These Old Bones

by orphan_account

Summary

Soldier: 76, a.k.a. Jack Morrison, is feeling the effect of the long years of combat and his age finally catching up with him. It leaves him wondering if saddling Gabriel with the task of looking after him really is in his beloved's best interest, or if perhaps he should say goodbye one last time.

Notes

So I know from the in-game dialogue between the heroes that the super soldier experiment left Jack actually rather fit and spry, but my headcannon is that after time, the effects of the experiments start to cause more harm than help (seeing as how they wouldn't have known what the serum would have done in the long term. I expect they didn't think any of these soldiers would live out long lives).

Well, Jack starts to feel self-conscious about his inability to look out for himself or keep up with Gabriel, so he feels more like a burden, and that shame starts to ruin the good thing he has with his lover.

I'm such a sucker for hurt/comfort with Reaper76. Jack had to be strong for so long that now, I just imagine he just has not the strength to hold his head up anymore. It's just gotten so damn hard to hold on to himself.

Getting up in the morning has gotten harder and harder for Jack over the recent months, body stiff...
and aching, resistant against his will to move. It often took a lot of effort, and even when he could muster it up, many minutes were spent laying awake with blind eyes staring upward at the ceiling in a deep well of frustration. He hated getting up. He hated facing every morning with the same aches and pains, but staying in bed was worse by far. Might as well do something with himself if he was going to suffer pain whether he was active or inert. There was simply no respite from it. Christ but today was one of those days that was going to take especially long for him to get up.

Ever since reuniting unexpectedly, Jack and Gabriel had been on the run, trying to keep a low profile while they did a little re-evaluating, trying to find a new direction and purpose. Soldier: 76 wanted to know the full truth in all its detail that led to the fall of Overwatch, and Reaper wanted to make sure the organization never had the chance to rise up again, to seize control and power that it had no right to possess. Jack and Gabriel were both trying to find a middle ground, and though tensions have been pretty high because of their differences in goals, it was undeniable that they needed each other. But being on the run has taken a toll on the old man’s body, feeling it more and more with each passing day. It wasn’t Gabriel’s fault, not really. It was because Jack was pushing himself too hard to try to keep up. Being inhuman, the man didn’t suffer the same limitations a mortal being had to endure, and though he tried to be conscious of pushing too far past human limits of exertion, and Jack always waved off the concerned mumbles, asking if he needed rest or if they ought to stop for the night. He didn’t want to slow them down. Curse these old bones.

A soft groan passed through Jack’s lips, that same mild distress coming through that was evident every morning. He let his eyes flutter open, the cracked ceiling coming into his hazy view. Nearby, he could hear heavy footsteps thumping against the floor towards him, the smallest of chuckles rumbling through Gabriel’s chest.

“Come on, old geezer. I didn’t want to push you to get up before you actually did, but we should get going before someone gets the jump on us.”

“Not now, Gabe.”

Jack lay on arm over his eyes, this simple movement almost too much for how exhausted he was. He can usually take Gabriel’s jabs in stride in the morning, but right now, it was all too much. He could hardly stand being in his own skin. Everything was far too much. It was just so smothering.

“Earth to Morri. You need to get your ass in—“

“Not NOW Gabe!”

His voice came out in an irritated growl, teeth grit tightly in frustration and pain. Gabriel could fuck right off. The other man nearly responded with anger, his own growl growing deep within his chest. Jack was ready for another argument to start, ready to muster some sort of energy to hold his own in some petty little screaming match. But the yelling never came. He heard those heavy footsteps come closer, and he knew he was being scrutinized under a damn microscope. He’s been able to feign the ability to keep pace with Gabriel for some weeks now, but he wasn’t sure how much longer that little charade would last.

“I knew we should have stopped earlier. Where does it hurt, Jack?”

Everywhere. It fucking hurt everywhere. And there wasn’t a damn thing Gabriel could do about it. Jack turned his face away towards the wall, flexing his feet back and forth, trying to bring a little movement to his body. That’s how he always had to go about it, slow and steady. But Jack didn’t do slow very well. He’d always been someone who worked long and hard, always on the go, ever since his youthful days on the farm as a boy. Having to live like this was agony. He suddenly and surprisingly felt hands on his right calf, massaging into the tight muscle, straining beneath cold
fingers.

“Christ, Jack, you’re completely rigid.”

A strangled moan passed through strained lips, but he could feel his leg starting to relax beneath the deep presses. It was an intimate and loving touch, though there was nothing sensual behind it. Jack couldn’t see the other man’s face, but he knew Gabriel was frowning with concern, and there was sure frustration evident as well. Poor guy really did try to take his health into consideration, but Jack couldn’t let go of that damn stubbornness of his. He hated being old, and he hated even more to see his health starting to degrade. Not that there was a damn thing he could do about it. That was life. The inevitable cycle.

“You need to take it easy today.”

“I’ll be fine, Gabe. Just... ngh... gotta get up. It’s the getting up part that’s the hardest. I’ll be right as rain when I’m out of bed.”

That was far from true. Faaaar from true. The pain and stiffness would only get worse throughout the day, and by the end Jack would want nothing more than to collapse right back into bed, thus starting the cycle over again. Day in and day out. At least having Gabriel here made his mood better. Well, generally speaking anyways. Being with him again gave the poor old man something to look forward to when he woke up, which is something he never thought he’d have again.

“Just take it slow. You don’t need to be pushing yourself too hard.”

A grunt, shrugging off the suggestion. Gabriel was right, though. Forcing himself up wasn’t going to get them going any faster. The man worked up Jack’s leg, working through the stiff and knotted muscles with tender care, not moving on until he was sure that the tension had ebbed away enough for the limb to gain mobility. He then helped Jack stretch and move his leg, lifting it, bending it, turning it about, careful as not to cause more pain and discomfort. Gabriel did this to each of the limbs, mumbling the occasional exasperation in Spanish, which earned a glare each time. He could do nothing but smile about it.

“You should know at least some of those words, Morri. I taught... well... tried to teach you. Remember?”

“Yeah, I didn’t have the attention span to sit still through all of those lessons and I sure as hell don’t have the memory recall to remember any of it.”

There was a hint of sadness in the old man’s voice. He wasn’t sure what was worse; having his physical prowess go, or his mental faculties. Neither were ideal, and he was mourning losing both the more his condition declined. Sometimes he wondered morbidly just how much longer he had on this Earth. Couldn’t have long, especially being on the run like he was, always getting into some kind of trouble. Traveling with Gabriel certainly escalated the danger, but he wouldn’t be much better off traveling alone. In fact, it was likely much safer for him to be traveling with someone else to aid him in combat, rather than struggling through a fight like he has been. He’s been pretty good about not exposing the fact that he suffers such weakness in a fight, but how much longer would that last?

“Well, I’ll have to teach you again, if things ever slow down. Now, lets get you up.”

With the aid of Gabriel’s supportive hands, Jack slowly managed to sit himself upright on the lumpy old mattress, rubbing the sleep sluggishly from his eyes. Honestly, he just wanted to fall back over and tell the damn sun to hide for the day. But the world didn’t stop just because he
wasn’t prepared to face it, so with a heavy sigh, the old man heaved himself to his feet, scratching at his thigh as a distraction for the pain shooting through his leg.

“There’s my Jack.”

“Yeah, yeah. God knows you’d get yourself into too much trouble if I didn’t get my ass up.”

“Why, Morri. I’m absolutely offended you’d think so little of me!”

Jack slapped Gabriel lightly on the arm, giving his eyes a feigned roll of annoyance while the other man laughed in amusement. The friendly banter honestly kept him pretty sane of late when the going got rough. There was actually a small bit of light in his life again, and that wasn’t something he had ever expected to get back. Even if he were to ever find out the truth behind the fall of Overwatch, he wasn’t sure he would get any true satisfaction out of it. What would it matter to him? He was living a hollow life, a life that would be without purpose once his mission was over. Jack supposed he would seek out death after that, but in a way, he’s already found death, and death gave him life once again. Ironic and humorous really, but he couldn’t complain, not if embracing death meant having his dearest Gabriel back by his side.

-------------------

Jack could feel the condensation building up in his respirator, breath coming in deep gasps as he pushed his legs to run faster, no matter the burn throbbing through them. It was a god damn ambush. The problem with the two of them traveling together was that it was a bit harder to hide, namely to hide “Reaper’s” current location from the Talon agents that had recently been on their heels. Alone he kept to the shadows, out of the public eye. Now he was out in plain sight, and Talon had the resources to find them all too easily. Dispatching them hadn’t been an issue before due to the wealth of combat experience between the two of them. Today was different. They could tell by the advanced tactical strategies used by these particular agents, by the fact that it was quite clear they had scoped out the area ahead of time, and because they knew with numbers on their side, separating the two would make for easy pickings, that these were skilled fighters. Gabriel would be fine, but Jack on the other hand just didn't have the spring to fend off a number of skilled agents.

Jack edged around the corner of the building he was using for cover, straining his ears to better pick out the sounds of nearby attackers. There was a large crack splitting down the center of his visor, his modified vision coming in red static, glitching out and proving to be more unreliable than of any actual help. Shit, this was bad. He could already feel his fingers going numb, edging into the threat of a full on panic attack. He was a fucking sitting duck. There was the faint scuffle of boots to his right. Jack jerked to face towards the sound, trusting his instinct, and fired a helix rocket with the hopes something would connect. It did if that pained holler was any indication. There was a heavy thud of a body hitting the ground, then all sound ceased from the agent after a gurgled, surprised gasp forced the last of his breath from his lungs. Not bad for having to rely on his hearing, but Jack only had so many rockets and he wouldn’t hold onto that luck for long.

“THERE HE IS!”

Speak of the devil. After a brief reprimand from a superior agent to the bonehead who thought it’d be a good idea to holler to get his comrades’ attention, a chase ensued, Jack drawing on the waning adrenaline pulsing through him. He just had to survive long enough for Gabriel to find him again. It was suicide trying to fight skilled members of Talon blind. He felt dizzy straining his eyes behind the broken visor, so he clicked it off despite the anxiety he felt about doing so, the panic making his movements a bit jerky and erratic. It may be broken, but that damn visor was his safety blanket, has been for many years. Without it, he felt far too vulnerable. Jack’s breaths started
becoming more ragged behind the respirator, his lungs burning for air, air he just couldn’t get in. He was pushing it. He was really pushing it, and he knew it.

\textit{Damn it Gabe, where are you?}

Jack pivoted on his foot and fired another rocket behind him towards the agents giving chase, but he wasn’t sure whether it connected or not. He could hardly hear a thing aside from his heart beating like a booming drum in his ears. He was running out of time and running absolutely blind in foreign streets. Odds were against him, and he’d more than likely eventually run himself into a corner, trapped like an animal. He was already finding himself skirting against the walls of buildings, his frantic mind telling him to keep pushing forward, but he just couldn’t keep himself from running into obstacles. Jeez, takes him back to the early days of his blindness when he dragged himself out from the rubble.

A sharp pain suddenly exploded from his knee, sending Jack crashing to the ground in a graceless tumble. He didn’t know if he was shot or he just blew his knee out. Neither would have surprised him. All he knew was that the jig was up. There was no way to run, no way to escape. It was over. The respirator had fallen from his face, skittering a couple of feet away, and suddenly the little air he was managing to take in seemed to absolutely evaporate. There was no air, and the wheezes became more desperate as he gripped his chest. There was an uncomfortable burning, the world around him becoming little more than a blur of existence he was becoming less and less aware of. All that existed was the pain and a faint hope that Gabriel would come.

“Well, well, soldier down. You’ve been a real pain in the ass, you know that, 76?”

The voice speaking was gruff, and Jack could practically hear the leer that was surely on the man’s face. A chorus of laughter followed. He couldn’t manage a sarcastic quip in return, not like he usually could. Not when he could barely get enough air in his lungs to keep from passing out.

“You need an inhaler, old man? Look at you…the great, big, bad Soldier: 76. Nothing but some relic trying to play hero. Well guess what, buddy? The world had a chance for their so called “heroes” with Overwatch, and that didn’t work out very well, did it? It’s our turn now.”

Jack made a feeble attempt at shouting back because damn was this bastard riling him up, but all he could manage was a strangled hack, his hand blindly feeling around for his rifle. Where the hell was it?

“I almost feel bad putting you down like a dog. …almost.”

Jack could hear the cocking of a gun, and his heart damn near jumped up into his throat. This was it. This was how it ended. Shamefully, floundering like a fish for air, injured and vulnerable. A pitiful way to go out. He always imagined he’d go down fighting, not utterly and completely incapacitated. It was then when he had resigned himself to his fate that a terrible shout ripped through the air.

“The fog of death will consume you without mercy.”

“GET HIM! ALL EYES ON REAPER! FUCK ORDERS, I WANT HIM DEAD!”

The sweet sound of Gabriel’s dual shotguns filled the air, the faint stench of death flooding Jack’s nose. From the sounds of shock and dismay coming from the Talon agents, it was a rage induced massacre that ended just as fast as it had been started. Gabriel had saved him. His blessed Angel of Death. It should have been a welcome comfort, but Jack could feel himself starting to slip away from consciousness. He was unable to calm his ragged breathing on his own. He needed his
respirator. Christ, this never would have been a problem before. He was weak. So very weak. How could he be so weak? So incapable of watching his own back? How far he had fallen. It was enough to fill Jack with shame. He was not the man who was brimming with optimism and pride, who could swoop in and save the day, who would have given his life for the sake of the innocent. He was a shell, a shell that wasn’t even worth saving.

“Morri, where is it? Where is it?!”

Gabriel’s voice was a bit frantic, heavy yet quick footsteps shuffling around Jack. There was a whole lot of grumbling in Spanish the old man couldn’t understand. Probably something self-deprecating and frustrated.

“You better fucking stay with me! Just…FUCK!”

Gabriel was never very good at problem solving when he was this frantic. Poor bastard. But it seems he got himself composed enough to find the respirator, because before Jack knew what was happening, he was in a pair of tense arms, a clawed hand fumbling with the respirator to attach it to the harness framing his face. His hand was shaking. Gabriel would never admit to it, but he was terrified.

“Come on you piece of shit…just…there! Jack…Morri, I need you to breathe.”

Jack’s hands came to the respirator pressed snuggly against his face once more, grasping it as if it was the only lifeline he had left keeping him alive. But he just couldn’t calm his hyperventilating enough for the oxygen to fill his lungs. Fuck they burned. Air, he so desperately needed air. His eyes were wild with fear, bugged wide, twitching about every which way as if searching for some unseen answer.

“Jack, you need to slow your roll. Come on, follow my lead.”

Jack could feel Gabriel taking exaggerated breaths, holding the old man close to his body so that he could feel the movement. He did as he was told, pressing his face against his beloved’s chest, almost hearing those deep breaths filling his body with life (though he did have to wonder if Gabriel even really needed to breathe). His own breaths weren’t as steady, and they shook with a lot of struggle. But the hum of approval he got for his attempts gave a small bit of ease to his mind, and that tiny bit of comfort helped guide his breathing. With the aid of the respirator, Jack could finally get in enough of the precious air he was so starved of, that burning starting to fade into a vague ache that was far more tolerable. His body sagged into the other man’s arms, body exhausted from the fight. He was trying to ignore the pain of his injuries, the minor ones, and the more severe blow to his knee.

“Shit, need to get you somewhere so I can look you over. Really not as spry as you used to be, Morri.”

“No…”

Jack could sense the other man’s surprise by how his body tensed impossibly further, and he would bet behind that mask, Gabriel’s face was all sorts of twisted, confused and frustrated.

“…no? No, what, Jack?”

“No, you’re…you’re going to leave me here Gabe. You need to high-tail it out of here.”

As much as it hurt Jack to say it, it’s what was best for his dearest Gabriel. With his age and his body wearing down, there was no way he’d be able to keep up. He never would. In fact, things
would only get harder for the both of them if he stuck around. Throwing himself in combat for so many years finally tore his body down, and the super soldier project was starting to have unforeseen side effects on his aged body. Jack honestly couldn’t be sure how long his health would last or whether there was a way to extend his quality of life. Because god, now that he had Gabe back, all he wanted was a few more good years. A few more good years to make up for all of the hell he’s been through. But at this rate…

“I’m old, Gabe. We both are. But you…well, you really aren’t going to feel the effects of age anymore. Not after…heh, I don’t envy you, but…face it. This old dog just can’t keep up.”

Jack took off one of his gloves, pulled the mask up off of Gabriel’s face, then let his fingers stroke gently against his cheek. It didn’t matter that his flesh felt like that of a corpse. He was starting to get used to it with how touch starved they both had been, spending their nights clinging so desperately to one another over the last couple of weeks. This bringer of death was still his Gabriel, and this closeness brought him such comfort. But in this moment, it made his heart ache. He didn’t want to say goodbye again. He didn’t want to let go. He really wished he didn't have to do this.

“I’m already living on borrowed time, time I shouldn’t have in the first place. What happens when I can’t fight anymore, even with my visor intact? What happens when my mobility limits our ability to travel? I’m…putting you in more danger. Putting a bigger target on your back. Solo, you can hide in the shadows, with me…together we stand out like a sore fucking thumb. Trust me, I…wish we had more time. All those fucking years…”

All of those years of tension. All of those years of misunderstanding. All of those years they lived as Soldier: 76 and Reaper, unaware the other had survived. So many years, gone, and they could never get them back. A sadness took to Jack’s face, his hazy eyes closing tightly. His fingers roamed over the features of Gabriel’s face, wishing to remember it when he was gone. He had forgotten what the man had looked like over the long years since his "death", something that brought great sadness to his heart. He never wanted to forget again. When Jack took his last breath, he wanted to remember the face of the man who loved him, that one person who cared the most. He wanted to remember they had found each other. He had the chance to say sorry and find the closure he has needed since the attack. This would be ok. He was doing the right thing.

Jack could feel Gabriel fumbling around with something, then there were cold fingers stroking his cheek. The way the fingers trembled was worrying. The man wasn't taking it well, although that wasn't too surprising.

“Gabe, look, I—”

Jack was silenced by a fist connecting with his face, and the other hand now gripped him by the front of his jacket, holding the old man at arm’s length.

“Of all of the cruel, cold hearted things you’ve ever said…after we found each other by mere fucking chance, you have the audacity to suggest such a thing? You're so willing to just throw it all away?!”

“G-GABE!”

Jack had half expected to hear the crack of his ventilator breaking, but in his dazed state, he hadn’t even thought to realize it would have needed to be removed in the first place for him to feel the fingers against his cheek. He would have been grateful for that if Gabriel wasn’t the one assaulting him. Another blast of pain erupted from his face as he was punched once more, such an angry growl roaring from the other man’s mouth.
“You listen here, Morrison. I’m my own person, and what I do, the danger I put myself in, that’s my choice! You aren’t keeping here against my will, and I have half a mind to leave you to bleed out, right here, as a disgrace. I really should. I should have killed you when I first saw you before I hesitated.”

Christ, what had he done? Couldn’t Gabriel see he was doing this for the man’s own good? Why couldn’t he see that? It was then that he finally had a startling revelation; this is how he’s always been. Jack always stuck to his delusional moral code, “selflessly” sacrificing for the good of others, always willing to be the one to make the hard decisions. But in all of that sacrificing and “doing good”, he had always been trying to control the situation. To morph the world and the people in it into what he believed to be ideal. The world would be perfect and peaceful if only they would listen. He hadn’t realized in becoming this person, he pushed those closest to him away and rejected their free will. He took away their ability to decide for themselves because he claimed to know better. And that’s exactly what he’s done now. Gabriel wanted to stay. No matter the danger, he wanted to spend his days finding some semblance of happiness again, even if that meant doing so on the run. At least, he had wanted to.

Jack could feel the panic starting to rise, his mind whirring with memories and regret of all the mistakes he’s ever made. He was seeing himself through a different lens and he was filled with disgust. Hot tears stung his eyes, and the old man tried to shrink away from this seething monster. Gabriel had every right to be angry, but the anger brought back those tumultuous years, losing his lover, losing everything. And now that he went and fucked it up (good going, Jack), he would have to grieve these losses all over again. Disgraceful, but a fitting death. His breathing became unsteady again, and he could feel the pressure of a headache coming on. He was waiting for the inevitable; either another good left hook, or for Gabriel to fade away and leave him for dead. Seems it would be the latter, because the hand gripping his jacket released, the growling dying down into silence. Jack slumped forward, as if the hunched position would help hold together the last shreds of dignity he had left. He couldn’t stop the tears as the panic and pain started beating him out.

Cold hands now cupped his face, thumbs wiping at the tracks the tears left on his dirty cheeks. Jack couldn’t help the desperate way that he nuzzled against one of the hands, searching for contact and comfort. Gabriel responded by pressing their foreheads together, willing to offer what was needed.

“You were blind far before all of this. You had good intentions, but the road to hell is paved many times over with good intentions. You can try to control the world around you all you want, but you’re not always right, and you don’t always know what’s best for people. You’re you. I’m me. I know what’s best for me, and I know what I need, and want…”

“Gabe…”

Jack, if he weren’t in such a state, would have been embarrassed with how small his voice sounded. So small and so afraid. He hesitantly grasped tightly at Gabriel’s cloak, his breaths a bit staggered with his broken cries.

“Morri, Morri, hush. I’m not going anywhere. I need you…and I have a feeling…you need me. Come here.”

Jack gratefully fell into the man’s arms once more, Gabriel ever patient through another mental breakdown in these many weeks. He was so thankful to have the support, something he hasn’t had in a long time. Too many years he’s had to ride through his mental illness and PTSD alone, many dark nights spent tucked away in a corner, curled up in a tight ball in some lame attempt to hold himself together. He honestly hadn’t a fucking clue how he managed to make it through the last
few years alone, but now, he didn’t have to do it alone. He didn’t have to be hollow anymore. Gabriel’s blessed humming started to vibrate through his body, and added with the protective embrace, Jack could feel himself starting to calm. Reality was finally starting to anchor back down, and it was such a relief.

“It’ll be hard, watching you fade…your health fail. But I’d rather remain with you until the end. We’ve caused each other enough pain. If I can bring you comfort in what time remains for you on this Earth, then that’s what I want to do. You already said it before, we lost a lot of years, so let’s make up for it. I might grumble along the way and pick fun at you for being such an old geezer, but hell, I’d rather spend the time I have with you taking care of you as opposed to you’re horrible idea.”

Honestly, Jack was glad his lover was so damn stubborn, just as stubborn as he was. Gabriel was never one to back down, and that’s just what he needed right now. He needed someone to take control while he pulled himself together. He's tried to be in control for far too long, and he just didn't have the energy for it anymore. He wanted to hand the reigns off to someone else, so why not give it to the man offering to help?

"You really wanna be taking care of my sorry ass? You aren't going to toss me into some old folks home, are you?"

"Not unless you piss me off again. You do that and it'll be tapioca pudding for the rest of your life."

Jack snorted out a laugh, nuzzling appreciatively into Gabriel's neck. He wasn't sure what he did to deserve this, but he would happily spend the rest of his days in the man's care. Cold lips brushed tenderly against his cheek, then Gabriel pulled back, taking to examining the injured leg now. The old man tried to recoil away out of instinct, but allowed his pant leg to be rolled up so that the damage can be assessed.

"Well, you weren't shot. Pretty damn swollen, but I think it's just a strain. Some down time and a little working it out, should be fine. And no, I'm not arguing with you about it."

"Yes, sir."

"Shut up, boy scout. Lets get you in bed."

Jack let the man help him to his feet, thankful to have help to keep pressure off of his injured leg. Damn his pride, damn his stubbornness, damn it all to hell. He was going to let go of his naivety, and finally listen and accept the help that he needed. The last leg of his life may be rough, but with Gabriel by his side, maybe things finally wouldn't be quite so bad.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!