighteen of course,” she replied. “Until then, I’ll just have to wait and practice. Although, I could join the cadet program when I’m sixteen...”

Jamie watched her skip over a couple of puddles, Winston trotting dutifully beside her.

“I think you’ll make a great agent, Efi,” he told her.

“Do you think?” Efi asked brightly. “Will you teach me, Jamie?”

He shrugged in response. “I dunno. I’m not really that good at being an agent myself sometimes,” he mumbled.

“What do you mean?” Efi asked. “You’ve been on so many missions. Everyone thinks you’re a great help on the team.”

Jamie considered this. “Everyone has so many special abilities and strengths,” he said quietly. “But I’m just the guy who likes to tinker, you know?”
“You’re smart,” Efi pointed out. “You make bombs.”

“Come on...” Jamie said with a groan, like he did not believe her.

“No! It’s true!” Efi insisted. “And you won the Ingenuity and Innovation Challenge earlier this year, didn’t you?”

“That was all of us,” Jamie replied.

“But it was your idea that won,” Efi went on. “And you need to know all about chemicals and stuff to make the bombs, right?”

Jamie watched her for a moment. She was brilliantly intelligent and had already surpassed any other technician on base for her skills in A.I. programming and computer engineering. Her abilities were practically unmatched anywhere and had already earned her global fame before she had even reached her teenage years. Jamie knew that all she needed was a little time and she would soon be an accomplished agent, and would probably easily overtake him in no time. Part of him was excited to see what path her career might take.

“You know something?” he said, “You’re going to make a great agent one day. But if you want my advice, ask me any time.”

“Thanks!” she replied. She switched her gaze back on the path ahead of them. They had made their way into the heart of Main Street now. “There’s Bod, Bath and Beauty!” she exclaimed suddenly, pointing a finger down the street.

She streaked ahead, with Winston galloping beside her, splashing together through the puddles of rainwater until they were both pressing their noses against the glass window outside the store. Jamie smiled before jogging to catch up.

Jamie waited patiently outside with Winston while Efi went in to make her purchases. She came out smelling soapy and smiling ear-to-ear with a paper bag full of bath bombs and body scrubs for Abayomi. Winston sniffed curiously about the bag before Jamie decided it was time for that hot chocolate he had promised Efi.

They headed down the street towards a coffee shop. By this point in the afternoon, the café was so full of patrons that they were spilling out into the alfresco area ringed with small, potted ornamental plants around the front doors. That’s where they spotted Satya and Abayomi seated at an outdoor table, chatting with cups of coffee resting in front of them.

Jamie arrived at that moment and Sayta’s eyes met his. He could tell she was surprised to see him, but her face broke out into a smile. He grinned back at her.

“That’s Orisa’s Christmas present,” Jamie told them.
Abayomi pursed her lips with disapproval. “Efi, I’m pretty sure pets are not allowed on base,” she said.

“That’s not true,” Efi insisted. “Bastion has Ganymede! If they made an exception for Bastion, they have to make one for Orisa too.” She pouted at Abayomi for effect and received a drawn-out sigh in response.

Jamie noticed both Satya and Abayomi had had their hair and nails freshly done. Satya’s hair shone bright in the weak sunlight. Abayomi’s fell about her shoulders in neat braids. Both sported colourful nail art, fitting of the Christmas season, on the ends of their fingers.

“Might I say,” Jamie interjected, hoping to redirect the conversation, “that you ladies are both looking very lovely after your trip to the salon?”

“Thank you, Jamie,” Satya replied. She straightened then and exchanged a glance with Abayomi, who giggled in response.

Jamie got the impression from the look they had shared that they had been gossiping before he and Efi had arrived. Most likely about him. Part of him might have been upset that Satya’s directive to keep their relationship private had gone out the window, but then he remembered he had practically spilled everything about him and Satya to Brigitte in two-point-five seconds after getting back from London. He could not hold it against her that she had wanted to discuss personal things with a girlfriend.

“I’d ask you to join us but we were just finishing up here,” Satya told him.

Before Jamie could answer, Abayomi interjected, “That’s alright! Why don’t you two go for a nice walk together instead?” She said this while smiling widely at Jamie and Satya.

Satya shot the other woman a look of reproach.

“I hear there is going to be a Christmas night market tonight,” Abayomi went on, ignoring Satya’s pointed looks. “You two should go!”

“But Jamie was going to buy me a hot chocolate now!” Efi whined.

“I’ll buy you one instead,” Abayomi told the younger girl quickly through grit teeth.

Jamie glanced between Satya, who was blushing furiously, and Abayomi. Then he looked down at their shopping bags gathered around the legs of the table they had been seated at.

“Looks like you’ve been shopping...” he said absently.

Satya looked down at the bags too. “Oh,” was all she said, but Jamie noticed she was trying to shuffle a few of the bags out of his sight with the heel of her shoe. Was she trying to hide something?

“Don’t worry about that,” Abayomi cut in again. “We can take the dog and all the shopping back to base for you if you’d like to spend some time together?”

“You’re too kind,” Satya said to Abayomi, a little forcefully. “But that is too much to ask of you...”

“We’ll take a taxi,” Abayomi insisted. “It’ll be fine!”
Jamie swallowed hard. He was not averse to some alone time with Satya at all. But he also did not want to contribute to her discomfort. If she was feeling up to it, perhaps now would be a good time for that first date she had promised him?

“I’m game,” he said quietly to Satya, and she smiled in reply. She thought on it for a moment before nodding her approval.

“Great!” Abayomi replied. She flagged down a waiter and ordered a hot chocolate for Efi who she directed to sit in Satya’s vacated seat. Then she turned back to Jamie and Satya and started shooing them away from the café with her hands. Satya barely had enough time to grab her purse before they were practically forced back out into the street.

“Thank you so much for babysitting, Jamie!” Abayomi called out to him as he turned to leave.

“Any time,” he called back, still a little surprised by how quickly everything had just happened.

Once they were alone and standing on the street together, Satya smiled at him apologetically.

“Sorry about all that,” she said quietly. “Abayomi can be a little forward.”

“That’s alright,” Jamie shrugged. He fisted his bare hands in the pockets of his khaki-coloured overcoat to stay warm. Well, to keep one of them warm at least. Glancing over at her, he noticed she was still dressed in her winter coat, her loose hair blowing in the wind.

They started walking together up the street, weaving between the lamp posts and the remaining shoppers. Her heels clacked on the pavement, peeking out beneath a pair of casual slacks.

“The night market should be up ahead,” Satya said.

He watched his own feet as he walked for a moment, letting the peg leg click against the stones followed by the clunk of his booted left foot. Suddenly, he felt too shy to meet her eyes.

“So, I guess this is our first date, huh?” he remarked.

Satya tucked a few windswept stands of hair behind her ear. “Yes,” she replied. “We haven’t had much of a chance until now.”

Jamie nodded. It was getting cold now as the late afternoon slowly lapsed into twilight. The small trees that lined the streets were bare, however, someone had wound fairy lights through the trees’ limbs, the lights twinkling like stars caught in the branches. Overhead, some festoon lights bridged the gaps between buildings and leant a soft glow in the dwindling light, setting the wet streets glittering all around them.

“I guess it's been hard to find time with everyone heading home for Christmas,” he told her.

Jamie watched as she shivered in her coat. He nudged her and offered her an elbow. She smiled gratefully and stepped closer, looping her arm through his, her gloved hands smoothing over the metal of his prosthetic forearm. They set off together like that through the streets, arm-in-arm.

“How come you aren’t heading home for Christmas?” he asked her. He felt her stiffen beside him.

“Oh, well...” Satya cleared her throat. “I suppose there isn’t really anyone to go home to,” she explained.

“What do you mean?” Jamie asked.
“I live in Utopaea. Alone,” she explained. She kept her eyes straight ahead on the path before them.

“So, where do your folks live?” Jamie watched her for a response.

“I haven’t any,” she said matter-of-factly. “I never knew my father, and I lost touch with my mother after I left for the academy.”

“Oh.”

If his hands were free, Jamie would have smacked himself in the forehead for bringing it up. It seemed like a sensitive topic for her. And he had stuck his foot right in it.

They rounded a corner and maintained their even pace. “We lived in Hyderabad then,” Satya went on. She was watching the pavement as they walked. “My mother and I... weren’t close. Last I heard, she had passed away a few years back from health complications.”

“Right,” Jamie said stiffly. “I mean... not ‘right.’ I just meant, I’m sorry.”

“It’s alright,” Satya said quietly. “We weren’t on speaking terms. I’ve made peace with it.”

Jamie accepted this information with a deep sigh. They carried on beneath the glowing lights. “I didn’t mean to pry.”

“Not at all,” she said. “What about you? Not heading back to Australia?”

Jamie shook his head. “I can guarantee you no one is holding their breath waiting for me to come back to Junkertown,” he said with a dark expression. “Glad to be shot of the place honestly.”

“So, no family to visit?” Satya asked.

Jamie shook his head. “Nah. Old folks passed away years back now when I was a little kid,” he explained.

“So I’m the one who is sorry,” she said, watching his face.

“It is what it is,” he said. He met her gaze then and smirked. “Bit depressing this talk is, for our first date.”

She laughed. “I’m just pleased to know more about you,” she said. “But we can talk about something else if you like.”

“Alright.”

They set off up another street, a small cobbled lane separating the buildings on either side. The crowds were growing thicker again. They must be nearing the night market. Jamie pulled Satya a little closer as a gust of wind whistled up the street.

As they arrived at the top of the street, Jamie spotted rows of stalls lining the sides of the laneway, marking where the night market began. There were people bustling about while still more fairy lights hung overhead between the trees and the tops of buildings. Stall vendors had set up small tables to sell candied fruits, Christmas crafts, ginger breads, and even a flower stall had an assortment of poinsettias on display.

“It’s beautiful,” Satya remarked, looking around.
“Yeah,” Jamie agreed. He had never been to a ‘Christmas market’ before, but with the sparkling lights and the sweet smells of baked goods floating in the air, it seemed like something magical to him.

“You know, it’s not really our first date,” Satya remarked as they began their stroll through the crowds of people. The Christmas music playing in the distance created a distinctly festive atmosphere.

“It isn’t?” he asked.

She shook her head. “We’ve been through so much together. It seems strange to call this a first date.”

“But all those other times didn’t really feel like dates,” Jamie replied. “Especially the times when we were running for our lives.”


“There’s nothing like the threat of bodily harm to really spice up the romance,” he said with a wry smile. Satya giggled.

“We’ve become quite close too,” she added quietly. “It seems strange to date at all.”

Jamie nodded. He had detected the nervous timbre of her voice, the courage she was summoning to say these words. Something was still holding her back from committing fully to this relationship. It made him worry he may never know where he stood with her.

Without him realising it, he had allowed an awkward silence to stretch between them. He thought it best to change the subject.

“Here, I’ll buy you a drink,” he said, guiding her towards a cart selling hot drinks and mulled wine. While Jamie paid for two hot chocolates, Satya admired the neat rows of gingerbread men and sugared biscuits arranged around the register. A gaggle of children charged past Satya, headed in the opposite direction, calling out to each other about a candy apple stand nearby.

Jamie returned to her a moment later with the hot chocolates in hand. They took their paper cups and heading deeper into cool air of the night market.

"Tell me about Christmas where you come from,” she said, falling into step beside him once more, one arm entwined with his.

Jamie shrugged. “It’s nothing like it is here. First of all, it’s hot. No cozying up around an open fire or anything like that.”

“So, you’ve never had a snowy Christmas?” Satya asked as they continued on with their stroll.

“Nope.”

Satya sighed. “Me neither.”

Jamie glanced up at the grey clouds overhead. The rain was moving on now, but the sky remained cold and dreary. “And by the looks of things we won’t be getting one around here any time soon either.”

She made a humourless sort of noise. “No. The weather has been quite mild around the Rock.” She
looked up at him as they wove between stalls packed with sweets and handicrafts. “What else? Tell me more.”

“I don’t remember much about Christmas with my folks,” Jamie went on, “but Christmas in Junkertown was like a big party. Sometimes me and some mates would go caroling.”

Satya smiled. “How sweet.”

“We made a mint! So many people paid us just to shut up!”

This time she actually snorted, almost spilling her drink in the process, and several people turned to look at her. Jamie laughed as well and tugged her away from the stares of the other market-goers. They hurried away down the street with Satya still trying to contain her giggles.

“I’m guessing you probably weren’t well-behaved enough for visits from Santa?” she asked him, once she had composed herself. They resumed an even pace.

“Nah, the cheap bastard never brought me nothing for Christmas,” Jamie told her with a smirk. “Let me tell you, I have a few choice words for the old fart if I ever do see him. I’m gonna tell him that good and bad are subjective. He can’t just not bring me presents because of this biased, naughty-list crap.”

“Santa isn’t real, Jamie,” Satya said with a nudge to his arm.

Jamie seemed not to hear her. “And don’t get me started on how he watches you when you’re sleeping. I’ve heard the Christmas songs. Worse than Athena!”

Satya hid a smile behind her cup of cocoa.

“Christmas in the Northern hemisphere is weird,” Jamie went on, but Satya said nothing in reply. He glanced at her then, worrying he had been talking too much. She was watching the pavement again as they walked. She seemed to be enjoying herself, as far as he could tell.

“What about you? Do you do much for Christmas usually?” he asked.

“I never celebrated Christmas growing up,” she said with a shrug. “But I was at the Watchpoint last Christmas and it was an enjoyable affair.”

They had come to pass by an open square surrounded by shops on all sides. At the centre was an enormous Christmas tree, sparkling with lights and ornaments, and a giant illuminated star at the top. Underneath the tree, a synthetic skating rink had been set up, only just big enough for a few children to experience the closest thing to real ice skating on the acrylic surface. Some of the smaller children were pushing upturned milk crates around the ‘ice’ to help keep their balance. Jamie and Satya paused near the barrier to the rink, setting their paper cups down on the ledge, so they could watch the adorable sight for a moment.

"Hey, Sat?” Jamie began.

“Hm?” Satya hummed in response, keeping her eyes on the children.

Jamie summoned a little courage. “Listen, I know we’re supposed to be taking this slow and everything, but I wanted to get you something...”

“Oh?” Satya asked, meeting his gaze. The was a ghost of a smirk on her face. “Like a present?”
Jamie flushed slightly. “Yeah.”

“I think tradition dictates that you wait until Christmas Day before the gift-giving starts.” she pointed out.

“Yeah, but... what if you don’t like it?” Jamie began to fidget with his fingers.

Satya could feel the furtive little tugs of his twitching through her hand where it was still resting against his forearm.

“If it’s from you, I’m sure I’ll love it,” she reassured him.

He hesitated for a moment, then reached into his jacket and revealed the box he had been carrying there.

Satya instantly recognised the label printed on the velvet box. It was an expensive local jewelry shop.

Jamie did not know how best to present his gift to her. He had not really thought this far ahead, and purchasing the necklace had been a spur-of-the-moment decision. He simply offered it to her with one hand.

Satya stared at the box resting in his palm, unsure what to do next. Finally, she disentangled her arm where it was still folded around his. She reached out with both hands and took the box. With no small amount of trepidation, she slowly opened the lid.

“Jamie...”

Her eyes slid over the inlaid silver and gold, the sparkling blue gem set in the centre. She said nothing for the longest time, just started down at the box in her hands.

Jamie worried for a moment he had gone over the top with the gift. Was it too extravagant? Too presumptuous?

Jamie began to fidget again. “I just... wanted to get you something to replace the one that broke a few months back...”

“I love it,” Satya said suddenly.

“You— you do?” Jamie asked.

She nodded. Pulling the necklace from the box. “Help me put it on?” she asked.

Jamie hurried to comply. Satya lifted her loose hair with one hand while Jamie fastened the clasp at the back of her neck. When he was done, she released her hold of the black strands and they fell back into place, framing her face. Her dark eyes stared up at him for a moment. Jamie was practically struck dumb by the sight of her.

“It suits you,” he told her.

She smiled, the necklace gleaming between the lapels of her coat.

“Thank you, Jamie.”

Jamie decided to freeze and preserve the moment in his mind for all eternity. She had never looked more beautiful to him than she did standing there under the glow of the fairy lights with her cheeks
flushed from the cold.

“How do I look?” she asked him.

Jamie realised he was staring, and that she had spoken but he had not been listening. “What?”

“I said, how do I look?” she asked again, a playful look in her eye.

There was no question about it. “You look beautiful.”

Then she smiled. And it was brilliant.

Jamie’s breath hitched in his throat. He felt like a spell had been cast over him. He could not move. That’s when he noticed the white flakes starting to settle on her head and shoulders.

Looking up, he realised small, white snowflakes were slowly fluttering down around them. The children in the skating rink were reaching up to catch the flakes with cries of delight. But how was this possible? The weather was way too mild for snow.

Glancing around, Jamie spotted the faux snow machine set up beside the Christmas tree. The market organisers were spraying the air with synthetic polymer to create the effect of real snow. Soon the air was filled with flurries of white flakes swirling across the skating rink and the town square beyond. There were cries of wonder and amazement from the gathered crowd.

Satya turned to lean against the edge of the skating rink, watching the children play in the fake snow.

“I’m glad we did this. It was a good first date,” she told him.

Jamie slipped an arm around her shoulders, pulling her close. “Can we go to Bubble Whammy after this? I’ve got a coupon.”

Satya giggled and leaned into him.

“Later. Let’s just enjoy this for a moment.”

--

There was a silvery thin cast of moonlight when Jamie and Satya re-entered the Watchpoint later that night. The grounds were empty and silent now as they passed through the security gate and heading towards the main buildings. Soon they were tracing familiar steps through the corridors towards the dorms.

"I can’t believe you still have that with you,” Satya remarked, staring at the boba tea in his hand. Jamie made a noise of appreciation as he glanced down at the beverage. “There’s not much that can hold me back from a good milk tea, half sweet, extra pearls,” he replied. He took a deep sip from the straw of his drink and let out a noise of satisfaction.

“Not even the time of day, nor the fact that it’s the middle of winter apparently,” Satya said with a smirk.
As they continued on their way, they came to pass by one of the larger Common Rooms. Peering through the glass panel in the door revealed a dark room on the other side. Satya paused by the doorway.

“Isn’t this the room you and Mei were supposed to decorate?” she asked quietly.

Jamie turned to look back at her, then towards the door. “Oh yeah,” he mused. He stepped towards the door to peek through the glass, but it was too dark to see much of anything. “Mei must have gone to bed.”

Satya reached towards the panel at the side of the door and swiped her wristband to let them in. The door slid open instantly and she stepped around Jamie into the room.

“Let’s see how much work we have left to do in the morning,” Satya said with a sigh.

“You mean you’re going to help?” Jamie asked hopefully, trailing behind her into the room.

“Maybe,” she replied, smiling at him over her shoulder. “Certainly, you will need to make it up to Mei after leaving with all that work to do.”

Jamie groaned. “It's not my fault she’s got it out for me,” he grumbled under his breath.

As they moved into the centre of the room, the scattered sofas and tables were illuminated by a wash of pale moonlight from the large plate glass windows on one side of the room. The rain clouds had moved on now, leaving the stars glowing bright in the darkness above the shining seas. Satya paused by the windows to take in the beautiful sight.

“Thank you for today,” Satya said, smiling at him. “I had a lovely time.”

“I’m glad we were able to find any time at all for it,” Jamie replied with a chuckle.

Satya nodded. “Yes, I hadn’t realised how busy we would be at this time of year. It seems like scheduling time for dates is more difficult than I had first thought.”

It was true, Jamie realised, however they were still able to see plenty of each other even if they weren’t on a date, whether it be in the Workshop, the Mess, or alone in her room. He always did like her room more. It was cleaner than his anyway.

“As long as I get to keep working next to you, I won’t mind too much,” Jamie said. “Any time with you is a date to me.”

Satya smiled in reply.

The moonlight on the water illuminated her figure. She was standing perfectly still, one hand reached out to touch the glass that separated her from the distant waves. He approached her silhouette in the darkness, his boba still clutched to his chest. She smiled at him warmly, like an invitation, so he came to stand beside her. The silver light washed over them both.

“Sometimes, I wish for more though...” she said quietly. She turned to look wistfully back to the sea beyond the Watchpoint’s boundary.

‘More?’ Jamie wondered what she meant. Did she want the same things he wanted from their relationship? Was she finally ready to share her true feelings?

He summoned some courage to ask his next question.
“You mean, like... making this something a bit more official?” he asked quietly.

Satya smiled at him. “I’d like that,” she whispered, and Jamie’s heart soared. “But...”

‘Why did there always have to be a ‘but’?’ Jamie wondered.

“There is so much at play here,” Satya said quietly, her eyes once more on the waves in the distance. “So many reasons to be cautious, so many eyes watching us...”

Jamie nodded. “I told you I would wait as long as it takes,” he said. “You mean a lot to me. And I’ll keep waiting as long as you need.”

The room was so quiet then. Satya turned eventually and watched him closely, her mouth slightly parted. Jamie wished there was a little more moonlight so he could see her face better.

“You have been so good to me,” she said eventually. “And it’s not fair to you, that all this pressure is put on us because of forces beyond our control.”

She became flustered then. He could tell because her voice took on a higher, shakier pitch. Her eyes began to water.

“We’ve moved so quickly... you mean so much to me too... what if they make me leave?” she whispered, her breath hitching in her throat.

“Satya, it's okay,” he said. He reached for her then, his hand alighted on the forearm of her ever-present gauntlet.

She stilled. Looking down at his metal hand where it applied a gentle pressure to her arm. Her breathing returned to an even and steady cadence.

Jamie held her gaze in the thin light.

“Forget about what-ifs. Forget about Vishkar,” he said.

Satya took a deep breath and held still, waiting for him to continue.

Jamie went on, “What do you want?”

The silence that stretched between them seemed endless to Satya.

In one simple question, he had her re-evaluating her priorities. She had lived her life practically in servitude to Vishkar. She felt obligated to them after all they had done to rescue her from poverty. They had given her a whole new life and the ability to wield hard-light. They gave her a purpose. How could she turn her back on all they had done for her? In all the time she had worked for them, she had never asked for anything. There had been no need to. Everything she had ever wanted had been practically handed to her. But now there was one thing she wanted that Vishkar could give her.

What do you want?

Her eyes met his once more.

Suddenly, she surged towards him, throwing her arms around his neck and then her mouth was on his. Jamie’s eyes went wide with astonishment. The warm press of her lips, soft and full against his, silenced any cry of surprise he might have released.
Jamie slid an arm around her waist and held her tight. This outburst of emotion had all come as a bit of a shock, but he was not complaining. Feeling her pressed against him was a sensation he had come to enjoy, even revel in. He would just need to hold his boba tea at arm’s length for a moment until she was done.

Eventually she pulled back, taking a deep breath of air and looking up at him. Her eyes shone in the darkness, but there was a hint of a smile again on her face.

She leaned towards him again, and he met her halfway. This time it was different. When she kissed him again, it was filled with a kind of intense purposefulness and certainty that seemed to convey to Jamie an increase in her confidence and conviction. Had she made a decision?

Jamie could not think on it too much. With his face was stuck to hers, he realised he was still awkwardly holding his boba cup to one side so as not to accidentally spill it all over her. He tried to succinctly reach over to a nearby table to set it down without Satya noticing. He managed to set it down right on the edge before refocusing on the beautiful girl in front of him with renewed vigor.

With his hands now free, he let them settle on her hips so he could pull her close. Satya made a low noise of approval. Her arms snaked tighter around his shoulders, drawing him near.

She released him momentarily so she could lean back and look up at him.

“It’s you,” she said.

“What?” he asked, blinking down at her in the dim light.

She smiled again. She seemed calmer now. “You asked me what I want. I don’t want to live in fear of what might happen,” she said. “I know what I want.”

Jamie watched her, waiting for her to continue. He could feel her fingers in his hair now. He hoped she noticed how it was growing in nicely now that he had been trying not to burn it off so much lately. His hands lingered on her hips, fingertips grazing her ribs.

“I want to be with you,” she told him. With her body crushed to his, she whispered her next words directly into his ear. “Will you have me?”

“You mean... like a girlfriend?” Jamie whispered back. He felt her nodding against his neck. “Even though I’m a bit scatter-brained, I walk with a limp, and I’ve got a bad rap?”

“Yes,” she said with a laugh, and his hands tightened where they rested on her hips. “But only if you’ll have me,” she added.

They looked at each other then, and Jamie smiled widely at her. Nothing would please him more.

“One date and we’re already boyfriend and girlfriend? It must have been one hell of a date!” he exclaimed.

“Shut up!” she said with a laugh, cuffing him on the shoulder. “I already told you; it wasn’t really our first date.”

He laughed too. He leaned towards her, ready to capture her lips with his once more...

Suddenly the overhead lights switched on and Satya jumped away from him like she had been burned. Momentarily blinded, Jamie stumbled to one side almost knocking his boba cup off the nearby table. He growled and swung around, squinting through the brightness for who had dared to
interrupt them.

When Jamie had regained his vision, he looked over at the light switch beside the door. Something small and blue was hovering there. To his surprise, he realised it was Snowball, staring back at them with two little angry animated eyes. He chirped at them with annoyance then flitted across the room to one of the sofas. Jamie followed the droid’s every movement, baffled.

He glanced briefly at Satya, noting she was staring wide-eyed at something across the room. Jamie followed her line of sight to find something was moving under a blanket on the sofa where Snowball had taken up position, glaring at them. Jamie stared at the blanket as it began to fall away, revealing someone underneath pushing themselves into an upright position. Jamie went cold. He recognised the neat hair bun and thick-rimmed glasses sitting askew on a small, round face. It was Mei.

Mei sat up and stretched her arms wide. Both Jamie and Satya stood stock still, watching as the blanket slid to the floor. Had Mei been listening to their conversation?

Mei blinked in the bright light and looked around, spotting the other two agents across the room. Snowball chittered angrily over Mei’s shoulder.

“Oh, it's you two,” Mei mumbled, rubbing tiredly at her eyes. “You woke me up.”

Jamie glanced at Satya. Her cheeks were flushed, and she was staring at Mei with pursed lips.

“Were you listening to us?” Satya asked Mei as calmly as she could.

Mei shot a confused look in Satya’s direction. “What are you talking about?” she asked. She took off her glasses and cleaned them on her shirt. “I was asleep.”

Mei replaced her glasses on her face, yawned again, then seemed to pause and consider the two agents standing on the other side of the room. “But I did have a really weird dream,” she went on. “About a rat king and a dancer falling in love. Snowball was a sugar plum. And I was forced to crack nuts with nothing but my teeth for all eternity.”

“What a strange dream,” Satya said stiffly, avoiding Mei’s eyes. “A dream which bears no relation to anything that may or may not have happened in reality.”

Mei stared back at Satya for a moment, confused. “Er… yes.”

Satya glanced at Jamie to gauge his response to having almost been discovered yet again, but noticed something had very obviously captivated his attention. Looking past him, Satya realised the source of his distraction. With the overhead lights now illuminating the space, it was clear to Satya that the whole common room had been transformed. A quiet awe settled over her as she stepped around Jamie to get a better look.

Icy crystals glittered on every surface and hung in precision-cut icicles from every corner and ledge. More of the crystals festooned the walls and furniture in frosty garlands. Finally, a layer of shiny frost dusted every available surface. The effect left the whole of the room sparkling like a winter wonderland.

The most beautiful of all, however, was the fifteen-foot Christmas tree glistening with encrusted crystals of ice in the dim light. It was the same tree they had abandoned Mei to decorate alone earlier that afternoon, but now it looked nothing like when they left the room hours ago. Every bow of the tree seemed to glow from within, shining under a layer of frosted ice. Diamond and snowflake-shaped ornaments, and baubles of every colour, decorated the tree from top to bottom.
At the highest point, an enormous star carved from ice with intricate snowflake patterns topped the tree. The whole scene was glittering with tiny fairy lights set within the branches.


Satya was stunned into silence. She stood beside him, gaping similarly at the scene.

Mei stood from the sofa and crossed the Common Room floor to stand beside Satya. Snowball trailed along behind her.

"Mei, did you do all of this yourself?” Satya asked eventually.

Mei followed the gaze of the other two agents to the shining decorations, and then back again. She was a little surprised by their reaction, so she must have done a good job. It had taken her all afternoon to set the permafrost in place with her Endothermic Blaster, and she had stopped to take a nap a few hours ago when exhaustion had overcome her.

Before Mei could answer Satya’s question, Jamie uttered something that gave her pause.

“All of this... how is it possible?” he asked quietly. “It must be a Christmas miracle.”

“What are you talking about?” Mei asked him.

Jamie did not respond at first, seemingly transfixed by the sight before him. Suddenly, he gasped, like a realisation had come over him. Hands over his mouth, he spun to look at the two girls. “It must have been Santa!” he said.

“What?” Mei and Satya both said at the same time. They shared a look of confusion over Jamie’s strange statement.

“I wasn’t sure if he was real,” Jamie whispered, staring up at the towering tree once more. “But maybe he heard my Christmas wish! He came to visit me!”

“You think Santa did this?” Mei asked, her face flushed with anger. The thought that Jamie was denying her the credit she so rightly deserved for decorating the Common Room without his help infuriated her. The only ‘miracle’ that had happened as far as Mei was concerned was that she had managed to get any of this done at all in a single afternoon. She watched as he raised a shaky hand once more to his mouth, a look of astonishment on his face as he stared up at the glittering tree.

“Well, I don’t understand how else this could have happened...” Jamie said, and Mei had to restrain herself from leaping at him to throttle him there and then. She watched the hand at his mouth, still trembling with unspoken emotion.

“I mean... do you?” He looked at Mei then. His eyes were wide with quiet wonder.

Mei’s expression softened. She took in his boyish excitement, the innocent belief that something magical was afoot. That a boy from the bush, who probably had not received a visit from any men in red suits in years, was witnessing some mystical force or power.

Mei sighed.

Snowball arrived at her shoulder, hovering in place and staring at Jamie with an annoyed expression on his animated display, perhaps feeling similarly that Jamie had purposefully
overlooked their extensive efforts to prepare the Common Room in a single day. Mei tickled him playfully and his sour mood dissipated. He chittered with pleasure.

“No, Jamie,” Mei said. She stepped forward so she was standing next to him. She also looked up at the glittering tree, admiring her handiwork. “It must have been Santa.”

Satya also stood so that her shoulder brushed with Jamie’s. She smiled up at him and his obvious delight.

The three of them stood looking up at the tree, the Common Room awash with the warm glow of fairy lights. Each of them felt certain that something magical, by some interpretation or approximation, had happened that day.

Chapter End Notes

I hurt my arm badly so the chapters may be coming late for some time until both hands are back to 100%. Typing tends to make my hand stiff and sore. Some notes on this chapter:
1. Satya got him a nice pair of mittens and a scarf for Christmas.
2. ARGH! Stupid mushy crap is hard to write!
3. I haven’t read the ‘Hero of Numbani’ book yet so some details about Efi may differ from canon. I didn’t want the official novel to interfere with my story I’ve got going in my head so I have deliberately not read it yet. But I hope to check it out soon.
4. Most fans seem to agree Orisa’s dog was based on the dog, Winston from Disney’s “Feast” short film (2014) so I went with it.
5. I was thinking I might write a Christmas one-shot this year so I didn’t want to set this chapter on Christmas Day. I thought I’d save what happens on Christmas Day for later.

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