Overwatch: Campaign Mode

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/7748353.

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning: Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category: Multi, F/F, F/M, Gen
Fandom: Overwatch (Video Game)
Relationship: Satya "Symmetra" Vaswani/Aleksandra "Zarya" Zaryanova, Lúcio Correia dos Santos/Ana Amari, Jesse McCree/Mei-Ling Zhou, Fareeha "Pharah" Amari/Angela "Mercy" Ziegler, Genji Shimada/Angela "Mercy" Ziegler
Additional Tags: Mother-Daughter Relationship, Dissociation, Plot Centric, Identity Issues, Exploring morality
Stats: Published: 2016-08-22 Completed: 2017-02-26 Chapters: 22/22 Words: 118771

Overwatch: Campaign Mode

by GeneralIrritation, Sapphixx

Summary

THE FINAL CHAPTER!

Nobody wakes up in the morning and decides to do the wrong thing. And yet every evil act committed is done under conscious effort. A rip-roaring blockbuster exploration of the identities of 23 heroes as each grapples with their definition of justice.

Sapphixx.tumblr.com
thegeneralreturns.tumblr.com
Chapter 1: The Call

“We live in a world where everyone thinks they do the right thing, so they are entitled to do the wrong thing. So ends can justify the means.”
-Alex Gibney

“I no doubt deserved my enemies, but I don’t believe I deserved my friends.”
-Walt Whitman

Gibraltar

“Winston?”

Athena...

“Winston! He’s going to have all agents’ locations!”

The fog from the gorilla’s mind cleared. His vision returned.

Heavy boot-steps thudded towards him, and he looked up at the hooded, masked figure advancing upon him, dropping the two shotguns he had used to incapacitate him.

The Talon mercenary.

The man who would have made away with the Doomfist from the museum, if Winston and Tracer hadn’t been there to stop him.

Reaper...

The future, despite both trends and prognosticators trying to claim otherwise, is not written in stone. It is true that hope can dwindle to nothing, but the same, of course, can be said of fear.

As the twenty-first century reached its quarter-point, humanity, through a series of events internal and external, great and small, (and frankly so numerous that a single recounting couldn’t possibly do them justice), arrived at a state that hadn’t been achieved since the species had started walking upright:

Peace.

Ideas were shared. Cultures commingled. And mankind revived its exploratory spirit and once again looked upward to the stars.

And here on Earth, there was no greater a symbol of humanity’s open arms towards each other than the development of the omnium.

Omniums, which were fully automated and machine-run factories, produced Omnics: robots with an advanced artificial intelligence that bolstered the manufacturing sectors of nations where they had gone to seed, while establishing them in developing nations.

Prosperity abound, the inhabitants of planet Earth let their better natures, their imaginations and
Reaper pulled two more shotguns from under his long, black coat and leveled them at Winston’s face.

“I’ll be sure to send them your regards, monkey.”

Winston felt a small flame kindle within him. The same flame that he felt he had to smother every time a surge of emotion coursed through his heart. The flame that threatened to burn down the intelligence and civilization in which he lived, and reduce him to the animal he knew he was.

There was nothing stopping him from shedding the pod that pinned him to the ground, standing on his rear hands, and rending Reaper limb from limb. But even with anger threatening to shunt him back to the primal savagery of the animal kingdom, he knew that he was better. He *had* to be better.

“I’m not a monkey,” Winston said, his voice oozing out of his mouth in a low, defiant growl. He grabbed for a stray shield generator and slid it across the floor to Reaper’s feet.

Winston’s pride had taken several blows in recent weeks with his work on this shield generator. Meant to be deployed on the ground as a sort of portable bubble under which soldiers could regroup during combat operations, this shield generator didn’t so much generate a shield so much as it… well… exploded.

Winston felt that Reaper didn’t need to know this information.

The shield generator built a small hard-light bubble around itself, before that bubble dissipated, being replaced by four holographic stop signs emblazoned with the word “FAIL.”

Reaper laughed.

“I’m a *scientist,*” Winston said, and covered his head with his hands.

But the past? The past is where the pessimist lives, and after events had unfolded, those pessimists knew, and would tell anyone who would listen, that humanity’s golden age was too good to last. Those who would use hindsight as a weapon are among the most overbearing of mankind’s number. Particularly when they’re right.

The first of many long shadows that would darken humanity’s new dawn was the downfall of the Horizon lunar base. A scientific research facility built on the surface of the moon, Horizon was home to humane veterinary experiments focused solely on increasing the intelligence of gorillas. These experiments worked. So well, in fact, that Horizon staff was caught unprepared, under-equipped, and outsmarted when the gorillas turned. There were no human survivors.

Only one gorilla, who had boarded an escape rocket bound for Earth, managed to cling to a non-violent and high-minded nature. This young gorilla, who was clutching a pair of glasses given to him by Horizon’s head researcher, was named Winston.

*But the fall of Horizon was but mere prelude to the darkness that was to come…*
Reaper growled as he got to his feet and aimed one of his shotguns at Winston.

Winston opened fire.

A jet of electricity bloomed from the Tesla Cannon’s barrel, blanketing Reaper in light and voltage. He screamed, and his long black coat began to singe before he collapsed into a cloud of ionized smoke. Both of his shotguns clattered to the floor.

Winston beat his chest a couple of times and grunted before the distorted and laggy voice of Athena, the AI that managed the base, came in over the loud speakers.

“Extraaaction… ninety perrrcent…”

The omniums, which had given so much to the world, had, for reasons no one could explain, begun to produce hostile Omnis. Earth’s population was caught off-guard, as the military of every developed nation had been scaled back considerably, and the Omnis themselves were responsible for producing what little weapons the human race felt were necessary in this age of peace.

The loss of human life was catastrophic.

To combat The Omnic Crisis, the United Nations unanimously signed off on an initiative that would bring together the brightest minds and steadiest hands of all countries that could spare them. Soldiers of every stripe and scientists of every discipline would unite as one and both decisively and unilaterally strike against the growing Omnic horde.

The group was called “Overwatch.”

During Winston’s scuffle with the mercenaries that had invaded the base, Reaper had placed a flash into Athena’s hard drive that would extract the names and locations of all former Overwatch agents.

Athena was trying her best to combat the hack.

And she was failing.

Winston yanked out the flash and growled as he crushed it in one of his massive front hands.


Winston rushed to the keyboard to offer the AI as much assistance as he could. “Hang on, Athena!”

The bar on screen measuring the status of Reaper’s hack hit ninety-nine percent before the screens blinked off. The slight whirr equipment powering down heralded the oncoming silence.

“Athena?” Winston asked with eyes wide.

“Athena?”

First headed by the American Gabriel Reyes, and then by the American Jack Morrison, Overwatch was a success. The Omnic Crisis, was, thanks to Overwatch’s brilliance and power, beaten back, and life on Earth stabilized. With the remaining Omnis peaceful, and Overwatch’s hand on the tiller of world peace, mankind once again continued its march forward.

But even this was too good to last.
The decades long existence of Overwatch came to an end in a manner both dramatic and hasty, punctuated by a series of high-profile failures. The murder of the French agent Gerard Lacroix by, of all people, his own wife. Accusations of corruption aimed at both Overwatch, and its clandestine sister organization Blackwatch. The public resignation of the American Jesse McCree, and continued open criticism by an Overwatch senior official, the German Reinhardt Wilhelm. The death of Overwatch’s second-in-command, the Egyptian Ana Amari, in an assassination attempt upon an Egyptian politician by an upstart terrorist organization known as Talon, which Amari had failed to stop.

But the end—the true end—came when Jack Morrison and Gabriel Reyes (who had gone on to lead Blackwatch) finally let their rivalry and mutual resentment overwhelm them, and they came to blows, which claimed the lives of both men, as well as the base in which they fought.

Finally, finally, it was too much for the world to bear.

As suddenly Overwatch was willed into existence, it was just as suddenly destroyed. Another unanimous resolution by the UN led to the signing of The Petras Act, which deemed all Overwatch activity illegal, and subject to prosecution.

And the group that had pulled the world back from the brink of destruction now scattered to the winds.

Two beeps, and Athena came back online. “Virus quarantined.”

Winston sighed and rubbed his forehead.

“I am running diagnostics on core data,” Athena said. “Restoring systems.”

A hologram popped up near Winston’s keyboard.

**INITIATE**
**OVERWATCH RECALL?**
**Y N**

Winston had stared at this holographic recall prompt several times over the last few years, whenever something on the news had disturbed him. Successful operations by the ever-growing Talon organization. The Vishkar Corporation out of India undertaking reconstruction efforts in Brazil, and forcing the locals of Rio de Janeiro into slave labor while doing so. The attack by the Australian Liberation Front on an omnium’s fusion core that turned the Australian outback into a radioactive hellscape. Two separate Omnic Crises forming in both Korea and Russia. And the assassination of Tekhartha Mondatta, leader of a peaceful sect of Omnics hailing from the Shambali Monastery in Nepal, by a Talon operative during a peacekeeping visit to London early this year.

And every single time, Winston pushed “N.” He had grown with a respect for the world and its people, and knew that help unasked for could do a lot to hurt the people he tried to protect. He didn’t agree with the signing of the Petras Act seven years ago, and seven years later, he still didn’t. But the world knew what it wanted, and Winston forced himself to go along with it.

But this… this was different. This was a coordinated Talon strike designed to reveal the names and locations of Overwatch agents. There was still enough resentment in the world that such information would be worth a great deal to those who did not have the best interests of the world at heart. To destroy even the ghost of Overwatch would be to leave the world without a defense it didn’t know it still had.
Winston picked up the pair of glasses given to him by the head researcher on Horizon, Doctor Harold Winston, and put them on. The late doctor’s words came back to him, seeping through the barricade in the back of his mind.

“Never accept the world as it appears to be. Dare to see it for what it could be.”

For the sake of his old friends, for the sake of all the tomorrows to come, Winston pushed “Y.”

An amber holographic globe came up in place of the recall prompt, and the names of both old agents and hopefuls that he had added to the contact list popped up on the globe’s spherical surface. Sweden. Switzerland. Korea. America. Egypt. Brazil. England. Various other places and various other hopefuls.

But the one over England, designated “Tracer,” was the first to answer the call, and she did so immediately. Familiar, female, and almost tragically Cockney, Tracer’s voice came over the speakers.

“Winston? Is that you, luv? It’s been too long!”

It hadn’t. They’d seen each other a couple of months ago in America at the Overwatch museum. Winston could have been gone for five minutes, and she’d have said the exact same thing.

That didn’t stop Winston from smiling, though.

“Yes,” Winston said, before chuckling to himself and pushing his glasses up his nose. “Yes, it has.”

Winston felt flush with purpose for the first time in years. So overwhelming was his reverie that he didn’t notice the thick wisp of black, viscous smoke rise from where two shotguns lay a floor beneath him, and leave the facility…

And so it came to pass, on this day in 2076, that Overwatch was reborn. And all over the world, the bravest and the strongest, the smartest and the fastest, awoke to Winston’s call.

And each of them, to a person, would look within themselves to see if they could answer that call, and aid a world that so desperately needed them…
Chapter 2: The Answer

London

Hana Song stood near the window of the train as it neared the station in downtown London. Standing under a massive and almost formless green sweatshirt that, under any other circumstances, she wouldn't have been caught dead wearing, she felt that peculiar blend of fatigue and nervousness native to all those trying to hide from something. She scanned the rest of the compartment from behind her blocky sunglasses: a mass of tired commuters, old ladies, and a few pre-teens huddled around one phone that was playing the latest in Brazilian hip-hop from Lucio Correia dos Santos.

None of them recognized her.

But she had been recognized at Heathrow, though. Coming into the terminal, fresh off the non-stop from Seoul to London, she had managed to still pull off poise in the face of a long, brutal flight that included a crying baby in the first class seating section in which she had sat. Hana didn’t even know that was possible. She knew that first-class passengers could, theoretically, have young children that could accompany them on flights, but presented with the possibility, she imagined infants in first class to also be wearing business suits, also smiling the smug half-smile of those who had dodged having to sit in coach. Crying just seemed… beneath them.

And then she heard it. She heard the dread cry that had been following her for three years, now.

“Nerf this!”

It had come from a teenage boy near the McDonalds, holding a cup of McMiso Soup in one hand and a dingy plastic spoon in the other. Wisps of red hair poked out from under an Arsenal cap, and his face was so ridden with acne that it looked less like a skin condition, and more like someone had splashed his face with acid. He waved with his spoon hand, smiling a smile that revealed impressively straight white teeth, stereotypes about English dentistry be damned.

And Hana waved back.

Anything for a fan...

That had been the four word mantra that her publicist had told her must be foremost on her mid whilst in public. It would not do for Hana Song (callsign and streaming handle: “D.Va”) to appear ungracious amongst her admirers. Not when her subscriber count was climbing. Not when her movie was about to open in America. Not when she was the face of Korea’s bravery and ingenuity in the face of their second Omnic Crisis. Not when there were so many MEKAs to sell in countries that were terrified of another Omnic Crisis of their very own.

But Hana knew this wouldn’t do. She couldn’t risk being recognized on the streets the way she had been in Heathrow. Thus necessitating this drab and embarrassing change of attire with clothes bought exclusively in airport gift shops. The stylish and expensive suit she had worn on the plane wound up in the trash. Hana was a rich girl, though. She could afford more clothes.

The train pulled into the station, and the doors opened. Hana, confident no one could recognize her, breathed freely as she made her exit, invisible among the throng of commuters.
She checked her phone for the address at which she was to arrive. It was far enough that it would necessitate a cab ride. She had only ever been to London once on a business trip to persuade English entrepreneurs and politicians to buy Korean Mekas for deployment in the countryside. But being as that business trip was, well, a business trip, she hadn’t seen as much of London as she’d have liked.

Even under the depressingly gray British sky, Hana Song thought it was a good day for a walk.

As she made her way down the wet sidewalk to the neighborhood of King’s Row, a four word refrain repeated itself in her head. Not ‘Anything for a fan,’ for that had been burned into her brain so deeply over the past ten months that she could hear it when she slept. No, this one she’d had trouble remembering. She’d had to refer to the message she’d gotten last week a number of times in an attempt to get it right.

Whitehall, from Universal Exports. Whitehall, from Universal Exports. Whitehall, from Universal Exports. Whitehall, from...

“Oi!”

Hana snapped out of it. She had found herself in front of a British pub (the sign outside of which informed all passersby that the name of the establishment was “Henry’s”). A heavyset man with a towel over his shoulder was standing near the pub’s red entrance door, and was staring daggers into a tall, skinny Omnic that had been walking a few feet in front of her.

“I don’t allow Omnics into my pub,” the heavyset man said in a cockney drawl. Judging from the reference to “his” pub, Hana assumed this must be Henry.

“I had no intention of entering your establishment,” the Omnic said in reply. “Omnics don’t drink.”

This did not seem to deter Henry. “Keep walking, then,” he said. “Go underground where you’re wanted, ‘cause it sure as hell ain’t here.”

The Omnic kept walking.

In spite of the hype surrounding Hana “D.Va” Song’s status as the face of Korean defense, she had only ever gone on two combat operations against Omnics. Both were depressingly easy, as the Korean military didn’t want to risk their investment in the D.Va brand on a mission that held any real stakes. But the fact of the matter remained that both she and her country had grown prosperous on the corpses of Omnics.

So seeing blatant prejudice against a peaceful Omnic that was just handling their own affairs put Hana in a light, shallow funk. She felt that she didn’t feel bad enough about stuff like this, which only made her feel worse.

And that funk got slightly deeper as she found herself across the street from the address she was give. She looked both ways before crossing the street, and when she looked left, she saw a makeshift vigil in tribute to Tekhartha Mondatta. A little girl, accompanied by an Omnic and a human woman in a beanie with blue and blonde hair, lit one of the many candles assembled beneath a picture of the slain Omnic civil rights leader on the side of a building that had no doubt been painted by a local street artist.

Right, Hana thought. This is the neighborhood where Mondatta was assassinated.

Shrugging off the history of the neighborhood and the poignancy of the scene, Hana crossed the street and stood in front of a bland row house whose only impressive quality was how truly unimpressive it was. The first feelings of doubt, that she had been scammed and lead on a fool’s
errand, bubbled up in her mind. But the button on the fence in front of the house that she was supposed to press was there, so she did so, anticipating and dreading where the next few moments would take her.

A blue, life-sized holographic image appeared, of an impressively tall, impeccably dressed black woman holding a holo-tablet.

“Good afternoon,” the hologram said in an African accent that Hana couldn’t place. “Are you here for the delivery?”

“I am,” Hana said, parroting the first of two phrases the message had given her.

“Very good,” the hologram said, smiling warmly. “Now I just need your name and place of employment to verify you as the recipient.”

“Whitehall,” Hana said. “From Universal Exports.”

The hologram pointed her hand to the brown door of the row house behind her. “Right this way,” she said, and blinked out of existence.

Hana walked up the stairs to the brown door, her heart thudding faster with every step. Everything so far had gone as the message had said, and if the next part was true, there was no telling what—or who—could be beyond that door.

She turned the brown knob on the door, entered the house, turned around to close the door behind her and saw…

Nothing.

There was nothing here.

There wasn’t even any light. She couldn’t see an inch in front of her face.

The sound of whirring motors accompanied the ground shifting beneath her. She was in a very small, very cramped elevator.

The next few moments passed in a drunk, logy parody of time. The seconds stretched to eons before the door opened. But open it did, flooding the small elevator with light, and the first sight to greet Hana Song once her eyes adjusted, was a gorilla wearing glasses and white body armor. The creature made its way toward Hana, and she instinctively pressed her back against the wall of the elevator, as though she could melt into it and disappear.

“Welcome,” the gorilla said, and Hana’s heart leapt into her throat.

“My name is Winston,” the gorilla said. “It’s a pleasure to meet you. I apologize for the secrecy, but given the nature of the enterprise…”

An automated voice, the same voice as the woman from the hologram on the street, came in over loud speakers in the small anteroom that housed Winston. “Good afternoon, Miss Song.”

“That’s Athena,” Winston said. “She’s Overwatch’s AI coordinator. Do come in, Miss Song. I trust the flight from Seoul was pleasant?”

Hana Song had many habits in the throes of both frustration and panic that she had never quite possessed the self-awareness to observe and quantify, one of which was this: when she was startled,
she stated the obvious.

“You’re a giant talking gorilla,” Hana said.

Hana had come at the halfway point in the number of people of giving their names as Whitehall from Universal Exports above, only to join the growing ranks of Overwatch below.

At four o’clock PM Greenwich Mean Time, Athena made her voice heard once again.

“Winston. The three-thirty window has passed.”

Winston sighed. Though he didn’t say it, Hana knew Winston had expected more people. He told Athena to lockdown the facility’s exterior security and let those assembled get to know each other for about a half an hour before the briefing began.

The number assembled could best be described as “eclectic,” and of them, she only took the initiative to introduce herself to two of them.

The first was renowned musician and Brazilian freedom fighter Lucio Correia dos Santos, and he was just as surprised to see her in this London basement meeting room as vice-versa. Hana, to her credit, kept her cool, and did not ask for an autograph. Lucio, in contrast, had asked for hers. And after she had signed the t-shirt he was wearing with a marker that was in the desk at the front of the room near the display screen, they shared a few snippets of conversation.

“Wow,” Hana had said. “Overwatch…”

“I know, right?” Lucio had said, his enthusiasm making his long, blonde dreads tremble. “This is so cool!”

“Are you worried that this is… you know… illegal?”

The thought had apparently not occurred to Lucio. “Are you kidding?” he had asked before pointing at Winston (who hadn’t seen him).

“He’s a super-smart moon gorilla! This is the best day. Of, like, all the days.”

The two things that Hana had taken away from the brief conversation with Lucio were his enthusiasm, and his shortness. Hana was taller than Lucio, and Hana Song was not a tall woman.

Shortness and enthusiasm could not, however, be applied to Reinhardt Wilhelm, who was accompanied by his friend and assistant, Brigitte Panzer. Hana didn’t have measuring tape on hand, so she could only assume that Reinhardt cracked the seven foot mark. And once he saw Hana, however, he seemed to almost shrink. Once she walked up to Reinhardt to introduce herself, Hana could see why.

Underneath Reinhardt’s leather jacket (which Hana imagined necessitated the death of three separate cows, for how big it was) was a t-shirt, upon which was emblazoned an image of Hana herself, in her skin-tight White Rabbit body suit, headset over her ears and pink paint whiskers on her cheeks. She was flipping a peace sign and blowing bubble gum. And beneath this image were two simple words in a future-punk pink font.

NERF THIS!

“I didn’t know you were going to be here,” Reinhardt had said, his stiff formality and steadily
reddening cheeks giving him the appearance of a tomato with impeccable manners. “I am going to go to the corner, now, to spare myself further embarrassment. Excuse me…”

Which is exactly what he did. Brigitte wiped a stray bit of brown hair from her green eyes and said “He’s usually not this bashful.”

And as she watched the mammoth Reinhardt Wilhelm attempt to vanish into the corner to which he had sent himself, Hana remembered that she had had his poster up on her wall when she was a little girl: a black and white print of a much younger Reinhardt, resplendent in his armor, his hammer in one hand and his helmet under the other arm, looking up and off into the distance at whatever heroes looked at.

And that little girl would have geeked out over seeing Reinhardt now.

But these last ten months in the Korean military had taken something from her. She had been drafted, yes, but she had gone willingly, because she loved her country. Her country allowed her to make a living playing Starcraft II. But serving Korea meant seeing the ins and outs of service. Her country asked that she serve as a public relations agent to the world at large a great deal more than they had asked her to fight. She had seen the curtain pulled back on her own patriotism, revealing the weights and pulleys that made it work.

And yet, she remembered the little girl she had once been, who would have lost her mind seeing Reinhardt Wilhelm live and in person. And as she resigned to take one of the seats in this meeting room and learn what she could from eavesdropping on whomever else might come in, she felt a keen loss that defied words at how far away that little girl seemed to be. Ten months and a lifetime past.

That loss deepened at the next arrival: that of Doctor Mei-ling Zhou, followed by a small, floating robotic drone that she had called “Snowball.” Hana knew quite a bit about the illustrious Doctor Zhou, as she followed Doctor Zhou’s blog, “Mei’s Adventures.” Mei listed her age as thirty-one… but Hana wondered if that accounted for the ten years she had spent in cryogenic stasis at an Overwatch watchpoint in Antarctica. If so, did that mean she was actually forty-one? Or did she count it and she was actually, technically, twenty-one? Did the stasis preserve her? Hana wished to go up and introduce herself, but she feared one of these questions would come tumbling out of her mouth like a can of soda from a vending machine, so she stayed put in her seat.

Hana had no doubt that such restraint would be alien to the next arrival: one Lena Oxton, who, Hana learned from the many conversations she seemed to be having simultaneously, went by the callsign “Tracer.” The young Englishwoman showered her multiple conversation partners with a stream of consciousness studded with English slang, of which Hana herself could only recognize “innit?,” “wotcher,” and “bird.” The thing that puzzled her about Lena from a simple outside glance was the bright blue energy thing that she wore over her bomber jacket. Did that, like, monitor her heart-rate or something?

Speaking of physical impairments, the one-eyed, one-armed Torbjorn Lindholm made his entrance not long after Oxton. Hana had heard of the Swedish weapons developer both from her daily current events briefs, as well as anecdotes from her superiors, from their dealings with him concerning his perceived slights in the wake of Korea’s MEKA boom. Colonel Kim, the MEKA division liaison, had referred to Torbjorn as part of the human anatomy that Hana herself had been far too busy to actually see up close and personal as of yet. But for the intents and purposes of a meeting of Overwatch, he maintained a civil tone, and seemed particularly interested in what Reinhardt had been up to.

But Torbjorn’s genteel air shattered irreparably upon the arrival of the afternoon’s final participants: Genji Shimada and Tekhartta Zenyatta. Upon seeing them, Torbjorn’s one eye widened, and all
four feet of his height turned red. Then he turned on the rest of the room to talk to Reinhardt directly.

Hana was familiar with both of these latest entries. A former playboy and member of the Japanese Shimada clan, Genji had gotten into a violent altercation with his older brother Hanzo, which left the younger brother at death’s door. One rescue by Overwatch later, and Genji had been given cybernetic enhancements that made him look like… well… a green cyborg ninja dude. He even carried a sword.

For a reason Hana had been unable to unearth in her research, Genji left Overwatch, though apparently, by his presence here, the split was not acrimonious. At some point down the line, he had met up with Tekhartha Zenyatta, who had been Tekhartha Mondatta’s right hand… Man?... until they too had a parting of the ways. There had been scattered reports of Zenyatta and Genji seen in each others’ company, helping those who needed helping, walking the path until the path led them to King’s Row.

Of all in attendance, there were three that Hana had not been able to get a handle on, and Genji was making a big show of not making eye contact with the first of them. This person being a blonde woman in her thirties in jeans, a white button-up, and a brown leather jacket. She was scanning the room while not making eye contact with any of its inhabitants, like a queen surveying a particularly ragged set of subjects. This blonde was standing next to the second, a tall and seemingly muscular woman (if the thighs bulging inside of her jeans were any indication) that Hana knew to be Egyptian from the Eye of Horus tattoo under her right eye, plainly visible behind the yellow tint of her aviator shades. The Egyptian woman was looking at the floor, for the most part, and when she looked up, her expression was troubled. As though she thought the blonde woman desperately needed a hug, but was too brittle to withstand even the slightest pressure.

And the third? The third was an old white guy in a mask. He wore a leather jacket with the number seventy-six on the back, and had a thinning patina of white hair atop his head. He, too, had decided to hang back and not socialize. And he was sitting two chairs behind her.

“Hey,” the old man said.

Hana looked at him.

“Yeah, you.”

“What?” Hana asked?

“What do you think?”

“Of what?”

“The people here.”

Hana scanned the room before turning her attention back to the old man.

“I don’t know what to tell you,” Hana said. “We haven’t started yet.”

“A soldier starts when they haven’t started yet,” the old man said. “You read the room before you make the room your own. Just pick someone and tell me what you think.”

Hana’s eyes spun outwardly to the rest of the room, and fell on the blonde. She looked at her for a bit, not knowing what she could possibly… Hmmm…

“The blonde,” Hana said.
“What about her?”

“Does… does she overdo everything, or just her clothes?”

The old man spared a glance at the blonde form behind his mask. “When I was a kid, the word for that was called ‘extra.’ What makes you think she’s overdoing it?”

“Look at her shirt,” Hana said. “Look at the collar. It’s starched. She wore a starched shirt to a secret meeting of an illegal paramilitary organization. Yeah, she’s trying to offset it with the jeans, but they’re brand new. Which tells me she doesn’t wear jeans often. And I’m guessing it just killed her not to iron creases in them, but she knew that if she did that, it would set off warning bells. So she’s even overdoing looking like she’s not overdoing it.”

“That,” the old man said, “is Doctor Angela Ziegler. Hails from Switzerland. Her callsign’s ‘Mercy.’ She speaks five languages, and she was a brilliant surgeon at just seventeen when she joined Overwatch. You’d do well to respect her.”

“I never said anything about not respecting her,” Hana said. “You asked me what I saw, and I told you… And five languages? Everyone in the world speaks English, so she needs that, Swiss, and three more to get by? If that’s not overdoing it, I don’t know what is.”

Hana could sense the old man smile behind his mask.

“That’s very observant,” he said.

“That,” Hana said while pointing at Doctor Angela Ziegler, “is extra…”

Across the room, Hana Song’s observation of Fareeha Amari, the Egyptian, were not far from the truth. Usually she wore her leather jacket and aviators as a stand-in for her combat armor. Symbols of pride, strength, and, if she were being completely honest, something to make her seem cool and aloof to the women she might encounter. At this moment, though, they felt more like weighty pieces of armor that she was cowering behind like a child.

A few days prior, she had been contacted by her mother for the first time in nine years. Usually this would have been, at most, an awkward familial obligation to ignore or slog through before falling out of touch again. The last time they had seen each other in person, they fought bitterly. It hadn’t been unusual at that point; her mother disapproved of her decision to follow in her footsteps and join the military and took any opportunity to voice that displeasure. She never seemed to be able to accept that Fareeha was an independent adult, who could decide of her own accord that this is what she wanted to do with her life. But no matter how she pleaded her case, her mother could only see her as a tiny child trying to emulate her heroes.

They had been inseparable, once. Her mother had been her hero, her whole world. And Fareeha was, in turn, her mother’s world outside of work, too. As the child of one of Overwatch’s founders, the whole strike-team was her family. At ten years old she could take a grown man to the ground, shoot a rifle, and see the world through a tacticians lens as well or better than any of the new recruits they took on board. And through it all, her mother watched over her, helped her grow, always ready to teach her something new, or simply lavish her with the kind of affection and prideful praise that every child needs. But for as much as she was treated with an adult’s dignity as a child, it did not last. Somewhere along the line her mother’s view of her didn’t age as she grew up. Even as she started to become more independent, more outspoken and curious, her mother still saw her as her little baby bird under her wing—incapable of making her own way in the world.
Fareeha never for a moment stopped wanting her mother, though. She was still her hero, her best friend, her first and best teacher. Even if her world had to expand to fit more people into it, her mother remained at the center. With every passing year, with every new conflict and unintended slight, the less that her mother was accessible to her. And the less she could access her, the more that wanting turned painful. And the more pain she was in from that unsatisfied want, the more she resented her mother. And the more she resented her mother, the more she hated herself for needing her.

The last contact her mother had made was a terse voicemail informing her that she would be back in Egypt on business, and that if she could behave herself, then perhaps they could meet. Fareeha didn’t even bother returning the call. And for close to a decade now, she had been kicking herself for not picking up the phone, trying to make amends—or at least telling her mother that she still loved her, no matter what happened between them.

Two days after that message had been left, Fareeha received notice that her mother was missing in action, presumed dead.

She kept that voicemail across five different phones, and listened to it more nights than not. That is, until two years ago, one tearful night, when she finally allowed herself to delete it and move on with her life. Alone.

So if she looked to an outside observer as if she needed a hug, it’s because she did, desperately. She even knew many of the people here, and considered them family. But Wilhelm was engrossed in conversation already, old Torbie looked like he could melt steel beams with the stink-eye he was giving the two omnis that had just entered, and what was she supposed to say to Angela? "Hey, remember me, I was Ana Amari’s kid? You may remember me from all the times I stared down the front of your shirt. Anyway my mom faked her death and now I need a hug."

Ridiculous...

But even as she was thinking that, Angela was waving her hand in front of Fareeha’s eyes and giving her one of her trademark gentle, heart-stopping smiles.

“I—sorry, was just spaced out. What were you saying?”

Angela reached out to squeeze her shoulder, expression full of patience and compassion.

“You should take this moment to see her, Fareeha. You two may not get another chance for a private moment for some time.”

Fareeha’s lips parted, but it seemed that she could produce no sound, so she swallowed thickly and nodded in silence. Angela gave her shoulder another squeeze before turning back to surveying the room. Some small part of Fareeha was hoping that she would accompany her down the hall—after all, her mother had basically adopted Angela when she joined Overwatch—but that did not seem to be her intention, and she felt it would be the height of childishness to ask.

And so, clenching her first hard enough that her neatly trimmed nails left angry red crescents, she forced herself to walk out of the conference room and down the dimly lit underground hall. The silence of the hallway as the door shut behind her was as jarring as walking out into a blizzard. But she forced her legs to work. Left, right, left, right, left, right, left, as though she were a new recruit in Egypt, marching drills again.

She felt no time pass before she was in front of the door that she knew her mother was behind. Heart hammering, she wrenched the door open before she could shrink back down into a hesitating mess.
How was she supposed to react to her mother here in front of her? Silver haired and with a few more crows feet, but still smiling just as she remembered, still warm as the little girl in her still knew. Fareeha felt a bolt of adrenaline course through her body, the instinct to run away or cry out gripping her heart. And yet, she willed herself to remain still. No matter how many times she had read and re-read her mother’s letter, and no matter how many times she had rehearsed everything she could think of to say to her when they met again, the powerful physical presence of her once-lost mother struck all memory and reason from her mind.

Anger roiled like sickness in her heart. She felt everything she had stuffed into her heart for the last twenty years start to threaten to spill out. She wanted so much to be angry. She wanted to scream and strike out at this grotesque apparition in front of her. But she also wanted to cry and collapse into her mother’s arms again. It was all Fareeha could do to stand in shock, not letting either impulse take control of her.

Her mother stood from her seat, and approached slowly, fighting a losing battle against a familiar grin tugging at her lips, and with a tear welling up in her one remaining eye. They stood for a moment, beholding each other, each with close to a decade of feelings pent up and aching for release.

Ana took another small step forward and tentatively placed her hands on her daughter’s broad shoulders.

“My beautiful little girl…I had forgotten how tall you’ve become.” she said quietly, voice filled with pride, “My baby bird has grown into a falcon.”

At this, Fareeha realized how tightly her jaw and fists had been clenched and released them, only for a half-sobbed laugh to escape from her throat. And despite herself, she smiled the kind of broad ungainly smile so full of joy and wonder that it felt as though her face might split in half. Words still failed to come. Ana took another step in, moving as if to embrace her daughter in a hug, but was stopped suddenly by Fareeha’s hand placed delicately on her chest. Fareeha momentarily panicked at the hurt she saw in her mother’s eye, and quickly explained,

“I’m…Going to need a little time. I’m sure you understand.”

To which Ana could only nod.

“Fareeha, I—“

But before she could get the words out, her daughter’s hand moved to squeeze her own, silencing her again.

“There will be time for that, later. Right now I just want to see my mother.”

Ana squeezed her daughter’s hand back, enveloping it in both of her own.

“Thank you.”

The tall Egyptian woman (who the old white guy had told Hana was named “Fareeha Amari”) came back into the room with an older lady in tow. The older lady was an ex-looker, and if she still had her right eye, she still would be. Hana looked back at the old guy, who, even behind a mask, looked shocked.

Hana looked from the old guy, to the older lady, and back again. "Do you know her?"
"Yeah," the old guy said. "That's Ana Amari."

"Fareeha's... what, mother?"

The old guy nodded. Hana wanted to ask why this should impress her, let alone him, but she never got the chance.

Winston cleared his throat, and like the unruly classroom full of students that this new iteration of Overwatch resembled at an outside glance, they slowly reeled their independent chatter into silence.

"Any questions before we begin?" Winston asked. Lucio’s hand immediately shot up.

"Yes?"

Lucio straightened up in his chair and folded his arms in his lap, trying to get into a serious mode through posture alone. "How long have you been in London?"

Winston blinked. "Four days. I came here from Gibraltar."

"So... How does a gorilla get through customs?"

Winston smiled. "Carefully," he said. "Any other questions?"

Silence.

"Athena," Winston said, "if you’d be so kind as to bring up the footage, please?"

The screen behind Winston came to life with footage from what appeared to be a closed-circuit security system.

"Thank you, Athena," Winston said. "This is the security footage of the Talon break-in at Gibraltar a week ago."

Hana saw mercs in black running up staircases and busting into a main room, only for Winston himself to lay a brutal and thorough beating upon them. The angle switched to a man in a long black coat and hood, wearing a white owl-skull mask over his face placing a flash into a giant hard drive.

"Hold, please," Winston said.

The image of the guy in the mask froze.

"Enhance."

The image closed in.

"This," Winston said, "is the principle behind the attack. Interpol records have no name, but an alias: 'Reaper.' And he is a known Talon mercenary and assassin, with a very peculiar and grisly modus operandi..."

A crime scene photo came up on screen of a severely dehydrated husk that used to be a human being; the lips pulled back to reveal teeth above shriveled gums, and eye-sockets where the eyeballs had shriveled to nothing. The body was wearing military fatigues.

"Jakarta," Winston said.

Another photo, this time of another husk in a sequined evening gown.
“Monte Carlo.”

Another photo, another withered corpse, this time in a business suit.

“Johannesburg. These bodies and others like them show signs of intense cellular degradation, almost as though they’d been… well, I guess the layman’s term would be ‘sucked dry.’”

“That’s precisely what happens,” Angela said. Every eye in the room immediately turned to her and some of those eyes—particularly those of Reinhardt and Ana—were alert, and the tiniest bit judgmental.

“And unlike Interpol,” Angela said, “I know exactly who he is.”

Angela looked around the room and apparently saw the expressions of parents who had come across hidden notes from school staring back at her. She stood up straight, tucked some of her blonde hair behind her ear, and tried to muster as much comportment as she could.

“There is no way to say this delicately,” Angela said. “Reaper is Gabriel Reyes.”

The room exploded into a cacophony of exclamation and shock, but Hana could only remain silent, turning the prospect of this over in her head. One of the founders of Overwatch, the former leader of Blackwatch, whose death (along with that of Overwatch leader Jack Morrison), was the catalyst that caused the world to turn on this organization and finally ban it, had been alive this entire time?

But in this inner silence as the room raged around her, the only thought that came to Hana Song’s mind was but a single question. But this question caused Hana’s silence to thankfully, mercifully, end.

“Hey!” Hana said, trying to bring the room to order. “Hey!”

The room took a few seconds to dull, before everyone decided to look at Hana. All except Fareeha Amari, who looked at Angela with seeming reproach. Angela noticed this and looked so unbothered by it that it rolled back around to looking deeply bothered.

“How did this happen?” Hana asked.

Angela loosened the collar of her button-up. “After the struggle that… that we convinced the world claimed the lives of Captain Morrison and Captain Reyes at Gibraltar, I found that C… Gabriel, was only barely clinging to life. Something had to be done, so I administered a biomedical treatment that was, at that point, in its developmental stages. It was a sort of nanotech scrub that was supposed to quickly repair any damaged cells and then excrete itself from the top-most layer of the patient’s skin upon completion.”

Mei piped up. “But something went wrong.”

“Yes,” Angela said. “The governing AI of the nanotech was faulty. Upon repairing the extent of Gabriel’s injuries, the nanites, left with nothing to do, began to destroy him from the inside, only to repair him again. And the cycle keeps repeating itself.”

Angela turned from those assembled to the screen, her blue eyes taking in Reaper’s image.

“Gabriel Reyes’ cells are stuck in a perpetual state of degradation and regeneration, causing pain that is constant, excruciating, and felt throughout the body. He can control the nanites somewhat, as evidenced by his puff of smoke trick, which he used to escape through an air vent in his containment cell. And the nanites can make more of themselves, and being that they contain Gabriel’s genetic
information, they can draw from the surrounding matter to essentially rebuild him from a single cell, should the worst come to pass.”

“So you’re saying,” Fareeha said, “that he can’t be killed?”

“It’s theoretically possible,” Angela said. “Provided, of course, that every cell in his body is extinguished simultaneously. But barring dropping him into a volcano, I don’t see how it could practically be done.”

“Hmph!”

Everyone turned toward the sound. It came from Torbjorn, who was running the mechanical claw that served as his right hand through his long, golden beard, his one remaining eye twinkling with menace.


Angela sighed. “I created a monster. And we didn’t tell the world about him because after so many scandals and corruption accusations, we didn’t have the heart to drive the last nail into Overwatch’s coffin ourselves. Not after all the good we did. I thought there was enough left of Gabriel Reyes left that he wouldn’t resort to terrorism and assassination, and I was wrong. I have no problem admitting this.”

“As well you shouldn’t,” Torbjorn said. He had the air of a school bully who has the fattest kid in class in his sights. “No one soldier is above the mission. Overwatch took you in, Angela. Had faith in you. And this is how you repay them?”

“Hey,” Genji said from the back of the room. “Leave her alone.”

That he was criticized, or that he was criticized by Genji in particular, seemed to offend Torbjorn to his mortal core. He opened his shoulders like a book to push his chest out. Hana thought the diminutive fellow would have stood on his tip-toes if he thought it would fool anyone.

“The day I take lessons in manners from a God-forsaken tin can abomination is the day I squat and crap cufflinks!”

“Well,” Genji said, “given how short you are, you won’t have to bend your knees that much to do it.”

“Enough!”

Ana Amari had silenced the room, and proved that Torbjorn wasn’t the only one who could give a room full of soldiers a one-eyed death glare. Just that she could do it the more successfully of the two. The only one who dared make any noise was Zenyatta, who put his hand on Genji’s shoulder and said “Genji, that was unworthy of you.”

And judging from how he lowered his head in response, Hana thought that Genji agreed.

Ana softened her face and looked to Winston. “We seem to have gotten off-topic. Continue, if you please.”

Winston, who had reacted with shock upon learning of Reaper’s identity with the rest of the room, quickly reassembled himself and got back to business.

“Right, well… In addition, we know that Reaper is not working alone.”
The image on screen dissolved to that of a photo that was blurry and out of focus. It was of a woman in her thirties with a visor covering her forehead, and holding back a long, black ponytail. Hana couldn’t tell which about this woman was the more outrageous: the shockingly formfitting bodysuit she was wearing, or the purplish, bluish tint of her skin.

Hana noticed that Lena Oxton had knocked over a plastic coffee cup from the table she’d been leaning against. She bent down to pick it up, her cheeks reddening with embarrassment. The picture of the purple woman had clearly rattled her. And Hana noticed, out of the corner of her eye, Zenyatta taking note of Lena’s reaction as well.

“This,” Winston said, “is Amelie Lacroix. Codename: ‘Widowmaker.’ Once upon a time, she was married to an Overwatch agent named Gerard Lacroix. One day she goes missing. Overwatch agents found her in a factory, blindfolded and tied to a chair, but nothing seemed to be outwardly wrong with her. Two weeks later, she garroted Gerard in his sleep, and then vanished. Talon had brainwashed her, and she’s been working for them ever since. Her greatest hits include the assassination of Tekhartha Mondatta six months ago, as well as…”

“She took my eye and left me for dead,” Ana said. Much like the last time she spoke, her words silenced the room. But someone had to break that silence eventually.

“Why does she look like a grape?” Mei asked.

“It’s part of her conditioning,” Winston said. “They’ve slowed her heart-rate down to near lethal levels, resulting in the tint of her skin, well, doing that.”

“Why would they do that?” Hana asked.

“She’s a sniper,” Winston said. “A low heart-rate means fewer difficulties aiming. Not to mention a lowered body temperature confounds thermal imaging, which is the best way to locate a sniper.”

“It’s cheating,” Ana said, and yet again the room fell silent. She looked out at the assembled party.

“I don’t bear a grudge,” Ana said. “We were both professionals tending to our business, and she tended to hers that day more efficiently than I did to mine. Truth be told, until the unpleasantness, it was one of the more enjoyable missions of my career… but then again, it’s all fun and games until someone loses an eye.”

Silence followed. Silence that, judging from the look on Ana’s face, was deeply disappointing.

“Nothing?”

“Anyway,” Winston said.

Ana scratched her forehead underneath her hijab. “I’ve been sitting on that joke for years…”

“Anyway,” Winston said, “we know they’re working together because four months ago, the two of them attempted to steal the Doomfist from the Overwatch museum in Indianapolis. Lena and I stopped them.”

That took Hana by surprise. An attack in a public place by a terrorist organization would have been in the news, or at least in her briefings, but it had been in neither.

“And no one thought to report this?” Zenyatta asked.

“To report on Overwatch is to promote Overwatch,” Reinhardt said. “Or so the traditional media
thinking dictates. We’re still not very popular.”

“So we just, like, wait until Reaper and Widowmaker pull something and then swoop in?” Lucio asked.

“Actually,” Winston said, “we don’t even have to wait for that. Reaper tried to hack Athena at Gibraltar, before Athena stopped it, but that hack left some very specific, very interesting code.”

“Some of which includes Talon transmission frequencies,” Athena said over the speakers. “Which I have been monitoring.”

“Yes,” Winston said, “and even this has yielded fruit. It turns out that Reaper and Widowmaker have gone rogue.”

“Wow,” Lena said. “I didn’t know terrorists could just put in their two weeks like anyone else could.”

“You can’t,” Winston said. “They’ve been disavowed. Burned. Their assets have been frozen and their safe houses have been made public. And Talon’s put out a reward on them, so they’re still a hot topic. When Talon knows something, so will we.”

Winston leaned against the wall and folded his arms. “These recent attacks lead me to one conclusion. Reaper wants to destroy what’s left of Overwatch. Why? I don’t know. But the attacks at the museum and Gibraltar? The attempt on the contact list? Even those three husks I showed you were former Overwatch.”

“Soldiers?” Fareeha asked.

“One of them was,” Winston said. “One was an accountant and the third was in public outreach. Reaper doesn’t seem to care.”

“Wait,” Lucio said. “So us just being here puts us on Reaper’s hitlist?”

“Reaper tried to get the contact list,” Hana said. “The same contact list that Winston used to contact us. We were on his bad side no matter what.”

“Right,” Winston said. “But for now? Now we wait until we have something concrete to move on.”

“For now,” Ana said, “we are finally honest with each other.”

Ana peered out into the room once again and looked at Hana. She felt her bowels turn to water under the diminishing gaze.

Until she realized that Ana wasn’t looking at her. No. She was looking at the old white guy in the mask behind her.

“Jack Morrison,” Ana said. “You take off that foolish mask this instant.”

The old guy stood up, his head hunched down a little like a dog’s would be if you yelled at it for peeing on an expensive rug. His hand raised to his mask and removed it, revealing a weathered face that still had a youthful glow. His eyes were wide and blue, and his visage was marred by a series of scars running across its center.

If the revelation that Gabriel Reyes was still alive caused pandemonium, then the revelation that Jack Morrison also still lived caused the exact opposite. The shock caused a silence that didn’t feel like an
absence of sound, but like a nullification of the fact that sound could be made at all.

“Hello, Ana,” Jack finally said. “It seems no one stays dead in Overwatch.”

“Yes,” Ana said. “Lucky us.”
"Twenty years on, and your mother still comes to your doctor's appointments, I see," Angela said. Her voice had a teasing lilt. "It's good to see that some things never change."

Fareeha blanched slightly at the comment, but managed a self-conscious chuckle. Before she could muster a comeback, though, her mother interjected,

"What can I say? It's been far too long since I have gotten to spend some quality time with my daughters."

Angela smiled tenderly at this, and, eschewing her usually impenetrable air of professional conduct, drew the two women into a warm hug, whispering,

"It is good to see you both safe."

While Fareeha felt she could never fully understand the depth of the relationship that her mother and Angela had, she had an inclination how important it was to both women. Angela had lost her parents when she was very young, and had lost her young adulthood to the responsibilities of being a medical prodigy. While everybody had treated her with the respect that her abilities commanded, it had always seemed to Fareeha, even when she was quite young, that Angela missed out on some of the pleasures and adventures that came of stumbling through youth. When her mother had taken the young doctor under her wing, it provided a space for her to be her own age.

With the three of them together hidden away in the medical office after hours, or in the Amari's quarters, they had a private little world all their own. A world where her mother could shed the weight of her reputation forged in the desperation of the Omnic Crisis and simply be a doting mother. Where Angela could let herself be the curious, gawky teenager that she might have been had she been born in a more peaceful time. And even little Fareeha herself could pretend that they were a simple little family. A family that didn't need to worry about saving broken bodies or choosing which lives would end, which would continue. A family free from concerns about where they would live next week, free from questions over who fathered Fareeha or whether Angela's research was, strictly speaking, ethical.

Over the years in that private world, Angela had been many things to Fareeha. A second mother, at times, with how she doted on her when she was young. A sister, at times. Her mother had said sometimes how much she had wanted to have a great big family, so they would never be alone, after all. But as the age gap between them became smaller, and Fareeha started to notice Angela's legs, Angela's breasts, Angela's milky throat, any thought of her as family became too awkward to bear.

And in this moment, as she mentally prepared herself to be poked and prodded by the woman who prompted so many years of emotional uncertainty, every one of these old thoughts came flooding back. At this point she had spent more years out of contact with Angela as she had spent around her, and rationally knew that they were both adults now who could have a personable relationship uncomplicated by adolescent hormones.

But the rational side of her brain had little sway over the roiling in her gut that made her feel like she was thirteen again.
Rather than stew in it, though, she spoke up, as she stepped onto the clinic's scale. A lesson that she had learned at fifteen was that the real Angela's unpredictable nature was far more reassuring than the version held in her head.

"So, Angela, I saw in your file that you were doing work in Jordan? You should have given me a call! I could see Jordan from my window on a clear day."

The doctor smiled sheepishly, staring pointedly at the pad she was writing Fareeha's weight on, which... had it dropped again? Hopefully she could get it back up before her mother started hounding her about it.

"I'm sorry, Fareeha. I did think about it, you know. But those first few years I was so wrapped up in my work, trying to get out of the shadow of Overwatch. And by the time I looked up, it had been four years, your mother was..." she hesitated for a moment, trying to dance around what would likely be a harrowing topic for some time.

"Gone," she finally said, "and I just wasn't sure how to anymore."

As she stepped off the scale to sit on the examination table, she gave Angela's shoulder a squeeze and smiled reassuringly.

"It's in the past now. I'm sure we'll more than make up for lost time."

Angela smiled warmly at this, and nodded, "I look forward to it."

"By the way, did you ever make it to any of the Mumenshantz revival shows?"

"Goodness, I'm surprised you remembered that! Er, say 'ah' for me." As Angela inspected Fareeha's mouth and throat, Ana filled in, chuckling at the memory

"Are you kidding me? When you showed her those creepy clowns of yours she had nightmares for weeks! Took her years before she stopped shuddering at the sight of black jumpsuits and masks."

If she were completely honest, masks still freaked Fareeha out, just a little bit. But now was perhaps not the most dignified moment to reveal that.

"But to answer your question, I never did, I'm afraid. There are videos of it online, but it just isn't the same."

As the tongue depressor was taken from her mouth, Fareeha raised her eyebrows "It certainly seems that way. I can imagine that having your psyche clawed at in person in real time is clearly the more compelling experience."

Angela shoved her shoulder with a little giggle, "Oh yes! And on the way out they even give you a free referral to a therapist." She sighed wistfully "Ahhh, but I could just never manage to justify it to myself. There was always somewhere in the world that needed my help."

"And let me guess" Ana interjected, "you also haven't owned a couch or a padded chair in all this time, either? Probably hasn't even treated herself to a chocolate bar since I last saw her, either." She winked at Fareeha. Anyone else attempting to wink with only one eye probably would have looked, well, like they were just blinking. But to Fareeha at least, the gesture was unmistakable. More than anything, it was these little things that made her mother feel well and truly home.

That feeling of coming home was quickly shattered, however, when her mother nonchalantly mentioned, "I must admit, my visiting is not entirely social. If I am to aid you in keeping these silly
people alive, Angela, I suppose I should be acquainted with the facilities."

To any outside observer, it would have come off as a neutral comment, at most. Perhaps even a humble one, in deferring to Angela's greater level of expertise. But Fareeha noticed the subtle command in her tone. There was no question, or room for questioning in what she said. It was, in her mind, a statement of fact. And just as apparent to Fareeha was the almost imperceptible steeling of Angela's features as she inhaled, lips tightening. All of a sudden Fareeha felt like she was thirteen again, but instead of the pleasant warmth of before, it was the chill of seeing her elders fight as though she was not there.

After what was likely no less than a second, but what felt like endless frosty minutes, Angela replied, "If you are talking about that device, Ana, I really can't say that I approve—"

Judging by her practiced diplomatic tone, she probably had more to add on to the statement. But Ana snatched onto the brief pause like a bird of prey.

"What can I say? It suits my purposes. Seems a little late to get a degree in medicine."

Angela opens her mouth, but closes it again in a tight-lipped disingenuous smile. Fareeha's heart wilted at the sight of it. She had barely had time to bury the mixed, volatile emotions the felt about her mother's return to avoid dealing with them. She wasn't sure she had it in her to see a fight break out in what she hoped would be a safe haven to return to.

After taking a breath, though, Angela, thankfully, did not retaliate. But her expression stayed as distant and unreadable as before.

"Then I guess it is as good a time as any to discuss the modifications I have requested to Fareeha's armor."

The words slipped off her tongue, cold and slick as glass.

"After reviewing combat data from other Helix Security personnel, and comparing it to other soldier augmentation programs across the world, I am finding the safety features in the Raptora armor… Quite lacking. As I'm sure you have seen firsthand, Fareeha, if someone wearing these suits is wounded in battle, what might have been treatable injuries are quickly made more devastating by falling from the air, and by the suit itself acting as a barrier to getting to the wounded area in time."

Thankfully, talking shop always did seem to unravel Angela's barriers. The cold look in her eye was slowly being replaced with one of deep concern, which she directed quite pointedly at Fareeha, going as far to gesture towards some of her more prominent scars.

"With our limited facilities and the design necessities of flight armor, there is little that can be done to fully rectify this. But, after researching the Russian method of automatically disabling their mobile armor at first sign of an attempted hijacking from an Omnic program, I believe I have devised a solution that will improve safety in your Raptora armor and Hana's MEKA a great deal in the short-term."

She made her way to her desk, rifling around until she found a ream of papers covered in technical specifications and bullet-pointed lists of procedures. She handed it to Fareeha, and continued, "I'll let you look over all the details at your leisure. The simple version is that this medical subroutine will monitor your vitals and, when injuries occur, the suit will react in your stead if you are incapacitated or disoriented. For example, if a fracture is occurred and you are falling, your thrusters will automatically engage to orient your body to shield the fractured area and slow your descent."
After landing, the suit will disable movement around the fractured area so that it cannot be further aggravated. As well, the locks on your armor will be made remotely controllable, so that an ally can quickly remove it to treat any wounds, or remove you from the area."

Flipping through the dossier, a lot of the technical jargon was going straight over Fareeha's head. But, what she did understand checked out, and she trusted Angela to have her safety in mind. Some of the injuries she had seen on her comrades in Egypt still kept her up at night with regret. And if this might lead to developments that would stop such preventable deaths in the future, any of these features would be worth it.

Even if the phrase "remotely lockable joints" gave her the willies.

She looked up from the papers, setting them aside for now. She would have time to look them over more thoroughly in private later. "Thank you Angela. I appreciate this greatly. Although, hopefully we won't have to put these systems to the test any time soon."

Angela smiled at this, relaxing a little more. Ana rose and clapped her daughter on the back.

"Yes, thank you. If my foolish daughter here can't help but run far and fast from a safe life, it's good to know that someone is still looking out for her."

Fareeha made an expression of only half-mocking exasperation, and the comfort of the trio returned, albeit uneasily.

"But, in any case, if I know my girls at all, I know that it is entirely likely that neither of you have eaten enough once in the last decade. Let's go see if the boys left us anything for dinner."

And with her familiar roguish smile, the closest she could muster to motherly tenderness outside of looking at childhood photographs, Ana waved them on towards the facility's dining hall.

"Colonel Kim wants to know where you are."

Hana took her headset off with one hand and dropped it in the kitchen counter. She couldn't use the hologram or screen functions on her phone (as secrecy was paramount to this clandestine resurrection of Overwatch), so she was using her phone as a phone, like some Cro-Magnon savage from a hundred years ago.

"Colonel Kim can't know where I am, Harry," Hana said. "I'm on leave."

"You still have obligations, Hana."

"I know. And I plan on meeting them. But if I burn out, I'm useless. I'm on leave. Me-time is me-time."

Harry sighed on the other end of the phone. "Can you at least make the premiere in LA?"

Hana punched the bridge of her nose with her free hand. "I'm sorry, Harry."

"Hana, if the female lead of a spring tentpole picture doesn't make the American premiere… The internet's gonna have a field day with this. You know that, right? 'Oh, one of the stars bailed on the premiere, the movie's gonna suck.'"

"Harry…"

"Just… Just respect the position this puts me in. Okay? That's all I ask. Respect it."
Hana closed her eyes and nodded, forgetting that Harry couldn't actually see her. "Yeah, Harry, yeah, I respect it."

"Thank you… Enjoy your vacation, huh?"

Harry hung up without saying goodbye. Hana put the phone down next to her headset.

"Boyfriend?"

Hana spun around. Sitting in the dark, in the corner of the kitchen, still wearing the outfit he wore during training, was Jack Morrison. His facemask was resting on the table at which he sat, next to a paper plate that held half of a sandwich. Tuna, and… were those potato chips?

"No," Hana finally said. "Publicist."

"Right," Jack said. "You have a movie coming out, don't you?"

Hana nodded. "Hero of My Storm."

Jack nodded in return. "Any good?"

Hana felt herself almost slip into what she called Public Property Mode, wherein she must wholeheartedly endorse everything she laid her hands on. Yes, the film is spectacular! You can really see the money on the screen! But me-time was me-time, after all.

"It sucks," Hana said. "The government of my country asked me to star in it. Ease America into the prospect of buying Korean MEKAs."

"Oh," Jack said lightly, and took a bite out of his sandwich.

"You don't think I'm taking this whole Overwatch thing seriously, do you?"

Jack swallowed. "Oh, I know you're not taking it seriously. Even if I didn't hear you tell your publicist that you were pretty much on vacation…"

"Which you did."

"…I could tell from your behavior in the simulation room. Tell me, was jump-jetting Genji behind enemy lines really necessary?"

"Hey," Hana said, putting some stink on her words. "Hey. I don't see you crawling all over Genji for flipping around everywhere."

"Genji flipping around serves a purpose," Jack said. "It draws eyes, and it draws fire. It gets the bad guys to un-bunker once they see a target. It buys me time, it buys Ana time, to find a point of attack. Up until that point though? You stay behind Reinhardt's shield until we can find a place for you. And that pink metal monstrosity you're in. And I vouch for Genji. I know how he thinks. Hell, I can even vouch for Mei, who I don't know, and has no combat experience, because she stays behind the shield without anyone having to tell her to. But you? You I can't figure out. I know you got the world on a string, which begs the question of why you're trying so damn hard to get arrested doing something illegal. And why you're doing that illegal thing so poorly."

Jack stood up. "Why are you here?"
Hana put her hands on the hips off her blue body suit and looked down at the floor for a moment, before meeting Jack's eyes again.

"Do you know what I found a week before I took Winston's call? A gray hair, Jack. I'm nineteen years old, but... it doesn't feel that way."

Hana pointed at the company logos on the leg of her body suit. "See these? These companies pay me to be me. But of you get paid *just* to be you, you're not you anymore."

Jack nodded. "So it's like the fella said. You're not a businessman, you're a *business, man.*"

"Right," Hana said. "I'm a public commodity for the greater good. I'm rich. I'm famous. I'm *important...* and I'm going gray."

Hana let that hang in the air, before she took a step forward.

"See that?" Hana asked.

"What?"

"That was me, putting one foot in front of the other. No one told me to do it. No one asked me to do it. It didn't benefit anyone besides myself, but I did it anyway. Because I wanted to. So if you ask me why I joined Overwatch... That's your answer."

Jack looked Hana up and down. "I respect that," he said. "But if you ask me..."

"Which I didn't."

"... you take yourself too seriously. And you don't take what you do seriously enough. Which sucks, because there has to be something to you, as so many people see it. But if you take the opposite approach? Then you're a grown-up. Officially, I mean."

"Do grown-ups fake their death?"

Hana immediately regretted saying that, but if Jack was offended, neither his face, nor his timing, indicated as much.

"All the time," Jack said. "And don't worry about the going gray thing. It makes *me* look distinguished, anyway. I don't know about you."

Hana pointed at the sandwich behind Jack. "I thought we just had those nasty rations."

"Mei made a grocery run," Jack said.

"Did she get any Mountain Dew?"

Jack's eyebrows rose. "You drink that stuff?"

"Yeah."

"Mei didn't get any Mountain Dew," Jack said. "But I could pee in a mason jar. Same thing, really."

Mei did, in fact, make a grocery run.

It had been a week since the first meeting in the conference room, and no word had yet arrived from
Talon backchannels on Reaper's whereabouts or intent. This week was filled with training exercises, with Angela's insistence on taking blood and tissue samples, with three meals a day of disgusting rations that were a decade old.

Until finally, something had to give, and Lucio Correia dos Santos, being a wealthy man, took it upon himself to provide for those assembled in this deceptively large underground Overwatch base by paying for groceries. Anything to stop the madness.

But it was Doctor Mei-ling Zhou who had persuaded Lucio that allowances must be made for booze.

It was Mei who stood at the head of one of the tables in the mess hall, holding in her hand a small paper cup filled with an amber liquid, displaying it to those assembled as though it were a tablet of a deity's word, hewn from the rock of Mount Sinai. Mei was a small woman, in pajama bottoms and a blue tank top that accentuated the roundness of her, well, everything, but with this cup in her hand, she stood as mighty as a Norse Valkyrie.

“This,” Mei said, "is known only as 'The Demon Deacon.' Its world tour is both legendary, and ongoing, starting at the science lab at Wake Forest University, continuing to Watchpoint Antarctica, before finally coming to the swingingest part of swinging London. The Demon Deacon's ingredients are known only to a select few, of which I am one. And this select few know that The Demon Deacon is a shot that can clean the rust off of an internal combustion engine block. The Demon Deacon is a shot that can de-ice the wings of an airplane. The Demon Deacon is a shot… that can end… a marriage."

Mei slowly brandished the paper cup containing The Demon Deacon to everyone seated at the table: first at Torbjorn on her immediate right, then to Brigitte sitting next to him, then Reinhardt, before crossing the table to Lena, and then Lucio, who was on Mei’s immediate left.

"Only the bravest enter the lair of The Demon Deacon,” Mei said. "And only the hardiest survive its fiery touch. So, assembled members of Overwatch… Who is worthy?"

One artificial arm (which was more like a lobster's claw than an arm, really) went up.

"I am worthy," Torbjorn Lindholm said. If the lips under his long, golden beard were smiling, no one could tell. Even this silly intro to a shot was to be undertaken with the utmost gravity.

Mei grinned, and handed the paper cup to Torbjorn, who downed The Demon Deacon without hesitation.

Nothing happened.

"That's it?" Brigitte asked.

"Wait for it…” Mei said.

Torbjorn grunted. "There is no drink on earth that can…"

Whatever Torbjorn was going to say next was lost to history, as a sudden and violent coughing spasm enveloped him. His face turned red, and tears came to his one remaining eye.

Everyone else at the table laughed.

Except Lena.

Torbjorn tried to speak between scattered coughs. "It waits until… it gets to your stomach… and
then it's like it... sets itself on fire all the way up to your throat."

As the laughter died down, Brigitte said "You know, I wouldn't have guessed you would be this lively, Mei. You're so cute and tiny."

"I am," Mei said. "But I was stationed at Watchpoint Antarctica where I had to monitor climate change, which means tracking ice floe movements, above-water glacier measurements, and penguin eating habits. After initial set-up, do you know how much time that takes out of a given day?"

"No," Reinhardt said.

"Fifteen minutes. And it can't be done remotely. So for the remaining twenty-three hours and forty-five minutes of those given days, I was stuck inside a small compound with a dozen under-sexed, hyper-driven nerds who sacrificed their social lives for their doctorates. Let's just say a lot of stuff can happen."

"Like what?" Lucio asked.


And everyone (except Lena) laughed at this as well. But all assembled knew not to further this line of questioning. Doctor Mei-ling Zhou was the only survivor of the polar storm that hit Overwatch's Watchpoint Antarctica. All inside went into cryogenic stasis to wait the storm out, and ten years later, Mei was the only one who came out alive.

"You know," Torbjorn said. "They say you are what you eat. Reinhardt, why are you a ten-year-old ration?"

Reinhardt Wilhelm (who was boisterous on the battlefield and proper to an almost prissy extent everywhere else) looked up.

"This ration had everything my body needs."

"But not everything your body wants," Mei said.

"I need to be in peak physical condition," Reinhardt said, before he noticed Brigitte was munching on a hamburger. He seemed almost hurt by this.

"What?" Brigitte asked. "I'm your mechanic, I don't actually have to wear that armor. I can eat whatever I want."

To prove this point, Brigitte took an extra large bite. Reinhardt seemed helpless.

"Why are you all picking on me?" Reinhardt asked. "Look at Lucio. He's eating a fish sandwich and drinking water. Pick on him."

"This is true," Torbjorn said. "Do you not eat red meat, Friend Lucio? Do you not drink?"

"I do," Lucio said. "Just not during Lent, that's all."

"Awww," Brigitte said. "I want to pinch your cheeks."

"And I want to play clothes-free Guess-the-Element with Fareeha," Lucio said. "That doesn't mean it's ever gonna happen."
So loud was the ruckus of laughter and whooping that no one noticed Lena silently get up and leave without eating or drinking anything. The remainder of the conversation followed her out of the room.

"Did you save any beer for Fareeha?" Torbjorn asked.

"There are a couple for her in the fridge," Mei said. "I know she's Muslim, but I don't know if that means she can't drink. If they go missing, then we'll know."

One of the first and most persistent questions that Lena "Tracer" Oxton received after returning from the time-warp was whether or not she had seen God. By now she had at least a dozen quips to answer with that would garner a laugh and let her move on.

"Barely missed him! Could only make it as far back as his day off and he'd scarpered already."

"I met a big lion and that nice black bloke who voiced all them documentaries, but my mate tells me they're strictly allegorical."

"I did. Sold me a bridge in Brooklyn... At least I think that was Him..."

Among others. But were Lena to be honest, for all that she had seen, she had no vocabulary to describe or even understand almost any of it. Everything was just too powerful. Sure she'd seen her own birth, from every angle, from every perspective of everyone in the room, and in every variation where she came out backwards, sideways, had a twin, or ended up being born strangled black and blue. And then there were the histories, the knights in armor, the endless men in robes with sticks and livestock backdropped by every possible landscape on Earth, the space shuttle launches and the drawings on cave walls.

But after a few viewings that was the easy stuff. Floating like a mote of dust through the picture-house of all existence there was no sleeping. But at least she could zone out and let humanity wash over her like warm rain. Those sights were the comforting exception to everything else for most of the time that she had spent unstuck. Because no matter if she were ten-thousand years removed in any direction from the time that she knew, or in a reality with so many different variations so as to be entirely unrecognizable, there was always a reference point. Earth and its humans were her home, even when it was totally unrecognizable. With even the most oblique reference point to the world she knew, she could find her way back to herself, pick herself back up, one atom at a time, and get her bearings. Even for just a moment.

She got better at it. But that wasn't most of her trip.

Obviously time became meaningless when she became unstuck from it, but there was still an adjustment period. If she had seen God it would have been in the immediate aftermath of the accident. And it was as she was tumbling that she saw the most beyond describing. Cosmic bodies dancing like savages in the night. The eyes within eyes in the dark that made black holes look like a flaming torch. All things twisting, churning, glowing, defying light, defying gravity, defying reason. She'd wanted to cry, but had no eyes to weep. She wanted to scream, but had no mouth to open. And in this tumbling void where all the nothing becomes something and everything isn't, even those concepts rapidly boiled away. What are eyes to that beyond sight? What is a mouth to that beyond sound? What does it even mean to feel if there's nobody there to do it?

She had no idea who she was. But even that kind of simple phrasing couldn't capture it. The concept of self, the concept of knowing, were meaningless in the warp. Her consciousness was inseparable from all that surrounded her, and there was only the one possible feeling that could be felt—the overwhelming crushing feeling of existence that was pleasure, pain, impossibly loud and quieter than
death, the sadness, the joy, the joy of sadness and the sadness of joy. Everything wrapping into and out of and between itself and around everything else.

Or in simpler terms, really bleeding scary, all that.

If they'd wanted a description of the time beyond time, they should have sent a poet. Lena, though? She was just some bird from the seedy end of Lewisham who joined the RAF after barely stumbling through secondary school.

Primarily, more than any great philosophical point or eternal question, the thing that Lena learned as she became more proficient at navigating through time and alternate realities, were twofold. First, is that going to bed and waking up and going through the day knowing that she is herself, is the most brilliant thing in the world and she'd never take it for granted again. Second, is that even through every possible disaster, natural or artificial, through every possible war and mishap and cosmic event, it would all basically be okay in the end. Everywhere she'd gone on Earth, there were people. And when she returned in different times, in whole different timelines of different decisions, there always existed some version of those people who were better than the ones they'd seen before.

And for the most part, that was good enough for her. That was enough to keep her chipper through almost all the horrors she'd seen, almost every day.

Almost.

There were days that came when the Single Indescribable Feeling would overtake her. Some of those days she lost herself for a little while, forgetting who she was, when she was, walking into doors or talking out of turn because she couldn't figure out if she was herself or the person she was with. Other days she could feel herself getting lost before it happened, and she would scream just to know that she could scream, and cry just to know that she still could.

So when people looked at her funny when they found out she studied the teachings of Tekhartha Mondatta, she found it hard to fully explain to them why it appealed to her. To a lot of people, religion was still a stodgy, dusty word that evoked images of confession boxes and chastity belts. Of repression, hypocrisy, and swallowing vague answers wholesale without question. But in the Shambali, Lena found seemingly the only people in the world who could even begin to understand what she had gone through. The focus on questioning and finding peace in the sometimes contradictory and slippery concepts of identity, of existence, even if it was tailored to people who had been put together in a factory, resonated deeply with her.

And so, to this day, the meditations and the mindfulness really helped make those days of feeling unstuck fewer and further between.

Today, however, was not one of those grounded days.

By all means it should have been. She had the good fortune to be led by Mondatta's brother himself, Zenyatta, and his prized pupil, Genji Shimada. But no matter how much she tried to focus inward, find her peace, there was always thought clawing its way in on the edges. While she'd learned over time how to pick up and put down her own insecurities and fears as she could handle them, the problems of others were still something that had a way of latching onto her back like a monkey. And apparently, it showed during the evening's meditation in a converted compound in the King's Row facility.

And Zenyatta, in the way that only he could, effortlessly found the itch in the back of her mind.

"What is your preoccupation with the French woman?" Zenyatta asked. "Once you can say it aloud,
then we can truly begin."

She blanched at how precisely he pinpointed the object of her frustration. Part of her wanted to try to shrug it off, or at least question whether he really wanted to get involved with her personal angst. But, then again, he did break away from the Shambali monasteries and teaching circuits to get directly involved in helping people.

"Well," she said, starting slowly, "every morning, I wake up and try to do the right thing. I know it's hard. Everyone tells me it's hard. But it's what I try to do. And even when I muck it up, I can at least say that I tried. I tried to be a good person. Because no one wakes up to make the world worse."

She sighed.

"But she killed Mondatta. One of the brightest lights in the world, right? Tried to bring peace, end war. I… I need to know what it was that made Amelie Lacroix wake up and decide that killing him was a good idea. What made her convince herself that she wasn't a bad person?"

As Lena finished, Zenyatta nodded to her, and hummed in consideration. It was a low sound, like someone accidentally leaning on an electric keyboard. Comforting, in its own way.

"We are all one in The Iris," Zenyatta said. "Each step ripples outward to our families. To our loved ones. To those we have never met. For each step is a marker proclaiming that we, however briefly, were here on this planet. That the soil shifted beneath our feet. That our cast shadows tell the story of our bodies stopping the light of the sun from reaching the ground."

He paused momentarily, his thought processes audibly whirring and clicking in the quiet room.

"Know that the ripples you cast are immutable. Invincible. Unpredictable. I know that you are careful, my child, just as much as I know that others are not. In their pursuits, no matter how noble, they tread deeper than they should. And others are overtaken by their footfalls."

"And you're saying Amelie's one of those uncareful people?" Lena asked.

Zenyatta hummed again.

"Amelie…Is one of their victims."

Lena knitted her brow. By now most of this made some kind of sense, but it was still taking her a moment to transpose it into the English language and pragmatic reality. Seeing this, Genji turned his head toward them from his sitting position on the floor.

"Consider: We are at Point B. We all started at Point A. The paths we all took to get here are very different from one another. People hold different things sacred. People throw different things away. But we are all still unique and whole. The key to holding peace with others is to realize that attempting to change them is folly."

Something clicked in Lena's head, and she retorted.

"So after what your brother did to you, you wouldn't try to change him? Try to get him to better himself?"

"No."

The statement fell from Genji's vocalizer with impressive finality. But even so, once the answer settled a moment later, he continued.
"Just because I would not try to change him," Genji said, "does not mean I would not try to reach him. The difference between people is not as great as the difference between peace and turmoil. When your eyes are open, you step on fewer toes."

Lena thought about this, and let her defenses wind their way down, before nodding uneasily.

"Finding your own personal peace means inflicting fewer of the people you love with your own personal war," Genji said. "Just because your burdens should be acknowledged, does not mean they should be carried."

"For example," Zenyatta said, interrupting, and even without a face capable of expression, Lena could hear the wry smile in the master's words. "My pupil here would rather pine over the good doctor Ziegler than approach her openly."

Genji looked away, shifting slightly in his seated position before muttering,

"She already bore a responsibility over me. She is too… She should not be made to bear any more."

Between Zenyatta's statement and Genji's sudden bashfulness, Lena was pulled from her thoughts long enough to break into her shit-eatingest of grins.

"My, my! You and Swiss Miss eh, lad?"

Lena could tell that Genji wanted to defend himself from this scrutiny, and preserve the decorum of a holy man from the altogether undignified position of being a guy who had a girl he was too nervous to talk to, but Athena, chiming in overhead, had other ideas.

"All Overwatch personnel, please assemble in the conference room..."

Hissing static over the radio...

"Reyes and Lacroix."

"What about them?"

"They killed one of our guys going for the bounty. Stay away from Ilios. They're too big for us."

Winston pressed a button on Athena's console, and the transmission silenced. He turned to everyone in the room.

"That," Winston said, "is a recording from Talon communications. It seems we have a location for Reaper and Widowmaker."

"Ilios," Hana said. "That's in Greece, right?"

"It is," said Fareeha.

"What's in Greece?" Lena asked. "Besides yogurt and democracy, I mean."

Ana rose before them in the front of the room, and put her hands behind her back.

"The Ilios port," she said. "Athena cross-referenced the shipments going in and out."

"What did you find?" Jack asked.
"Omnium fusion cores," Athena said.

"Ummm," Mei said. "I'm not an expert, but… terrorists can use those to make bombs, right?"

"They can," Torbjorn said. "Powerful ones."

"The terrorists, or the bombs?"

"Both," Winston said. "One makes the other."

"Not if we stop them," Ana said, smiling as she did so. "Suit up and head to the hangar. The first combat operation of the new Overwatch is a go as of now…"
Chapter 4: See Reflections on the Water

Ilios

Welcome to Ilios, a jewel on the coast of the Mediterranean, known as a tourist destination of The Titan of Ilios; the four-hundred foot statue of an ancient Greek warrior in Ilios Harbor, that greets both cruise ships and shipping vessels alike.

But Ilios is also known (in financial circles anyway) for the recently established Port of Ilios. Anyone East of Turkey who makes something that they wish to sell in the European mainland knows that their goods don’t make it there unless they go through Ilios first—be these goods Yemeni coffee, Indian Hard-Light apparati, Korean defense equipment… or Ethiopian omnium fusion cores, which were the cheapest on the market for their efficiency. This made Ethiopia a formidable world power after the end of The Omnic Crisis, as one of the keys to peace between man and machine was that omnis could no longer make the fuel sources which powered the omnium factories on their own.

And it was in this picturesque seaside destination (studded at regular intervals by expensive, touristy espresso bars) that Alastair Petrakolous, Ilios’ mayor, was awoken in the pre-dawn hours by one of his aides.

“Sir, you need to see this.”

The walk to city hall was a short one, and when he got there, those who were still in the building were flustered, clearing their desks of their belongings and exiting with a huff.

And it wasn’t until Mayor Petrakolous made it to his office that he found out why.

“Greetings,” the holographic imaging system installed by his predecessor on the rear wall said. “If you are hearing this, your town will be the site of an Overwatch operation within the next twenty-four hours. It is strongly advised that you use your administrative powers to evacuate the town immediately, until such a time that an Overwatch representative can contact you, giving the all-clear. Thank you for doing your part in making the world a better place. Greetings. If you are hearing this…”

“What do we do?” the aide asked.

Alastair Petrakolous was, above all things, interested in self-preservation, and did not want to be the one in charge when a group of costumed yahoos came into Ilios to destroy everything when he had been given ample opportunity to protect the people of his town.

In spite of the chance that this was a malfunction on Overwatch’s part and that this was nothing to worry about, Alastair Petrakolous elected to evacuate Ilios.

There are two quirks in a post-Overwatch world that were perfectly captured in the temporary departure of Ilios’ citizens from their home. The first was that anyone under the age of fifteen not only did not know how to evacuate, indeed, they barely knew what Overwatch was. It was up to the older people of the town to hastily lay down the ground rules for an Overwatch evacuation: take only what you need, find someone and hold on to their hand, and if possible, leave a store-bought health pack out where someone (hopefully Overwatch personnel) could use it.
The second was the almost serene confidence in those in their early twenties and over. Those of high school age among Ilios’ evacuating residents figured that this was a world their elders had wanted to come back because it reminded them of their youth, like an old band going on tour again. But the truth was far more banal, for even eight years after the organization’s official dissolution, insurance companies still sold Overwatch insurance, and most in the town (indeed, most people in developed countries) still bought it.

And it was into this almost abandoned town that a dropship bearing the Overwatch sigil on its side landed on a hotel rooftop near the center of town. And this dropship bore the latest iteration of the group that had once saved the world.

“Winston,” Ana asked. “Can you read me?”

“Loud and clear,” Winston said over the radio from his spot in the control room back in London. “Just a reminder to use callsigns for proper synching.”

“Wait,” Hana said. “Why do we need to use callsigns? Why can’t we use our names?”

“Everyone,” Ana said, “point to Captain Amari.”

Half of the dropship’s passengers pointed to Ana while the other half pointed to Fareeha, standing both bulky and resplendent in her blue Raptora armor.

“That’s why.” Ana said. “And considering the ghost of murders past is haunting Overwatch, a nod towards secrecy doesn’t hurt. Care to go first?”

“Um… Sure,” Hana said. “D. Va, signing in.”

“Pharah, operational,” Fareeha said.

“Mercy, on call” said Angela (whose extraness in the eyes of Hana “D. Va” Song was only enhanced by her Valkyrie Response Suit, which could have been mistaken by anyone for an angel costume).

“Tracer’s here, luv,” said Lena.

“Soldier: 76 standing by,” said Jack.

“Zenyatta is present.”

“Genji. Nominal.”

“Ana online.”

“Lucio’s here to kick it.”

“Torbjorn. Ready.”

“Mei checking in!”

“Reinhardt is here to protect the innocent!” bellowed Reinhardt, thumping the floor of the aircraft with his hammer and striking a pose.

At which point everyone in the dropship looked at Reinhardt, and by his almost imperceptible cringe D. Va could imagine the old German going red in the face behind that massive helmet.
“What?” Reinhardt asked, going in an instant from a macho warrior to an old man who didn’t know he embarrassed himself almost instantly. “I really missed this! I’m excited to be here.” Tracer giggled at his enthusiasm, and clapped him on the back.

“Anyway,” Soldier: 76 said, “we work in a six person formation. Me, Pharah, D. Va, Reinhardt, Tracer, and Mercy to start. The rest will be two minutes behind us. Understand?”

Everyone nodded.

“Oh, and D. Va?” Soldier: 76 asked.

D. Va looked at him.

“No streaming.”

“Dammit…”

As the bay doors of the shuttlecraft opened, an uncanny sight greeted the team. The sun shone cheerily in a cloudless perfect blue sky, making the bright white plaster and the milky flagstones of the plaza glow. In the distance through thin gaps between the crowded buildings the Mediterranean sparkled gaily and what looked like a cruise ship lazily made its way past the island. But despite the idyllic scene, there was an eerie silence. Doors were left ajar up and down the street, swaying slowly in the gentle breeze. A loose scarf caught on the wind, lurching its way around the empty walkway, never fully taking flight. Food, drinks, coats, purses were all left abandoned in the open-air restaurants that lined the plaza.

They had all encountered this scene before, a hundred times or more in a hundred different cities in their previous military careers. The skills were the same every time, even if the places changed—eyes in all directions, every corner checked, every door or blind corner potentially housing a bomb, an Omnic turret emplacement, or a simply wide-eyed young man too hopped up on adrenaline to consider his own life beyond scoring a kill for his cause. Risks were everywhere, in all directions in tight streets like these. It almost made a few of them wish for the slog of trenches and open fields—sure, the risk of getting evaporated by artillery or landmines was that much greater, but at least it would be over and done with.

As they made their way through the narrow winding footpaths between buildings, Reinhardt covered the front, his shield broad enough to reach from one edge of the alleyway to the next. Pharah took to the rooftops scouting ahead and keeping her eyes on the sky. The occasional growl of her thrusters as she moved from building to building and the slick skitch of Lucio’s skates the only sounds to break up the team’s lonesome, echoing marching steps. Soldier: 76 and Tracer peered into each doorway and window they passed with weapons at low ready, checking corners and making note of possible lines of ingress and egress for themselves and their potential enemies.

One picturesque lane of shops, homes, and restaurants blended into the next, and the next, until it was hard to remember the exact route they’d taken away from the ship. The initial sting of disheveled, emptied out living spaces began to ease, but there was still the distinct feeling of walking in an open field with a metal rod in a storm, just waiting for that lightning to finally strike.

"In a razor sharp buzzing they come to haul me from my bat-infested nightmare time," Mercy muttered under her breath. In most situations, it would have barely registered to anyone not paying attention. But over the communicators, her voice came across as a low, crackling hiss. "A dimming, from which they, inexorably entwined, are just as much a part of."
"Not helping, doc," Tracer said with a sharp inhale as she eased open another door.

Mercy shrugged and frowned "I recite poetry when I'm nervous."

"Know any poems that don't have bat-infested nightmare times?" Soldier: 76 asked. "Maybe some Shel Silverstein?"

If Mercy did, she didn't say anything. No one said anything.

The silence was broken gradually, by the sound of tank treads grinding against the flagstones. It started far off, but became louder worryingly fast. Most of the small strike team had no idea what to make of the noise. Their surveillance should have caught a tank being airlifted onto the island, after all. But even if one had slipped past, these pathways were far too small for one to drive through without levelling whole city blocks. To the wizened ears of Soldier: 76 and Reinhardt, however, the familiar sound seized their hearts in a vicelike grip of visceral fear.

“It can’t be…” muttered Reinhardt, dumbstruck. His armor covered every part of his body with seven millimeters of hardened steel plating, but for all it reassured him he might as well have been nude. He gripped his hammer with white knuckles as the grinding of the treads finally got close, and the source of it turned the corner, coming into view 30 meters ahead. To D.Va, it looked a little like an overgrown version of the remote controlled monster truck her neighbor had played with on summer nights when the streets were clear. To Soldier: 76, it may as well have been Lucifer himself, opening up the gates to Hell.

“BASTION UNIT, TAKE COVER!” Bellowed Soldier: 76 as a shell crashed into Reinhardt’s shield, cracks spiderwebbing across the translucent surface.

Five minutes earlier…

Satya Vaswani (callsign: “Symmetra”) stood in one of the abandoned streets of Ilios, looking up at the Overwatch dropship landing on the roof of the Apollo hotel.

Two weeks prior, Winston sent out the Overwatch recall not only to former agents, but to hopefuls that he had hoped to recruit. But not all of these hopefuls accepted the call.

Indeed, some of these hopefuls received a second message from someone else, who identified themselves only as “R,” and spoke of a great corruption within this new Overwatch that only he could stop, and R (later to be identified as Gabriel Reyes) also tried to recruit them.

And when her superiors in the Vishkar Corporation were made aware of these messages, they ordered Symmetra to side with Reaper to protect corporate interests.

But Symmetra was not alone on this street. To her immediate right were two men from the radiated outback of Australia, the fat and stoic one being Mako “Roadhog” Rutledge, and the scrawny, excitable one being Jamison “Junkrat” Fawkes. Roadhog sighed in his pig-themed gasmask, and Junkrat used his artificial hand to pick his nose.

To their right was someone with whom Symmetra had been trying to avoid eye contact with since they had first met a week prior.

Aleksandra Zaryanova.

Zarya…
The first, unbidden thought that Symmetra had had about Zarya upon their initial meeting was both simple and strange:

*I can technically climb her…*

For Zarya was six foot five, a former bodybuilder and power-lifter in her native Russia, and the thought of actually, *physically* climbing this woman, from the slickness of her black boots to the pinkness of her short hair, made her warm in the pit of her stomach. And for the life of her, Symmetra had no idea *why.*

She had never been good with people, or herself. She knew from a young age, training in Vishkar’s Architech program in Pondicherry, that the smallest physical suggestions of her fellow human beings, the subtle gradations in their voices, would forever elude her. So too would the subtle variations in her own behavior be lost on them. She had decided, in desperation, to adapt a demeanor that others would describe as cold and steely. She knew people didn’t like that, and she knew that she herself never really felt that way on the inside. But at the very least, their reactions would be predictable, and so the world made sense.

But being icy around Zarya was proving… *difficult.* Not when the very sight of her made Symmetra feel such radiant inner warmth. The lush greenness of her eyes, the uncommon pinkness of her hair, the hard and generous *bigness* of her made Symmetra frown until it hurt in order to keep from *smiling.*

So Symmetra decided to keep her distance from Zarya. She didn’t know what Zarya thought of her, nor what of herself that she could give away that Zarya would accept without laughing or running. She didn’t want to be *weird.*

“*Symmetra,*” Reaper said in her earpiece. “*It’s time to begin.*”

“*Affirmative,*” Symmetra said, and looked to the two Australians on her right. “*It’s time.*”

Roadhog stretched his back until it popped. Junkrat, for his part, cackled, an uncanny grin spreading across his face that seemed like it was in danger of splitting his head in two. He turned and clapped his hands.

“*Bastion!*” he called. “*Here, boy!*”

It came, not like a dog, but like an elderly, sightseeing tourist from behind a bank. An omnic Bastion unit, of the kind hostile omniums pumped out during the crisis. Seven feet tall, it was, covered in moss with a canary perching on its shoulder. The bird was every bit as inseparable from Bastion as Bastion itself was from Junkrat. Only Junkrat knew where Bastion came from, and Junkrat wasn’t saying. As the Omnic approached, the man’s grin soured into a poorly-disguised look of disgust.

“Get ready,” he said to Symmetra as Bastion came up to him. Junkrat reached up to shoo away the bird that perched on Bastion’s shoulder. It twittered in annoyance, fluttering a few meters away.

With a few swift movements of Symmetra’s artificial left hand, the canary (which Symmetra had started privately calling “*Ganymede*”) was trapped in a hard light stasis ball, which floated gently back to her. As Bastion gently sauntered toward her to retrieve his companion, Junkrat stopped it with a hand on its chestplate. As he stood with one hand on the robot, and one fishing around his belt, he looked as though he had stepped in something foul. Finally, he produced a string of long-fuse firecrackers out of one of the innumerable pouches and pockets that adorned his body.

“I drop these, you run,” Junkrat said, his smile returning as he lit the fuse of the firecrackers on one
of his locks of hair (which, Symmetra had learned, he kept smoldering during fights).

Junkrat dropped the firecrackers, and everyone scattered out of sight.

As Bastion looked around, wondering why everyone ran away from it, the firecrackers went off in a collection of staccato pops that sounded like gunshots.

Bastion’s demeanor immediately changed. The blue display plate on its face immediately turned red. Anyone who had still been standing there would have heard the hum of its weapons systems coming online.

Bastion was ready for war…

“I CAN’T HOLD OUT, RUN!” Cried Reinhardt, fighting the urge to start running for cover.

A second shell pounded into Reinhardt’s shield, shattering it, and sending a cloud of shrapnel skittering harmlessly across the ground. Yet another shot rang out relentlessly from the barrel of the little tank, leaving a smoldering crater in the front of Reinhardt’s chestpiece, sending him toppling onto the ground. Shots careened past his prone form, blasting through the walls that formed the tight alleyway, and leaving each member of the team on the ground with burns, lacerations, and ringing eardrums.

Pharah, able to escape the worst of it on the rooftop, jetted upwards, firing a concussive burst towards the tank to push it back out of their line of sight. Mercy immediately flew up to join her, caduceus staff pointed back at the ground to heal the wounds the team had just incurred.

“You’ve got a few seconds! Go! You’re sitting ducks down there!” Pharah ordered over the communicator. Free of the explosions for a blessed second, the fireteam scattered. Reinhardt struggled to crawl into an open doorway to regain his bearings (by the feeling of it, Brigitte was going to have stern words with him about the fall onto that hip), until Lucio helped him to his feet and dragged him inside.

“Hey hey big guy, just focus on the beat,” Lucio gently reassured, as one of his songs became audible from his handheld speaker, “this’ll make you feel better.”

Reinhardt grunted as he slumped down against the wall of the apartment they had taken cover in.

“Don’t you have any ‘Hoff on there? Please, I’d like the last song I hear before I die to be something I understand…”

Lucio just chuckled and patted the rapidly recovering old soldier on the Soldier.

“You’re gonna be just fine.” He said with a smile.

Back outside in the alleyway, the Bastion had reappeared around the corner, and seemed poised to begin a second barrage at the scattering Overwatch agents. Heart still kicking like a jackrabbit in her chest from the first engagement, D.Va engaged her thrusters, speeding towards the machine with defense systems up.

“Kid! Get back here, you don’t know what kind of backup that kind of thing has—“growled Soldier: 76 over the communicator, but D.Va was beyond caring. She’d faced bigger. Ten of these things wouldn’t have anything on her.
Shell after shell exploded from Bastion’s barrel, each blast echoing deafeningly in the cramped streets, each shot being vaporized harmlessly by the barrier of the MEKA. She let out a little snort, letting her well-trained arrogance take over as she barreled into her target.

“Huh! Are you even trying?”

But where well-placed trash talking can crack the façade of even the coolest agent, a machine remains dispassionately engaged. Even as it scraped and bounced across the ground from the impact of the MEKA, the Bastion unit rolled up out of its tank configuration and onto its feet, spraying D.Va’s cockpit glass with a hail of bullets as it backed into an alley.

“You’re not getting away that easily” she muttered, maneuvering to follow the retreating figure. She had expected the Omnic to give up easily enough, perhaps standing its ground in one last-ditch exchange, but it just kept running. Every corner she turned as she tailed it, she could barely get a short burst off before it changed direction again. D.Va growled in frustration, ignoring Soldier 76’s repeated orders to call off the chase as a light on her control panel lit up, informing her that her boosters were ready to be used again. With a short laugh, she engaged the thrusters, nimbly skirting around the last corner her prey had turned.

But as she turned the corner, control sticks at full tilt in expectation of quickly overtaking of her quarry, a number of concerning hisses and pops emitted from her MEKA, and its movement ground to a halt.

All around her, electric blue beams of plasma were being emitted from small hard-light turrets hidden between loose flagstones, in shrubs, on the edges of overhangs. D.Va shot frantically at the offending objects, tearing apart the open-air seating area of a restaurant and blowing deep black gouges into the creamy flagstones of the walkway in the process. But before she could get them all, acrid smoke began to pour from the joints of her MEKA, and each pained movement the machine made produced a high-pitched grating noise as damaged rotors tearing themselves apart.

With three of the turrets still eating through the MEKA, and warning lights flashing, D.Va slammed the eject button. She was spat out the back, landing on her feet a few meters behind just in time to see the machine crumple to the ground and emit a few final pathetic pops as the beams of plasma ceased.

With a frustrated sigh, she looked from the smoking remains of her MEKA, to the now-empty street that the Bastion had fled down. At the best of times she hated spending so much energy only to not score a kill. But the sting was worsened now as she considered the fact that she wouldn’t even have the moral high-ground of the elimination to defend herself against Morrison’s inevitable chewing out.

Standing in the silence and stillness of the gleaming maze of fashionable apartments and cafes was quickly giving her the spooks, though. And with a heavy sigh, she drew her pistol and opened up the communicator channel to report back to the rest of the group. It might be a long walk back, and even Morrison’s bitching was better than walking through row after row of empty yawning buildings alone.

In a distant alley, Symmetra could hear the Bastion tank barreling down the street. She turned the hard light stasis ball that held Ganymede over in her artificial hand.

As Bastion neared the alley, she freed the bird from its bonds and Ganymede, instinctively, went in the Omnic’s direction. Once it perched on top of Bastion’s tank barrel, the machine slowed, rearranged itself back into its humanoid form, and gently encouraged Ganymede to land on its shoulder. The display plate on Bastion’s face had gone blue again.
“The Omnic is docile,” Symmetra said.

Reaper’s voice came into her earpiece. “Good,” he said. “The others will be here shortly.”


“Take Bastion and go,” Reaper said, his speech slow and deliberate. “Do what we came here to do.”

“And what will you do?” Symmetra asked.

A pause over the line before Reaper replied.

“Have… Fun…”

Pharah and Mercy soared above the streets with Tracer and Soldier: 76 covering the ground below, on lookout for Lucio and Reinhardt who had gotten lost in the chaos of the Bastion attack. They were still responding on the communicators, thankfully, and with the second fireteam deployed there was a good chance someone would find them soon. All things considered, they were still making good headway toward intercepting the Talon’s theft of the omnium fusion cores. If all they had up their sleeves were a handful of cheap tricks like these, this inaugural mission would be a piece of cake. Even D.Va’s recklessness (she could hear Jack hissing into his communicator even 10 meters up in the air) could be afforded if Talon couldn’t bring themselves to present a united assault.

"No more poetry, or am I just that reassuring?" Pharah asked. Immediately after she had gotten it out, Pharah found, much to her severe consternation, that she didn't have a smooth bone in her body. Whether Mercy didn't pick up on the inadvertent flirtation, or she did and elected to ignore it to humor the poor, square, younger Captain Amari, Pharah could not tell.

"I... I can't think of any when things are exploding around me," Mercy said, wiping a lock of blonde hair from her eye as she flew.

"Okay," Pharah said, trying to smile away her embarrassment. "Honestly, I'm impressed you can reme--SHIT!"

Out of the corner of her eye, something like black smoke coalesced. As she turned in the air to face it, it was already too late. Reaper appeared in the cloud, standing tall and imposing on a rooftop just below her and Mercy, one shotgun aimed at each of them. She tried to warn Mercy, get in front of her, and fire at Reaper all at once, but didn’t have time to do any before two shots boomed out and they began to fall. She reached out in vain, but Mercy was already falling away from her, towards the glass roof of large civic building with what looked like a strange mixture of panic and acceptance in her eyes.

As Pharah tumbled through the air, the perfect white buildings below her rose to meet her like the teeth of some great and terrible maw. With a sickening crunch, she hit the ground

Pharah came to moments later, her visor cracked and armor laying heavily on her body, and she heard two pairs of footsteps approaching with an accompanying voice.

“Well how do you do! Looks like the boss man’s been hunting bird. Tell me Roadie, you ever have roast pigeon?”

She gave a heroic effort to right herself and find her weapon as two figures of comical proportions came into view—both inhumanly tall, one nearly circular in his girth, one rail thin and hunched like a
bundle of bent wire. But as she came to her feet, something latched around the small of her back, and she was lurched forward through the air towards the porcine giant wearing a gas mask.

She had been groggy just moments before, but the shock woke her, and time seemed to slow as she was reeled in ever closer. A distant memory came to her, from when her mother was just beginning to teach her martial arts.

"Remember, habibti: Anyone who grabs you is just as much stuck to you as you are to them. Every good throw starts from this place. All it takes, against anyone, no matter how large, is to press the advantage."

Her mother always told her when she was young that with proper form and a cool head, she could take any man to the ground—even adults much bigger than her like Jack or Gabriel. It looked like that theory would finally be put to the test.

With only a moment to react before the pig man had her in his grasp to do whatever foul deeds he planned with the massive gun held in his other hand, she kicked her feet down, the steel boots of her armor grinding against the flagstones, and wrapped one arm around the chain, holding it as tightly as she could. As she careened towards the barrel of the man’s gun, she threw her legs forward and her body down, effectively ducking out of the way just as the barrel erupted in a belching conflagration of fire and shrapnel. With the chain still in her hand, she heaved herself forward with the last of her momentum, foot connecting squarely with the man’s kneecap. He grunted loudly in pain behind his mask and lurched to the side, but before he could fully react, Pharah gave a mighty pull on the chain attached to his hip, causing him to stumble and crash into the ground.

Wasting no time, she righted herself and delivered a heavy steel-clad kick to the man’s head.

His companion looked on with wide eyes, and an expression of fear and bewilderment. He didn’t hesitate a moment before turning on his heel and hobbling as fast as he could. She noted, now that she had the time, that he had a peg-leg.

*Just what kind of low-budget, old-fashioned cronies had Reaper gotten for himself?*

“Well, seems like you’ve got it handled. Remember, Mack, my old chum, I believe in you!” the peg-legged man called out as he fled.

Below her foot, the pig-like giant grumbled through his mask, “It’s Mako…”

By the tone of his voice, this was clearly a sore spot between the two. She almost felt sorry for the poor beleaguered ogre. But not sorry enough to deliver a final kick under his chin.

Reaper followed Mercy through the shattered skylight of the apartment and spread his smoke along the floor of the living room, like a thick drop of oil polluting the bottom of a shallow puddle of water.

Mercy staggered to her feet, using her Caduceus Staff to gain leverage, before finally leaning on it to keep herself upright. Blood trickled from a small scrape along her cheekbone. He saw the look in her blue eyes go from pain, to confusion, to barely concealed terror as the smoke at her feet told her what was happening.

She looked… *tired.* As though the pain she made a living causing kept her up at night. And he rippled in the air around her in fury. *How dare* she do as people did when she had turned him into a monster? *How dare* she be human when she had made him so inhuman? She was a creature, vile and lascivious from beyond the pale, and this mockery she had made of herself, pretending to be a person who felt guilt, enraged him further. And the greater insult was how she presented herself to
the world. A version of herself so idealized and false that Reaper would have laughed, had not the constant pain insured that he never would again.

An angel.

A creature of mercy.

Reaper began to swirl his smoke around her in a slow-motion whirlpool. To every atom of himself, to every nanite that tortured him and fueled him, he gave voice.

"Angela…"

The sound boomed, came from everywhere, and Mercy jumped slightly at its omnipresence. In an instant that lasted an age, he could feel her falseness as she reassembled her fright into something of a poor man’s veneer of confidence.

“Hello, Gabriel,” Mercy said.

The smoke around her ripped violently as a scream of fury tried to set the very air on fire. Pictures were knocked crooked on the wall and books fell from their shelves. Reaper’s smoke disintegrated the offending tomes before they hit the floor, the nanites taking them apart on an elemental level and absorbing the books into themselves.

“NO!”

Mercy’s air of bravery was a poor one, as Reaper could feel her shaking within him.

“Reaper,” she said.

A small wisp of smoke arose in front of her as the rest of Reaper settled and calmed.

“Yes,” he said, and the wisp of smoke drove itself straight into Mercy’s heart.

She grunted.

And then she screamed.

“YOU DID THIS TO ME!” Reaper screamed, and Mercy could not reply. Her smooth, pale skin, began to wither and gray. Her gums blackened and receded from her perfect teeth. Golden blond hair began to fall from her scalp in clumps. Her beautiful blue eyes began to shrivel and shrink inside empty sockets. Even her tortured screams winnowed away to nothing in her throat as her vocal cords dissolved.

Reaper tore the oxygen from her bloodstream, the air from her lungs, the electrical impulses from her brain, and as she died within his vortex, one thought allayed the pain of his existence. One thought pushed Reaper slightly closer to hope and happiness, before life would, inevitably, pull him back to despair and agony.

Oh, if only I could do this again…

The soles of D. Va’s feet were sore, and her knees began to ache from the running.

Well, the light jogging.

Note… to self, D. Va thought, her interior monologue broken up by the external forces of her deep
breaths. *More... cardio...*

The sound of her winded footfalls provided a beat to the sound of distant crashes, explosions... and what sounded a little like screams from the good Swiss Doctor Tries-Too-Hard.

She hoped Mercy was okay. She tried not to think about the prospect that she was not.

While the violence seemed distant, the street she was on at the moment seemed peaceful and abandoned. D. Va had the itch to just bring another MEKA down and thrust back to Soldier: 76 and Tracer, but Soldier: 76 drilled into her head that she was only to use the MEKA for combat instead of for transport. "It's too big," he said. "As a target, and as a way to block pathways for anyone who might try to get past you."

So on foot it was. She’d stepped on Soldier: 76’s toes enough for one day. Not that she felt threatened by him, but she just didn’t want to hear it right now.

Speaking of whom, D. Va spied Soldier: 76 attempting to hide behind the corner of a store that sold sunglasses a couple of blocks away. Behind the corner of the candy store across the street, Tracer was also hiding. Though given the clingy, yellow-ish orange eyesore of a bodysuit that she was wearing, she’d have to do a better job.

D. Va brought her jog back down to a walk.

*Other note to self; D. Va thought. Ask Tracer how she can run with that bodysuit wedged up the crack in her—*

It was with this next step that D. Va found out that the street wasn’t quite as abandoned as she thought it was.

Unbeknownst to her, D. Va’s foot ran across a laser tripwire. There was no indication that she had done something wrong until it was too late.

It felt like a red-hot steel lance had pierced through her back and driven her to the ground, and it was a moment before she registered that the cracking sound she heard was that of a rifle. Her chin bounced off the street, forcing one of her teeth out of her mouth, where it skittered across a cobblestone.

She was halfway through using her right arm to roll over when the pain began to register in her brain, and she stopped, on her side, and looked down.

Just below her sternum was a black-red stain of blood about the size of an apple, that was rapidly blossoming outward. Dark blood poured from the wound, painting the pearly white cobblestones crimson.

The only relief D. Va found as she died was that the wound explained why she couldn’t breathe. She could still feel the pain, burning like nothing she had ever felt before. But somehow, in the shock and confusion of the sight, the pain seemed trivial, beneath caring about. Even as her vision faded, she couldn’t process her own death.

*It’s getting dark out.*

*I thought it was noon.*

*What time does the sun set in...*
Yellow light flashed.

She was standing, now, instead of lying on her side. Only now was she cognizant of the fact that she was dead.

Except...

*If this is Heaven, it sure looks a lot like Ilios.*

D. Va stepped out from the alley in which she stood and looked down. Her chest was whole. No wound, no blood, no nothing. Not only that, but the sweat that had formed upon her brow from her jog was dry. Her knees no longer ached. The soles of her feet were no longer sore. She licked her lips and found that the dislodged tooth was still in her mouth.

And Soldier: 76 and Tracer were still hiding behind the corners of those shops, but now, she was a few feet behind them instead of a block in front.

As she stepped forward to meet them, D. Va realized that not only had she died and come back to life, but had also teleported twenty feet and changed directions.

Soldier: 76 looked behind him and saw her. If he seemed surprised that D. Va had violated the only law in life that applied to everyone, then she couldn’t tell behind his mask.

“Huh,” Soldier: 76 said. “That’s convenient. Widowmaker’s up in that tower. Or at least her rifle is. I think you activated a tripwire.”

D. Va tried to speak, but a belch came out instead. The only ill effect seemed to be that her stomach was rumbling.

“Why… What happened?”


The rumbling in D. Va’s stomach got worse, and she wasn’t sure she heard him properly.

“’Respawned?’ What… Wh… *I WAS DEAD A MINUTE AGO!*”

“And now you’re not,” Soldier: 76 said, as though he were humoring a sulky toddler. “You know, you should consider yourself lucky. The first time *I* Respawned, I…”

The rumbling became too much to bear. D. Va’s dinner of steak and kidney pie (which Tracer had dared her to eat) erupted from her stomach and surged out of her mouth, before depositing itself on the cobblestones between her feet in chunks a shade of brown unseen in the natural world.

“Yeah…” Soldier: 76 said. “I… I did *that*…”
Chapter 5: More Than Darkness in the Depths

In the years between the end of the Omnic Crisis and the fall of Overwatch, the organization’s top scientists were confronted with a quandary that was, to put the matter mildly, difficult to solve.

For it took the best, the brightest, the bravest, and the strongest to defeat the Omnic menace, and with good reason, as the standing armies of the world’s developed nations on down to local law enforcement proved ineffective. The explanations behind this were numerous, but the one root cause behind every failure was prevalent.

It is easier for an Omnic to repair itself than it is for a human being to heal.

And so, the Respawn program was born.

The brainchild of medical wunderkind Doctor Angela Ziegler, blood and tissue samples from a given combatant or combatants are uploaded into the Respawn mainframe, which is located underground beneath the Overwatch facility at King’s Row in London. From there, Overwatch’s governing AI (designated “Athena”) remotely overlays the map of an area of engagement with a “Respawn Field,” and dots it with what Doctor Ziegler referred to as “Spawn Points.”

Upon the cessation of a combatant’s brain activity, heart-rate, or both inside the Respawn Field, Respawn disassembles the fallen combatant on an atomic level, given, of course, that they submitted blood and tissue. The atoms of this combatant are then transmitted to one of Overwatch’s orbiting satellites, and then transmitted back to Earth’s surface to one of the Spawn Points, where they are reassembled into their original form and given a bioelectrical charge to bring heart and brain function back on line.

The amount of time that elapses between death and Respawn? Eight seconds.

To be sure, Respawn is not perfect. First, it does not regenerate lost limbs or body parts, as former Blackwatch agent Jesse McCree became painfully aware of during a mission to Bratislava gone disastrously wrong. Second, Respawn must also utilize weapon coding and advanced 6D printing imagery, as the initial Respawn test subjects Respawned completely unarmed and totally nude.

But the third of Respawn’s faults veers into the tragic.

Respawn, officially, never made it past the development stages. It was during these development stages, however, that three master codes that granted access to Respawn were give, whereby the holders of these codes could access the mainframe and upload blood and tissue samples of Overwatch personnel remotely. The first of these three keys was, naturally, given to its inventor, Angela Ziegler.

The second and third keys, however, were given to the then-leaders of Overwatch and Blackwatch: Jack Morrison and Gabriel Reyes, respectively.

As it happened, the initial round of testing began a mere two days after the battle that supposedly claimed the lives of Captains Morrison and Reyes, and thus, could not have been used to save them. Furthermore, Respawn was readied for field operations a scant six days before the signing of the
Petras Act. It was never used in a UN sanctioned op, and its existence was never made public.

But the flaw in Respawn comes into focus when one realizes that there was no protocol or procedure in place for key revocation. Put simply, Morrison and Reyes still could, to this day, upload blood and tissue samples from field agents remotely, and use them to give their teams more chances at life after death.

Meaning that Reaper, as well as his cohorts like Satya Vaswani, Jamison Fawkes, and Amelie Lacroix can Respawn at this very moment as they attempt a theft in Ilios to nefarious ends.

Which… well, that just sucks for everyone, really…

Ilios

D. Va stood back up and blinked a couple of times before wiping her mouth.

“Okay, so, um… If none of us can die, then why do we have healers like Mercy and Ana?”

“Because each Respawn takes a few seconds and drops us off at a Spawn Point. It eats up time and sets us back,” Soldier 76 said.

D. Va thought that made sense, but her stomach was still rumbling too much to capacitate intense critical thought. In lieu of a reasoned response, she just nodded.

“Sorry we didn’t tell you,” Soldier: 76 said.

“This is, what, hazing the rookies? I take it you didn’t tell Lucio, either.”

“Oh, we told him.” Soldier: 76 said, to which D. Va could only blink.

“Are you telling me I’m the only one who didn’t know?”

“Well…” Soldier: 76 began, with all the body language of an eight-year-old who broke a lamp while playing ball in the house. “Y’see… Ana thought it’d be funny.”

As though it were a bellowing tease by a sadistic god, Ana’s voice came in over the radio.

“Did she Respawn yet?”

“Yeah,” Soldier: 76 said. “She, uh… She ralphed in the street.”

Elderly Egyptian laughter flooded D. Va’s ear, and she pinched the bridge of her nose.

“Ana… So help me…”

A bullet from Widowmaker’s sniper rifle pulverized a brick in the shop corner that Soldier: 76 was hiding behind. He flinched, ducked, and wiped some of the stray concrete from his neck before he turned to Tracer.

“Tracer,” he said. “If you’d be so kind…”

She was off before Soldier: 76 could finish the sentence.

Around her chest, glowing a bright blue, was an invention that Winston called a “chronal accelerator.” It was large, cumbersome, and to be worn at all times as it was the only thing keeping
Tracer tethered to the present after the Slipstream incident that sent her hurling through time. All of her clothes had to be specially made and segmented so she could get them on and off without removing the chronal accelerator. She even had to shower in the damned thing.

But it did have its advantages, as she could alter her own personal team-stream for a few seconds at a stretch, in either direction. She had never needed to reload the two pulse pistols that she carried into the field. Why should she, when she could just rewind time to when the guns had pulse charges in them?

Another nifty thing she could do was halt her own time stream to cover ground on foot at a stunning speed. This ability (which Tracer called “blinking”) looked, to everyone else, like Tracer could teleport ten, twenty, thirty feet away in an instant. Which wasn’t strictly true, as Tracer still had to cover the ground on foot, but nothing else, up to and including time itself, covered it with her.

Tracer took off in a run towards where the fire was coming from, blinked forward once,

_Crack._

A shot rang out from somewhere above, pulverizing a flagstone several meters behind her. She blinked again,

_Crack._

Another shot rang out, this time accompanied by a sharp burning in her chest. She looks down, to find a bloom of blood growing just below her collarbone.

_Goodbye, lung._

She rewinds the last few moments, the blood flows back into her body, the wound stitches itself closed, the pain seeps away, all in an instant, as though it never happened.

_Hello again, lung!_

While it wasn’t her favorite way of gathering intelligence, it was quick and effective. Right before the last shot hit her, she spotted the flash in the bell tower of an old church two blocks away. “Figures she’d go with something that goth.” She thought to herself.

Steeling herself, she blinked three times in rapid succession, rounding the corner and arriving at the base of the church. The echo of five more shots hung in the air as she pushed the heavy wooden doors open with one shoulder, pistols at the ready. There didn’t appear to be anything in the chapel save for dusty pews and a moth-eaten cloth over the tabernacle, but Tracer continued cautiously. The silence was broken as she was halfway across the room by Soldier: 76 growling into her comm.

“I know I’m already old, Tracer, but maybe you could neutralize the sniper while you’re still young?”

She frowned, easing open doors on the far wall until she found the staircase up.

“You’re more than welcome to come in here and risk your own arse getting poisoned, or shot, or tied up, love. Until then, give me a minute.”

The claustrophobic staircase led up to a small ledge below the bell, where a rifle sat on a tripod, hooked up to a laptop. As she took a step forward, the screen lit up and the barrel of the rifle swiveled around to aim at her. Acting on instinct she fired from the hip towards the laptop, obliterating it instantly. The rifle came to a stop pointing directly at her chest, before sagging slightly, apparently now useless.
Before Tracer could even catch a breath, a motor revved outside, and a white speedboat could be seen over the ledge of the tower zipping into the Mediterranean. At its helm was Amelie “Widowmaker” Lacroix. Tracer tapped the side of her orange goggles to magnify the image.

Behind Widowmaker, in the rear of the boat, was a box about the size of a small cabinet that bore the stylized “C” of Chike Fusion, Ethiopia’s premiere manufacturer of omnium fusion cores.

“Widowmaker has a fusion core,” Tracer called out in alarm.

Winston’s voice came in over the radio from London.

“Negative,” he said. “The automated security at the Port of Ilios has reported no breaches.”

Ana’s voice came in next.

“No choice,” Tracer finally said, before she switched her radio off. There were speedboats at the pier beneath the bell-tower. She leapt, blinking onto the dock to break her landing before leaping into the nearest vessel. It was an old-fashioned mid-twentieth century thing with an equally old-fashioned ignition. In her ill-spent youth she’d hotwired her fair share of cars, and compared to the modern protections those had, this old ship was a cakewalk.

Within moments she was roaring across the sea in pursuit of Widowmaker.

Back on land, Lucio and Reinhardt made their way towards the town center to regroup with the fireteam.

"I'm gonna die," Lucio said.

"You will not die," Reinhardt said. "You will merely Respawn. It will take but a few seconds before you revive as good as new."

"Reinhardt?"

The German Juggernaut turned around to see Lucio, weapon pointed at the ground like a toddler’s water pistol, an expression on his face common to death row prisoners who wished to make loud proclamations while strapped in the chair.
"Remember when I said I wanted to play clothes-free Guess-The-Element with Pharah?" Lucio asked.

Reinhardt tried to stifle a groan. Young ones with their hormones... It just seemed unchivalrous.

"Yes?" Reinhardt asked.

"I don't," Lucio said. "I want to play it with Ana... I need help..."

Reinhardt sighed, closed the distance, and put his hand on Lucio's shoulder.

"One does not need help with good taste, young man. Now come. We've a battle to win."

As they turned the corner, a lone figure came into view. She was a behemoth of a woman, at least two full meters tall, pink-haired, and carrying what appeared to Lucio to be an enormous glowing DJ coffin. He put his hand on Reinhardt as he backed up slightly around the corner.

"Think we can take her on, or should we just go around?" he asked in a hushed tone. Whether or not Reinhardt heard, he seemed to have no intention of answering. He passed the corner and started walking purposefully forward, staring straight into the eyes of the woman down the path.

"My man? Reinhardt?"

He still didn’t speak, but as he ripped the helmet from his head, Lucio glimpsed a mad smile plastered on his lips. Some kind of unspoken agreement seems to pass between the two goliath figures, as they both dropped their weapons with a terrible clatter, and broke into a jog towards each other. Before they could reach, Reinhardt activated his back-thrusters, slamming into the woman with the force of a speeding truck.

Reinhardt was famous for his charge, being known in his time to topple military vehicles, quadrupedal Omnics, and even small buildings. But this pink woman manages to catch him, arms straining and heels sliding against the stones of the pathway, refusing to be thrown. They skid together like this for ten meters before the woman gains enough traction to stop the charging night with a mighty scream. Before she could make use of the reprieve, however, Reinhardt delivered a devastating punch to her chest.

To Reinhardt’s surprise, however, she did not crumple to the blow, and began landing punches of her own into his face. As the two laid into each other, huge meaty sounds of impact echoing down the narrow paths, Lucio could only gape in horror. But each laughed, cackled, really. Even through blood streaming down her face from a broken nose and a number of lacerations, the woman grinned broadly, and Lucio could only assume Reinhardt shared her expression. She staggered momentarily after a left hook caught her off guard, and the old knight took hold of her in preparation for a throw. But even as he gave her a hip-check that could likely shunt a ¾ ton pickup truck out of the way, she did not fall. Instead, she turned and executed an expert counter-throw of her own that sent the old man down with a thundering sound of steel against stone.

What had started as a fairly even matching, edging in Reinhardt’s favor quickly turned ugly as the woman laid blow after sickeningly loud blow into his face. She hauled him up onto his knees, and wound her fist back for another freight-train of a punch, when, to her surprise, her arm slowed, before it froze in place, icicles forming on her forearms and biceps. She looked back and saw that she was caught, felled, by an Asian woman in glasses with a small drone hovering near her head. She barely cracked five feet, and she was built like a medicine ball.

There was terror in Mei's eyes as she sprayed the behemoth with her endothermic blaster.
"Sorry," Mei said. "I'm not a violent person."

As Reinhardt wiped the blood from his remaining good eye, he was greeted by the sight of his opponent sent screaming through the air by a wall of ice that had sprouted from the ground. He pants a few times, struggling to his feet, before leaning his ruined face against the blessed coldness of the wall. It had blocked off the alleyway between himself and the tiny woman, but his voice was more than loud enough to carry over.

“Thank you Mei, I owe you a great debt. But I assure you, I almost had her!”

On the other side of the wall, Mei smiled. Before she could respond, an arrow lodged itself in the ice right next to her head. She looked up to find her assailant knocking another arrow in his bow atop a building further down the block. Not stopping to think about why anyone would bring a bow to a gunfight in this day and age, she dove into a nearby restaurant for cover, colliding with a stranger in her panic.

It was a man, as it turned out. And as he stumbled backwards, catching himself on the railing of the outdoor seating, a handsome man. He flicked his floppy chestnut bangs out of his eyes with one calloused hand, and smiled. It was a broad smile, and crooked as a lightning bolt. Only a small scar on his chin marred his powerful features.

“Mei, Reinhardt, Lucio, come in,” called Ana over the comm, breaking Mei’s reverie. “There are two enemies, maybe more, encroaching on your position—the archer and the cowboy. Keep your eyes open, and stick together. I’ve got you covered.”

The man tipped his broad-brimmed hat. “Sorry little lady, didn’t realize this spot was taken.”

And this was how Doctor Mei-ling Zhou met the outlaw Jesse McCree.

Mei felt her mouth go dry and her cheeks enflame. And with a bashful giggle of disbelief, she shoved him over the railing down the cliffside.

"Sorry..."

What had started as separate skirmishes had now meshed into total chaos in the residential districts as it became two frontal assaults, butting heads for ground and supremacy. Mei, Lucio, and Reinhardt reconvened with Soldier: 76 (who had the freshly Respawned Jesse McCree pinned down behind an overturned mailbox) and D. Va (who had called down another MEKA deal with the similarly freshly Respawned Zarya).

Ana had descended from the rooftops and had opted to both heal the advancing Soldier: 76 and take potshots at Roadhog with her biotic rifle, with Pharah hovering above her, waiting to fire rockets at those who dared come up for cover to give her mother grief. And Zenyatta, levitating and cross-legged, fired Orbs of Discord at Junkrat from a point near Reinhardt’s shield.

“ROADIE!” yelled Junkrat. “HELP! IT’S THROWING ITS BALLS AT ME!”

For as much as Tekhartha Zenyatta preached presence and observation within the Iris of the world away from combat, he did not notice an arrow being fired from an adjacent rooftop, covering the thirty meters between the Omnic and his would-be assailant faster than a normal human being could blink.

But Genji Shimada was no normal human being. And he did not blink.
Genji’s metal fist closed around the arrow, halting it mere inches from Zenyatta’s head. He looked to the rooftop from whence it came, and found a devastatingly handsome man in feudal garb, holding the offending bow in a calloused left hand. And the one word that came from Genji’s mouth, and the way it was spoken, told the whole story in a way that novels by the masters could not.

“Brother…”

And Hanzo Shimada, the man responsible for his brother Genji’s current mechanized state, lowered his bow, and glared.

As Genji sprinted toward the building upon which his brother perched, Lucio felt the word that summed up the situation slide out of his mouth in the slowest of slow-motion. As though the world entire were submerged in a thick, clear jelly that hindered all, save for the warring brothers, closing the distance between each other.

“SHIIIIIIIIIIT!”

What followed, in the conflict between Genji and Hanzo Shimada quite simply cannot be described, save for the briefest of sensory flourishes that could be recalled through the faulty mechanism of memory. A katana slicing lengthwise through arrows, sending their disparate halves sailing downward in futility. The clang of shurikens being shot out of the air almost as fast as they could be flung.

But what can be described was the reaction of all those on the ground, which was utter rapt silence, and complete statue-like stillness.

As the litheness of Hanzo’s human form and the power of Genji’s augmented form reached their potential as their high-speed skirmish defied gravity up walls and physics between rooftops, the still and dumbstruck soldiers’ thoughts reached back, back, back to their most vivid and emotional memories.

Pharah, reading the letter from her mother over and over again, until her brain reduced each letter to its component shapes, rendering all meaning within moot.

Reinhardt, on the day the Petras Act was signed, wondering if there was still a place in the world for the errant, and the pure, and the good-hearted.

Junkrat, on that cold night in the irradiated outback, looking up at the stars, deciding finally and at long last to leave the rap game.

And it was Junkrat who finally broke the reverie of all those assembled. He wiped a tear from his eye and looked at Roadhog.

“That’s pretty,” he said.

Then he shot Mei in the face.

Out on the Mediterranean, Tracer was gaining on Widowmaker’s boat. Even though the sniper had a considerable head-start, no modern electric powered boat could best the classic petrol engine of Tracer’s ship of choice. Noticing the gains that Tracer was quickly making, Widowmaker headed for a patch of rocks near the cliffside that jutted up out of the water like the tusks of a wild boar.

A lesser sailor might have been deterred by the imposing obstacles, but Tracer was no such lesser sailor. She wasn’t chosen for the Slipstream project on pluck alone, after all, and on land or sea she
was as cracking a pilot as they came.

Or at least that’s what she told herself as she approached the rocks. While Widowmaker threaded through them seemingly effortlessly, Tracer careened like a pinball through the rocks, bumping and scraping with every turn. But even through these mishaps, she was gaining ground, and fast. As they hit an open patch of water, she gunned the throttle and rammed the side of her boat into Widowmaker’s craft, and fired a burst from her pistol over the bow. The pistol ran dry alarmingly quickly though, and Widowmaker remained as characteristically cool as ever as she stood from the driver’s seat, rifle in hand.

Tracer let go of her own steering wheel and hit the deck as Widowmaker perforated the boat. Internally, she apologized to the gorgeous vessel, suddenly realizing that the old beauty would likely not survive the fight. Almost as if on cue, the engine began to eject a plume of thick oily smoke. She began stand to regain control of the craft, but Widowmaker managed to graze her in the shoulder in that moment. She screamed and clutched the wound, but knew that if she rewound to be rid of it, she’d end up in the middle of the ocean.

Looking up, she saw Widowmaker drop her magazine and begin to load a new one to finish her off. Apologizing to the boat one last time, she took the chance, vaulting off the driver’s seat and blinking through the air onto Widowmaker’s ship before the old speedboat behind her erupted into a fireball.

Despite Overwatch having the advantage of numbers, the mercenaries had tricks up their sleeves. Every time it seemed like they could pick one off, a pink bubble would surround them, shielding them from harm. When one was about to be chased down, feet would be caught in steel traps and their quarry could escape. Explosions, shrapnel, and high energy beams stymied their approach at every turn so that they could never quite push their advantage.

That is, until the Overwatch agents finally managed to corner the mercenaries in the town square. With little cover, and only the bulk of the giant woman and the enormous pig-man to shield them, it looked to everyone involved as though they would be massacred in short order.

And nowhere was the writing on this wall clearer than from a nearby alley, where Torbjorn had been, biding his time, and building a turret with the strength to chew through almost any defense that could be mounted against it. The old Swedish bastard even had the nerve to laugh as he fired his rivet gun haphazardly above them, making their space of operations smaller and smaller.

Zarya, for her part, fired a blast from her particle canon that tore an arm from D. Va’s MEKA, forcing the small teenager inside to bail out.

"I AM GREATER THAN MAN!" Zarya yelled. "I AM STRONGER THAN MACHINE! COME TO ME, AND MEET YOUR DOOM!"

McCree wiped the sweat from his brow. "Can you be stronger than machine over there? I like this hat, and I don't want to get any more holes in it."

Pharah had begun to smile the kind of smile that only graced her lips upon victory, when it was as though the air seemed to permeate with bad breath. The sky almost seemed to darken. And though at first she thought the heads-up display on the helmet of her Reptora armor had begun to malfunction and dim, she saw all of Overwatch instinctively tremble. They felt it, too.

“No…” breathed Pharah. She had failed to stop him once today already. "No, not again!"

But even as she looked all around her, launcher poised at the ready, she could see nothing but thick,
black smoke filling the air around them. And in the middle of this street, Reaper began to take solid 
form, wielding Hellfire shotguns in both gloved hands as he began to whirl in a bark, viscous cloud 
of himself. The members of Reaper's team instinctively hit the deck, and her last thought before the 
chaos was that Reaper had trained his people well.

_We didn't corner them, Pharah thought. We were led here._

The members of Overwatch fired into Reaper's smoke, but they may as well have fired into the 
Mediterranean for all the good it did.

"DIE..."

Reaper's first shot destroyed Torbjorn's turret, shredding the old man's face with shrapnel and setting 
his long, golden beard on fire.

"DIE..."

Ana Amari's left leg separated from her body at the hip in an explosion of blood and screams.

"DIE..."

The chestplate of Pharah's armor caved in completely, shattering her ribs and puncturing her lungs.

And on and on it went, as all of Overwatch was laid to waste, one by one, a mad and furious mantra 
owning the air completely.

"DIE..."

"DIE..."

"DIE..."

Tracer blinked straight into Widowmaker, tackling her to the deck of her craft. Before Widowmaker 
could react, she delivered a resounding blow to the side of her jaw with the butt of her pistol and 
ripped the rifle from her hands. As she recovered from the blow, Widowmaker raised her hands 
slowly as if to surrender, smirking mockingly through bloody lips.

“Well done,” Widowmaker said. "I did not think you had it in you, chérie. And what, may I ask, do you plan to do with me?"

Truth be told, Tracer hadn’t fully considered the answer to that question before she started this chase.

“I’m bringing you in!” she announced, though both of them noticed it sounded like more of a 
question than a statement.

“And do tell exactly why I would come with you?” Widowmaker said, drawling, as though this were 
some kind of tiresome formality. Tracer’s throat clenched.

“I’ll—“

“What? Shoot me?” The woman beneath her snorted in derision. Her frankness made Tracer hesitate 
for a moment, and Widowmaker took that moment to leap to her feet and snatch one of Tracer’s 
pistols out of her hand. She pointed the weapon at her, backing towards the edge of the boat.

“We are both disposable, chérie. And the sooner you learn that, the sooner..."
Tracer thought that Widowmaker knew how to finish that sentence, but the hesitation in her voice and the look in her eyes said that Tracer was beneath such consideration. As though it was a sin to both speech and thought to explain it to someone so lowly and so foolish as Lena Oxton.

"No," Widowmaker finally said. "That is your fate. You will never learn."

And in that instant, she turned the pistol on herself.

Tracer screamed. "NO!"

Widowmaker loosed a single round under her own chin, and in this instant, Tracer's thoughts almost broke themselves with the turns they took.

Instead of Widowmaker's body limply falling over the side of the boat, it vanished in a flash of yellow light. And when her own pistol fell to the deck with a dull thud, Tracer knew what had just happened.

Widowmaker didn't shoot herself to prove a point or make a gesture. No, she shot herself so she could Respawn.

Back in Ilios.

Half a kilometer away.

Tracer fell to her knees, and saw the box containing the Chike fusion core. Her hands gripped the lid of the box, even though she knew full well what she would find inside.

Nothing...

She had been played. More than that, she had let herself be played, defying a direct order from her commanding officer in the process.

Tracer tried to remember if she had ever before felt this deep a shame, and she came up empty.

Soldier: 76 was the last to fall to Reaper's fury, and he thought he could detect a hint of distinct pleasure as Reaper used his shotgun to open a hole in his stomach the size of an old lunchbox.

And as he lie on the white Greek flagstones, his blood dying them red, he thought that this was a smart play on Reaper's part. Instant kills would have Respawned all of them instantly, but the wounds inflicted were painful and non-lethal. They would take time to bleed out, which would be time Reaper would use to get away.

But this, too, shall pass, Soldier: 76 thought. Respawning was great, but getting there had a habit of being a colossal pain in the ass.

Poor Ana, though. She lost her leg. Once she Respawned, that wasn’t going to grow back. He wondered how personally she was going to take this. She handled losing an eye in stride. Who knew, right?

Soldier: 76’s vision began to dim, and the last thing he saw was a golden glow above him.

Respawn or Saint Peter would be great, right about now. Either or. I’m not picky.

But neither the computer that brought them back to life, nor the man who helmed the pearly gates of Heaven had such a sweet voice.
Of course, any voice would sound as honey tasted if it said the three sweetest words in the English language.

“HEROES NEVER DIE!”

Soldier: 76’s vision cleared. His wounds rapidly healed and reknitted. And while Respawn couldn’t re-grow lost limbs after a combatant’s heart and brain had ceased to function, Mercy’s Valkyrie response suit could, provided the patient was still alive.

Ana’s discarded leg dematerialized and reformed at the point where it had been severed. D. Va’s jaw grew back. Mercy had even configured her Caduceus Staff so that the Guardian Angel protocol could repair Omnis like Zenyatta and kinda-sorta Omnis like Genji.

And as Mercy descended to the street, the rest stood, weapons in hand, smiles on their faces, taking a wordless moment to look at each other, congratulating themselves for luck, providence, or both.

It was this wordless moment, however, that would cost them dearly.

For if they were not looking at each other, they would have seen Junkrat a block down the street, rolling a tire toward them. The tire had made it halfway to the team when Junkrat yelled:

“If at first you don’t succeed, blow it up again!”

At which point the members of Overwatch turned, and saw the tire coming toward them. But it was Mei who noticed something funny about it.

“Are those explo—“

BOOOOOM!

Junkrat’s exploding tire obliterated the street and instantly vaporized anyone and everyone who was standing on it, causing the entire team to Repawn at Spawn Points a hundred meters away.

The first combat operation of the newly revamped Overwatch had just ended in a colossal and dismal failure.

It so happened that the Port of Ilios, with all the Omnium fusion cores contained therein, was not Reaper’s intended target.

While the Port of Ilios had state-of-the-art security protecting it, Andreadis Metalworks, which was Reaper’s target, had but a chain-link gate and a padlock protecting all that was contained inside. Both the gate and the lock were quite easily bypassed by Bastion and Symmetra.

Andreadis Metalworks didn’t have omnium fusion cores, true, but what they did have was shelf after shelf of iron tubing. While most would consider these tubes to be next to worthless, it was what Bastion and Symmetra ferried from the Andreadis Metalworks to a jumptruck three blocks away in a nearly abandoned parking lot while the rest of Reaper’s team waged a successful campaign in the streets of Ilios.

This jumptruck served as a rendezvous point for the team after the battle was won. The last of the team to meet was Widowmaker, who Respawned an additional two blocks away after her adventure with Tracer’s pistol. She filed into the rear of the jumptruck’s trailer, walking past the smelly junkers and Hanzo, past Zarya and Symmetra (the latter of whom was trying to paradoxically stand too far and too close to the former) and past Reaper, who was programming coordinates into the
jumptruck’s automated driving computer.

She stood in the rear of the trailer, between a hunched over Bastion and McCree, who was examining the cylinder of his Peacemaker revolver.

“Hey,” McCree said to Widowmaker after he snapped the cylinder closed. She looked at him in a way that said that doing so was not only a chore, but a chore not worth performing.

“You shot yourself in the head to Respawn off that boat, didn’t you?”

She didn’t nod… but she didn’t shake her head, either.

McCree produced a small, white plastic vial from beneath his poncho, and shook it. The contents rattled inside. He removed the lid and held the vial out to her.

“Aspirin?”

Chapter End Notes

Co-author Saphixxx would like to thank Malory Ortberg (formerly of The Toast) for teaching her what heterosexual women find attractive. THANKS, MALORY!
Somewhere over Croatia

No one looked at each other in the dropship heading back to England. Some stared at the floor, others were preoccupied with the ceiling of the craft, and still others just stared off into the middle distance.

And no one said a thing.

The silence surrounding defeat has its own aura, its own weight, even its own smell. Those wishing to break the silence in this dropship feared recrimination from their comrades. Why weren't you there when I needed you? Why weren't you faster? Why weren't you stronger? Why weren't you better? Why weren't you more?

It was not unlike the environment in the locker room of a futbol team after a blow-out defeat. And not unlike such a locker room, the coach took it upon herself to speak first.

"When I was a child," Ana Amari said, startling everyone else, "about six years old, I cleaned hotel rooms in Cairo for spare coins from the concierge. One day, a Canadian tourist left in a hurry, and left some things in his room, one of which was a very large book. I couldn't read the words on the front, but I knew, from the funny little man on the cover, that I held in my hands the complete works of William Shakespeare."

Ana scratched her brow underneath her hijab. "Every day, I took that book to the library and used its one computer to translate every last line in that book. All thirty-seven plays and one-hundred-fifty-four sonnets. It took me a year, and by the time that year was over, I was fluent in English. *Coriolanus* is a personal favorite, though you will find few academics who agree with me. I took to street corners to recite soliloquies and speeches. I made more money doing that than cleaning hotel rooms. The point I am trying to make is that I grew up in a different world than most of you. It was not fashionable, or expected, or a mark of status to know English when I was a girl, particularly in Egypt in the twenties. But learn English I did. Because I wanted to know Shakespeare. On Shakespeare's terms."

Ana's one remaining eye sharpened, going from rhapsody to accusation. And that eye fell on Lena Oxton.

"And yet Flight Lieutenant Oxton is from England, the country that originated the language, and she does not know the meaning of the words *Do not engage!*"

Lena thought to herself that it would have been easier if that eye were filled with contemptuous rage. Even disappointment would be a welcome thing to see at this point. But instead, she was met with the dispassionate gaze of a surgeon about to cut into her with painful precision.

"When we go on a mission, it is because we have gathered intelligence that gives us some idea what our enemies are likely to be doing, are likely to have already done, and are likely to do next. This means that when we are in the field, we do not rely on gut feelings or emotional reactions."

She spat the last words as though they were bitter in her mouth. But her composure returned a moment later.

"We think of Widowmaker as a sniper, but I can assure you, the weapon she wields most keen control over are our own emotions. Playing with emotions is a good way to get people to hesitate,
and in that moment of hesitation, evil strikes," she punched a fist into one open palm for emphasis, "like a viper. Quick and poisonous. It was one such moment of hesitation that allowed her to take my eye, and the lives of several of my men. And it was another such moment that allowed her to take the life of Mondatta from under you. Both of these were an emotional blow against the world as much as they were about removing important tactical targets."

Lena opened her mouth to speak, but Ana raised a finger and locked eyes with her, silencing her as effectively as if she had put a hand to her throat. Ana’s features softened slightly, and she continued.

"The problem is not that you were trying to stop her from what seemed to you a terrible thing. The problem is that she knew that you would try to stop her, and she manipulated you for it. Twice now she has strung you along, wasting your time so that she can accomplish her goals without real hindrance. She can prey on emotions because she herself does not have them."

"Was I supposed to just sit by and do nothing, then?" Lena cried out, before clamping her mouth shut.

Everyone else in the dropship had been making a point to look elsewhere during this exchange, either through respect, pity, or second-hand embarrassment. But everyone visibly flinched at Lena’s protestation. Only Fareeha locked eyes with Lena, and the eyes of the younger Captain Amari were filled with dumbstruck horror, laden with thirty-two years of knowledge concerning the fates of those foolhardy enough to talk back to her mother.

Ana’s features hardened again, and when she spoke, her voice was cold enough to raise goosebumps on a glacier. "You are supposed to do as you are told. And any bright ideas you have are to be in service of what you are told."

She took a deep breath, lips tight, before the tension released again. "She knows how to harm you, Lena. But you do not know how to harm her. She knows how to manipulate you, and you do not know how to resist it, or even begin to play her game in turn. You are merely reacting."

Lena frowned and tried to stare a hole through the floor of the ship, tears pricking at the edges of her eyes. She wanted to deny what was being said. But she knew she didn't have a leg to stand on.

"A truly effective soldier knows themselves as much as they know their training. What you did today shows me that you do not know yourself, in which case not even God can save you. The next time you see her, do not react... Wait... And listen to your orders."

Ana would never know how close Lena had come to spilling her innermost thoughts and jealously guarded secrets concerning Amelie Lacroix, and how her place in the world affected Lena’s very existence. Shame, it seemed, could loosen the lips of Lena Oxton better than alcohol ever could. But to do so would be to let her emotions run away with her yet again, violating the point of Ana’s painful and disappointed lecture. So all that could escape from her lips was...

"I'm sorry, Captain."

"Apologies are meaningless," Ana said, not even dignifying Lena with eye contact. "Just do better."

London

As soon as the dropship landed inside the hangar of the King's Row facility, all inside went to their separate corners of the expansive underground base to feel sorry for themselves. Not a word was spoken amongst them. Hana, however, for lack of anything better to do, followed Jack.
She followed him to the armory adjacent to the simulation room. There, upon the table in the middle of the room, he disassembled his heavy pulse rifle, and began to clean it. All without saying a word.

They had suffered a grave defeat, and whenever Hana herself had screwed up royally during a simulation in her training with the Korean army, Colonel Kim was always there to tear her a new one. Getting to know him this past week, she knew that Jack Morrison was cut from that same irritable, authoritarian, ornery cloth. But here she stood, having suffered the worst combat defeat of her career, and Jack Morrison had nothing to say to her. No words of encouragement, no lectures, no tirades.

Something was bothering Jack on a deep, elemental level. And Hana knew what it was.

"Who is he?" Hana asked.

Jack stopped cleaning his gun. He took his facemask off and set it on the table before turning to her.

"I know all the biographical information on Gabriel Reyes," Hana said. "All the news that's fit to print. But I don't know who he is. You do. Tell me."

Jack stood up straight and scratched his head.

"Gabriel Reyes was born in a part of Los Angeles called Boyle Heights. You know how they say things get worse before they get better?"

"Yeah."

"Well, in LA in the thirties, before the world decided to get along with each other, that was true. Gang violence was the worst it had ever been, and Gabriel told me that he had a choice. He could either join a gang and let it swallow him whole, or he could join the army."

"And he joined."

Jack nodded. "He served as a radio operator in Strasbourg when the Omnic Crisis broke out. He got earmarked for a classified soldier enhancement program, same as me. Real Super Soldier stuff. That's where we met. He was always 'Gabriel' and never 'Gabe.' Everyone has their quirks and faults as a soldier, and his was that he never looked up. Had an exceptional grasp of what was in front of him, behind him, to either side, but never above."

Jack sighed and leaned on the table.

"Word came down of a UN initiative. Fight the Omnics with no accountability. The best and the brightest in the world were being brought in. 'Overwatch,' they called it. And Gabriel was the guy they picked to lead it. And he led it well... for nine months, until he bombed his first TV interview on CNN. He came off as guarded and defensive. But he was like that. He had this copy of Nicholas Nickleby that he carried everywhere with him. I don't think he ever read it. I just think he didn't want to look like a kid from Boyle Heights who never went to college in front of a bunch of scientists and politicians."

"So they picked you to lead Overwatch after that interview," Hana said.

Jack nodded once more. "The UN liaison said I was 'effortlessly charming.' They sent Gabriel to head up a new division, Blackwatch.Handled all the cloak-and-dagger spy stuff. I barely saw him after that, except in New York for the UN briefings every six months."

He sighed again. "The first big scandal that led to the end was a Blackwatch op in Dublin. What was
supposed to be a quiet mission involving the procurement of files from an office building somehow turned into a bombing that left sixteen civilians dead. I asked him what went wrong, and do you know what he told me?"

Hana shook her head.

"He said that the difference between right and wrong was the long view. What was the good play now wouldn't be the good play tomorrow, and those sixteen dead would have thanked him if they knew how safe he'd made the world."

Jack wiped his eyes and looked at Hana. "I know there's this…like… narrative out there that I was the idealistic one and Gabriel just got more and more bitter as time went on, but the fact of the matter is that we were both idealistic. He and I just had different definitions of the word. And… and when he tried to kill me at Gibraltar, I was just as shocked as everyone else was."

Hana saw this old man seem to age and grow younger at the same time. The memories weighed him down while at the same time reducing him to the kind of raw disappointment that could only be felt in childhood. It was like she was the audience to the deepest and most personal moment that one would usually have in private, but this trust that she could see that he gave her endeared him to her, while at the same time giving her the suspicion that maybe, just maybe, despite all outward appearances, she was the adult in this relationship.

"When you're drunk," Jack said. "Or when you're scared. Or you're in the worst kind of pain… The real you comes out. Gabriel was my boy, from way back. We drank together, laughed together, fought together… and Reaper was in him the entire time. And I… I couldn't see that."

Jack, finally, broke eye contact with Hana. "I don't know what that says about me," he said. "I really don't."

Later that night, Fareeha stood rooted to the spot just in front of the door of the medical clinic. She had tried everything she could to settle the twisting guilt in her gut, but no matter what she tried—training, reviewing the comms recordings, maintaining her armor—she kept getting distracted by the weight of the failure that she felt.

In her long and storied military career, she had known failure intimately. No matter how experienced she or her comrades were, there were always missions that went straight to Hell even before they started. It was simply the nature of combat, she had always told herself, there are always too many variables that can't be controlled, too many unknowns to ever fully expect a victory even with the best planning. And in the past that had been enough. Losses would be bitterly cursed, the dead would be mourned, lessons would be learned, and she would do better next time.

But this time wasn't like the past. For the past two decades she had dreamed about fighting alongside her mother and Angela Ziegler, and wanted nothing more than to protect them, aid them, to bring justice to the world alongside them. And she had not only failed when given her first chance, she had failed Angela twice.

"Who takes care of the caretaker?" was a question that had run through her head endlessly since she first witnessed firsthand how hard Angela toiled in her pursuits. Throughout her childhood, it seemed like the answer to that question was: nobody. And ever since, she hoped someday to be strong enough to be that person. To give something back to the woman who gave so much to the world, and who she cared for so deeply on a more personal level.
Putting her forehead to the cold steel of the door, she inhaled deeply, and gave a timid knock. After a few moments, the muffled click of heels could be heard on the other side, and the door slid open with a hiss. As Angela came into view through the open door, Fareeha fought the urge to fall to the floor and sob apologies at her feet. But she knew that asking forgiveness would just be another burden to thrust upon the doctor.

As she met her eyes, Angela was smiling, her brow knit slightly in concern. "Fareeha, is something the matter? You know you’re always welcome to come in."

Fareeha returned the smile half-heartedly, and rubbed the back of her neck, giving a noncommittal sound in response. As Angela gestured towards the inside of the clinic, Fareeha walked in, and sat down in one of the chairs, fidgeting nervously with her hands. It was a habit she thought she'd broken years ago, but it came back when she was anxious like this.

"Is something the matter?" Angela repeated softly, pulling up a seat to sit opposite her.

With a thick swallow and a deep breath, Fareeha muttered, "I just feel like I didn't do enough." And as soon as the words left her lips, she felt like a sullen child again.

Angela laughed, and put a hand delicately over Fareeha's, halting her fidgeting.

"Fareeha," she said, her voice still light with laughter, "are you looking to be chastised like Lena was on the way here? I never took you for a masochist."

Fareeha half-coughed, half-laughed and blushed slightly as she saw Angela's mischievous smile. In that moment, the tension she had felt since she had boarded the plane back to base began to bleed away, and the tears she'd been holding back for hours finally broke through.

Through the tears, she finally managed to choke out, "I was just so worried when I saw you fall! I shouldn't have let them hurt you. You deserve so much better."

Without a word, Angela leaned up from her seat and squeezed Fareeha tightly around the shoulders until she stopped shaking. As her breathing evened out, Angela released an arm to wipe away the tears under Fareeha's eyes with her thumb. And as she did so, she spoke.

"Don't worry Fareeha," Angela said, softly. "There's nothing permanent they can do to me. Least of all Gabriel."

And Angela hugged her. Fareeha didn't know if Angela knew about her feelings toward her, let alone if she reciprocated them. But in this embrace, Fareeha could feel the fiction creep in, embarrassing in theory as it was soothing in the moment, that if Angela truly loved her, they'd still be holding one another like this. The second-guessing and wondering seemed so far away, now.

And in this embrace they stayed, until Athena called them to the conference room.

All were assembled in the conference room, and all were transfixed by the sight on Athena's screen.

"I see it," Jack said. "I just don't believe it."

They were watching footage from a surveillance camera at a café in Ilios. The massive, hulking Bastion unit taking a breadstick out of a basket on one of the tables, and rendering it to mulch in its hands before gently beckoning a small yellow bird to eat the crumbs off of the tablecloth.

Reinhardt, who had destroyed more Bastion units with his hammer during the Omnic Crisis than
there were fingers in the room to count, was reduced to giving voice to the beginnings of competing thoughts in his mind, each circling its drain before bobbing back up again, maddeningly out of reach.

"I mean… Well, that's just… How does… What?"

"I've never seen a Bastion unit do that," Ana said.

Torbjorn stroked his beard. "It's a fault with the relays between the CPU and the IFF. It has to be."

"It is all too obvious, yet no one here will say it," Zenyatta said.

All in the room turned to him. Some, like Fareeha, were curious. Others, like Lena (who was sitting by herself in the corner) were deeply admiring. But only Torbjorn looked like a man with a shovel who was about to pull elephant duty at the circus.

"That Bastion unit has a soul," Zenyatta said.

"Pfeh!" said Torbjorn in reply, and "Pfeh!" he said yet again.

"If that eight foot killing machine has a soul, then no one does," Torbjorn said. "The word is meaningless."

Zenyatta cocked his head at Torbjorn. "It is said that the soul is not internal, but rather it is held in the reactions of others. Do not look at the Bastion unit, Torbjorn. Look at the bird."

Torbjorn looked at the footage on the screen, before turning back to Zenyatta. "What about it?"

"That bird is not afraid of the Bastion unit in the slightest," Zenyatta said. "The bird would not react so well to you were you to attempt to feed it, Torbjorn, but the existence of your soul was never in doubt."

Torbjorn turned a shade of red, before saying "Pfeh!" for a final time.

"Who is it that said that the soul is not internal?" Genji asked.

"I did," Zenyatta said. "Just now."

"Soul or not," Hana said, "that thing tried to blow us up when we first spotted it."

Winston pushed up his glasses. "Actually, we have some more interesting video. Athena, could you roll two-twelve, please?"

"Certainly," Athena said, before showing surveillance footage of Symmetra capturing the bird before Junkrat used firecrackers to enrage the Bastion unit. More footage, this time of Symmetra freeing the bird, soothing Bastion back into docility.

"They're using the bird to control him," Angela said.

"It," said Torbjorn.

"Him," replied Genji.

"Enough," Ana said. "They're using the bird to control the Bastion unit. That gives us an in when we meet in combat again. Winston, the others?"

"Right," Winston said. "Let's start with the most disappointing one."
A grainy photo came up of a man in a cowboy hat, and Fareeha could hear Mei gasp next to her.

"Jesse McCree," Winston said. " Former Blackwatch agent, and former lieutenant in the Deadlock Gang, operating out of New Mexico."

"His resignation from Blackwatch was very vague, and very public," Jack said. "Before he raised his stink to anyone who would listen, Blackwatch was just a rumor, so far as the public was concerned. After Jesse, the public would put any dirty deed at Overwatch's feet, because we had a Black Ops division we didn't tell them about."

"Why did McCree resign?" Lucio asked.

"Jesse idolized Gabriel Reyes," Angela said. "He was the one who got him out of that gang and into the Overwatch fold. After Gabriel's methods became more and more... unsound, Jesse came under the impression that we were about to have him arrested and tried for war crimes."

"Were you?" Mei asked. The look Jack gave her was a more enlightening response than a written paragraph would have been.

"Moving on," Winston said. Another picture came up alongside McCree's. The Japanese man, whose duel with Genji held everyone in the room rapt in Ilios hours prior.

"Hanzo Shimada," Winston said. "Eldest scion of the Shimada crime family operating out of Hanamura in Japan, and brother to our own Genji. Genji, would you..."

Genji lowered his head, as though he had dreaded the coming of this moment for a long time. The airing of one brother's grievances against another.

"Genji," Angela said. "It's alright if you don't..."

"No," Genji said. "Some here don't know. They need to know what they're going to face."

He folded his hands and leaned forward in his chair. "I... am a holy man. But my devotion to The Iris came from both my failure as a criminal and my success as a womanizer, and a drunk, and a layabout."

Genji sat up straight. "It was ordained from my birth that I would assist my brother Hanzo in the family business, but I had no interest in murdering people for a living. The clan elders decreed that Hanzo must either take me in hand, or destroy me, and cleanse the shame from the Shimada name. And I... am not so easily taken in hand."

"Your own brother tried to kill you?" Brigitte asked.

"And he almost succeeded," Genji said. He looked at Angela a moment before speaking. "You saved me, Doctor Ziegler. You gave me this body. And even after all these years, I am... unsure that I have repaid you in the manner in which you deserve."

Fareeha thought that she caught exasperation in Angela's sigh after Genji said this. But she couldn't have been too exasperated, as she was also blushing slightly. Fareeha felt a... not-niceness in the pit of her stomach.

Which passed as soon as it came. Oh, if this were the movies, where they could hate each other with impunity. But in real life, two people having that one specific thing in common (namely that they both adored the same woman, and both were too cowardly to tell that woman so) meant that they'd
get along great, provided they were grown-ups, as Fareeha Amari and Genji Shimada most definitely were.

Genji turned away. "To Hanzo's credit, he sought to atone for his actions against me, and for my part, I have forgiven him. But I think his atonement hinged on his mistaken belief that I was dead. If I am alive, his atonement is worthless. I think… I think he wishes to commit the crime for which he seeks to punish himself."

No one said anything to that, and Genji was done speaking. Zenyatta put his hand on Genji's shoulder before Winston brought up two more pictures.

"This is Mako Rutledge and Jamison Fawkes," Winston said. "Callsigns 'Roadhog' and 'Junkrat,' respectively. Our two friends here are Australian."

"I thought the entire continent was irradiated," Hana said.

"Not all of it," said Winston. "Just a lot of it, and these two are from the irradiated part. In fact, Roadhog played a part in Australia being irradiated in the first place."

"You mean he's ALF?" Jack asked.

"Australian Liberation Front," Winston said. "A bunch of back-country yahoos who decided to turn to terrorism when they didn't agree with the government. As a gesture of goodwill, the Australian Prime Minister provided Australia's omnis with a piece of the outback after The Crisis. The ALF didn't take kindly to that, and they stormed the omnium, breached the fusion core, and triggered an atomic explosion."

"It's not too hard to understand," Torbjorn said. "It was somebody's home."

"It's the Australian outback," Fareeha said. "No one was using that land for anything except the big scary wildlife. Which is bigger and scarier now that radiation's involved."

"What's Junkrat's story?" Ana asked.

"He's crazy, and he likes blowing things up," Winston said. "Word was he found something in the omnium that got him a lot of attention, but there isn't enough solid intel to confirm or deny that. He and Roadhog work as mercenaries, which would explain why they work for Reaper, depending on how much money he took from Talon's coffers before he split. And next we have…"

An image of a very large woman with pink hair and an X-shaped scar over her right eye appeared on screen. More than one member of the assembled Overwatch groaned at the sight.

"I take it we remember Miss Aleksandra Zaryanova," Winston said.

"She has pink hair and she's built like a brick shithouse's father," Jack said. "Of course we remember her."

"She hits really hard," Reinhardt said. Brigitte turned to look at him.

"That's what those pressure readings from your armor were?" she asked. "I thought you were blocking cannonballs, and she was punching you?"

"Really hard," said Reinhardt.

"She is quite literally, if the records out of Russia are to be believed, the strongest woman in the
world," Winston said. "A power-lifter and bodybuilder, she was training for a world championship tournament when Russia had its second Omnic Crisis. She ditched training for the army."

"But why would she be working with Reaper?" Ana asked.

"There are some unsubstantiated rumors that she was seen at meetings of several Anti-Omnic organizations in Russia and Siberia. If that's true, it explains a lot. No offense, Zenyatta, but I don't think she'd join any club that has you as a member. Not if that's how she thinks."

"None taken," Zenyatta said. "Not all can be as mature and above their own prejudices as our dear friend Torbjorn."

Torbjorn rounded on Zenyatta. "Hey… What?"

Winston straightened his glasses. "And finally…"

The final image that appeared on-screen was that of a beautiful Indian woman in her twenties, wearing a white headset with a light blue visor. Her face was an edifice of pure, icy disapproval.


"I've been to Utopaea," Hana said. "It's… pretty…"

Hana trailed off as she noticed that everyone else in the room was looking at Lucio, who was about to open a bottle of water. He finally noticed that he held the attention of the entire room, and it seemed to startle him.

"What?" Lucio asked.

"Is this going to present a problem?" Ana asked.

"Is what going to present a problem?"

"You have to have bad blood with Vishkar," Jack said.

"The… reason being?" Lucio asked.

"Vishkar came into your home town after the Omnic Crisis in Rio and basically enslaved you," Brigitte said. "You had to band the locals together and drive them out."

"Ohhhhhhh," Lucio said. "That. That's, like, not gonna affect how I do this job, or anything."

"No one would blame you if it did," Fareeha said.

"But it won't," said Lucio. "We chased them out of Rio. They left. What do you want me to do? Go after them?"

"Wow," Mei said. "You're… a well-adjusted adult."

"Yes," Genji said. "What are you doing here?"

"At any rate," Winston said, "There have been a few pieces of intel that allude to Talon and Vishkar having dealings with each other. If she got the call from Reaper, then Vishkar told her to go. And on that note, it's been a long day, and we should bring this one to a close. I'll let you know if Athena
finds anything else."

"Dismissed," Ana said, and everyone got up to leave. Hana saw that she herself along with four other people stayed behind. Jack was up front, talking to Winston, while Mei stood by her seat and kept staring at the screen. No one needed to tell Hana that she was staring at the picture of Jesse McCree. Lucio, who had yet to open his bottle of water, instead opted to hand it to Mei.

"Oh, I'm not thirsty," Mei said.

Lucio looked from her, to the picture of McCree, and then back to Mei.

"Are you sure?" he asked

Mei sighed, took the bottle of water, and walked out with a blush in her cheeks. Lucio followed.

Hana tapped Jack on the shoulder. He turned around.

"When I was a tournament player for Starcraft II," Hana said, "I gained a foothold on the competition by watching streams of their play. I want to know if you guys still have any footage of Reaper in action. I mean, from when he was still Gabriel Reyes."

Jack squinted at her, as though she had suddenly decided to start speaking in tongues.

"What?" Hana asked. "I can't show initiative?"

"It's not that," Jack said. "It's just… Starcraft II? That game's ancient. My dad played that game."

Hana put her hands on her hips and cocked her head to the side. "If you play something that's over fifty years old, people will say you're cultured. Don't ruin this for me."

Jack smiled and turned to the screen. "Athena, do we have any old Gabriel Reyes footage?"

"I have one-hundred-seventy-five pieces of footage containing Gabriel Reyes," Athena said. "Eighty-nine of which concern com—"

Athena's voice cut off, and the screen they were standing in front of went dark.

"Athena?" Jack asked.

Nothing.

"Does Athena crash often?" Hana asked.

"No," Winston said. "Never."

The screen went white, and red letters appeared at its center.

HeLL iS eMpTy…

Hana's blood felt like it had frozen in her veins.

…AnD aLL ThE dEvILs…

"What the hell is going on?" Jack asked.

…ArE hErE.
The squeaking of Jack's shoes on the linoleum floor drew Hana's eyes to him. He had suddenly stood ramrod straight, his face pointed towards the ceiling. His eyes had rolled back in his head, the veins in his neck bulged and turned black, and foam had started to collect at the corners of his mouth.

Hana put her hand on his shoulder. "Jack!"

And as suddenly as the spell had overtaken him, so too did the spell release him. He fell back, his head making a sickening thud on the linoleum. Hana knelt down in a panic and put her fingers to his neck.

"He doesn't have a pulse," Hana said.

The alarm in Winston's eyes magnified ten-fold. "And… he's not Respawning!"

Hana got to her feet and bolted for the exit, to find Angela without needing to be told to do so.
Chapter 7: The Broad Expanse of Tranquil Light

London

In the hospital wing of the King’s Row Overwatch facility, two women stood over the hospital bed of an old man under sedation. Only the steady, slow beeping of the heart monitor and the dull thrum of the air conditioning felt the need to make noise.

Doctor Angela Ziegler reached into her lab coat and pulled out a small baggie that contained small black spheres. They were slightly bigger than fish eggs, but slightly smaller than ball bearings. She showed them to Hana Song.

“I pulled these out of his small intestine,” Angela said. “It’s not nanotech, but it’s close. When activated remotely, they release a cocktail of four toxins that I’ve heard of, and another two that are brand new to me. They would have killed a normal man, but Jack isn’t normal. He enrolled in a soldier enhancement program set up by the United States military when he was a young man. The enzyme regimen that they subjected him to that aids his digestion most likely saved his life tonight.”

Hana Song looked down at Jack. The covers of his hospital bed came up to the heavily bandaged surgical incision around his abdomen. He had an IV in his arm and an oxygen mask over his mouth. Hana didn’t hang around Jack Morrison because of his history or his presence, not because she felt she had something to learn, even though she did. She didn't hang around him because she was a mentee desperately looking for a mentor, no. The simple fact of the matter, now that she’d had time to ponder a world that no longer contained him, was that Hana Song thought Jack Morrison was cool. Yeah, there were qualifiers and caveats (his age, for one, and his lousy sense of humor for another), but he was still cool. There was a won-it-all, done-it-all certainty to the man that cemented his place in the world, and in a time when Hana felt as though she had too many masters to serve, masters who made demands of her heart and mind in addition to her body and time, she felt that she needed to be around that certainty, even if for no other reason than just to see what it looked like.

And now he was shrunken, still, clinging to life. It was like she was looking at a husk, bereft of the things that made Jack Jack. That all his inherent virtues and vices had lit out for the territories, leaving behind this crude shell.

“How’d they even get in there?” Hana asked.

Angela looked the baggie over again. “It’s about the size of buckshot,” she said. “From a Hellfire shotgun.”

Hana nodded. “Reaper…”

“And that’s why I had all of you scanned before I let anyone see him,” Angela said. “I was looking for these, and didn’t find any. He saved that shot just for Jack. The Guradian Angel protocol on my staff that healed all of you doesn’t recognize the materials of which these are made. A kind of glucose plastic polymer that isn’t supposed to interfere with bodily functions until they’re activated. They would have been destroyed during rez processing, otherwise.”

Angela put the baggie back in her lab coat, and they both stood there and looked at Jack’s chest slowly rise and fall with his breath. Hana was keenly aware at this moment that this was the first time that she had held a one-one-one conversation with Doctor Angela Ziegler. In the efficiency of
her ministrations and single-minded devotion to her work, Hana had to admit that maybe, maybe she was a little harsh in her initial assessment of Angela Ziegler’s character as the Swiss Bronze Medalist in The Four-Hundred Meter Trying-Too-Hard.

She smelled like hair spray, though. Angela Ziegler had just gotten out of surgery on an old man’s digestive tract, and she still smelled like hair spray. Hana wondered how her hair did that… that swoopy thing, and she apparently had her answer.

“I’ve seen the way he looks at you,” Angela said.

And in a twenty-four hour period marked by a tremendous military defeat that was studded with a purple French woman shooting her in the back, an American edgelord in a bird skull mask taking off her jaw with a shotgun blast, and puking in public, Hana hadn’t considered her day ruined until just now. The visceral reaction must have showed on her face, because Angela’s eyes went wide with reassurance.

“Oh, no,” Angela said. “Not like that.”

“Thank God…”

“No,” Angela said. “I mean… It’s… It’s the same way Ana, and Reinhardt, and even Jack still look at me sometimes.”

Angela turned away, and began to stare at nothing.

"I was a medical prodigy," Angela said, "recruited at a young age after my parents were killed, and told how important I was. How I was going to change the world. They… ‘saw something in me.’”

Angela said those last words as though she were a noblewoman directly quoting the punchline of a truly awful dirty joke. Like the very words were beneath her. Angela looked at Hana.

"I take it you've heard those words before," Angela said, not making it a question. "'I see something in you.'"

That she had. Streamers were a hot commodity in Korea after the government’s initial forays into AI controlled MEKAs failed, necessitating the need for pilots.

Hana nodded. Angela looked away again.

"I wonder where I would be," Angela said, "without the expectations of others. Would I be a lawyer? An actress? Would I sweep floors for a living? Muck stables? It's been so long since I've been left to my own devices that my own devices themselves are foreign to me. I... do not know whose path I am on. I don't know if I chose this, or I felt compelled to reward the expectations of others. Because they saw something in me."

Angela rubbed the side of her nose. "In all honesty, I don't think I've ever said those words to anyone else in my life. I've heard them so often, and know what they mean, and I still cannot understand the impulse that would drive a person to say it to another human being. When someone says ‘I see something in you,’ what… what is that?"

The answer came quickly to Hana. “Faith.”

Angela looked at Hana.

“Y’know…” Hana said. “People want to help others, but sometimes they can’t. Not in the way they
need it. But they see others that could, and hope they do. People say that the world is good, and in
order for the world to be good, some have to go where they’re needed. Sometimes other people can
see where we ought to go better than we can, I guess.”

Angela folded her arms. “Why, Miss Song. You truly are as young as you look.”

She smiled when she said it, and her voice was warm, but Hana felt that she had just been shaded, all
the same.

“This has been enlightening,” Angela said. “And I thank you for indulging me.”

“People tell me that I look like I understand.”

Angela smiled wider, and got a twinkle in her blue eyes. “So you do. We must speak again, but for
now, I must bid you good evening. I have to clean up here, before I am expected elsewhere.”

Hana nodded, said “Good night, Doc,” and then left.

In one of the cheap plastic chairs outside the room, sat Fareeha Amari.

*Of course she is*, Hana thought.

“Hello,” Fareeha said.

“Hey.”

And then she just stood there for a moment. They’d gotten along well enough in training, but much
like with Angela before her, this was the first outside work verbal exchange between Hana and
Fareeha.

Hana pointed at the door. “Angela said she was expected elsewhere. Are you… ’elsewhere?’”

Fareeha nodded. "It's just the nice thing she says to people before she goes to bed. I'm just going to
walk her to her room."

“Oh,” Hana said. “Is it true that Angela speaks five languages?”

“Yes.”

“So it’s, English, and then Swiss, and then…”

“Swiss isn’t a language.”

Hana blinked a couple of times. “It isn’t?”

“No,” Fareeha said. “Angela speaks English, French, Italian, German… and *Spanish.*”

Hana detected the stank that Fareeha put on the last one. “Why Spanish?”

Fareeha leaned toward Hana in her seat and grinned conspiratorially. “*Telenovelas,* Fareeha said.
“Angela *loves* them. And she will *kill* me if she finds out I told you.”

At which point Fareeha’s grin broke into a full smile so infectious that it spread to Hana herself.

And Hana felt the small smidgeon of liking that she felt for Doctor Angela Ziegler smother and die.

Fareeha Amari sat in that cheap plastic chair, beaming, dark-skinned and well-cultivated guns
coming out of either side of a tight black tank top, her muscular thighs making the seams of her jeans plead for a priest to deliver last rites. This woman had been in a suit of armor firing rockets at Russian bodybuilders and Japanese gangsters not ten hours before.

Just as Genji Shimada was an earnest man looking for answers and finding faith for his pursuits. A man who could duel his brother to an acrobatic stand-still that could grind the rest of the world to a halt along with it.

And they were both reduced to messes around Angela Ziegler. And the damnable thing was that everyone knew about it except her.

Hana Song thought that for all of Angela Ziegler’s many strengths, she had to have been the least observant person ever brought to prominence in the planet’s history. And Hana Song thought this because even this derisive notion was better than the alternative, which was that Angela Ziegler was heart-stoppingly cruel.

But Fareeha would hear none of this, and Hana felt her smile fading. Time to make excuses to leave!

“Anyway,” Hana said. “I have to, uh… get to bed, and all.”

“Of course,” Fareeha said, and sat back. Hana turned to walk away.

“Hana?”

Hana stopped and turned around. Fareeha opened her mouth to say something, but stopped, and appeared to be assembling her words as though they were cheap furniture with instructions written in a dead language.

“Is your mother proud of you?”

Hana’s mouth opened, as if to say “Of course she is. She tells me all the time. She sends me care packages of beef jerky and Pop Tarts when I’m away for too long.” Which was true.

But the look on Fareeha’s face was a concerned one. It had dawned on Hana that this was going to be the third time in one very long night that one of her co-workers had bared their innermost thoughts to her, and it was getting on her Goddamned nerves.

“Yeah,” Hana said. “I’d like to think so. Is Ana proud of you?”

Fareeha took a deep breath before she spoke. “There are days, and… there are other days.”

She just left it at that. Hana didn’t know what to say, so she turned and walked away, keeping her pace slow, in case Fareeha had anything else.

Hana had gotten two steps before a great and fiery urge overtook her. Just about everyone had turned the evening into confession time, and all she could do was sit there like a dope, and nod. Fatigue and anger commingled, forcing her to turn around and stomp up to Fareeha (who looked surprised, for her part) and unload something which was bothering her for a change, which was…

“My mom sells aluminum siding!”

And the exclamation mark of that sentence was quickly followed out of her mouth by the remaining invisible shreds of her dignity. Foolish though she felt under Fareeha’s confused gaze, she felt as though she had to finish the thought.
“There’s no backstory there. When Korea got hit by a second Omnic Crisis, she wasn’t killed on the
job, she didn’t lose any customers, everything was fine for my family. She just sells aluminum
siding. But I’ve spent the last ten months surrounded by politicians, businessmen, actors, directors,
and military personnel. In just the past week, I’ve met people whose albums I bought, people whose
posters were on my wall, super-intelligent gorillas, time-travelers, and a mean old lady who thinks
it’s funny when I puke.”

Fareeha nodded. “Mother did that to you too, huh?”

“And all of them tell me that what I do is important because it protects people. Saves people. But
whenever I fight, it’s in a town that’s abandoned. I don’t meet these people I’m saving, and I don’t
think anyone else here does, either. Normal people. Like my mom. Who sells aluminum siding.”

And with this, Hana ran out of steam. If there was a point to all this, she had lost it a long time ago.
Hana and Fareeha lazily locked eyes, each embarrassed for the other.

“Just… y’know… perspective. And… And God, I’m tired.”

“Yes,” Fareeha said. “I can see that.”

All in the facility were subjected to full body scans after the attempted assassination of Jack
Morrison. Ana and Winston were in the conference room going over the implications of the
Respawn and Athena hack. Torbjorn was looking over something for Winston. Genji and Zenyatta
were meditating. Angela and Hana were in the hospital wing, and Fareeha followed Angela because
that’s what Fareeha did as a matter of course.

So the remaining five: Reinhardt, Lena, Brigitte, Lucio, and Mei decided the best thing to do after a
day of defeat and attempted murder was to drink, and drink heavily.

Or at least the women of their number did. Reinhardt and Lucio abstained for dietary and religious
reasons, respectively.

They convened in the kitchen, leaning against the counters, and for the first fifteen minutes of their
drinking session, they said very little. The longest bout of conversation was triggered by Reinhardt,
who began it thusly.

“I just don’t understand it…”

Everyone looked at him.

“Well,” Brigitte said, nursing her Jack and Coke, “I don’t know why Americans put an ‘H’ at the
beginning of the word ‘herb’ if they’re just going to leave it silent, either. It confuses me too.”

“Not that,” Reinhardt said, and stood up, glass of cranberry juice in hand.

“A good deed is crucial,” he said. “Paramount. Not just its own reward. When I was your ages, I
had no time for romantic dalliances, yet I find myself constantly tripping over them.”

He pointed to Lucio. “Why, he burns for…”

This is where Reinhardt seemed to catch himself, and Lucio’s face reached a point where it said that
the two feet in height and two-hundred-fifty pounds in weight that Reinhardt had over him would
have helped him very little if he was going to say what he was about to say.
“Fareeha,” Reinhardt said, and Lucio’s face regained its joviality.

“And speaking of whom, both Fareeha and Genji have designs on Angela. I wonder if anyone else has their eyes on the good Doctor Ziegler?”

Mei took a sip of her martini with her left hand, and raised one finger.

“Really?” Reinhardt asked?

“Yeah,” Lucio said. “Really?”

“I’m not saying I want to start a relationship with her,” Mei explained, a blush growing on her cheeks, “just that if Angela wanted to learn the Mandarin term for ‘Respect,’ I could stretch that lesson to a whole evening.”

Reinhardt turned pale. “I… I feel dirty just listening to that.”

Mei grinned with a faraway look in her eyes. “In a perfect world, so would she.”

“I thought you had a thing for the cowboy,” Brigitte said. “Jesse McCree.”

Mei set her martini down on the counter next to her. “Yes,” she said. “I have a thing for the rugged handsome bad boy with a six-shooter. Pity me, for I am a poor, living stereotype.”

“Did you see his belt buckle?” Lucio asked. “BAMF.” English isn’t my first language, so I don’t know what that stands for.”

“I would tell you,” Reinhardt said. “But I would have to put one… no, two deutschmarks in my swear jar.”

“He’s not kidding,” Brigitte said. “He really does have a swear jar.”

“Mei,” Brigitte said. “Did you notice the belt buckle?”

Mei took another drink. “I noticed what was underneath it.”

Reinhardt turned even paler. “Of course you did, Mei… Of course you did.”

Everyone laughed at this. Everyone except Reinhardt, and…

“Lena,” Lucio said. “You’re not still beating yourself up over today, are you?”

Lena, who had been nursing her bottle of Newcastle Brown, looked up. She’d been silent and staring at the floor throughout this entire exchange.

“I have made worse mistakes,” Reinhardt said, “and recently, as well. But dwelling on them only opens the door to making more. This, I can tell you from experience.”

“I’m not,” Lena said, softly. “I mean I am, but… it’s tricky, innit?”

Mei narrowed her eyes and put her drink down. “Can I ask you a question, Lena?”

“Yeah,” Lena said.

“It’s a personal one.”

“Given how you’ve been going on,” Lena said, “I wouldn’t have a leg to stand on if I said ‘No,’
now would I?"

Mei took another drink, and set it down before folding her hands.

“Do you… have feelings for Widowmaker?—Now, before you answer, I just admitted to having a thing for Jesse. No one here will judge you if you have the same kind of romantic… whatever for Widowmaker, so… I mean, it would explain a lot.”

Lena looked Mei in the eye, and told her the truth.

“No.”

Mei nodded, satisfied, and picked her drink back up.

“Like I said,” Lena said. “It’s tricky… I know it looks daft to everyone on the outside looking in. But… Once upon a time there was this woman, Amelie Lacroix. I don’t know much about her, but there came a point where Amelie Lacroix just stopped. Just ceased to be. Widowmaker replaced her in her own body. And Amelie Lacroix became… unstuck.”

Lena looked down at her chronal accelerator, before looking back up.

“I became unstuck once. Vanished from the time stream, and went everywhere and nowhere like you wouldn’t believe. My mum told me she even had a funeral for me before Winston came up with this thing on my chest to bring me to the here and now. And the barmy bit was, I was there for it, though don’t ask me how. I was unstuck… and then I came back. I was nowhere, and now I’m somewhere. And if Amelie Lacroix is nowhere, then… well…”

Lena sighed. “The Iris—the thing Zenyatta and Genji are always going on about—is a circle that grows and shrinks with the world, and we all gotta make it move. But across from you on The Iris is your opposite number, right? Not like an evil twin or nothing, but someone whose life looks like yours, in a weird way. If it’s true, and I think it is, then Amelie… Widowmaker… whoever, that has to be mine, right?”

She looked at the faces of every person in the room. They seemed confused and bewildered. But this felt good in a way that expounding upon her quandary with people who had answers, like Genji and Zenyatta, did not. Being with people who were as lost as you was held its own appeal.

Finally, Lucio turned to Brigitte.

“Does Reinhardt really have a swear jar?”

Brigitte sighed. “It’s been empty the entire time I’ve known him. I don’t even know why he has it.”

Just after they had gotten off the transport, Fareeha had pulled Ana aside, quietly informing her that she’d like to talk later that night. Aside from when they had talked briefly upon reuniting, they hadn’t been alone together, and the prospects of what such a talk might entail weighed heavily on Ana’s mind. Some part of her hoped that maybe they could just go back to being as close as they used to be, and skip over the messy business of emotional talks. It wasn’t an entirely baseless hope. Even if they hadn’t been alone together, they had been by one another’s side nearly constantly. And in group settings they had been comfortable, cracking jokes in a comfortably familiar way.

Some things had clearly changed. Most notably that her daughter now had an almost palpable air of confidence, so different from her childhood shyness. But other things, like the crush she had fostered on Dr. Ziegler since the moment they had first met when she was twelve years old, had not.
“I could have lost both eyes and still seen that one.” She thought to herself with a smirk.

But in the end, she knew that a quick, clean reconciliation was only a fantasy. They had been close. Closer than most parents are with their children. And to make Fareeha think that she was dead, to put her through that grieving process, was unforgivable.

To distract herself briefly as she made her way down the quiet, stark halls of the Watchpoint towards her daughter’s quarters, she mulled over the conversation she had just had in the conference room.

She had been unaware that Athena could even be hacked, but as Winston informed her, this most definitely was the case. And if Athena goes down, so too does Respawn, as Athena was the program's governing AI.

The silver lining to this dark cloud was that there were protections in place for such an event. Athena had been designed from the ground up to include subroutines that would detect harmful incursions and force a reboot and restore process. The problem with this was that the elapsed time from hack to reboot was a ghastly two minutes and nine seconds, which was an eternity when one had soldiers on the field.

"The best giveaway that something’s wrong," Winston had said, "is that the radio also goes down during a hack. So if you can't reach anyone when you're out in the field, lay low, because Respawn's down, too."

Of additional interest was the message that had flashed on Athena's screen before Jack went down. Winston had his opinions about what it meant. "'Hell is empty, and all the devils are here?' That sounds like a pretty Reapery thing to say, don't you think?"

Ana wasn’t so sure. She'd known Gabriel Reyes a long time, and in that duration, she'd gotten a sense of the things he did and did not like. It had been an in-joke between herself, Jack, and Reinhardt at the time that Gabriel had been deeply insecure about his own education, as he had not gone to university. At times when scientists or politicians in Overwatch's orbit quoted something from literature to prove their points, she had seen Gabriel's eyes narrow and his nostrils flare, as though it were a targeted insult.

Winston was entitled to his opinion, but Ana thought it was very unlike Reaper to quote The Tempest.

As she approached the section of the base that Fareeha was lodged in, she slowed her steps, trying to give herself as much time as possible to steel herself. Even from the other side of the hall, it felt like she was entering into enemy territory unarmed. Her stomach sank and the back of her throat went dry. When she reached out to open the door, it was almost as if in a trance.

Fareeha’s room was small and dusty, and to most it probably would have looked unbearably Spartan. But to Ana’s eye, it was marked all over with tiny personal marks—an aged and weathered poster of Reinhardt in his glory days, a dog-eared Quran and notebook next to it on the bedside table, a model of a 20th century Soviet bomber on her desk, among other things. It had been over a decade since she had been in her daughter’s space. And even if it felt like she was an intruder here now, it warmed her heart to bear witness to it.

Fareeha was sitting on a moth-eaten couch just across from the door, leaning with her elbows on her knees. When her eyes flitted up to meet hers, Ana felt as though the room temperature had dropped twenty degrees. Before she could say anything, Fareeha looked away, and began to speak.

“This morning...” Fareeha checked her watch. “Yesterday, I died.”
She let that hang in the air for a moment. Ana’s first instinct was to say “Twice, no less! You always were an overachiever.” But bit back the quip. By the tenseness in her shoulders and the look in her eyes wavering between flintiness and despair, she surmised that her daughter needed her to be more present than that. By the way she was biting her lip, Fareeha was probably more worried than angry.

“And if it weren’t for Angela and Respawn, I would have died having never really spoken to you since you returned.”

Ana nodded again, and by the way Fareeha was clenching and unclenching her jaw, she braced for fire.

But the fire never came. Instead, in a small voice, she simply whispered “I missed you.” and in that moment, her daughter did not look like the nearly 2 meter tall, broad shouldered surly rocket-jock that she had grown into. She looked like her little girl, trying on her mother’s uniform that was still too big for her.

Ana tried to close the distance between them and embrace her child, but Fareeha raised her hand and shot her a sharp glare. Her little girl disappeared in an instant, only to be replaced by Captain Amari, the hard woman she had become. She had not earned the privilege of an embrace from this new person, it appeared.

“Why did you leave me, only to come back? Do you even know yourself?”

Ana let out a dry laugh, “You’re really not letting me off the hook, are you?”

Fareeha chuckled humorlessly in turn, “You’re really not letting me off the hook, are you?”

Even after thinking about the answer to this question for close to a decade, the rhetorical end to her daughter’s question hit uncomfortably close to the bone. In truth she wasn’t sure that she knew with any certainty. Every moment since her world had been torn asunder by the Omnic Crisis, she had simply done what needed to be done. With a rifle in her hands, or with a company of soldiers to direct, the answer always came easily. There was no need for questions of why, only how.

‘Why’ was still a foreign framing to her. And when she had tried to justify her actions to herself over the past decade, they always ended up becoming a how. Running a way is how she would stop herself from causing her daughter more pain, how she would learn to live with herself with no world-spanning directive to follow.

Shame and pride washed over her in waves. Her daughter had become perceptive over the years, whether she knew it or not. Part of her wanted to keep running from the question, but looking at the woman her child had become, she knew she couldn’t live with herself and keep disappointing her.

Ana sat next to Fareeha on the tiny couch. Fareeha didn’t flinch away from the contact where their thighs touched, which was a heartening sign. With three deep breaths and as much soul-searching as her mind could get its hands on in that time, she finally said:

“I left because I was ashamed. When I had you, you were the first thing that made me feel like this world had a place for me in it. Before then, I only knew how to fight. But when I looked into your eyes for the first time, I saw hope for the world. I saw hope for myself. That I could be something more than a killer.”

She tried to look Fareeha in the eyes as she spoke, but the intense gaze she met forced her to avert her eyes and stare at her hands. If she looked close enough, sometimes she swore she could see bloodstains on her hands. But she knew such a thought was silly. She was an old woman now, and
dark marks were just another sign of that.

“I only knew how to look at things bigger than myself. Saving my community, my country, my world. Even just taking care of my company of soldiers, I could focus on them, instead of me. Everything in my world was through the lens of my scope, and in that view, there wasn’t room for personal feelings. When I suddenly had you, it was the first time my focus had been shifted from that to something smaller. You and me…It was like this little world all its own. And I didn’t know how to make those two focuses work together.”

From the corner of her eye, she saw Fareeha nod, and lean in almost imperceptibly.

“So, when I was recovering in the hospital, I had a lot of time to think about how badly I lived up to that hope. I took you for granted, Fareeha. And I didn’t notice you growing up. When you told me for the first time that you wanted to be a soldier like me, I just wanted to cram my baby bird back in its cage, to keep her forever as a comfort to myself. You were my hope to see a better world, and the thought of you following in my footsteps was like being told the awful world I spent so long trying to fix would never recover. That the only thing I loved would just be taken by it. We were both so angry with each other, and I didn’t know what to do. It seemed like it would be better if I just left and let you live your life.”

Fareeha’s brow knit, and she winced as though she were in pain, “I wasn’t mad at you, Mother.” She whispered, “I just wanted you to respect me.”

Ana looked up in wide-eyed shock, “Respect you?” she laughed, “Fareeha, you can do with a rocket launcher in midair what took me years to learn how to do with a rifle from a prone position. I would be a fool to not respect you.”

Despite the praise, Fareeha did not look convinced. “And yet, you don’t—or at least didn’t—want me to do this.”

Ana faltered, and resumed staring at her hands. After a moment, she answered honestly, “No. I don’t.”

“Why?” Fareeha asked, her voice taking a sharp accusatory edge, “Have I not proved yet that I’m not just some starry-eyed child chasing storybook heroes?”

Ana’s lips drew tight, and she glared. She still couldn’t meet her daughter’s eyes, so she settled for giving her hands the harshest stare-down they’d likely ever receive.

“Don’t… put words in my mouth.” She took a deep breath and gritted her teeth, trying not to let reactionary anger get the best of her. She knew that she had patronized her daughter repeatedly in the past. And, she probably continued to do so, to some degree. But having it pointed out so frankly still stung, and it was hard to not get defensive.

“Tell me, Fareeha, what do you think about before you pull the trigger?” she asked, finally.

Fareeha sighed in thinly-veiled exasperation “Even with a small payload, a rocket launcher is still a weapon with a high potential for collateral damage. So I check once, twice, sometimes up to six times, what is near my target? Am I going to wipe out an apartment or blow up a car if I miss? Are there any civilians or teammates nearby who might get hit by errant shrapnel? Is the cover they’re hiding behind structural support to a building? These sorts of questions.”

“And at what point do you spare a thought for the life you are about to end? Or is that just another one of the variables on your checklist?”
The question was blunt and meek at the same time. Ana could feel her daughter shrink slightly back into the couch. But even so, her voice remained confident when she replied.

“I don’t fight amateurs,” Fareeha said. “Anyone who willingly steps in front of a rocket launcher knows what they’re getting into.”

“This is why the idea of you fighting makes me uneasy,” Ana said, gesturing with her hand to punctuate the statement.

“What?” Fareeha asked. “Am I being unreasonable?”

Ana finally steeled her heart, and met her daughter’s eyes. They were still hard and unfamiliar.

“You’re not.” Ana said. “You’re being perfectly reasonable, and that’s what worries me. It is the easiest equation in the world when you let the other man deal with the question of his death. But it is that cold pragmatism towards life that led Overwatch to its grave. And what led me away from you.”

Fareeha inhaled sharply, as though she was about to interject. But Ana frowned, and continued to speak before her thought could be interrupted.

“Every time we kill someone, another person out there feels the loss you felt when I—‘left’, or some other euphemism that could safely be hidden behind. But if she were to regain her daughter’s trust, it was time to be honest. ‘—When I abandoned you. Their family, their friends, their community feels that exact same loss. Not everyone we kill has the decency to be an abusive husband or a bigot or some other thing we can feel fine about removing from the world.”

Fareeha’s hardness fell away slightly, and with renewed boldness, Ana continued,

“You are a brilliant soldier, Fareeha. And I always knew you would be. I just worry that getting here required killing the gentleness and warmth I knew in you as a child.” And what she did not say aloud, what she scarcely even allowed herself to think in her most private thoughts, was I don’t want to see you, my hope for a better world, become everything I hate about myself. Because where would that leave me?

Fareeha was silent, visibly mulling over what she had just heard. Ana added, to fill the heavy silence,

“So to answer your first question, I came back because I needed to see for myself. I don’t want to be just another thing that makes your heart hard, Fareeha.”

And, timidly, Ana placed her hand gently on her daughter’s shoulder.

“I’m sorry.”

Fareeha looked at her with the tired eyes of someone who had given up hope too many times. Seeing that look hurt Ana like a knife in the chest, and the cold, precise words that accompanied it twisted the blade further.

“Apologies are meaningless, Mama. Just do better.”
Chapter 8: How the Other Half Lives

Santa Fe, Twenty Years Ago

Even at the age of seventeen, Jesse McCree was not a stranger to this interrogation room. The first time was for possession of a firearm, and his arresting officer, Officer O’Connell, couldn’t have been nicer. Jesse got that one pled down to community service.

The second time was for stealing a car, and the same officer, Officer O’Connell, was a little less nice, and told Jesse point blank that it disappointed him to see the young man in his station again. For that one, he got six months in juvvie.

And both of those times, the buzzing of the fluorescent lights over his head drilled into his brain, just like it did now. The same smell of stale coffee in the air. The same echoing screams from the drunk tank down the hall.

But this third time was different. The buzzing light was still driving him nuts, and the smell of old Insta-Caf still larded the air, but the drunks had been moved out of the station. And no Officer O’Connell.

Fewer cops at all, for that matter.

Plenty of ATF agents, though.

And they were all awful sore that Jesse shot and killed two of their own.

The agent who handcuffed him to the table in this interrogation room leered at him as he did so. His hands were shaking.

“See that surveillance camera up there in the corner?” the agent asked, the scent of cheap tobacco wafting out of his yellowing maw. “We know how to turn it off. And we will, when me and a couple of the fellas beat you to death for what you done. You ain’t got a friend in the world, you little shit.”

This didn’t scare Jesse. He figured it getting pummeled to death on the floor of an interrogation room beat lingering in prison until he got put into an electric chair putting down two federal officers. He knew they put you in a rubber diaper before you rode the lightning so you didn’t soil yourself in front of witnesses. Factoring that, he’d take the ATF Knuckle Express everyday, and twice on The Lord’s Day.

But it had been half an hour since that ATF agent threatened Jesse McCree’s life, and while there were no bellows from the drunk tanks, a new kind of screaming had begun. It was loud, hoarse, and muffled by the walls. Didn’t seem to be coming from the tanks, though.

Unless his ears were deceiving him, Jesse reckoned these screams were coming from processing.

The screams died down, only to be replaced by a succession of slamming doors that came nearer and nearer to the interrogation room. Jesse steeled himself. He may have been handcuffed, but he still had his teeth. The ATF agents may not have been cops in the conventional sense, but he imagined a pig still tasted like pork, no matter how clean and fancy it was.
The door to the interrogation room swung open. The agent that had threatened Jesse before came in, followed by a dark-skinned man in a tailored black suit. His black hair and beard were immaculately groomed, and his eyes were those of a man who brooked no stupidity. He had a file folder under his arm, as well as a leather document case.

The agent glared at the man in the suit. “You’ll get a call from Washington about this!”

The man in the suit turned his head slowly, and held the agent in what appeared, to Jesse, to be the greatest of contempt.

“Roland Lee,” the man in the suit said.

The agent lowered his brow. “What?”

“The Acting Deputy Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives,” the man in the suit said. “His name is Roland Lee. I served with him in Strasbourg. Tell him I said Hi. And he likes his coffee with two sugars. You should know that if you plan to get in my way again.”

The agent turned a particularly lavish shade of red, and slammed the door behind him as he left.

Jesse looked at the man in the suit. “Who are you, mister?”

“Don’t call me ‘mister,’” the man in the suit said. “My dad was a mister. I’m not.”

“Then what do I call you?”

The man in the suit narrowed his eyes at Jesse. “’Captain.’”

Jesse didn’t say anything to that. The Captain sat at the table across from Jesse and placed the file folder and the leather document case on opposite sides. He then picked up the file folder and opened it.

“The Life and Times of Jesse Estus McCree,” The Captain said. “As dutifully chronicled by the state of New Mexico.”

Then The Captain began to read.

“Born February eighth, 2039 to Christina and Dodd McCree. Nothing of note till we get to high school. Your mom passed when you were fourteen, and three months later you got popped with a handgun that wasn’t yours. Must have screwed you up, huh?”

Jesse didn’t say anything, but The Captain looked at him for a moment, and then looked down again, as though he had gotten his answer anyway.

“Two years later you steal a car and spend six months on a juvenile detention center. And in the six months between then and now, you fall in with Isaiah and Morecombe Deadlock, and their little crew. How’d you make that connection, anyway? A kid you met in juvvie? Got you a meet with the Deadlock boys?”

The kid Jesse met in juvvie was named Sammy, and he was in The Deadlock Gang. The Captain was right, Jesse joined through Sammy… But he wasn’t about to tell him that.

“I gotta say,” The Captain said. “Your compadres in the Deadlock Gang don’t have quite the same flair for the dramatic you do. You have a collection of the hardest, nastiest guys in New Mexico, rap sheets a mile long, wearing leather jackets and jeans like any decent professional criminal would,
and *your* little cosplaying ass is with them in a poncho and a cowboy hat. They’re carrying Bersa automatics and *you* have a six-shooter. A *modified* six-shooter, sure, but a six-shooter nonetheless. It even has a little spur on the grip.”

The Captain started laughing. “I mean… I mean that’s just *style* right there. They say kids don’t respect culture, but how many old westerns did you watch before you decided to put those clothes on in public?”

The Captain’s laughter subsided, and when it did, he looked Jesse up and down.

“That’s what gets people, though,” The Captain said. “Movies, I mean. Guys like you and me, we ain’t born with guns in our hands. That’s a point we have to get to. But until we get to that point, we watch movies. And when we finally do get guns in our hands for the first time, we see them as problem solvers instead of tools. One shot, problem solved, movie over. Today, you got ATF on you ferrying a shipment of illegal guns over the border. You fired two shots at a truck and got the agents in both of the front seats right between the eyes through a tinted windshield, bringing the truck to a stop. And I’ll bet… I’ll just *bet*… that you were so busy waiting for the credits to roll that you didn’t see the roadblock the staties set up.”

The Captain leaned back in his chair. “Am I wrong?”

He wasn’t. But Jesse didn’t say that.

“Why’re you here, Cap’n? You here to offer me a deal? Lighter sentence if I tattle on the boys?”

“A *lighter sentence*?” The Captain asked, not even bothering to keep the derision out of his voice. “No, youngster. I’m offering you your freedom.”

Jesse… hadn’t seen that one coming. He must not have been able to keep the shock out of his face, because The Captain started grinning like he just got two bags of chips out of a vending machine instead of one.

“You with the army?” Jesse asked. “That how this works? I get into a uniform and serve my country?”

“I’m not with the army, youngster,” The Captain said. “I’m with Overwatch. I want you to serve the *world*.”

Jesse started laughing.

“You… You want me to fight *robots*?”

“Actually, no,” The Captain said. “There’s a little initiative that Overwatch is setting up. Intel gathering, real cloak-and-dagger stuff. The only reason ATF got wind of the guns was because of an op this initiative was working as a kind of trial run. And we had to work *hard* to get that info, so you did a good job, there. So you’re a crack shot with a talent for secrecy who isn’t afraid to die. Why *wouldn’t* Overwatch want you on the team?”

The Captain reached for the leather document case, and unzipped it. Inside was an official-looking piece of paper and a pen.

“And all you have to do is sign this, and agree to testify in court against Isaiah and Morecombe Deadlock.”

Jesse furrowed his brow. Of *course* they wanted him to tattle.
“You think I haven’t signed anything because I’m loyal? I haven’t signed anything because the Deadlocks have boys everywhere. When they put me under, they’ll do it slower than an angry pig, and a damn sight slower than an electric chair. They probably have boys outside this station right now, waiting for anyone in the gang who walks out. Because when a job goes as bad as it did today, the only kind of person sees the sun again is the kind who talked.”

The Captain folded his arms. “You ever hear of a man named Reinhardt Wilhelm? German guy, seven feet tall, swings a giant hammer and wears armor thicker than a Texas girl’s ass? He’s waiting outside, hammer in hand, ready to walk you to your transport. You’re worried about Deadlock’s guys coming after you? Let them. And when they do, have some popcorn handy, ‘cause Reinhardt’s pretty entertaining when you get his dander up.”

The Captain slid the confession closer to Jesse.

“Sign it,” he said. “You have to pay with secrets to keep them for a living. And you best believe Overwatch serves better food than federal prison.”

Jesse stared at the confession, trying to gauge how long a suitable crisis of conscience should take. He knew he was going to sign, but didn’t want to give The Captain too much satisfaction. Jesse reckoned he might get used to it.

“Hell with it,” Jesse finally said, reaching for the pen. “I can either die, or meet Reinhardt Wilhelm and then die. Not really much of a choice is it?”

After he had signed, The Captain fished a handcuff key from the front pocket of his suit jacket and freed Jesse from the interrogation room table. As he rubbed his wrists, The Captain extended his hand.

“Gabriel Reyes,” The Captain said.

Jesse extended his own for the shake. “Jesse McCree, at your service.”

Gabriel Reyes smiled. “Right on both counts, youngster.”

---

**Hanamura**

Jesse stubbed his cigar out on the heel of his boot before throwing it into the trash can a few feet away. It bounced off the rim before landing harmlessly on an empty cheese doodle packet halfway down.

He was standing in a parking garage underneath an abandoned office building in the Hanamura, Japan, next to Roadhog, who was sitting on the concrete floor, listening to Swahili Death Metal on his headphones and reading a comic book.

*My life as a spy, Jesse thought, is just going from basement to basement.*

From near one of the pillars, Junkrat, sooty face and singed hair, made his presence known.

“Hey, Roadie,” Junkrat said.

Roadhog took off his headphones. “Yeah?”

“What do you call a bird with one wing?”

Roadhog looked down. He still had his gasmask on (and point of fact, Jesse had never seen him
without it), so it was unclear what expression occupied the girth of his face.

“Dunno,” Roadhog said.  “What do you call a bird with one wing?”

Junkrat wiped his lips and sniffed.  “You call it… a Symmetra.”

Satya Vaswani was over in the corner of the garage.  She had removed her artificial left arm and placed it on a table they had brought down from one of the floors above.  Her right hand was busy with a hard-light torque wrench of her own design, prodding the artificial arm, making adjustments.  If she had heard Junkrat use her callsign, Satya gave no physical indication that she cared.

Junkrat began to walk toward her, and Jesse felt the hairs on his neck stand on end.

As they were the only two in their group’s number that wouldn’t give a shopkeeper a thudding heart attack upon meeting them, it had fallen on Jesse and Satya to procure provisions.  On these excursions, Jesse had learned three things about her.

The first was that she really didn’t like crowds, as she would make Jesse wait until crosswalks had gone from white to red multiple times, if it meant not having to pass through a throng of people coming the other way.  There was no pleading on her part.  She simply would not move.

The second was that for all her cold and surly reticence, he didn’t think it was entirely genuine.  Hanamura was gearing up for a cherry blossom festival next week, and even with her I-Don’t-Fart-and-No-One-Else-Should expression firmly plastered on her beautiful face, he could notice her slow her strides and look up at them as they were leaving or coming back from the garage.  Jesse had asked her how she had lost her left arm, as he had lost his own during a Blackwatch mission in Bratislava gone bad, to which she replied: “That is my business alone, Mister McCree.”  Which was true, and he left it at that.  But he didn’t think anyone was this all-business… and he was apparently right.

The third, and the strangest, was that she apparently timed her blinks.  He’d noticed it on the dropship over to Ilios.  Satya was looking at the Russian, Zaryanova, and he looked out the window next to her.  He just noticed it in passing, but once he did, he was stunned by it.  Twelve seconds from blink to blink, without fail.  If her Ice Queen demeanor was just an act, then she clung to it like a drowning man would to anything that could float.

As Junkrat got closer to her, Jesse conjured that that act was about to get tested.

“Don’t you think you should handle your playmate?” Jesse asked.

Roadhog looked back up from his comic to see what was most likely about to go down.

“Probably,” Roadhog said, and then went back to reading.

Junkrat stopped a few feet away from Satya, and Jesse turned toward the both of them.

“All those legs, and me without my climbing gear,” Junkrat said.  “I’ll just bet that if I left that tunic up in the back, I’ll find an arse so round psychics could use it to tell the future.”

“Hey,” Jesse said.  Junkrat turned to him, and so did Satya, for that matter, this being her first indication that she knew what was going on.  Roadhog looked between Junkrat and Jesse, and put his head back down.  But Jesse could solidly guess that behind the lenses of that gasmask, Mako Rutledge had his eyes on Junkrat, getting ready for any false moves.

“What do you want, bucko?” Junkrat asked.
“You really shouldn’t swear in front of a lady,” Jesse said.

In contrast to Satya, Junkrat blinked like he was seizing whenever pressed.

“Says who?” Junkrat asked.

“Nine out of ten doctors,” said Jesse. “They say you’ll live longer.”

Junkrat leered, his yellow eyes narrowing. “Do they now?”

“Sure they do,” Jesse said. “And being as I shot the tenth doctor for swearing in front of a lady, I’d say the other nine were right.”

Junkrat blinked a few more times, before standing up straight and extending his hand in front of him, as though it were holding an invisible cigarette. He turned to Satya and began to speak in an unsubtle parody of a posh British accent.

“My apologies, Madam Vaswani,” Junkrat said with the accent. “Upon the intercession of our dear friend and mutual colleague, Mister McCree, I have learned the error of my ways, and seek nothing so humbly as your forgiveness.”

He bowed. Without a word, Satya reached over, wrench in hand, and unbolted Junkrat’s false leg with a flick of her wrist.

With a whoop, Junkrat toppled onto the ground, only to shriek with laughter.

Satya looked back down at her artificial arm. Junkrat turned, still in character, started to drag himself back across the room towards Roadhog and Jesse.

“Why, Roadhog!” Junkrat said with the accent, in between breaths as he crawled. “Look at the state of you! Are you not aware that we are gentlemen, and as such, must act in a manner most gentlemanly? Shape up! Pip-pip!”

Roadhog looked from Junkrat, back to his comic book, and lifted his pinky in a manner most gentlemanly whilst he read. Junkrat laughed as he crawled toward Jesse, the connecting point on his knee scraping against the pavement. He hoisted himself up using Jesse’s leg, and leaned against him as he reattached his prosthetic.

“Women,” Junkrat said, his voice low. “You can always count on ‘em to play straight man. Except that cute little ice box of yours. Seemed like she was the one makin’ a right joke outta you.”

Jesse scowled. “I have no idea what…”

“You know damn well who,” Junkrat said, his voice still low so only the two of them could hear. “The Chinese Sheila with the glasses. Yeah, I saw the two of you in Ilios, shooting at each other while trying to miss. Good thing you had me to paint ‘em all over the pavement for you” His eyes looked far away, and he breathed out a low, cruel chuckle as he reminisced over the scene.

Jesse scowled. “What kind of dirt Morrison has on that girl to get her on that battlefield, I don’t know. Plain as day, though, she didn’t belong there. I’ll put a bullet in a soldier sure as sunshine, but I ain’t never fallen so far so as to put down a civvie. That’s the line. No two ways about it.”

“Y’see that’s where they got you bamboozled, mate. The only thing to do with a gang as rotten as Overwatch is to blow it up and salt the earth. Same as the bots in me old outback. Pickin’ and choosin’ is just letting the cutest of the rabid dogs go free,” said Junkrat, bushy eyebrows jumping to
punctuate the sentiment.

Jesse clenched his teeth, but before he could say anything, Junkrat continued. “There’s a reason we keep you around, and it isn’t for the sparkling conversation. That I got to provide on me own with you miscreants and creeps.” He snorted and looked over his shoulder at Roadhog and Satya. “I intend to blast every last one of those drongos to bits next time we meet. And if you can’t remember why it is you’re here, you might get caught in the blast.”

Jesse’s right hand was shaking, hovering over his holstered Peacemaker. All he needed was one sudden move from the junker, and he’d be more bullet-hole than man.

But no sudden move came. Junkrat looked next to Jesse.

“Come along, Roadhog,” Junkrat said. “We’re businessmen. We got no business here.”

Roadhog got up and they both walked past Jesse in the other direction. They didn’t get far before Junkrat turned around.

“Tell you what, Jesse,” Junkrat said. “I’ll save any bits of your girl I find afterwards just for you. I’m not greedy. I’m a gentleman!”

Junkrat cackled loudly before the two of them went through the door on the other side of the garage. Jesse opened and shut his hand before he turned and walked to the other door. He had to see The Captain, anyway.

As he walked past her, Satya looked up at him and said “That was unnecessary, Mister McCree.”

Jesse stopped and looked at her. He knew she’d say that. And he knew she’d mean it, too.

But he tipped his hat to her, just the same.

“It was for me, Miss Vaswani. You have a good night, now.”

Elsewhere in Hanamura, Widowmaker stared into a porcelain cup. Or at least, she thought she did. What had begun as a nagging question had quickly torn to the forefront of her consciousness like a freight train.

*Is this a cup, or just the memory of a cup?*

She can cause her arms to reach out, make her hands pick it up, and have them work in tandem to put the cup to her lips. There was warmth there, and even a flavor when tea washes over her tongue. But none of it felt real. None of it felt like her own.

Those hands did not feel like her hands. They felt like the hands of a puppet on its string. The taste upon her tongue was also not her own. Rather, it was simply a packet of meaningless sensory information delivered to her conscious mind to comprehend. All of it feels exactly as real and immediate as the memories she can conjure up of different cups, different tastes, different days.

She can turn her mind to the rain that danced on her flesh while stalking a target a month ago, or to an exquisite roast duck she had eaten four years ago, and feel it all just as readily as the taste that the tongue in her mouth is describing.

So the question lingered:

*Is this a cup, or just the memory of a cup?*
It wouldn’t be the first time she had gotten lost in these memories before, after all. At any time she could close her eyes, and take herself back to another moment in time. Any moment of pleasure or pain, any experience, big or small, that had something worth revisiting could be revisited at a moment’s notice.

Every mistake she had ever made was written in excruciating detail on the inside of her eyelids. Those mistakes could be learned from, and over time, there were less of them. And, in turn, every success could be indulged in over and over again the way others indulged in an orgasm. This was a more dangerous pursuit than dwelling on failure. She had some recollection of someone saying that fear is what drove men to failure and madness, but in her experience, the expectation of success—no matter how well founded—was the surest path to shame and defeat.

But the difference between these past languid perusals of memory and this moment, was that in this moment, she could not determine what was memory and what was reality.

As she makes her hand put the cup back down in front of her, she hears a voice, the texture of which is like sandpaper on her skin. It sounded like it was being said through a concrete wall, and as she played back the sound of it in her head, the less she could tell if she were processing present words or imagining past ones.

But what’s the difference, really? The moment has past, and the words of that moment are now unreachable, untouchable.

With an almost imperceptible grunt of frustration, she gives up trying to parse the words that may or may not have been said. As she lets go, her consciousness sinks away to an unbidden place.

When he can’t find her way back to the present, old memories come, and those are harder to dislodge. Memories of time spent in a dark room. So dark she couldn’t tell when she was sleeping or awake. Time stretched and shrank there, with no way to mark it. Hunger, thirst, and fatigue came and went capriciously without any conscious way of regulating them. Her limbs disappeared in the dark, her voice was silenced, and who she had been in a past life died.

On a good day, she could remember the voices that came from the walls and fed her new nascent self with direction. Eventually she would emerge back into the brightly lit, burning hot world just as suddenly as she had disappeared into the dark. And back in this ugly, chaotic world, she would make her first kill, and her new life would begin.

This was not a good day, though. And the dark encroached endlessly in all directions.

Had she ever gotten out after all?

Was this all a desperate fantasy?

Was she in Hell?

She didn’t know.

She didn’t know.

She didn’t know.

Screwing up her eyes and forcing herself to breathe, she swims up, up, up out of the darkness. For a moment, she surfaces again.

Looking up at the man across from her, he looks at once far away, as if through a looking glass or a
photograph, and at the same time altogether too close. His face is a blur of ten men’s faces, far off in the distance. His presence is almost physically hot and itchy on her skin.

Memory or not, it would be so easy to reach up, crush his larynx between her fingers, and the question would be settled. If he died, then she would know this was real. If she knew where she was, she could act, she could make the world make sense again.

In the fog of her senses, she hears a chirp, a flutter of wings. She sees a flash of white in the corner of her vision, and her hand snaps out automatically. As she brings her hand back, she finds a small bird struggling beneath her fingers. After applying a small amount of pressure with her thumb and forefinger, there was a muffled pop, and the bird stopped struggling.

And in that moment, Widowmaker released a breath that she hadn’t realized she had been holding. For a moment, the fog cleared, and she was aware that this was not a memory. This was the present. Her body was her body. Her thoughts were her own. And the kill that she had just made was hers to briefly savor.

As the familiar post-kill sense of wholeness blossomed in her chest, any chance of briefly luxuriating in the feeling was spoiled by the continued gaze of the man across from her. With her fog lifted, she could remember that it was Hanzo Shimada, her ally for the time being. They had fallen into this habit, this place, he silently drinking tea, and she cleaning her sniper rifle. She had poured herself a cup one evening, and he did not object. Indeed, she had never heard Hanzo say a single word in the time she’d known him, and she guessed that no one else on the team had, either. And so this became their evening refuge, drinking tea away from their competent, yet vulgar teammates and sharing silence.

Hanzo stared over the edge of his cup as he took a sip. His eyes briefly pointed to the dead bird still clutched in Widowmaker’s hand, and his eyebrows rose expectantly as he locked eyes with her once more.

Widowmaker carefully set the bird down where it would still be visible in the corner of her eye, inhaled deeply, and, under Hanzo’s meditative gaze, she began to speak.

“This castle. How would you imagine the builder would react, if after weeks of carving and joining the wooden beams that support it, laying the bricks that form its walls, painting the tapestries that hang along its corridors, the next morning after its completion, they found an empty piece of land again?”

She picked up her cup again and took a sip. Glancing down at the settling tea leaves, she continued.

“Consider yourself finding this pot of tea emptying itself the moment that it finished steeping?”

Hanzo looked at the pot, and into his cup, then looked back into Widowmaker’s eyes and nodded.

“Many people have supposed that I practice my art simply for some pleasure in the act of killing. It is not such an art. When I paint upon my canvas, I change the world. She who pulls the trigger shapes reality. But the display we witnessed on that mission, dead men waking only to die again?” She huffs a joyless laugh, “And they call me perverse… Weeks of planning and moments of exacting execution was replaced with a cheap carnival shooting gallery.”

Breaking Hanzo’s gaze, he leaned back slightly, and glared at the horizon. She was silent for a
moment, before speaking again.

“What is real anymore, if death isn’t? A world without death doesn’t make sense. And I cannot stand disorder.”

When she met Hanzo’s eyes again, he simply nodded.

Ten... Eleven... Blink.

Satya Vaswani walked down the long hallway, absent-mindedly flexing the fingers of her artificial arm. She had fielded questions about how she had “lost her arm,” and she had never told a soul.

But the fact of the matter was that she hadn’t lost her arm at all. She had simply given it up.

*It is not my fault,* she had mused to herself privately, *that people keep asking me the wrong question.*

The Vishkar Corporation’s other hard-light conjuring architechs used bracelets or rings to ply the trade, but Doctor Vijay Sachdeva, head of Research and Development for the architech program, came to her with the idea of additional lenses for greater pliability. The lenses had to be larger than the ones for the bracelets and rings, and had to be installed on a rotational axis for maximum effect. Doctor Sachdeva and the rest of R and D researched the problem for eight months, and they determined that the only way this could work would be if the architech in question submitted to amputation, and in place of the severed limb would be a prosthesis containing the additional lenses.

It was not forced upon her. It was requested, and just the once. And Satya accepted.

*They provided for me, therefore they are good. If they are good, then what they do is good. If my thoughts disagree with them, then my thoughts are bad.*

This was a mantra that played on a loop in her subconscious. It saw her through her amputation and her therapy. It saw her through the stench of burning favelas and the noise of bodyguard jobs for Vishkar executives on the prowl for seedy strip clubs. It saw her through the orders from the Vishkar executive board to fly to Japan to aid a known Talon terrorist. It overrode what little of the concepts of right and wrong she had learned from her parents before she was taken in by Vishkar, and saved from poverty in Hyderabad at the age of six.

Ten... Eleven... Blink.

At the end of the long hallway connecting to the garage was a locker room. Why it was in this basement, Satya could not say, but it had been her small bit of solace away from the upper floors where everyone had spread out. Bright lights usually bothered her, but the fluorescents in this locker room, combined with the white tile beneath her feet soothed her somehow. While the rest of the building had fallen into disrepair, the floors were miraculously clean, and the way the tiles were organized in—

“Hello, Satya.”

Satya’s thumb dug into the side of her index finger, which was the only outward display of shock she allowed herself. Her insides, however, lit up and flared out, sending a tingling to her fingers.

Aleksandra Zaryanova sat on a wooden bench next to a row of gray lockers. She wore a gray sports bra and a pair of red gym shorts that hugged thighs the size of... something. She didn’t have a gift for metaphor at the best of times, and this was decidedly not that. Zarya (as she insisted she be called) had no doubt just gotten out of the shower after working out, which explained her current,
and rather revealing, attire as she painted her toenails.

Satya Vaswani had a fixation upon straight lines, order, and symmetry, which is why it confounded her that she, in direct defiance of her own conscious mind, developed an attraction most monstrous to this woman. Zarya who, as evidenced by the flesh exposed, was made of curvatures, one atop the other. From biceps to deltoids, abdominals to lats, Aleksandra Zaryanova was all muscle… All touchable, climbable, kissable, squeezable, lickable, scratchable muscle, and… and…

And although she remembered, at all times, to blink every twelve seconds, Satya Vaswani had to actively remind herself, in this moment, just to breathe.

“Good evening, Zarya.”

“I ask everyone to call me Zarya,” she said. “Because hearing ‘Aleksandra’ in foreign accents sets my teeth on edge.”

Zarya straightened her posture slightly, and said “Eeeul-ix-eeean-druh” in an accent that, were she familiar with the region, Satya would have pegged as an eerily accurate recreation of Sub-Minnestotan Midwestern.

“But you,” Zarya said. “You may call me Aleksandra.”

Aleksandra called a halt to the paintjob she was giving her toenails, and finally looked at her with eyes so green that Satya wanted to go swimming in them.

“Say it,” Aleksandra said. “Say my name.”

Ten… Eleven… Blink.

“Aleksandra,” Satya said.

Aleksandra smiled and closed her eyes in a way Satya had seen people do in coffee commercials.

“The way your tongue hugs the ‘R,’” Aleksandra said. “It’s… something else.”

Aleksandra continued painting her toenails as Satya felt her brain suffocating itself trying to find something to say.

“You are painting your toenails,” Satya said.

Because people do this when they speak, yes? They state the obvious?

“I was,” Aleksandra said as she closed the bottle of pink tail polish. “But now I am done.”

“Why?” Satya asked. “You always wear shoes. No one ever sees them.”

Satya inwardly chided herself for this momentary lapse in her self-control. It had been made evident to her by her classmates in the architech program during childhood that she was “weird.” She always said the wrong thing, so she took it upon herself not to speak unless absolutely necessary. She had difficulty picking up the nonverbal cues of others, so she made sure she was as literal in her speech as she could be to minimize confusion. And it was made abundantly clear to her on her first ever date when she was fifteen (with a boy named Dev in the class above her) that the nonverbal cues that she herself put out were odd and confusing, so she dedicated herself to controlling every aspect of her movement, so that they remained deliberate yet fluid, as not to be robotic, up to and including timing her blinks. She even looked in the mirror and tried on several resting facial
expressions, so as not to look vacant, before settling on one that appeared to the outside world to be coldly disapproving, though not that she herself could tell. This had not gone over well with a great many people, some of whom called her “Frost Temptress” and “Ice Bitch,” but Frost Temptress and Ice Bitch reactions were at least predictable.

At least no one laughed at her.

At least no one called her “weird.”

And though she was fairly certain her question about Aleksandra’s practice of painting her toenails hadn’t made things weird yet, Satya thought she could ill afford another venture into this kind of territory until Aleksandra responded.

Aleksandra smiled, and Satya hoped it was a good, happy smile, and not the bad kind of smile that sometimes preceded a mean remark or a cruel joke.

_Ten… Eleven… Blink._

“I paint my toenails,” Zarya said, “because it requires precision, patience, and delicacy… And I like how it looks. How it makes me feel. The world knows I am beautiful, and now it must know I am oh… so… so pretty.”

Satya felt that she was poorly armed in her battle against the urge to yell “You sure are!” and yet she was successful all the same. This line of inquiry seemed to go well, so Satya opted to continue down it. She noticed the shiny smoothness of Aleksandra’s massive calves, leading up to her generously toned thighs and asked…

“Is that why you shave your legs as well?”

Aleksandra’s brow lowered, and she slowly turned around on the bench to face Satya, bringing her feet down to the tile floor with two soft, meaty thumps.

“Why is everyone always surprised to learn this about me?” Aleksandra asked. “I don’t shave my legs to make statement. I have a pair of silk pajama bottoms. It feels nice.”

Satya knew that the tone of the conversation had changed, but she didn’t know how. Before she could successfully examine how she might have offended her, Aleksandra stood up from the bench while looking down at her feet. She pointed to her freshly painted toenails.

“Do you like the color?” Aleksandra asked.

“I do,” Satya said. “It is very pretty.”

Which was true.

“I tried to get a shade that matched my hair,” Aleksandra said, “But I think it is a little light. It looks… like…”

Normally, Satya had to mine her vocabulary to compare things to colors, because that was just using metaphors in reverse, and she was terrible at that in both directions, but in this one, brief instance, it was easy.

“Goat’s milk strawberry ice cream,” Satya said. “It looks like goat’s milk strawberry ice cream.”

Aleksandra wrinkled her nose. “They make strawberry ice cream out of goat’s milk?”
“Yes,” Satya said, not spotting the derision in Aleksandra’s voice.

“And you eat it?”

“Whenever I can.”

“How is your own free will?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Because I am Hindu,” Satya said. “It is the only kind of ice cream I can have that still uses milk.”

Aleksandra widened her eyes. “Oh! Yes, of course! Because you aren’t supposed to—Yes, I see now.”

“Does this present a problem?” Satya asked, genuinely curious.

“Not at all,” Aleksandra said, and with this she stretched her arms above her head. She was tall enough to wrap her fingers around the pipes on the ceiling that fed the sprinkler system. Aleksandra’s sports bra crept further up her midriff. The seam crept up to the underside of her generous breasts, and revealed a near-mythical set of eight-pack abs.

“If anything,” Aleksandra said, “I appreciate a woman who can place herself in the arms of something… bigger.”

Ten... Eleven... Blink.

Aleksandra’s lip did something strange. It was bigger than a smirk, but smaller than a sneer. And in the silence that followed, Satya felt a hazy, almost imperceptible sense of expectation in the air. Not unlike the kind that accompanied bellhops as they stood at the door after they had brought her bags up to her hotel room. It had taken her two years to figure out that they expected to be tipped for their services.

Satya’s mind flashed back to the seediest bodyguard jobs she had ever taken for Vishkar executives. Drunken middle-aged business men cramming rupees into the g-strings of half-naked women in strip clubs.

And yet another image slinked into her head. That of herself walking to Aleksandra and stuffing a fifty rupee note into the waistband of her gym shorts. Hearing the crinkle of paper. The back of her own finger getting the briefest, the most nourishing sensation of Aleksandra’s skin against her own… and this was an image that Satya was shocked to find that she was more than okay with.

If that is how people express appreciation, Satya thought, then I’ll do it. Because I… I really appreciate this.

In the time it took her to realize that she had spent too much time without saying anything (and in the time that she realized that she had left her purse upstairs), the moment had passed. Aleksandra had brought her hands down from the ceiling.

“Good night, Satya,” Aleksandra said. “I hope your dreams treat you well.”

And then she left the locker room.

Satya knew that if those gym shorts hugged Aleksandra’s thighs so tightly, then they would also
have a firm embrace on her backside, and although it took all of her inner fortitude to abstain from sneaking even the briefest glance at such a sight, she managed not to do so.

It would be weird.

She had always been like this. Men and women who had caught her sunniest and gooiest fancies were to be avoided at all costs. Even magazines whose covers bore the faces of Tollywood actors she found attractive had to be turned over on newsstands and in waiting rooms. They looked at her, and she found something wanting in the act of looking back. As though they could see her, and she had to turn on her twelve second blinks and Ice Bitch face to keep them from judging or laughing.

Ten… Ele—Wait, what?

Satya’s head whipped around to the doorway through which Aleksandra had just passed, and she blinked several times in rapid succession.

“I appreciate a woman who can place herself in the arms of something… bigger…”

She was… She was hitting on me!

She blinked a few more times, though she wasn’t aware of it. Her Ice Bitch face broke, though she couldn’t feel it. Her lips broke out into the widest smile that would have told anyone who had been there that Satya Vaswani was in the sloppiest and dumbest kind of love that could be found in anyone who wasn’t thirteen years old.

All her life, Satya had seen movies and read books of people falling into each other’s arms, smiling and giggling. She had regarded it with incomprehension, the same way she regarded people who could pole vault, or slam dunk a basketball. But unlike those two skills, Satya thought love could be in reach. That somewhere, hidden among the innumerable citizens of the world, was one who could look at her as herself, and find something there to cherish.

She could go to her now. She could walk down that hallway. She could grab Aleksandra’s meaty shoulder to turn her around. She could run her hands through the short cropping of Aleksandra’s pink hair and bring her head down to her level, before pressing her lips to her own.

And yet Satya’s feet remained rooted to the spot. The expression that had earned the ire of many slowly congealed back onto her face. And the countdown began to the next blink.

The moment had passed. It seemed, to Satya, that her life was a limbo, waiting for the next moment, and mourning the moment that had passed. The moment that she did not seize.

No.

No, it would be weird now.

And I would probably screw it up anyway.

Reaper was in dispersion.

He could not get used to the constant, maddening pain that had been the cornerstone of his life since Angela Ziegler “saved his life” with untested nanotechnology. Each cell in his body died and regenerated every second. He couldn’t end his agony, but merely alleviate it, and one of the only ways to do so was to disperse into smoke and occupy a large space, such as this former boardroom in this office building in Hanamura, empty save only for a row of monitors that displayed the building’s
security feed that he’d had Satya get up and running.

The smoke hugged the walls of the boardroom, and felt vibrations throughout the building, including those of a lone set of footsteps in the hallway outside, accompanied by the light jangle of spurs.

Jesse.

He wanted to talk.

Reaper hated small talk when he was still Gabriel Reyes, but now he despised it. Everything Reaper did hurt, so everything had to be deliberate. People who expected to talk, expected to meander, and who knew how long and unpredictable that could be?

Reaper’s smoke drew to the center of the room into a column, before it amassed into his chosen corporeal form, mask and all. This was what Jesse saw when he opened the boardroom door, bringing light into the darkened space.

Jesse didn’t say anything at first. He just looked around the empty room, as though something untoward must have been going on prior to his entrance, before his eyes fell on Reaper, and he began to speak.

“Lemme ask you a question,” Jesse said. “You ever go out drinkin’, and get you a female bartender? And the more you put ‘em away, the…the more beautiful she gets. Even three sheets in, she ain’t gonna win a beauty contest, but…you kinda question why you need beauty contests, when the prettiest girl in the world is givin’ you whiskey. All them contests already been won. Then you wake up the next morning, head tryin’ to kill you, and you think to yourself ‘Damn, if’n I can’t find a girl like that when I’m sober?’”

This was apparently bothering Jesse, but how this brand of foolishness could bother anyone was lost on Reaper, who could only tilt his head in confusion.

“You came to me to talk about women?”

Jesse scratched his forehead under the brim of his hat. “I got climatologists on the brain,” he said. “DJs, too. Lil’ Korean girls in big pink robots. I gotta empty my Peacemaker at ‘em on your say-so.”

“You have a problem shooting at people trying to shoot you?”

“I don’t have a problem putting down true believers,” Jesse said. “Oxton? Reinhardt? Fareeha? They bought their chips and sat at the table knowin’ the rules of the game. Them others don’t. Or I don’t think they do, leastways.”

“That is how they work,” Reaper said. “They take in the talented and the young.”

“Like you did me?” Jesse asked.

“You were too smart to fall for it,” Reaper said.

It seemed to Reaper that Jesse grinned before he could tell himself not to. When rumblings spread throughout the organization that Gabriel Reyes was going to be brought to trial for his part in the Dublin bombing, Jesse went to the media and blew the whistle on Blackwatch, which had never been made public. If Overwatch had come forward with this information on their own in order to successfully prosecute, then they could have saved some measure of face, but Jesse’s defection made it look like a cover-up. This hurt their standing immeasurably in the eyes of the public, and
Overwatch’s days were officially numbered.

But Jesse’s smile faded.

“Ana Amari is alive,” Jesse said.

“Yes.”

“And you don’t seem particularly rustled by this… Which tells me you knew.”

Reaper didn’t say anything.

“You knew,” Jesse said, “and you didn’t tell me.”

Jesse’s loyalty to Captain Ana Amari had worried Reaper for twenty years. What it was that compelled this loyalty, Reaper could not say, and had never asked. It was his intuition that, had Ana been present at the time of the Dublin bombing, Jesse would not have gone to the press, and Reaper would still be Gabriel Reyes, and rotting in prison.

“Does it matter if I told you or not?” Reaper asked. “Does it truly matter what I say? Or does it matter… that she didn’t tell you herself?”

For a cowboy, Jesse McCree had a miserable poker face. He looked down at his boots, and Reaper could tell that his words had some effect on him, but not as much as he had wanted them to.

Reaper turned around, and looked at the row of security monitors.

“Amari… and Morrison… and Wilhelm all perverted a good and beautiful thing after The Crisis,” Reaper said. “They couldn’t adjust to the world they made. They got old. They thought… They thought that they were the saviors that the people told them they were. They thought there was a finish line! They thought there was a point that they could just stop! And when the world kept spinning, when new problems arose, they thought they could act like they always did. They thought they could use the same measures against human beings that they could against Omnics. Just because they were heroes, any measure they took was heroic, no matter how weak, no matter how broad, no matter how dangerous. They won the war, Jesse… but they lost the peace.”

Reaper turned around and looked at Jesse. The brim of his hat was covering his eyes.

“The point still stands,” Jesse said dimly. “You have a habit of making things get hairy. When they do, I’m not putting down any little girls, or scientists, or musicians didn’t know what they were getting into. That’s the long, Cap’n. It’s the short, too.”

“And you won’t have to,” Reaper said. “Respawn is the goal, not anyone who uses it. People who aren’t afraid to die don’t build such toys. Once it falls, those people you’re worried about will abandon Overwatch. Save the world, Jesse, without taking a life. I know you’ll take that. I’ve never doubted your commitment to a better world, and I still don’t.”

Jesse’s hat was still covering his eyes. Reaper felt madness creep in over his inability to gauge his former ward’s reaction. Jesse turned toward the door, and Reaper screamed inwardly, at himself, to say something else.

“Jesse?”

Jesse stopped.
“Jack Morrison has taken a protégé,” Reaper said. “Hana Song.”

“The lil’ Korean girl?” Jesse asked. “How do you know that?”

Reaper felt that that Jesse didn’t need to be privy to that information.

“She needs guidance,” Reaper said. “And care. Morrison can’t provide that, and I think my time has passed. But you can. Save a life, youngster.”

Youngster.

That’s what did it.

It was what he’d called Jesse twenty years earlier in that interrogation room, and he saw that Jesse remembered it, too. His eyes fell in a sad way, and a sweet smile curled his lips. He looked as though he remembered only the faintest traces of the song that played on the radio during the first time he kissed a girl. Jesse McCree was loyal.

And sentimental.

And weak.

After Jesse left, Reaper turned back to the security monitors and walked to the farthest one on the left. The one that displayed the south parking garage, on the other side of the building from the one where everyone else had gathered.

Reaper had had Satya upload a set of schematics into the Bastion unit. In between bouts of making sure its pet bird was supplied with birdseed, the Bastion was building a large conical structure with the iron tubes that the team had liberated from Andreadis Metalworks in Ilios.

He’d make sure that Satya saw to the structure’s shipment in the morning.
And so, they waited.

It had been two days since the disastrous operation at Ilios and the attempted assassination of Jack Morrison. In between training drills, the assembled members of Overwatch had socialized little these past forty-eight hours. Jack was still in sedation, and it was as though his comrades softened their steps and lowered their voices, lest they awoke him.

But at this one moment in time, as they were spread out across the King’s Row facility and beyond, they each found some measure of calm, either by themselves, or in a pair of instances, with each other, before the storm they knew was boiling just beyond the horizon.

Winston kicked his feet up in the conference room with a banana in one hand and a jar of peanut butter in the other. He interlaced his toes and cracked their knuckles before using his feet to bring up his playlists on Athena’s monitor.

He was a closeted music nerd, our Winston, never getting into a serious conversation about the subject, as the surest way to get into an argument was to ask another music nerd what their favorite band was. He had quietly and painstakingly amassed a library of music spanning the previous century-and-a-half. His big toe hit shuffle.


One floor down, Hana paced in front of her quarters. She didn’t want to go back to the medical wing and sit in the one lonely chair next to Jack’s bed, hoping he would wake up every time she looked away. And he didn’t want to linger in her room alone with her thoughts, either. So she hovered near the door, trying to figure out her next move, when Lena walked past.

“Hey, Lena,” Hana said. Lena stopped, eyebrows raised, mouth open in the little “O” shape that sometimes happened when she was curious about something.

“Humor me,” Hana said. “Play video games with me.”

Lena looked, for a brief moment, like she was going to say no. But something, though Hana could not say what, stayed Lena’s refusal.

“What’cha got?” Lena asked.

“More like, what haven’t I got.” Hana replied with a smirk.

Hana got her EmBox and monitor set up, and they both looked through Hana’s library. They settled on IBL ’76 (the officially licensed game of the International Basketball League). Hana, not wanting to dominate her neophyte friend in the first game they played together, picked the Athens Titans, who had good point guards, but sub-par centers. Lena, a hometown girl at heart, picked the London Broilers, who were just terrible.
As they settled into their game, Lena provided a soothing stream of babble.

“Yeah how do you like that!” She growled, every time she made an interception, even though she always lost the ball again within moments.

“Git some! Ahh yeah that’s right!” She cried before making every shot which inevitably fell short of the basket.

If she had been in a more charitable mood, Hana might have found the juxtaposition between Lena’s trash-talking and her general incompetence funny and endearing. But at this moment, its primary use was as simple white noise to keep her own thoughts at bay.

For her own part, despite her color commentary, Lena’s mind was preoccupied with what the Shambali monks called “The Great and Everlasting Permanence.” It stated that the long line of events preceding one’s birth and following one’s death, if viewed from the right angle, displayed that all things were not only possible, but inevitable. Lena had been unstuck in the stream of time before she knew about The Permanence. Had she known beforehand, she thought she’d have looked for the line. She considered it a lost opportunity.

“Fwoaarrrr, eat that!” hollered Lena as she scored her first free-throw, having missed the previous nine. She turned to Hana with a cheeky grin to continue her taunting, but found her comrade stony faced and with a slightly glazed expression. Seeing such an expression on Hana who was usually so colorful was disquieting to Lena, and it silenced her momentarily. As she turned back to the game, she thought a moment before querying:

“Feeling under the weather, love? Usually you’re so energetic playing on your streams.”

Hana turned to her looking as if she’d just been asked if she wanted to try a bite of boiled liver.

“It’s my job to be energetic there. Gotta keep up that brand!” she replied with mock enthusiasm. “My attitude is just part of the product. That’s not the real me.” She continued.

“Where does the real you enjoy herself, then?” Lena asked.

Hana shifted uncomfortably in her seat. “I dunno. In the field, I guess. I get to stomp on bad guys in a big pink mech with my name on it. What’s better than that?”

Lena giggled, but pressed the question, “Yeah for sure! But you can’t do that all the time now can you?”

Hana gripped the controller hard enough to flex the plastic. “I don’t care!” She spat. “Does it matter who am or what I like? I’m doing what people want, right? And I’m doing it well! Why does everyone care so much how I feel about everything?”

Lena personally thought there was a lot to be said for how one feels. Being so stupidly glad to be in a linear timestream again is what kept her going, after all. But, as she had only meant to make friendly conversation and as this was getting into existential-type issues she did not feel fully qualified to tackle, she switched her attention back to the game.

“I dunno, but how do you feel about GETTING DUNKED ON?” Lena whooped.

Hana countered the assault effortlessly. But, much to Lena’s reassurance, she smiled just the tiniest fraction as she did so.

Down the hallway, in the kitchen was… no one. There was also no food, which necessitated Lucio
leaving the King’s Row facility for the friendly climes of a street market. He could have gone into the supermarket a block from the facility, but this place three further blocks down, reminded him of Rio. Only colder, and more expensive.

As the lady in one of the stalls rang up his vegetables (and the one bag of chips that Hana requested), he went over a new song in his head. He never planned to put this song on an album, or play it at one of his shows, but this one… this one was just for him. There was however, one impediment to the song’s proper construction.

*What rhymes with “Amari?”*

A floor above the kitchen, Ana Amari herself sat alone in her quarters, nursing a cup of tea. She was used to high end, loose leaf oolong straight from China, but now? Now she was drinking Twining’s chamomile like some manner of primitive, medieval serf.

Ana took a sip. She was still smarting from her conversation with Fareeha the other day. But even apart from the specifics, apart from the sad way her daughter had rebuked her, Ana stepped back, took the broad view, and found that it wasn’t much more generous to her.

Of all the people in Overwatch, and all of the people in Reaper’s cadre of miscreants and criminals, it was Ana, and only Ana, who had children. There were plenty of protégés; Hana to Jack, Jesse to Gabriel, Brigitte to Reinhardt, but no flesh and blood children.

Ana had felt an overweening need, from an early age, to serve as an example. To be the one that all looked to for guidance. And now, in her sixties, the small kernel of fear bloomed in her heart that she had. That her failures as a mother were far from private. Were so prevalent, in fact, that they terrified all around her into abstaining from bringing a future generation to the world.

Ana took another sip of her vaguely shitty supermarket tea, and wondered what that meant.

As she was considering the question, her communicator buzzed. It was Angela, asking if she’d like to join her in her quarters later to watch a movie. With one final self-indulgent sigh, she decided to take the offer. There would always be time for more brooding and feeling sorry for herself. But an afternoon where her more-or-less adoptive daughter was free was a rare thing indeed.

Back down a floor, and Fareeha Amari, clad in the sad uniform of teal sweatpants and a Hawaiian shirt that signified the advent of Laundry Day, sat in a rec room that had been stripped of all recreational activities, save one: a dart board.

She had realized that morning that her standing with the two people she would usually spend her free time with—her mother and Angela—was in an awkward place. She had used her mother’s own words against her to rebuff her attempts at an easy apology, which, if prior experience held, would have the woman sulking on her own for some time. As for Angela, among the string of awkward moments they’d shared since their reunion, sobbing into her arms topped them all. It was nice to know that Angela was still as warm and supportive as ever, but Fareeha hoped to come to her in a less childishly compromised position the next time they spoke.

But, more than her fraught relationships with the two women in her life, something else bothered her. Namely, she had realized that for as much as they seemed to implicitly respect her authority, she actually knew very little about any of the new recruits. Overwatch had inspired her so much growing up not just because of the great deeds they did, but also because it was a tightly knit organization that felt very much like family. She had seen firsthand that the people of Overwatch cared for one another and looked out for each other in a way unlike any other military force she had ever known. If she wanted to help lead Overwatch back to its former glory, she was beginning to feel that she should
help facilitate that atmosphere once again by becoming acquainted with her colleagues.

And in service of that goal, this morning she had made the decision to play darts with Genji.

Her choice was partially made by chance—Lucio was out running errands, Zenyatta was charging, Lena and Hana were playing games together, and Brigitte and Dr. Zhou seemed to be occupied in their work. But even so, she legitimately did want to like the man. He was probably the most disciplined of this new patchwork of a new Overwatch consisting of newbies and old pros alike, which endeared him to her immediately, and that discipline extended to his faith and his philosophy, which in her mind made him imminently trustworthy.

“I don’t know how fair this will be,” Genji said, twisting a dart between thumb and forefinger, “You are only human, after all.”

“Hey, it’s not all about winning.” Said Fareeha with a smile “This is just some fun. Place nice, play Pharah.”

A bad pun or two had always worked in the past to get a soldier’s guard down, but Genji’s reaction surprised her. Rather than the customary groan or surprised chuckle, he let out a full, hearty guffaw. Filtered through his vocalizer, it sounded uncannily like someone leaning on an old electric keyboard.

Genji threw the first of what would be many darts into the dead-center of the board.

“Oh, I’ve got one for you.” He said, before continuing in a serious tone,

“パンツ 食った(く)ことある?”

Fareeha blinked and smiled in polite confusion. Genji giggled at her response, before admitting, “It only really works in Japanese. The words mean both ‘Have you ever made bread?’ and ‘Have you ever eaten underpants?’”

Fareeha couldn’t help but laugh lightly in turn. Even without a visible face to bear the expression, Fareeha could hear the smile in his voice, and it was infectious. She threw her own dart, which went wide into the 4-point box.

“This actually reminds me of a story.” she said with a sly grin.

“So this woman has twin sons, and she gives them up for adoption. One of them goes to a family in Egypt, and they call him ‘Ahmal’. The other goes to a family in Spain, and they name him ‘Juan’.”

She began, throwing another flier. “Years later, Juan gets in touch with his birth mother, and sends her a picture of himself. The mother is so pleased to see that he has grown into a strong, healthy young man, and tells her husband that she only wishes she also had a picture of Ahmal.”

Genji nodded slowly, as if suspicious, as he threw another dart into the increasingly crowded bullseye.

Fareeha continued, “But her husband responds, ‘They’re twins! If you’ve seen Juan you’ve seen Ahmal!’”

Genji groaned and laughed, doubling over slightly.

And so they played darts, and exchanged puns. Fareeha did better than she thought she would, but
she wouldn’t have called the game competitive. As the game continued and their rapport got more comfortable, Fareeha’s prior self-doubt began to melt away and she decided that she would stop in to see Angela later after all.

Six doors down, in her quarters, wearing her University of Cologne sweatshirt over a faded pair of sweats and holding a bowl of popcorn as she sat on a couch, Angela was watching the latest episode of *Este Titulo es Falso*. In it, Graciaplena, head of her family’s ranch, had two suitors: one, a soldier in the Mexican National Guard named Jose, and the other, a former thief turned seminary student named Diego, who had not yet taken his vows, and was waiting for some sign of Graciaplena’s love before he did so.

But Graciaplena was a dastardly woman, as she proved after she expressed noncommittal toward both their advances. As they both turned to walk away, she produced a small gun from the jewelry box in her bedroom, and shot Diego in the back.

While this may have surprised a novice viewer, a veteran of *Este Titulo es Falso* such as Angela Ziegler could only snort.

“Called it,” Angela said, before she ate another handful of popcorn.

Over in the hangar, Brigitte Panzer made adjustments to the armor of Reinhardt Wilhelm, while Reinhardt himself did pull-ups on a bar not a few feet away.

Brigitte looked over at Reinhardt and sighed. She wondered when he was going to find a nice man and settle down. Her father was a police officer, and she remembered him telling her that there came a time for all men and women in uniform to take off that uniform for the final time, and if they were lucky, they’d be able to do it themselves.

Her face fell. Reinhardt was a wonderful man. And wonderful men, when they got old, should die in bed, and not on the street, or in a foreign land where nobody knew their name.

Reinhardt wasn’t thinking of anything at all. Which was, Reinhardt considered, the point of doing pull-ups.

And in the corner of the hangar, Tekhartha Zenyatta was sleeping. Or at the very least was the closest thing to sleeping an Omnic could get. Every twelve days, Omnics of Zenyatta’s make entered into a shutdown mode so diagnostics could be run and repair protocols could be enacted.

The Shambali called this “The Blinking of the Eye.” It was theorized by the late Mondatta that if one could make themselves aware during this shutdown mode, then they would know themselves beyond an understanding of their hardware and software and would, in essence, achieve a True Consciousness that eluded both the mechanical and organic alike.

But for Zenyatta? No luck so far. In the moment that he awoke, however, one question burned in his mind.

“Reinhardt,” he said, soft voice carrying across the quiet hangar. “What are the consequences of our revival?”

Reinhardt halted his pullups, and, after a moment, dropped from the bar and walked towards Zenyatta. Fixing the omnic with a puzzled look, he finally said, “I’m not sure what you mean, friend. Fighting is always a terrible thing no matter how noble the cause, but I think we will be able to do good for the world.”

“Not that, Reinhardt, I mean our returning from death.” Zenyatta clarified.
Reinhardt didn’t know what that meant.

Doctor Mei-Ling Zhou sat in the empty mess hall and analyzed holographic slides of soil samples, with Snowball hovering over her shoulder, providing light. Mei considered herself fortunate that, unlike many of her Overwatch compatriots, she not only had a day job, but a day job that she could take with her. She was analyzing these soil samples for rain acidity, to see how effective various world legislations had been in curbing air and sea pollutants.

But her thoughts, as they had a habit of doing lately, drifted to Jesse McCree. She imagined sitting across from him at a candlelight dinner. She imagined a picnic with him in a sunlit park… And she imagined collecting different coins from various world currencies, and throwing each one at his tight, solid ass to see how far each one bounced.

In the medical wing, after almost forty-eight hours of sedation, Jack Morrison’s eyes finally fluttered open. Through the pain, through the drugs, through the nagging effects of Reaper’s toxins, he finished the last thought he’d had before the attempt on his life.

What the hell does Reaper want with iron tubes?

And in the armory, Torbjorn Lindholm analyzed code, and fumed.

This code had been found in Athena after the hack that almost killed Morrison. It had been quarantined, and Winston had asked Torbjorn to analyze it, as he didn’t trust Athena to do it, now that she had been compromised.

He was serving with Omnis. And what was worse, Zenyatta had the nerve to sass him, and Genji (who wasn’t strictly Omnic, but was mechanical enough to deserve the distinction) had the unmitigated gall to be nice to him, thus robbing Torbjorn’s attempts to antagonize them of any bite they might have had.

He was serving with these blasted tin cans, yet did not turn coat. He served Overwatch because it was better than the alternatives. The fact that he received no credit for this didn’t strike Torbjorn as fair. In his day, men and women settled things with fists and guns. The premium on flesh and bone had sunk disastrously low, polluted with artificial limbs and computerized gewgaws.

It was at this point that Torbjorn used his artificial eye to speed up analysis of the code, as irony was not one of his strong suits.

When he did, though, he found something… quite remarkable.

Back at Angela’s quarters, Reinhardt knocked softly on the closed door. He always felt guilty for bothering her during her downtime, but if he didn’t talk to her now his earlier conversation with Zenyatta would be running around his head for hours. Angela called out brightly to let himself in. When he entered, he found Ana and Fareeha sitting at opposite ends of Angela’s couch, with Angela herself sprawled between the two, her legs laying across Ana’s lap, and her head on Fareeha’s.

“Sorry to bother you fine ladies, but—” Reinhardt began, but Angela held up a finger to interrupt him, a broad smile on her lips. It was at this point he noticed that the trio were watching an ancient movie of a genre Reinhardt had seen the three of them indulging in many times in the past. He’d tried to join them once, but even more than feeling like an intruder, he just couldn’t make heads or tails of the appeal. All black and white, it seemed like every one of them was just a lot of long shots of men in big hats and women smoking cigarettes while half-shrouded in shadow.

"Why did you have to go on?" the lady in the film asked.
To which the gentleman in the film replied "Too many people told me to stop."

Ana exhaled in delight at the quote, and Fareeha nodded with a small smirk as Angela righted herself and paused the film.

“Now, what can I help you with?” she asked.

“I had a rather troubling conversation with Zenyatta just now. He was asking about the technology you use to revive us.”

Upon hearing this, Angela’s brightness immediately melted away, leaving behind a kind of nondescript placidity that one could only use context from which to derive irritation. She nodded for Reinhardt to continue.

“He said something about how some trees only seed when they are burned, and he spoke of paths that were shrouded and could now be walked. I… Could not make much sense of it, I’m afraid. All that spiritual stuff goes right over my head. But it seemed like he was quite upset, and I wasn’t sure how to explain it to him,” he said.

Angela spoke immediately, with a frankness that shocked everyone in the room. “And he has good reason to be upset! It is an appalling piece of technology if you ask me.”

“Weren’t you the one to build it, though?” Reinhardt asked, taken aback.

“I was. I built it when I was young and still high on the accomplishments I made with Overwatch’s unlimited funding. But looking at it now, it seems like the height of hubris to bring into the world something with so much power and so little potential accountability.”

Fareeha and Reinhardt stared at Angela, but Ana raised a hand in support.

“I would be inclined to agree, actually, if we’re all being honest,” she said. Fareeha looked as though she had been slapped.

Reinhardt’s brows knit in consternation. “But Ana, you even said it yourself that people like Widowmaker use death to spread confusion, chaos, and hatred! If this technology became widespread, she, and anyone like her would be powerless.” He said.

Ana fixed him right in the eye and exhaled, her lips drawing into a tight line. “That’s easy to say of people like Mondatta, who were so clearly innocent and valuable to bringing peace to the world. But how do we choose who gets to be immune to death?” She chided.

Alongside her, Angela nodded in agreement, adding, “Within our lifetime we could see a class of immortal people arise, free from any consequence or accountability.”

“Even if that could be accomplished--and I’m not sure it could--” contended Ana, raising her eyebrow to punctuate her doubt, “It still makes the equation of fighting far too simple. All of us were quite prepared to dismember Jesse and Gabriel just a few days ago, even though the last time any of us spoke to them it was in friendship. Losses are hard, but they teach us something. There is no need for perspective or restraint when death has no consequence.”
As stoic as Fareeha was clearly trying to be, Reinhardt could see her begin to bristle as her mother spoke.

“That doesn’t have to be a bad thing!” she retorted. “There are only a few people who are as able and willing to fight as we are. Any time one of us is lost it leaves a hole that can never be filled.”

Reinhardt nodded in solemn agreement. “There were once many men like me. But now if I die, the secrets and techniques of the crusaders die with me,” he added.

“Exactly! But even more than that, there are only a few truly evil men like Reaper. Without the requirement of armies of people to be pressed or tricked into service on either side, our conflicts could be small, representing a pure distillation of moral conflict for only those who are truly prepared,” said Fareeha, with a fire in her eyes.

“I find it naïve to think that any conflict would remain so contained,” said Ana. “Where is the end point in such a situation? Two people with a blood feud could simply blow up city after city with nothing to stop them. Oh, except we don’t have to guess! We are already seeing this happen with the Shimada brothers,” she finished with a scoff.

Angela frowned. “And, speaking of, I have seen firsthand how damaging it is for a person to be seen as only a weapon. Genji didn’t want to be alive. Not when he was brought to me, and not for a long time after. I was tasked with reconstructing him because he was a valuable asset, his dignity never figured into the equation. And not everyone is going to be so lucky or so dedicated as to become a monk to recover from such trauma.”

“And what of those who died but wished to live?” asked Reinhardt, doing his best to not sound accusing.

“They should not have become soldiers if they were not prepared to die.” Angela countered. “It has taken us ten-thousand years of murder and grief to fully learn the reality of death. And it is only that reality which has only just caused us to begin to stay our hands as a species.”

Reinhardt folded his arms. “But how is that any less naïve than what Fareeha said?” he asked. “Humans can’t be relied upon to simply not fight. There will always be violence, and some things are worth fighting for!”

"I don't entirely disagree. But the reason that fighting is effective is because the person you fight is afraid to die, and that fear can be used against them," replied Angela.

"That is my point, though, that there is no justice in the killing that happens in the meantime. If neither side is permitted to die, every conflict must necessarily end with one side being captured alive and held accountable,” said Reinhardt.

Ana snorted with derision. “That sounds very nice if we assume that the good guys win every time. But what happens when they lose? They would be imprisoned and tortured by their immortal captors indefinitely, or let loose to live with the weight of their failure for eternity. Better to be dead, I say.”

“It’s only what they would deserve for failing their cause,” said Fareeha coldly. “People should be forced to deal with the consequences of failure, and find a way to try again. Choosing to die is a coward's way out.”

It was Ana’s turn to look as though she had been slapped, and for a moment she simply stared at her daughter, her eye wide. Fareeha stared back unflinchingly.

Angela exhaled tiredly. “War is not just about those who fight. It is about those who are caught in the
crossfire. I am simply worried for their sake, because they are not the ones who have the option of being revived in either case,” she stated.

Reinhardt thought that was a fair point worth considering, but if Ana or Fareeha agreed or even heard the comment, they showed no sign of it. The way the two of them appeared to be quietly seething as they looked at one another, it began to dawn on him that maybe they were having a different conversation than the one he was having with Angela.

If there was more to that conversation, however, it was cut off by Athena.

"Captain Ana Amari, your presence is requested in the conference room..."

And with that, Ana snapped her eyes away from her daughter's and rose with her usual unflustered grace.

"You girls feel free to finish the movie without me. Chances are Torbjorn or Winston wants to talk about something, and you know how meandering they can be," she said with a conspiratorial smile.

Reinhardt raised his hand and announced "I think I will also take my leave. Truth be told, I still don't fully know what to say to Zenyatta, but it has been an enlightening discussion."

Contrary to her assumption, neither Winston, nor Torbjorn were meandering.

“An IP address!” Torbjorn said, his one eye gleaming as a prospector’s would, surveying a rich vein of gold ore.

“What about an IP address?” Ana asked.

“The Athena hack,” Winston said.

“Precisely,” Torbjorn said. “Upon reboot, Athena quarantined a few stray lines of code, and that code contained an IP address. We know where the hack came from!”

Ana looked from Torbjorn to Winston and back again. “How trustworthy is this information?”

“Very,” Winston said. “I had Athena and Torbjorn examine the code, and they both came to the same conclusion.”

“I see,” Ana said. “And this hack originally came from…”

“Hanamura,” Torbjorn said. “In Japan.”

“Isn’t that the Shimadas’ old stomping grounds?”

“The very same,” Winston said. “Still is, as a matter of fact. The Shimadas have a ton of real estate holdings in the city. Lots of places to hide out in.”

“Is there any chance this could be a trap?” Ana asked. “They could be leading us there.”

“Bullplop!” Torbjorn said. “Reaper’s outfit doesn’t have the credentials to create something this authentic looking. Not unless one of the psycho Australians learned how to code when we weren’t looking.”

“Not Symmetra?” Ana asked.
“Symmetra can wave her hands around and make pretty sculptures,” Torbjorn said, “but hacking artificial intelligences and leaving a trail of bread crumbs isn’t what an architech does.”

“An architech doesn’t do espionage and terrorism, either,” Ana said, “but she seems to be doing just fine at both.”

Winston pushed his glasses up his nose. “Even if this is a trap—and I’m not stating definitively if it is or it isn’t—it’s the only lead we have. The only option we have from where I’m sitting is to trip it and step back.”

Ana put her hands on her hips and looked at the floor. She sighed deeply before she spoke.

“Athena,” Ana said. “Send the evacuation message to the Hanamura mayor’s office. Verification November Charlie Charlie Nine.”

A moment before Athena spoke.

“Message sent, Captain Amari. Estimated time of full evacuation: six hours.”

“Inform the crew,” Ana said. “We lift off in three.”

Hana spent ninety minutes of her three hours sitting at Jack’s bedside in the hospital wing. While he had awoken, lucidity was not something he was particularly blessed by at the moment. That he apparently wasn’t aware of the fact that she was in the room would be one thing.

But he kept calling for Gabriel.

And seeing him in that bed, babbling for a friend that he seemed only dimly aware had tried to kill him years prior, Jack appeared to Hana as the one thing that he had never seemed before: Jack appeared old.

Sure, she knew Jack was old just by the gray hair and his age, but he never really fit the definition. He seemed like the kid in the back of the classroom whom everyone liked, but could never be seen speaking to anyone, save a select few. Hana never knew how important those select few felt until she had met Jack Morrison.

Hana wordlessly left her seat at Jack’s bed and walked down the hallway to the hangar, the soles of her blue bodysuit squeaking on the linoleum floor all the while.

At the row of lockers in the hangar, in between the two dropships, Hana stepped to her locker, which happened to be in between the lockers that Ana and Fareeha had taken for themselves.

Fareeha, on her left, clad in tight blue leggings and a matching compression half-shirt (which was what she wore under all that armor) got a pair of dogtags out of her locker and put them around her neck.

Ana, on her right, too a metal facemask out of her locker, and seemed to weigh the pros and cons of wearing it, before putting it back.

And neither mother nor daughter spoke to each other. But the perceived drop in temperature between the older and younger Amaris seemed to tell Hana that this silence went beyond pre-mission superstition or ritual. These two were deeply upset with each other.

Jack, Ana, and Fareeha. All older than Hana, and all deeply set in their ways, all raging against
ghosts and slights of the past. Hana pondered, in this silence, whether there would be a point-of-no-return for herself, as well. If there would be an event horizon where her attitudes about the past would set in and calcify, and she too could treat the people she loved so frostily.

And if so, would she finally feel grown up?

And so the silence continued. The members of Overwatch quietly made their way onto the dropship bound to Hanamura, and said nothing until an hour into their four hours sojourn to Japan.

“Ohhhhhh,” Lucio said, punctuating this with an open-palmed slap to his forehead.

“What is it?” Tracer asked.

“They call her Widowmaker because she killed her husband,” Lucio said. “I just now got that!”

Chapter End Notes

Hello dear readers! Just so you know, Sapphixxx is going to be applying to grad school in the coming weeks, so we're taking a brief hiatus. Wish her luck, and have yourselves a happy Halloween!
A Hard Man is Good to Find

Chapter 10: A Hard Man is Good to Find

Hanamura

High atop a hill, Shimada castle and the deceptively quiet suburb that surrounded it overlooked the skyscrapers and highways of Hanamura. As the dropship swept over the area, each and every agent of Overwatch was struck in their own quiet way by just how different the blocks surrounding the castle looked, even at a glance, from the city around them. Where, for kilometers in every other direction, cars honked, swarming crowds of pedestrians crossed streets, and neon signs glowed even in the midday sun, the area of their operation was barren of any sign of activity.

On the surface, the silence was not so different than that found at Ilios. There was modern pavement instead of ancient flagstones, gleaming glass office buildings instead of white stucco shops, but the void left by the people who had evacuated was much the same. But on Ilios the whole island had been evacuated, and the homes and businesses could be thought of dispassionately as mere terrain as the battle began to rage. Here, however, at all times, the presence of humanity within arm’s reach was impossible to ignore. Traffic helicopters wound lazily through the sky, traffic noises could be heard dimly in the distance, and if any of them squinted at the windows of the tallest skyscrapers that could still be seen from the hilltop, office workers could be seen toiling away in blissful ignorance.

At the very least, the knowledge that they knew where their enemies would be hiding this time was a small comfort.

Whatever caused the overriding sense of gloom that hung over the team before takeoff had clearly not resolved itself in the four hour plane ride, and in absence of useful tactical input or a joke that seemed adequately funny to lift the mood, Lucio hummed to himself under his breath to try and ease the tension of walking into enemy territory.

“Humm, dun-d-dun robes the color of muscari..? No c’mon man that’s awful… She’ll broach no charivari..? Eugh, even worse. Sorry, Amari. Hey now, that could work…” he muttered.

While Lucio had thought he was quiet enough to not be heard over the roar of the engine, his train of thought was interrupted by Ana moving to lean next to him.

“Is that a new song you’re working on?” She asked with a small conspiratorial smile.

Lucio did his best to keep a cool face. He’d done interviews on live television before, given speeches before revolutionary rallies, stared down military and police, but Ana’s kind gaze shook him to his core in a way he’d never before experienced.

To his credit, he only blushed a little bit.

“Y-you listen to my music?” he managed, immediately chastising himself for sounding like a lovestruck schoolboy.

“Of course I do! With that beautiful voice you have, I would be a fool not to.” She replied with ease.

Lucio had mind to continue the conversation, but between fighting a goofy grin and a mouth that was suddenly alarmingly dry, it was a losing battle. And as Ana leaned down to whisper, “I cannot wait to hear you sing for me.” into his ear, the battle was truly lost. With a small chuckle and a final knowing glance, Ana returned to her position in the formation, right next to Reinhardt.
"That was cruel," Reinhardt said.

"What was?"

"You whisper louder than most men snore," Reinhardt said. "Leading the poor boy on like that, knowing how he feels about you, when you have no intention..."

"Who says what my intentions are?" Ana asked Reinhardt. "I was dead for years. Don't begrudge me my indulgences now that I'm alive."

The metal of Reinhardt's gauntlet meeting the metal of his helmet gave an audible clank! to the most manly, heavy metal, and decidedly German facepalm any on the dropship who'd cared to look had ever seen.

"First Jesse, and now Lucio," Reinhardt said. "What is it with you and cradle-robbing?"

"I don't go to these young men," Ana said. "They come to me. What do you call that?"

Reinhardt gave it a second before he said "Grave-robbing?"

He had expected Ana to respond by caving his visor in with her fist, or at least giving him a glare hot enough to melt steel. But for her part, she cackled out loud and slapped her knee. Wiping a tear from her eye, she said

"Graverobbing. I'm going to have to remember that one!"

Elsewhere on the dropship, near the window overlooking the city, Genji Shimada stared out to his former home below. Pharah and Mercy were with him, as people with nebulous feelings of love and reproach toward one another had a habit of clumping together like metal shavings drawn toward a magnet.

"I wiled away many an hour of misspent youth at an arcade in midtown near the temple," Genji said. "I wonder if the Lost Vikings VI machine is still there... I wonder if it still has my high score..."

"I cannot imagine someone as serious as you in an arcade, pumping coins into a machine," Mercy said, the corner of her mouth curling into a smirk.

"You didn't see me with the green hair, either," Genji said. "One is not old and wise without first being young and stupid. I was under the impression that playing a rigorous amount of arcade games would make me better with my hands, and would aid me in combat...and with women."

Mercy folded her arms and smiled. "Did it work?"

"With which? Combat, or women?"

Mercy never found out. For Pharah, who had been hanging on to this conversation with equal parts bemusement and horror, noticed that they had touched down and took it as an opportunity.

"Genji," she announced, "you know this stronghold better than any of us. Scout ahead and report back to me. I don't want us to be surprised like last time."

Genji’s lighthearted languor was immediately replaced with a disciplined, readied stance as he stood.

“Very well, captain.” He said, saluting before he exited the ship.
As the rest of the fireteam checked their gear and prepared to form up, Tracer nudged Pharah’s ribs with her elbow.

“Can’t blame you for nippin’ that little conversation in the bud. I’ve been there too, mate.” She whispered.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.” Pharah said flatly as she adjusted her boot.

“Sure thing, captain.” Replied Tracer with an amused grin. And as she walked away, Pharah thought she could hear Tracer singing to herself.

"Ohhh-ohhh... Ohhhh mercy, mercy meeee...."

As the team got into formation out on the street, Genji returned.

“As we thought, our enemy is occupying my family’s castle. They are stationed around the grounds, but do not seem to be expecting company. The main gate is not even closed” He explained.

Pharah nodded and turned to face the rest of the formation. “Perfect. Stick together everyone, and we can use the element of surprise to crush them before they can regroup.”

“There is one concerning detail,” interjected Genji. “I did not see the Bastion unit.”

“It’s probably just hidden. When it does show its face, I’m not letting it get away this time.” Said D. Va.

Pharah nodded. “That’s right. We can’t let them win by cheap tricks this time. Now, everyone, get behind Reinhardt, and follow my lead.”

So began the march to Shimada castle through abandoned streets and the falling sakura leaves the dotted the pavement a lively, clashing red. Taking up the rear of the procession one Doctor Mei-Ling Zhou, whose heart was beating in her chest with the force and rhythm of the backing drummer on an old rock song. That her fellow Overwatch compatriots were silent made no difference to her, as the pounding of her pulse in her temples was talking to her enough.

Only one thing could penetrate the thick buffeting of her own nerves and that this was the light, almost angelic clanging of metal from a nearby alley.

Like the jangle of a spur...

Mei’s head whipped around to the alley, and then back to the rest of Overwatch, who continued their march to Shimada Castle. They seemed not to have heard what she had heard.

The argument with herself was swift and decisive. Her better judgement suffered a first round knock-out as she ducked into the alley, screaming at herself for doing so. This was about more than what she wanted to find in that alley. She knew what awaited at the end of the journey with her comrades, and despite the skill of her company and her proficiency with her endothermic blaster, the fact remained that she was not a violent person and she did not want to die... again... for however brief a time it may have been.

She had just barely entered the alley when the loud and altogether intrusive sound of a cocking revolver called out to her.

Jesse McCree was standing but a few feet away, next to a newspaper stand, Peacemaker at the
ready. Mei reflexively raised her blaster in response.

"Ain't the way I wanted this to go down," McCree said. "I got into the game to slap iron on professionals. And professional though you may be, it ain't soldierin' that's your chosen vocation, and those in the soldierin' line are the ones whose names are on my bullets exclusively. So... here we are. Doctor. Tell me one thing to lower this here pistol. 'Cause honey? You been me the devil."

Mei blinked a couple of times before she lowered her blaster.

"I can drink you under the table," Mei said.

Now it was McCree's turn to stare. He looked her up and down as though she were an hourglass whose sand liked to switch directions.

He lowered the Peacemaker, though.

"That works, actually."

Crouching slightly to absorb the shock, Pharah touched off her jetpack and shot into the sky and over the gate with the sun at her back. As the familiar lack of gravity washed through her, her lip curled in a defiant smirk at the sight of her first foe: the woman called Symmetra, who had been handling Bastion at Ilios. She was deep in thought, placing one of her hard-light turrets. Note to self, Pharah thought, keep an eye out for more of those. But there was no time to linger on it.

As Symmetra glanced up at the sound of Pharah's thruster, the expression that crossed her face the moment before she was vaporized, it seemed as if she had witnessed the visage of a terrible, vengeful angel. And with the fiery conflagration let loose from Pharah's weapon marking the beginning of the battle, the rest of her fireteam rushed through the gate.

One-sided gunfire erupted in the warm spring air, and their foes scattered through the courtyard. Within moments the ogre that accompanied the peg-legged Australian toppled with a thundering crash as Torbjorn shot a rivet through his skull. A little copper cup fell from his hand as he died, and glinted cheerfully as his body disappeared in the yellow flash of respawn. The enormous Russian woman followed him shortly after, perforated by D.Va’s MEK.

Spatters of blood from the dead washed themselves clean from the castle garden and cherry blossom petals scattered in the wind, each marking a different kind of ephemerality. As Pharah landed on one of the balconies to let her thrusters cool off, she was on the precipice of letting herself feel proud of her team. Their success and cooperation was short-lived, however.

Everyone had been dutifully staying behind Reinhardt's shield, for once. But as he set foot into the castle garden, a two streams of plasma appeared from turrets hidden among the stones. Reinhardt let out a chilling howl as the beams cut through his armor, leaving angry red lines of molten steel in their wake. He let his shield down for just a moment before anyone could destroy the offending turrets, and that’s all it took for a single round from Widowmaker’s rifle to pierce his helmet. Pharah stared in mute horror as his goliath body fell limp.

A cry from Mercy: “ZENYATTA! I NEED YOUR HELP OVER HERE!”

The Omnic provided suppressing fire with his orbs as he floated over to Mercy, who was tending to a mortally wounded Torbjorn. One of Junkrat’s traps had completely severed his leg, and before he fell, he had caught the attention of two of Symmetra’s turrets. They’d gone off right in his face, burning off every last bit of hair and beard. Standing over him, Mercy thought Torbjorn looked like someone had deep-fried an old Tolkien illustration of an elderly hobbit. Whether it was the chaos
surrounding her, or the reality of the Torbjorn’s impending Respawn, Mercy forgot to chide herself for her lack of charity.

“Such… cheap… craftsmanship…” the charred Torbjorn whispered. “No… pride… at all…”

And he was gone in a flash of light.

“Mercy,” Zenyatta said. “Do you need Lucio to…”

It was at this point that an arrow from a nearby rooftop punctured the back of Zenyatta’s head. The orbs that floated around his neck fell to the grass with muffled thumps. Genji, who was a few feet away from Mercy, looked up to see his brother standing near a railing, bow in hand.

“Brother Hanzo!” Genji said. “I knew you’d come!”

And once again, like in Ilios, Hanzo and Genji Shimada broke away from the larger fight to engage in a duel that defied logic, physics, gravity, and explanation.

But unlike Ilios, The rest of the combatants did not stop to look. They continued their mutual quest to redden the soil with each others’ blood. Whatever advantage they may have been able to press from their surprise attack had evaporated in moments as the Overwatch agents scattered to pursue their individual glory fights and their enemies respawned mere tens of meters away any time one was felled.

From her vantage point in the air, Pharah could see that no matter how scattered her comrades became, and no matter how little they seemed to care for their bodily well-being, Mercy continued to fly from one end of the courtyard to the other, never stopping, in a constant dance to try and keep her allies alive. While everyone else wore a different mask during battle, some grim, some fearful, some laughing in the face of death, Mercy's expression was blank. Even at a distance, Pharah could see the faraway, resigned look in her eyes as she mended one of her friend's bodies, only for them to get themselves killed the moment she turned to move to her next patient.

Pharah was torn from her reverie the moment she heard Mercy call her name.

“Our team is too scattered,” Mercy said. “I need to get to the other side of the field.”

Pharah found it within herself to smile. “Say no more!”

Pharah maneuvered herself into position and Mercy used her staff to attach to her Raptora suit. They ascended above the rooftops, face to face. Pharah, above the chaos with Mercy, spared a moment to look into the doctor's eyes. Even face to face, nearly eye to eye, Mercy looked straight through her. If she had any thoughts about what that might have meant, they were lost as she spotted the glint of a sniper's scope in the periphery of her vision. Without a word, she took Mercy by the waist and turned her around. She lost the feeling below her waist before she heard the shot from Widowmaker’s sniper rifle that would have, in any other instance, put her in a wheelchair for the rest of her life.

Pharah plummeted back to earth as Mercy used her staff to attach to Ana and float harmlessly away.

"Thank you." Mercy said quietly.

When she came to at the spawn point a moment later, she found Reinhardt there as well, a cheerful expression on his face as he stretched his reformed body.

"Don't worry, Fareeha! We can take the fight to them as many times as it takes.” He bellowed affably as he made his way to the exit, clapping Pharah on the back on his way. Pharah stood in the
“COME ON!” Pharah yelled to the rest of Overwatch over her communicator. “GET YOUR SHIT TOGETHER AND REGROUP!”

Widowmaker reloaded.

After having dispatched the younger Amari, she lined up her scope and found who she was looking for.

Tracer.

Flight Lieutenant Oxton was engaged in a duel of sorts with Roadhog. He tried to use his hook to reel Tracer in, but failed every time, and she was filling the poor, slow oaf with bullets as she effortlessly blinked around him.

But it took even less effort for Widowmaker to pivot her rifle to where Tracer’s location was going to be. Though quick as Tracer may have been, she was all too predictable.

She gazed at Tracer’s body in motion as though a lover would, if Widowmaker felt love, which she did not. Outside of the heat of battle, she felt nothing at all.

Inside, that heat, however, there was revulsion.

As predictable as Tracer’s actions were, her thoughts and intentions were even more so. Widowmaker though that Tracer was truly transparent. So single-minded was she in her belief that she was in the right that she was blind to the evil that she wanted to perpetrate.

Tracer wanted to help her.

In the back of her mind, Widowmaker remembered the hell that was her induction into Talon. The molding and the shaping of her body and her mind into the perfect killer. She didn’t feel it anymore, but knew it objectively, as a fact.

And how much of a hell would Tracer, in an ideal world, have subjected her to in order to turn her back into Amelie Lacroix? How much torture would she have had to endure to fit the definition of justice, purveyed by an illegal paramilitary group and spear-headed by a none-too-bright British girl?

Widowmaker lingered on Tracer’s mousy hair, her dotty skin, her scrawny legs, her massive feet—and merde, those shoes—before she lined up her shot, which would have taken Tracer in the throat.

“Au revoir, che—“

The scope of Widowmaker’s rifle exploded, and she flew back, her head denting the drywall of the living room she had been nesting in. She fell to the floor in a sitting position, blood dribbling from the corner of her mouth, and a yellow biotic dart jutting from what was left of her right eye-socket.

Ana reloaded.

And laughed.

Hard.

“You know she’s gonna Respawn and keep her eye, right?” Lucio asked. He’d been guarding her silence of the spawn point, and felt a deep ember of indignation take root in the center of her chest.
on a rooftop as she’d gotten into position.

“I know,” Ana said. “It felt wonderful, though.” She held her hand out to him.

“If you’d be so kind as to help an old lady off of a rooftop?”

Lucio took it.

“I can do that.”

They jumped. Lucio pointed his Sonic Amplifier to the rapidly approaching ground.

“Oh, let’s break it DOWN!”

Lucio, Ana, and every member of Overwatch in the nearby vicinity glowed green with sonic shielding.

Which sadly left Genji out in the cold. His battle with his brother ended in yet another stalemate, but he had the misfortune to run afoul of Zarya. Genji had the gift of the ability to deflect bullets with his katana, and Genji found, much to his chagrin, that this ability was useless against Zarya’s particle beam. She cooked him alive, to the extent that, just before he Respawned, pink flame was flourishing from his visor.

Zarya herself had just enough time to throw a barrier on herself as she caught the attention of D. Va, who fired her MEKA’s weapons system. She hadn’t gotten a few shots off before Roadhog’s hook found its purchase in the MEKA’s torso.

“Come here!”

As the Australian’s hook brought her closer, D. Va felt the time pass in slow motion. Her thumb found a button on the MEKA’s left joystick with a skull and crossbones over it.

D. Va grinned.

“Nerf this!”

She pressed the button and bailed out of the MEKA, having activated the machine’s self-destruct protocol. As she ran from the site, she fancied that she could hear Roadhog’s panicked grunts as he tried to get his hook out of the MEKA.

BOOOOOM!

The explosion vaporized Roadhog, Hanzo (who was nearby), and half the house they were standing next to. It uprooted and obliterated a cherry blossom tree, which broke apart in mid-air. One of the boughs of which caught D. Va in the back, sending her sailing into a nearby temple, and knocking her unconscious.

D. Va came to in the middle of the temple. She tried her best to clear the cobwebs out of her head as she looked around to survey what had happened. The nearby explosions and gunfire accompanied the ringing in her ears.

She was in the middle of a black canvas mat in front of a statue of Buddha. Incense hung sweet and heavy in the air. She took a moment to be impressed by how far the explosion had knocked her. Her back hurt, and what she imagined were her kidneys were throbbing. She turned to head down
the narrow walkway toward the exit when… something… stopped her.

D. Va didn’t feel as though she was alone.

And sure enough, a deep growl came from what felt like the very air itself to confirm her fears.

“So…” Reaper said, making the air rumble. “You’re Hana Song. Jack Morrison’s little protégé.”

D. Va’s heart started thudding in her chest.

“How do you know that?” she asked.

“And what makes you think I’d tell you?”

D. Va reached for her pistol as she realized something truly horrifying.

The canvas that she was standing on wasn’t actually black.

The dispersion of Reaper’s cells receded to the center of the mat, leaving behind its natural white. It rose and took the form of Reaper himself, his white owl’s skull mask pitted, yet gleaming.

“Impress me,” Reaper said.

D. Va raised her hand to fire, but a tendril of smoke shot out of Reaper’s longcoat before she could pull the trigger. The smoke yanked her off of her feet, causing her to drop the gun as another tendril of smoke gripped her throat.

She couldn’t scream.

She couldn’t breathe.

The smoke rammed D. Va’s head into the wall once, twice, three times, before it dropped her back onto the mat, coughing up blood and seeing stars.

As Reaper advanced upon the helpless and unarmed D. Va, he liberated one of his Hellfire shotguns from his coat and aimed it at the girl’s head.

D. Va closed her eyes.

“I’m unimpressed,” Reaper said. “Get better before we meet again… and we will meet again.”

Reaper walked away.

A scant block from where the battle raged at Shimada Castle, two souls stayed sheltered from the carnage. In the Rikimaru restaurant, leaning against the edges of booths that shielded them—at least somewhat—from the noise, Mei-Ling Zhou and Jesse McCree sat on the floor and drank cocktails of Doctor Zhou’s mixing.

To say that they were appreciating the silence would be somewhat inaccurate as, being but a single block separated them from the battle, pops, bangs, booms, splats, cries of pain in specific, and Junkrat’s creepy laughter in general, were still audible.

If either felt bad for leaving their respective teams behind, neither of them showed it. After all, if one occupied the other, then that other could not visit harm upon their teammates.
And if either felt bad for relieving the Rikimaru of some of their stock in alcohol, neither showed that. Given the destruction and mayhem underway within a gifted spitter’s spitting distance from their location, they conjured that a couple of bottles of hooch would break no one’s bank.

In fact, the only bad feeling that could be found between the two of them was to be found solely in McCree. Not pertaining to the present situation, no, but rather to the beer taps behind the bar section.

Indeed, one tap in particular…

“Natural Ice,” Jesse said.

“What’s that?” asked Mei.

McCree took a sip of the Black and Tan that Mei had made for him, and set it back down on the floor next to him.

“This is the first time I been out Japan way,” McCree said. “Spent years as a Blackwatch spook, been all over the world, but ain’t made it here. And from the outside looking in, I always figured Japan to be a classy sort of place. Pretty. Quiet… And here they are selling Natty Ice out the tap like this was some kind of common latrine… like Oklahoma…”

Mei took a sip of her martini. “Jesse, if you were under the impression that Japan was all the way classy, you clearly aren’t watching the same porn that I am.”

McCree paled at this revelation, yet blushed at the same time. Mei guessed as to why this was. She was wrong.

“Hey,” Mei said. “It’s alright. You need good links, I’ll send you some. We’re all adults, here.”

“Miss, you seem to be more adult than I am.”

Mei’s laugh was a clear, full-throated, pretty sound. “That’s the first time anyone’s ever accused me of that.”

“Well, this is the first time I been on a date next to a war zone, so it seems we’re both doing new things today.”

Mei smiled. “Is that what this is? Is this a date?”

From a block away, a voice loud and clear. “JUSTICE RAINS FROM ABOVE!” Explosions followed.

“I don’t see why it can’t be,” McCree said. “Of course, this bein’ a date, I best ask after your family. Seems the gentlemanly thing to do, though I can’t speak as to how well I fit the description m’self.”

“Okay,” Mei said. “Umm… I’m an only child. Both my parents are alive. I talk to my father a whole lot. My mother… less so.”

McCree raised his eyebrows. “Is there a story there?”

“Not much of one.”

“Given our current surroundin’s, ‘not much of a story’ is the perfect kind of story.”
“It’s not really a story,” Mei said. “More of a, um… misunderstanding.”

“If you don’t want to talk about it, I won’t pry.”

Mei sighed and took a sip of her martini. “When I was little my mother told me ‘Little one, you are going to be a doctor when you grow up.’ So I found a field that interested me, went to college in North Carolina to study…”

“Chapel Hill?”

“No,” Mei said. “Wake Forest. I spent all those years doing all that work to get my doctorate… and she yells at me for being the wrong kind of doctor.”

“How’s that happen?”

“English isn’t my mother’s first language,” Mei said. “She got Climatology and Dermatology mixed up.”

McCree laughed.

“Mother kept sending me pictures of her friends’ moles and asking me what I thought. It took me years to figure it out.”

McCree laughed harder.

“Can I ask you something now?” Mei asked.

McCree shrugged. “It’s your turn, ain’t it?”

Mei swirled her martini. “Is it a cowboy thing to go for thick girls like me? Or is it a Jesse McCree thing?”

McCree took a draw of his own drink, and grinned.

“I enjoy me a woman in totality,” McCree said. “A pretty girl’s a pretty girl, no matter what she looks like. I don’t pick and choose no features.”

“Diplomatic answer.”

McCree furrowed his brow. “I got to say though… There’s a big reason and a little reason that, given my druthers, I may give a look to a girl with a certain…”

“Sturdiness?”

“Well, I was gonna say ‘presence,’ but yes’m.”

“Give me the little reason first,” Mei said.

“If’n I order something for you, you’ll finish it.”

Mei laughed. “I’ve been there. I dated a girl named Linda in college. She never finished her salads, but she kept grabb ing fries off my plate.”

“Where I come from, that’s a sure-fire way to lose a hand.”

“Trust me,” Mei said. “She almost did. The big reason?”
Amidst the sound of gunfire coming from a block away, McCree spared a moment, his eyes taking a far-away look.

“Out near Santa Fe,” McCree said, “on Route 66, there’s a big ol’ hole in the ground called Deadlock Gorge. Couple bad men out those parts name-a Isaiah and Morecombe Kitrosser took a mind to undertake themselves a criminal enterprise in the field of gun-running. Now ain’t a man alive gonna follow The Kitrosser Brothers, so they rechristened themselves ‘The Deadlock Brothers,’ and off to the races they went. This ain’t here nor there, but what’s both here and there is that there’s this trail going from the top of the gorge and looping all the way around down to the bottom where the quarry is. Ain’t no straight-away on that trail. Nothin’ but curves.”

McCree finally looked at Mei. “I figure whoever made that trail must have made you.”


“I got a silver tongue, do I?”

Mei took her glove off and put her hand on his cheek. “Well… Some further testing may be needed.”

McCree smiled. “I have to say, you’re awful cheesy, miss.”

“Cheese tastes good,” Mei said. “Here, I’ll show you.”

She leaned in. McCree didn’t stop her. The lenses of her glasses began to mist over as her lips parted. And just as her eyes began to close…

A flash of yellow light, and the hand that had been on his cheek closed on nothing at all.

Jesse McCree had Respawned.

Mei looked at the pocket of empty air that had, just moments before, been occupied by her prospective… whatever, before she looked at the glass storefront of the Rikimaru. It was intact. No bullet had breached the restaurant.

Mei put her finger to her ear. “Winston, come in.”

Winston came in over the radio. “Yeah, Mei?”

“Jesse McCree just Respawned.”

“Good work,” Winston said. “Or… I’m sorry? Whichever one…”

“That’s just it,” Mei said. “I didn’t shoot him… No one did.”
Partial English Moon

Chapter 11: Partial English Moon

Hanamura

Arrows studded the beam above them as Zenyatta and Torbjorn near a doorway that led out into the once peaceful courtyard. Torbjorn’s back was pressed against the wall, using his free, real hand to tinker with the turret that was firing out into the open.

Torbjorn named all his turrets. This one was named *Embla*, after a girl he had dated in high school.

But the errant fire and Junkrat’s haphazardly fired grenades were denting poor Embla, and the old girl was not long for this world.

Torbjorn was swearing to himself in his native tongue.

“I do not speak Swedish,” Zenyatta said between strafing orb volleys out the doorway. “Are you praying?”

“No,” Torbjorn said. “Yes… Kind of… Why the hell should I tell you?”

“It is best to talk these things through,” Zenyatta said. “Of all things, I wish to help.”

Torbjorn glared at Zenyatta with his one remaining eye. He sighed, wishing more than anything than to shut this hoity-toity tin can up. So he figured that he may as well indulge the thing.

“Respawn doesn’t regrow lost limbs,” Torbjorn said before he waved his artificial left arm in Zenyatta’s face. “I can’t tell you what I did with this arm while I still had it… but it was really important.”

Zenyatta fired another volley at Hanzo through the doorway, before coming to a floating stop next to Torbjorn. “Would it help if I said that I consider it an honor to fight along someone as distinguished as yourself?”

Torbjorn spat. “No. An Omnic’s honor is worth what’s in a circus worker’s shovel after the elephants pass by. And if you live long enough to see your little metal friends in Nepal again, you can tell them all that Torbjorn Lindholm said so!”

Zenyatta tilted his head, plucked an orb from the floating necklace of them around his neck, and attached it to Torbjorn’s head. It was an Orb of Harmony, which had healing properties.

“How about now?” Zenyatta asked.

Torbjorn’s heart-rate slowed. The small cuts on his right hand healed. The back molar that had been throbbing for the past couple of days instantly ceased mid-throb. His left hip stopped hurting, and his left hip had been bothering him for fifteen years.

“Oooohoooho!” Torbjorn yelled as endorphins coursed through his bloodstream, bringing a smile to his face. “I don’t like this at all!”

The rev of an engine from a few yards away, accompanied by a distinctly Aussie cry of “FIRE IN THE HOLE!”
“Oh, no!” Torbjorn said, the smile on his face in direct defiance of his internal dismay. “Junkrat’s tire!”

Torbjorn shrank against the wall and closed his eyes, waiting for the explosion, the shrapnel, the Respawn.

But they never came.

What arrived in their stead was a blast of cold air, and the sound of the explosion dulled, as though it was miles away instead of precious few feet.

Torbjorn opened his eyes. The doorway that had been the portal for both parties mutual gunfire had been blocked by a wall of ice. He looked over to the other doorway leading into this small room.

Mei was standing there, loading another flask of coolant into the back of her Endothermic Blaster, an expression on her face that was on the angry side of resolute.

“Your timing is impeccable, Doctor Zhou” Zenyatta said.

“Indeed, Friend Mei,” Torbjorn said. “We were…”

Mei held up a finger, silencing them both. Her drone Snowball floated up from the top of the coolant tank she had on her back, and into her hand.

She pressed a couple of buttons on Snowball, priming it. She stood near the doorway, waiting for the ice wall to melt. She raised the hand holding Snowball over her shoulder, ready to chuck the drone at anyone cataclysmically stupid enough to so much as look at her cross-eyed on the day that Jesse McCree vanished into thin air for no earthly reason before he could kiss her.

“Boys,” Mei said. “I am not in the mood…”

Ten… Eleven… Blink.

This had been the first time that Symmetra had actually fought alongside Zarya, and the sight was…

She’d get back to that. Metaphors weren’t her strong suit at the best of times, and the midst of combat didn’t classify as such.

Fighting at Zarya’s side, placing turrets and firing the occasional orb at Genji Shimada and Ana Amari, was a treasure trove of sensory input that she could file away for later, to help her improve as a front line fighter, and… y’know… other stuff.

The sight of the sweat rolling down Zarya’s bicep, the tang of its smell in her close proximity, the flush that came to Zarya’s cheeks when she was doing well. Catching her in profile made Symmetra want to run her own nose along Zarya’s jaw-line.

Even Symmetra thought that was weird. She’d never considered her nose as a tool for anything other than smelling air or food. It wasn’t as sensitive as her lips or her fingertips, but there was Zarya’s jaw-line, with a sign as loud as it was invisible, saying “Put Nose Here.”

I must ask myself questions about this, Symmetra thought. When I am not being shot at.

Ten… Eleven… Blink.

But her favorite part of this past few minutes was whenever Zarya put a barrier on Symmetra, yelling
“Get in there!” And for a precious few seconds, she was invincible, powerful, able to fend off the younger, dumber Shimada whenever he got too close. This feeling sent her reeling back in time, before meeting Zarya, before this insane mission with Reaper, before her time as a Vishkar operative, before even the day when a Vishkar representative came to her slum to take her into the architech program.

To a time when she was just five-year-old Satya Vaswani form Hyderabad, sitting on her father’s lap in the driver’s seat of cars in car lots that her family was too poor to buy. Looking over the steering wheel into the outside world beyond the windshield, she had felt a kind of freedom and possibility that hadn’t come to her in the two decades since, save for now, today, in the embrace of Aleksandra Zaryanova’s particle barrier.

She felt she could not be blamed that she synced up her countdown between blinks with the cooldown of Zarya’s barrier, waiting for that feeling to come again.

But it was on the fifth second that her anticipation was cruelly dashed. From over Genji’s shoulder, a dart flew, blue as opposed to Ana’s usual yellow, and found its target in Zarya’s neck. She immediately stopped and dropped her particle cannon. And from a few feet away, Symmetra could hear Ana yell…

“Nap time!”

Zarya began to fall.

Ten…

In preparation for this series of Overwatch mission to stop Reaper, Pharah had, in the parlance of D. Va, nerfed her missiles. Fighting in close proximity with comrades in arms, particularly some so lightly armored, meant that splash damage was a going concern. It wouldn’t do to send her fellow Overwatch members into Respawn.

This also meant that she had inadvertently made fighting Roadhog more of a chore than it needed to be.

It took Mercy, Pharah, and Reinhardt in a single-file line to deal with the hulking brute, with Reinhardt and his barrier at the front, Pharah bobbing and weaving on either side of him to get good shots, and Mercy taking up the rear to provide medical attention to Reinhardt, who was limping on one leg after a shot found its way into a gap in his armor just above the knee.

But Roadhog was firing great belching clouds of shrapnel from his scrap gun into Reinhardt’s barrier, and Pharah knew that it wouldn’t hold for much longer. She had to come up with a new plan of attack, and soon.

“Mercy?” Pharah asked.”

“Don’t distract me.”

“Doesn’t that staff have a protocol that increases damage output?”

“That would be distracting me.”

As if in perfect rejoinder to Mercy’s hesitance, Reinhardt himself provided a response.

“This barrier won’t hold out forever!”
Mercy closed her eyes and sighed, at which point four things happened in rapid succession.

The first was that, true to his warning, Reinhardt’s barrier did, in fact, break.

The second was that Roadhog saw this.

The third was that Roadhog fired his hook at the three of them.

And the fourth was that the hook found the left wing of Mercy’s Valkyrie suit before she had finished closing her eyes and sighing.

Pharah had never heard Mercy swear before… and technically, she hadn’t heard Mercy swear yet, as she had gotten to the “sh” of a very dirty word, and the prolonged “iiiiiiiiii” of this as yet unfinished dirty word commenced as the hook pulled Mercy toward the massive Australian in the gas mask.

Reinhardt hadn’t had time to react to this yet, and had next to no ranged attacks to retaliate with if he’d had.

But in this slowed-down world, as the woman Pharah loved was being pulled toward the business-end of Roadhog’s scrap gun, she saw that she had a shot lined-up perfectly.

Pharah pulled the trigger.

D. Va patted the back of her head as she stumbled out of the temple, and the tips of her bodysuit came away with blood.

She pressed a button on the other hand of her bodysuit, and a brand new pink MEKA fell from the sky to the satellite coordinates her signal had provided. No doubt Jack would pooh-pooh her throwing away billion dollar equipment like that when he had pooh-poohed Reaper throwing away shotguns, but D. Va felt justified, given how many of these things she’d helped the Korean government sell, she felt more than justified.

As if the loud sound of a MEKA dropping from an orbiting Korean satellite and into the middle of a courtyard in Hanamura wasn’t ostentatious enough, D. Va yelled “MEKA activated!” to no one in particular as she entered the machine and resumed her hunt for Reaper.

This hunt was not very long. Beneath the small bridge that linked the second floors of two houses on the opposite sides of a small stream, Lucio had run afoul of Reaper. Lucio raised his blaster to Reaper, but one blast of Reaper’s Hellfire shotgun shredded the weapon and severely burned Lucio’s hand.

Lucio fell to his knees, screaming and holding his mangled hand as Reaper pointed the other shotgun at his head.

D. Va risked slowing her MEKA down to fire the weapon’s systems at Reaper. They wouldn’t do much damage at this range but they’d divert his attention from Lucio to her, and she could put this monster down.

“Hey!” D. Va yelled from inside the MEKA. “Over here, you son of a bitch!”

Reaper began to turn his head.
Tracer ripped her tights.

It began innocently enough. En route to fill Roadhog full of holes (as his hook made its way toward Mercy) she saw a large rock in the middle of the courtyard, and amidst the chaotic thoughts that always went through Tracer’s mind during a firefight, this one stopped and stayed awhile.

*I should slide across it.*

*Like the cops do on TV shows.*

*It’ll look wicked!*

She got both feet up in mid run and felt her legs slide across the surface of the rock in slow-motion, and as it went on, she savored the feeling, and imagined how wicked she did, indeed, look.

But it took in instant after she had slid across the boulder to realize that had she known that there was a rough bush on the other side of that rock, she really wouldn’t have done this.

One of the branches of the bush caught the fabric of her tights halfway up her right thigh and tore up, all the way up to the waistband at the small of her back, revealing the entirety of her posterior.

As she used both of her pulse pistols to reach behind her and cover her modesty, two wholly appropriate and justly apt words broke out of Tracer’s lungs…

“**BLOODY HELL!**”

D. Va caught a glimpse of Tracer standing bolt-upright and using her guns to cover her butt as Reaper finished turning his head, looking from the incapacitated Lucio, right at her.

She stopped firing and brought her MEKA to a full gallop to advance on Reaper… and he just stood there. As though he were oblivious to the ton of metal barreling toward him. Oblivious to the storm of bullets, plasma beams, pulse rounds, arrows, rockets and shuriken at which he found himself within the eye.

And the damnedest thing… the absolute damnedest thing about it was that she could get a sense, even as her vision bobbed up and down from within the trotting MEKA, that the bastard was smiling behind his mask.

Reaper touched his hood as though he were an old-timey gentleman tipping his hat to a lady, and said:

“**Catch you on the flip-side, baby girl!**”

And he was gone in a flash of yellow light, Respawned without anyone actually having shot him. And even if it had proven after the fact that Ana or Torbjorn or someone else had put a round in his back before he vanished, she still wouldn’t have believed it.

As her MEKA brought up grass and soil behind her in her sudden stop in front of the still incapacitated Lucio, D. Va knew—she just knew—that Reaper had planned this somehow.

Pharah’s world was still in slow-motion as the end of her rocket launcher bloomed and the projectile emerged. And in this slow-motion world, Pharah heard something rather strange:

“**BLOOOOODY HEELLLLLL!**”
Her rocket slowly made its way past Mercy, on the way to Roadhog’s face, the poor Swiss doctor still on the “iiiiiiiiiiii” part of her first (by Pharah’s reckoning) drawn-out swear.

And as Tracer’s face dawned with surprise and she used her pistols to cover her recently exposed rear-end, the rocket crawled along the chain of Roadhog’s hook. It curled slightly, as though the universe itself guided the flaming death to a collision course with the snout of his gas mask.

But the universe had a habit of being cruel, as Roadhog—all hook, line, and fat bastard of him—vanished in a yellow blaze of electric light. He had Respawned.

It took Roadhog’s Respawn for Pharah’s trance to end and the world to snap itself out of its lethargy. The rocket zoomed into a rock-face beyond where Roadhog had been standing at normal speed.

And Mercy, who no longer hand a scrap gun to fear, found that gravity instead proved itself a foe of a singular worthiness.

Mercy trended downward, her profanity cut off before the “t” by her face hitting the ground. The rest if her body curled up in a U shape as her top half skidded across the ground. Her feet, finally hit soil with the rest of her after a ragged three-foot journey.

Pharah thought it looked painful.

Without thinking, she immediately sprinted past Reinhardt to the fallen Mercy, who had skinned the entire right side of her face. Once she got to her, however, Pharah’s brain shut down, and she found herself asking the dumbest possible thing she reckoned anyone could have asked.

“Are you okay?”

Mercy gingerly touched the raw and bleeding side of her face. “I think… I think my shoulder is dislocated.”

Even in her dumbfounded state, Pharah found that she had at least one good idea in her. She picked up the Caduceus Staff, pointed it at Mercy, and pressed the button on the side. Mercy’s face almost instantly returned to its normal, beautiful state, and she thought she could hear her shoulder pop painlessly back into its socket.

“Oh,” Mercy said. “So that’s what that feels like…”

Eleven…

Zarya hit the ground, her head bouncing off of the wooden walkway.

“BLOODY HELL!”

Blink.

As Genji reared toward her to seize this opportunity, the expression on Symmetra’s face did not change, her much maligned Frost Bitch setting did not alter one iota.

But inside was a churning and bottomless rage.

Genji Shimada was fast, almost impossibly so, but Symmetra had studied surveillance footage of the Ilios battle in her off-hours, and knew what he was going to do before he did.
She ducked to the side as his katana came down on empty air, leaving him exposed.

Symmetra brought her Photon Projector to Genji’s side and fired, the stream emanating from the emitter draining his life from him. She flailed his katana, trying to break the contact the beam had with his body, but he was denied.

She advanced on him, and it took all the power she could muster within herself to keep her voice level when she said:

“Get back.”

Genji groaned in pain and used the last of his strength to tumble backward, away from her. Symmetra was careful not to kill him, as a Respawn at that moment would have freed up the elder Amari to take aim at her and fire.

As Ana pumped Genji’s near-dead body with healing biotic darts, Symmetra rushed to the fallen Zarya’s side. She knelt and used all her strength to turn her over so she could breathe.

Now that she was face-up, Symmetra used her real hand to wipe away beads of perspiration that had formed on Zarya’s forehead. She struggled and strained to find something to say.

She didn’t need to.

Zarya’s luscious green eyes fluttered open, and they settled on Symmetra’s face. And she saw that Zarya’s lips did the smirk-curl thing again.

Ten…

Zarya said “I thought I only saw angels in my sl—“

And in a flash of yellow light, she was gone. Symmetra knew this was going to happen, of course. But it still didn’t lessen the sting of not hearing the end of a pick-up line that she knew all outside sources would have deemed corny, but, coming from Zarya, she would have liked anyway.

Eleven…

From behind her, she could hear Ana reload her biotic rifle and point it at her.

But before Captain Amari could fire, and before she herself could blink at her allotted twelfth second, Symmetra was gone as well.

In the event of Tracer ripping her tights, she might have been relieved to know that the only one of the assembled parties who actually got a good look at what was underneath was Doctor Mei-ling Zhou.

As the ice wall came down, with Snowball in hand, Mei heard the clarion call of “BLOODY HELL!”

Mei’s eyes went to the source of the cry and saw that Tracer’s tights had ripped, revealing pasty British keister.

Or, Mei considered in hindsight, playing over the brief instant she’d seen it in her head, the lack thereof.

For there was no crease in Tracer’s flesh demarking the separation of the tops of Tracer’s thighs and
the Partial English Moon that the rough bush on the other side of that rock had been complicit in revealing.

Indeed, the only evidence that Tracer’s long, slender legs did not, in fact, jam in at a weird angle under her ribcage, bypassing the pelvis entirely, was the presence of the red thong that Tracer wore under her tights.

The first of the thoughts that played in Mei’s head after seeing this? *Saucy!*

The second? *It makes sense. That’s why her tights ride up so far in the back, but not in the front.*

Of course, none of this made any impact on how attractive she found Tracer. Point of fact, Mei had, in passing or in-depth, fantasized about everyone on either side of this dirty conflict, save for D. Va (who was too young) and Junkrat (who smelled like burnt hair).

And of all the people on either side of this dirty conflict who would be most likely to be distracted by exposed flesh, however momentarily, that would have been Doctor Mei-ling Zhou. And afterwards, she could have kicked herself for it.

She released Snowball a full two seconds after she had planned to. The drone released a jet of freezing coolant on the ground that would have rooted Hanzo and Junkrat frozen to the spot…

Had they not Respawned—non-lethally, as McCree had—a split-second before Snowball started doing its thing.

As Snowball exhaled its coolant on the uninhabited grass, Mei saw that she had wasted an ultimate attack on ultimately nothing.

She sighed as Zenyatta and Torbjorn walked out of the doorway past her (the latter seeing to the metal ruins of the dear, departed Embla), and into the sun.

It would have been *wicked*…

The first order of business was for Tracer ask Ana for her coat, so she could cover up.

“I swear,” Tracer said as she worked her shoulders into the sleeves of the tattered longcoat her captain had given her. “If one of them had shot me, I could have Respawned. My tights would be fixed, and my bum wouldn’t be so cold.”

The second order of business was for Mercy to take her Caduceus Staff to repair Lucio’s mangled hand.

“Thanks,” Lucio said. “I gotta work turntables with these hands. This is my livelihood.”

After that? None of them were sure.

The members of Overwatch scanned the courtyard of Shimada Castle for bullet holes at the sites of where the enemy number had Respawned, and Ana found that, with the exception of Widowmaker’s ocular misadventure with her own biotic dart, no one on the enemy side had been killed before Respawning.

And a single question loomed over them, though they all seemed almost scared to ask it. It bubbled to the fore of their brains with the utmost urgency, until one of them had no choice but to give it voice.
And that one would up being D. Va. When they finally reassembled in the middle of the courtyard, D. Va asked:

“What the hell is going on here?”
And How We've Found the Same Old Fears

Chapter 12: And How We’ve Found the Same Old Fears…

Hanamura

Hana Song had a habit of carrying cash with her wherever she went, even on combat operations. She didn’t have the same *laissez-faire* attitude towards shops and those shops’ inventories that enabled Doctor Mei-ling Zhou and Jesse McCree to mix drinks with the stock of the Rikmaru restaurant, so at a clothing shop on the outskirts of Hanamura, Hana found a currency kiosk, converted her Korean won to Japanese yen, and left a suitable sum for a pair of jeans, a belt, and a scarf.

Bounty in tow, Hana found her way back to the center of town, near Shimada Castle. She found Lena (still in Ana’s coat) and Mei sitting on a small stone wall next to an arcade. But it’s what was inside the arcade that made Hana stop, and enter.

Genji stood in the middle of the brightly lit, noisy arcade, leaning against a game cabinet, the entirety of his body language heaving and sighing with what appeared to be sadness. Given what Hana knew about Genji, this sadness could be about any number of things, and if Hana knew better, she’d let him stew in his own misery, as the kind of deep family drama in which Genji was embroiled had a habit of being immune to the kind of looky-loo well-wishing that outsiders could provide.

And as her mouth opened, Hana found out that she did not, in fact, know better.

“Are you sad because we broke your family’s castle?”

Genji looked away from the *Lost Vikings VI* machine to place his gaze on Hana for a moment, before turning back.

“That is not my castle anymore,” Genji said. “It ceased to be mine when the elders of my clan saw fit to have me killed.”

Hana didn’t know what to say to that, except “So, uh… not *that*, then?”

“It shames me to say that I never got along with my brother,” Genji said. “And I fear that even were the order not sent, he would have attempted to kill me anyway. But it disturbs me the extent to which Hanzo will go to extinguish every last bit of my legacy.”

Hana’s brow furrowed. “*Your legacy?* That could, uh… yeah, I don’t know what that means.”

In response to this, Genji pointed to the screen of the *Lost Vikings VI* cabinet. Hana looked over his shoulder to see it.

Placing second on the high score screen was GEN, with 727,655 points, but placing first was HAN, with 729, 010 points. It took a second, but Hana finally got it.

“Wow,” she said.

Genji nodded. “Hanzo beat my high score on an arcade game in which he had no interest when I knew him. He must have come in here, day after day, pouring a ridiculous sum of money into this machine, improving his skills day by day, just to take it from me. For no other reason than it was
mine and that I was proud of it, in some small way. It seems that no way is too small for Brother Hanzo.”

Hana’s mouth was still open. “I mean there’s petty, and then there’s petty, and then there’s that.”

Genji nodded again, and sighed.

Hana didn’t even think about what she’d do next. She reached into a side compartment of her body suit and liberated all the Japanese coins she had on her person from the exchange at the clothing store. She held them out to him.

He looked from the coins, to her face, to the coins again.

“That’ll get you, what, three tries to get that score back?” Hana asked. “It’s *Lost Vikings VI*. It’s pretty simple. Some games are just like riding a bike.”

Genji took the coins, before wrapping Hana in a hug. He said something to her in Japanese, but being that Hana didn’t speak Japanese, she didn’t know what it was.

It must have been nice though, so she said “Hey, it’s alright. Get your game on.”

As Genji pumped a couple of the coins into the game’s coin slot, Hana walked out of the arcade, spotting Lena and Mei sitting on the wall. She reached into the bag of clothes and took out the jeans and the belt.

“I didn’t know your size,” Hana said, “but I think Captain Amari would like her coat back.”

Lena broke out in a broad, donkey-like grin. “You shouldn’t have.”

“Someone had to,” Hana said. “I think there’s a restroom on the second floor of the arcade. Don’t run, or the coat will flap up behind you, and we’ll see more of your business.”

“Righto,” Lena said, “and thanks again,” before she departed for the second floor of the arcade at a slow trot.

“I could stand to see more of her business,” Mei said.

Hana sighed. “That’s because you’re a pervert.”

“I prefer the term ‘libertine,’” Mei said. “When you take the view that all of the earth is here to please you, the happier you will be.”

“Whatever you say,” Hana said. “Your little Snowball gizmo have an ice cube function?”

Mei took Snowball from off the top of the coolant tank on her back and handed it to Hana. “It’s the little blue button underneath.”

“Thank you,” Hana said. She set the clothing bag on the pavement, took the scarf out, and emptied a few of Snowball’s ice cubes in its middle. She wrapped the scarf around the ice and placed this impromptu ice pack on the back of her throbbing head.

“Tough day at the office?” Mei asked.

“Reaper was under the distinct impression that my head was a basketball,” Hana said. “He kept dribbling it off the wall of the temple.”
“Ouch.”

“He said I was ‘Jack Morrison’s little protégé.’” Hana said.

“Hmmm.”

“I wonder how he knew that,” Hana said.

“Are you?”

“Am I what?”

“Jack’s protégé,” Mei said. “A very wise woman once said it’s not about what you’re called, but what you answer to.”

Hana looked at the ground and thought about that for a moment.

“I don’t think I’m learning anything from him,” Hana said. “Even though he still has the teacher vibe. It’s like… It’s like in American schools, they still try to teach cursive writing, even though no one uses it. It’s like he thinks his presence is teaching enough.”

“I had teachers like that,” Mei said. “I didn’t learn anything from them, either.”

“Well, then you know,” Hana said.

The two fell into a silence for a moment. Mei looked to her left while Hana still had the ice pack pressed to the back of her head.

“Hana, do you have any money left on you?”

“Why?”

“Why do you want to go to the movies.”

“Why do you want to go to the—“

Hana saw it. She closed her eyes, and she was unclear whether she said “Oh, for God’s sake,” or merely thought it.

Mei was looking at the movie theater across the street. The posters for the features playing were kept in glass cases on the outside. One of the posters on full display was the one for Hero of My Storm, starring Robert Greenways, Hana Song, and Thespian 4.0. Hana took up the middle of the poster, wearing a lab coat over the body suit that she was now, at this moment, wearing. She had a weather-meter in her hand, and her face was pure, practiced resolve.

“Is it any good?” Mei asked.

“No,” Hana said, “It’s terrible.”

“It can’t be that bad.”

Hana took the ice pack from her head and looked at Mei in a way that said “Aw, come on” in a better way than words could have.

“I play a scientist,” Hana said.
Mei’s expression darkened. “You’re nineteen,” she said.

“I know.”

“I spent seven years getting my doctorate, and you played a scientist in a movie.”

“I know.”

“That’s offensive to me.”

“I know.”

“What’s it about?” Mei asked.

“Me, Robert Greenways, and Thespian 4.0 try to stop a tornado,” Hana said. “There are quite a few scenes in my MEKA.”

“Does your MEKA stop the tornado in the movie?” Mei asked.

“No,” Hana said. “But it does influence sheepish world governments into buying MEKAs from Korea if the movie does well.”

“It couldn’t have been all bad,” Mei said. “Making a movie with a dish like Robert Greenways? Filming in LA?”

“First off,” Hana said, “Robert Greenways is an asshole.”

Mei seemed disappointed by this. “Really?”

“There are swear words in English I didn’t even know were words until he used them on his assistant for getting him the wrong kind of artisanal soda… and another thing I didn’t know was a thing? Artisanal soda!”

Mei frowned. “He was on the list.”

“What list?”

“The list of people I would cheat on my spouse with,” Mei said.

“Mei,” Hana said, “you’re not married.”

“I can’t,” Mei said. “Not with a list as long as mine!”

Hana had to smile at that. “And the worst part? We didn’t even film in L.A.”

In a conversation where Hana admitted that her nineteen year old self played a scientist, Mei seemed to react to this most recent revelation with the most incredulity.

“What kind of big special effects movie doesn’t film in L.A?”

“The kind that gets bigger tax incentives from shooting in Oregon,” Hana said.

“Oregon?” Mei asked. “That’s like ordering off a menu and the restaurant making you eat a photograph of the food you wanted.”

“We had to film in this little town called, uh…” Hana snapped her fingers until she remembered. “Arcadia Bay!”

“It’s a shithole,” Hana said. “All it is is truckers and art students who haven’t seen a Korean girl before. The things I do for my country.”

A pause.

“You shot the movie in Oregon?” Mei asked.

“Yeah.”

“Tornados don’t hit Oregon.”

Hana frowned. “They don’t?”

“I’m a climatologist,” Mei said. “I would know.”

Hana slumped. “Jesus, this movie is terrible.”

She pinched the bridge of her nose as Mei smiled.

“A few weeks ago,” Hana said, “I got a call from my publicist asking me if I was going to make the American premiere. I said no, and he wasn’t happy. Know what I was doing instead? This. I’m here to stop a very bad person from doing very bad things, and in the act of doing so, I get chided for avoiding my responsibilities.”

She looked at Mei. “You ever get the feeling the world is trying to tell you something?”

Before Mei could answer, Lena came back out of the arcade. Her new jeans hung loose on her, though the belt fit. To Hana, Lena looked like a young tree with that bag hanging loose around its bottom to keep the roots moist until it could be planted.

“I’ll get the cuffs dirty, I’m afraid,” Lena said.

Hana felt the holophone on her wrist vibrating before she could respond.

“Just a second,” Hana said. “I’m getting a message.”

Hana opened the interface. The message came from an unknown address and had no subject headings.

She opened it.

It was a picture.

Hana’s blood ran cold…

---

Fareeha stood in the entryway of the castle with arms crossed, watching as most of her team left the grounds to walk the streets of Hanamura. Part of her wanted to call out and demand that they stay in formation, but she could hardly blame them for cutting loose. Their battle had ended suddenly and without warning, and they were sure to have nervous energy to work out before boarding the flight back to base. They’d searched the castle and its grounds thoroughly, and it had been, as far as they could tell, totally abandoned. With the Respawn field still running, it’s not like any of them had anything to fear from an ambush, in any case.
And, she had to admit, it was a beautiful day for a walk. It was warm and bright, with a clear blue sky and cherry blossoms painting the wind and the ground in carefree pink hues. The only blemish was a cloudbank in the distance that threatened rain in a few hours. But for now it looked as soft and inviting as everything else. Especially after they had all spent the last few weeks cooped up in the King’s Row facility, Fareeha couldn’t begrudge her team an hour of relaxing in the sun.

Only Angela seemed to be immune to the day’s carefree charm. While all the others were rapidly disappearing into the streets of Hanamura, Fareeha spotted the doctor moving to sit at the base of a stump that had been a beautiful blooming cherry tree only moments before. The rest of the tree was lying severed a few meters away, still covered in the cheery pinks of spring.

As Fareeha approached, she saw Angela heave a sigh and stare blankly in the sky. She hesitated for a moment. This was the first time she had seen Angela in private directly after a battle. Was this just normal? She was certain to be exhausted after flying all over the battlefield trying to keep everyone alive. Maybe she wanted to be alone. But, with that sigh, it seemed just as likely that she needed a friend.

Either way, Fareeha had been standing a few steps behind her long enough that it would be awkward no matter what she did, so she chose to carefully sit down next to Angela at the base of the stump. Angela only gave her a vague smile and a nod, before returning to her blank surveillance of empty space. Undeterred, Fareeha opened a small compartment in her suit, and felt around for a moment.

“Hey, Angela, close your eyes and hold out your hand.” Fareeha said.

Angela shook herself from her reverie and gave Fareeha a puzzled expression.

“Excuse me?” She said.

Fareeha smiled. “Just trust me.”

With a small chuckle, Angela followed the instruction. When she opened her eyes, she found several small wrapped candies in her hand. She looked quizzically back at Fareeha, who was in the process of unwrapping one of her own and popping it into her mouth.

“Just seemed like you needed it. Try one.” Explained Fareeha lightly.

Angela smiled, unwrapped a candy, and put it in her mouth.

Fareeha had observed for some time that Angela was a great lover of chocolate. Unfortunately, all form of chocolate had a frustrating tendency to liquefy in the presence of jetpacks, so she had taken to carrying a small variety of hard candies that could resist the combined brunt of Egyptian summer heat and the burn of her thrusters. She had been worried that Angela wouldn’t care for the fruity hard candy, but was pleased to see that she seemed to be enjoying it.

And so they sat for a few quiet minutes, sharing the candy, looking out over the city. To Fareeha’s relief, although Angela still hadn’t said anything, the glaze was lifting from her eyes and she was beginning to seem truly relaxed. And, in turn, she let herself relax, too. The grass (or at least, the grass that hadn’t been torn up or scorched in the battle) was soft beneath her, a gentle wind rustled the leaves that remained on the scattered limbs of the toppled tree, and for a moment, Fareeha could pretend that it was just a normal, peaceful, spring afternoon being shared between her and her best friend.

“In truth, I wouldn’t have taken you for having a sweet tooth. Somehow it doesn’t fit with the whole
image of Captain Amari.” Said Angela, breaking the silence.

Fareeha grinned. “Well, I used to smoke, actually, when I first joined the military. But they made me give it up if I wanted a chance at the Raptora program. Besides, I knew you’d give me hell for it if I ever got to work alongside you.”

“Well, you’re not wrong there…” Said Angela, returning the smile with raised eyebrows. “Thank you, though. I did need this after that fight. It’s just a good thing I didn’t have to jog between all of you, otherwise I’d need something a little stronger than candy.”

“That’s definitely something I need to drill them on.” Said Fareeha, rolling her eyes. “I’m just thankful to have you around to keep these fools from falling apart entirely.”

“You always were a flatterer, Fareeha.” Angela said, before looking Fareeha straight in the eye, and taking one of her hands delicately in her own.

“But I know they would be okay without me. Because they would still have you. You’re going to be a great leader, Fareeha.”

Between Angela’s earnest tone and angelic smile, Fareeha felt the same moment of beautiful, visceral weightlessness in that moment as she did when she was in the air—at the apex of flight, but not yet falling, when it felt like she could just float away on the wind as easily and carelessly as a cloud. Where there were only possibilities ahead of her.

She opens and closes her mouth a few times, trying to get words to come. What was she supposed to say? Ever since she was a child she wanted to help build the world that the first incarnation of Overwatch fought so hard for. And Angela, who worked so hard, who had risked so much, who had done so much even after the organization had been disbanded, was like a human embodiment of the selfless justice she strove so hard for.

In that quiet, tender moment, the enormity of their situation dawned upon Fareeha. This reincarnation of Overwatch wasn’t just a military transfer, some new operation to manage and move on from. This was the beginning of the rest of her life. There was no turning back on this journey. And Angela Ziegler, who she had looked up to for so long, was there beside her, telling her that she believed in her.

In so many ways the moment felt perfect. The world was beautiful, Angela was happy, and Fareeha was so full of emotion that her heart felt fit to burst. She wanted to tell her everything. She wanted to tell her how much her commitment to peace inspired her, how grateful she was to take this journey with her, how long she had wanted to work alongside her, how beautiful she was, how much she wanted to always be together. She wanted to tell her that more than returning to the old bases she’d known as a child, more than wearing the uniform she’d grown up around, she was the one that made Overwatch feel like returning home.

But in the end, she knew now was not the time for grand declarations. They were both exhausted and dirty, and all too soon they would be boarding another hours-long flight, followed by endless debriefing. No, admissions as heavy as these called for privacy and for time. This could wait. They would be together for a long, long time, after all. And that was reassuring enough.

And so she squeezed Angela’s hand in turn and settled for a quiet, timid, “Thank you.” And hoped that her feelings found a way through, even in some small way.

The Shimada clan was an old one, the first instance of them appearing in history as the family of a
A daimyo under the third Ashikaga shogun Yoshimitsu in 1399. And old families, much like old people, fall into bad habits.

Namely that the Shimada clan did not change their PC passwords.

One radio transmission from Ana to Genji (between his first and second attempts at reclaiming his *Lost Vikings VI* high score) was all it took to liberate a computer inside Shimada Castle of the locations of The Shimadas’ real estate holdings.

The location that seemed most likely to have held Reaper and his band of miscreants during their time in Hanamura was an office building eight blocks away that once held Tanaka Incorporated, now defunct. What Tanaka Incorporated had done while it was still solvent was unclear, and purposefully so, as Tanaka Incorporated was a front for the Shimada Clan’s money laundering operation.

The examination of the old Tanaka Incorporated building was a three stage job. Reinhardt, with his helmet off, helped Zenyatta search for clues.

“Lena tells me that you are very observant,” Reinhardt said.

“I am Omnic,” Zenyatta said as he used his built in tech to scan hard drives. “My memory is photographic… quite literally. I have video playback for every memory I have.”

“They way she says it,” Reinhardt said, “it’s as though you can… make assumptions about what’s bothering a person. With an accuracy bordering on the mystic.”

Zenyatta tilted his head at Reinhardt. “When I am allowed.”

“Are there times when you are not allowed?”

Zenyatta sighed. “Genji, my pupil, thinks often of our mutual friend Doctor Ziegler.”

Reinhardt sighed as well. “Go on.”

“I offered to converse with Doctor Ziegler to see if she thought about him in return.”

Reinhardt stopped what he was doing. “You were just going to ask her?”

“Not at all,” Zenyatta said. “When I formed this plan, it was to be about Genji’s medical status. Heart-rate elevation and pupil dilation would have told me the rest.”

“Just like that?”

“Indeed,” Zenyatta said. “Genji, however, expressly forbade me from doing so. I have had as little contact with Doctor Ziegler as I could manage in accordance with Genji’s wishes.”

“He didn’t want to hear if she didn’t?” Reinhardt asked.

“I think,” Zenyatta said, “that he was petrified of what would happen if she did.”

“We are strange creatures,” Reinhardt said.

“As the sky is blue on a clear day.”

They continued to work in silence. Reinhardt opened his mouth to say something, but, like Lena had told him, Zenyatta seemed to know what was on his mind before he did.
“You want to know what I can tell you about yourself?”

Reinhardt, whose mouth had been open to speak, blinked a couple of times, as the word “Wow!” was having difficulty marching out of his throat.

Zenyatta cocked his head to the side again, and looked Reinhardt up and down, before saying:

“I think… that there is a man out there waiting for you. And you and he shall make each other very happy.”

Before he could tell his body to erect itself in haughty defiance at the implication of such a lack of chivalry and abeyance of duty, his body violently disagreed with him. His shoulders slumped, and the mighty German Crusader seemed to shrink.

“Thank you,” Reinhardt said quietly. “I really needed to hear that.”

On the lower floors, also pulling the same duty of scanning hard drives and hard surfaces, were Ana Amari and Lucio Correia dos Santos. And though they could have covered more ground if they split up on each floor, Lucio hovered near the Captain’s side. And Captain Amari, well within her rights to tell Lucio to get back to work, didn’t seem to mind this.

“You haven’t heard the stories,” Ana said, not making it a question.

Lucio jumped, as they had been working in silence up to this point, and the sudden statement frightened him a little bit.

“What stories?” Lucio asked.

“I am legendary,” Ana said. “For reasons I have earned, and reasons that… let’s just say have been embellished.”

“What’s, um…. What’s been embellished?” Lucio asked, and Ana could see microscopic beads of sweat forming in his upper lip.

She took a step toward him. “That I hunt young men for sport.”

“What, like… like with a rifle?”

Ana was successful in keeping the smile off of her face. “No,” she said. “The other way.”

Lucio appeared to be attempting to think of what other way there could be. It came to him eventually.

“Ohhhhhhh,” he said. “That’s, um… that’s not true, then?”

“No,” Ana said, not technically lying. In order to successfully earn a reputation, one would have to do the thing one was accused of more than once, which she hadn’t. And if young men were more amenable to taking direction and orders than their elder counterparts, she couldn’t be blamed for that, now could she?

“It isn’t?” Lucio asked. He had a face like a drive-in movie screen, and his look of disappointment could have been seen from the cars in the back row.

“According to your records, you’re twenty-six years old?”

“Yeah.”
“I have boots older than you.”

“Oh…”

“I am not being facetious when I say this,” Ana said. “The boots I am wearing right now are quite literally older than you.”

Lucio looked down at Ana’s boots, like he’d been ordered to do so. “They’ve um… they’ve held up pretty well.”

“As well as the woman wearing them,” Ana said. She began to walk past him, but stopped when they were shoulder-to-shoulder. She let her one eye linger over every last square inch of him, from the top of his head to the bottom of his light blades. Very slowly did Lucio sheepishly turn his head to meet her gaze, and Ana gave Lucio a moment—just a moment—of the look she had when she wanted to smolder. All authority and curiosity. It was the look she had when she needed to lay into a lazy or disobedient soldier under her command... only more so.

And then she kept walking. She didn’t need to see the mixture of arousal and sheer terror that pervaded every aspect of Lucio Correia dos Santos, from his stance to the look on his face. She could sense it, and in this sensation, she knew she still had it. And she took a moment to reflect that, in spite of their differences in background and place of birth, Lucio was an awful lot like Jesse McCree.

And in the middle floors, Fareeha and Angela, fresh from the hints, allegations, and things left unsaid by the tree stump, conducted their own search. And they spoke of nothing at all. Fareeha smiled ever so slightly as they worked in quiet, and whether Angela was either so wrapped up in her own work or simply didn’t comment, Fareeha could not say.

And in the parking garage, Torbjorn Lindholm found something during his own independent search. It was a piece of paper, upon which was something that struck terror in his heart. Looking at it, he cross-referenced his own findings and the info that the scans that the other members of Overwatch had sent him while searching the rest of the Tanaka Incorporated building.

He developed a theory.

And that theory troubled him greatly.

He radioed all other Overwatch personnel to meet him on the top floor of the building and waddled toward the elevator as fast as his stubby legs could carry him.

Ana, Lucio, Zenyatta, Reinhardt, Fareeha and Angela were already on the top floor by the time Torbjorn got there.

“What did you find?” Ana asked.

“Yeah, break it off, Sherlock,” Lucio said before his eyes went wide and a massive smile came to his face. He pointed at Torbjorn and yelled:

“TORLOCK LINDHOLMES!”

He looked at the faces of the rest of his compatriots. No one laughed. No one even cracked a smile... except for Fareeha, because Fareeha is a dork.

"Thank you," Lucio said to Fareeha. "You appreciate fine art."
“First thing’s first,” Torbjorn said, before handing the piece of paper he found in the parking garage to Ana.

“It’s a schematic,” Ana said. “Of…”

“A bomb,” Torbjorn said. “Or more specifically, a bomb casing about eight feet long and three feet wide. I found it next to quite a few discarded iron tubes.”

“The tubes Symmetra and the Bastion unit stole from Ilios?” Angela asked.

“The very same.”

“I think it was already assumed that Reaper was crafting a bomb,” Zenyatta said. “He is, after all, a terrorist.”

“There’s one small problem with that,” Torbjorn said.

“Which is?” asked Reinhardt.

“Between Shimada Castle and this building, all the scans I’ve been having you do revealed no traces of un-detonated explosive material.”

In light of the blank stares he was receiving, Torbjorn felt he had to elaborate.

“Most explosives, your dynamites, your Semtexes, your C-4s, leave behind some kind of residue. It’s difficult to track, but I’ve developed a way. And beyond the stuff Junkrat uses for his little grenades, I’ve found nothing of the sort here in Hanamura. Which brings us to our next problem.”

“There’s a next problem?” Ana asked.

“I checked the hard drives here, and at Shimada Castle. I’ve even did a brute force mine of the entire IP address. And…” Sweat started forming on his brow. Fareeha took a step toward the clearly distressed man.

“And what, Torbjorn?”

“The Athena hack,” Torbjorn said. “The one that took out Jack. It… it didn’t come from Hanamura.”

This was met with quietude, both stunned and incredulous.

“What do you mean?” Fareeha asked. “We came to Hanamura on your say-so. Because you said the hack came from here.”

“To be fair,” Ana said, “both he and Winston brought up the prospect of this being a trap. It appears they were right. We just don’t know what kind yet.”

“But the Athena hack,” Torbjorn said, “did more than just take out Jack or state intent. What it did is still in the code. I didn’t see it before, because I wasn’t looking for it, but now…”

“I was under the impression,” Zenyatta said, “that Athena had self-correcting measures in case of a hack.”

“To the purpose of shutting her down, you would be right,” Torbjorn said. “But this hack did more than that.”
“What did it do?” Angela asked.

“It reconfigured the parameters of a Respawn.”

More blank stares. Torbjorn rubbed his face.

“How is a Respawn triggered?” Torbjorn asked.

“If your heart or your brain stops working,” Lucio said.

“Precisely,” said Torbjorn. “What the Athena hack did, was reconfigure what triggers a Respawn to everyone on Reaper’s keycode from cessation of vital signs to something else.”

“Which is?” Reinhardt asked.

“Timestamp!” said Torbjorn. “At a certain point on Athena’s internal clock, Reaper triggered everyone on his keycode to Respawn.”

Ana closed her eyes. “And that’s why Reaper and his gang Respawned without anyone actually killing them.”

“Whoever did this is gifted with code,” Torbjorn said. “They’ve effectively turned Respawn into a long-range teleporter. Going from Hanamura to wherever Reaper set up his Spawn Points.”

“Where are his Spawn Points, Torbjorn?” Angela asked.

“I know.”

Everyone in the room turned toward the door. Hana was standing there, with Mei and Lena in tow. Their faces were glistening with sweat. From wherever they had been, they had run here.

“How do you know?” Torbjorn asked.

Hana held up the holophone on the wrist of her bodysuit. “Because he told me.”

She came into the center of the room and brought up the picture that had been sent to her.

“Mein Gott!” Reinhardt said.

It was a picture of Reaper, shotguns crossed across his chest, standing in front of the house in King’s Row that held the secret entrance to the Overwatch facility, where the only members in full standing in occupancy were an unaware Winston and a recovering Jack Morrison.

The caption that Reaper placed underneath the picture said it all.

“WISH YOU WERE HERE”

Ana put her finger up to her ear to radio out.

“Winston, come in… Winston, do you read?”

Winston didn’t respond.
London

Winston found the acoustics in the control room sublime. There was a slight echo in the King’s Row facility, which was a marked and much desired improvement over the muffled and muted Watchpoint: Gibraltar.

For Winston was a covert music nerd, and like all covert music nerds not yet jaded or cynical enough to be upfront about their passions, Winston liked to sing along with whatever music he was playing at the moment.

“All steps of the way… We walk the line.”

The personnel on the ground at Hanamura had been checking in regularly after the battle, since Mei told him that Jesse McCree had Respawned without anyone actually killing him. He was having Athena perform a self-diagnostic. He’d transfer the information for Torbjorn to verify when she was done.

“All your days are numbered… So are mine.”

The team was conducting a sweep of Hanamura, including Shimada Castle and an old office building they found. They hadn’t checked in for some time, which must have meant that they were busy. None of their vitals had gone offline, so there was no worry about any real danger on Winston’s mind.

“All time is piling up… We struggle and we scrape.”

Lost in the echo of Bob Dylan in the control room, and comfortable, warming nothing that the music provided, he didn’t see the scentless black smoke lightly streaming in from the air conditioning vent near the floor behind his chair.

“We’re all boxed in, nowhere to escape.”

The smoke collected on the floor, in direct defiance of how smoke should normally act. It swirled into a conical shape behind Winston’s chair, and became corporeal.

“City’s just a jungle… More games to play.”

Reaper stood over Winston’s head, with the gorilla none the wiser. He took an electric pulse charge out of his pocket and placed it on the collar of Winston’s armor.

“Trapped in the—huh?”

Winston wheeled around in his chair and made eye contact with Reaper for the briefest of moments before the pulse charge went off. Winston’s body was trapped in a spider web of electric bolts before the charge ceased. Winston fell out of his chair and to the floor, unconscious.

The only thing stopping Reaper from unloading both of his shotguns into this insipid animal’s face was that he probably had a Spawn Point set up somewhere in the facility. Dead, Winston was a threat. Knocked out, he was neutralized.
Reaper turned to the open doorway leading into the rest of the King’s Row facility. Out came the shotguns as he called into the hall beyond.

“Where are you hiding, Jack?” Reaper yelled. “We got a shitload of things to talk about!”

**Hanamura**

All of Overwatch stood stock still, staring at the picture on Hana’s holophone. Except for Lena, who immediately pressed her own up to her ear to make a call out.

“Em, it’s… *Em,* it’s very important you don’t go anywhere near King’s Row tonight. Leave London if you can. Can you get to your parents in Sheffield?... I know, but you’ll have to take the car… I know, I… I love you, too.”

Genji walked in, and was very confused as to what was going on. Before Hana filled him in, she had one very important question to ask.

"Did you get your high score back?"

Genji held out his fist. Hana bumped it.

“He’s after Respawn,” Reinhardt said. “He has to be.”

“How do you know?” Hana asked.

“He started this abominable mission of his to try and kill us all,” Reinhardt said. "So if we got together, he knew we’d head to where the Respawn mainframe itself was situated. With that out of the way, he can kill us all permanently.”

“What I want to know,” Ana said, “is how he knew where Respawn was. We never told him.”

Mei looked flabbergasted. “You gave him a keycode to Respawn, and you didn’t tell him where it was?”

“Secrecy was paramount,” Ana said. “Not all personnel had that information. The intel was need-to-know, and Gabriel didn’t need to know.”

“He used to be a spy,” Fareeha said, “and he apparently has a hacker working for him. If he wanted the information, he could have gotten it.”

Upon hearing this, a thought so uncharitable and vile scattered across Hana Song’s brain. She shooed it away instantly, but it formed itself even faster than that.

*Or someone talked…*

“Let’s not panic, just yet,” Ana said. “They have a bomb casing, right? But a bomb casing with no explosive material.”

Torbjorn was about to say something, but stopped himself. He put his hand to his cheek and went pale.

“Torbjorn,” Fareeha said, the dread creeping into her voice. “What is it?”

Torbjorn turned to Zenyatta.
“Omnis have a fusion core, correct?”

“Yes,” Zenyatta said. “They do.”

“And they’re basically just smaller versions of the ones inside omniums?”

“Indeed,” said Zenyatta. “And before you say anything, terrorists do sometimes use omnium cores as the cores of bombs, but they have to be supplemented by other explosive materials. Which, as you said, Reaper does not have.”

“And if an omnium core is overloaded without additional explosives, what happens?”

“An electromagnetic pulse,” Zenyatta said. “But not a very big one. But Reaper does not have an omnium core. In fact, he took great pains to make us think he was stealing one at Ilios, and even greater pains to show us that he did not wish to steal one. He took the iron tubing instead.”

“No,” Torbjorn said. “He doesn’t have an omnium core… but he does have a Bastion unit.”

This was met with silence.

“Wait,” Angela said. “Reaper is going to overload the core in the Bastion unit?”

“That’s what I’m thinking,’ Torbjorn said.

“But if an omnium core is overloaded and the EMP isn’t that big, wouldn’t the overloaded Bastion unit’s pulse be a great deal smaller?”

“Yes,” Torbjorn said. “But there are ways to amplify a small EMP into something a great deal bigger.”

“Like what?” Ana asked.


Now it was Ana’s turn to go a shade paler. “Symmetra!”

“Shit,” Hana said.

“How bad are we talking?” Ana asked.

“Provided that Symmetra is gifted with weaving hard light,” Torbjorn said, “and I have no reason to believe she is not… then the resulting EMP when she overloads the Bastion unit’s core will take out the Respawn mainframe… and the King’s Row facility… and the rest of London with them. It’ll destroy every electronic device in the city.”

All in attendance were in the grip of silence as the implications of what Torbjorn just said quickly set in.

“Every Omnic in London will be killed instantly,” Zenyatta said.

“And all the humans on life support in the hospitals,” said Lena.

“Every car on the road will just stop,” said Hana.

“And given how close to Heathrow that King’s Row is,” said Lucio, “a lot of planes are gonna start falling from the sky.”
“Reaper…” Mei said. “He… he wouldn’t really do this, would he?”

Ana turned to Mei. “Have you met Reaper? This is exactly the kind of thing he’d do.”

She turned to the rest of Overwatch.

“We are looking at a death toll in the thousands unless we can get back to London in the next hour, and we can’t do that in the dropship. And Winston still isn’t picking up, so we’re cut off from him, from Athena, from Respawn, so we can’t pull the same teleportation trick that Reaper did. So if anyone here has any bright ideas, now is the time to hear them.”

---

**London**

The Bastion unit and the bomb casing got to London from Hanamura the old fashioned way.

Reaper had them shipped through his old Talon contacts. The contents of the crate that arrived in London consisted of the Bastion unit, the casing, a bag of birdseed, and Ganymede.

As Symmetra and Zarya broke open the shipping crate that contained the bird and the Bastion unit (the latter seemingly unaware or incapable of caring about the fact that it was lightly spackled in the fecal matter of the former) in a garage near a King’s Row apartment building, Symmetra was pleased to see that Ganymede was still alive.

Symmetra had run the calculations, and found that while the EMP she would help trigger would destroy the Bastion unit, at least the bird would make it out of the bomb casing alive. She was pleased by this.

Ten… Eleven… Blink.

Inside the garage, away from the prying eyes of the people on the street in the evening air, Zarya and the Bastion unit placed the bomb casing on a small motorized cart that was connected to an old, disused trolley track that would slowly take the payload down the street a couple of blocks into an underground foundry in King’s Row that was close enough to the subterranean home of the Respawn mainframe beneath the Overwatch facility to override any potential protective countermeasures.

Zarya radioed out. “Zarya, checking in.”

Symmetra thought she should do the same. “Symmetra, checking in.”

McCree, Junkrat, and Roadhog checked in from their positions in the alleyways along the payload’s route. And from a rooftop above them all, Widowmaker did the same. From his own rooftop, Hanzo just tapped on his receiver twice to confirm he was there.

“Good,” Reaper said over the radio from inside the Overwatch facility. “Symmetra and Zarya will escort the payload containing the Bastion unit along the route.”

“Acknowledged,” said Zarya.

“And the rest of you,” Reaper said, “will cause a distraction… as big and as chaotic a distraction as you can manage.”

Junkrat laughed over the frequency as Symmetra’s blood turned to ice in her veins.
“Whoa, hold up,” McCree said. “What do you mean ‘chaotic?’”

“Don’t put it past Amari and her cohorts to get back here somehow the same way we did,” Reaper said. “In such an event, remember this: They can Respawn until we shut the mainframe down. Civilians and police officers can’t. If they get back, they’ll be in less of a hurry to shoot if they have to think about bystanders.”

Silence from McCree, before he said “You want us to kill innocent people! This ain’t what I signed up for!”

“You signed up to make the world a better place, Jesse,” Reaper said. “Remember which side of history you’ll be on if you fail me.”

Reaper cut off contact.

“Cap’n, come in!” Jesse said. “Reaper! Gabriel!” Then he cut off contact as well.

A war raged within Symmetra that, like all of her inner wars, did not show on the placidity of her face.

What Reaper had just asked her to be a part of flew in the face of her want, her desire, her need for order. The values instilled in her after almost a lifetime under the umbrella of Vishkar… yet Vishkar sent her here to follow Reaper’s orders.

And they couldn’t be wrong…

Could they?

They provided for me, therefore they are good, Symmetra thought, using this old mantra as a film over which she draped her inner conflict, trying to keep it from tearing her into unequal halves. If they are good, then what they do is good. If my thoughts disagree with them, then my thoughts are bad.

Ten… Eleven… Blink.

Zarya turned to her. There was a thin sheen of sweat on her forehead that Symmetra theorized had nothing to do with the effort she had exerted putting the bomb casing onto the cart. The inner edges of her eyebrows pointed up toward her forehead. Her eyes were big. Her lips were drawn down to either side of her chin.

Why do you look like that? If I had that look on my face, I wouldn’t be comfortable at all. Look different. Do that lip curl thing. After you do that, you say something you think is funny, and then you laugh. And it’s a nice laugh, or I think it is. When you laugh, I don’t think you’re laughing at me.

“A lot of things can go wrong out there,” Zarya said. “And if something bad does happen, I just want you to know…”

Symmetra stopped breathing as Zarya stopped talking. She didn’t like this pause. Zarya always had something to say. Her thoughts didn’t run in fits and starts like Symmetra’s did, and for a moment, she thought her Satya-ness might be spreading.

“…that I can bench press you.”
Symmetra hadn’t gotten to her twelfth second yet, but she blinked anyway.

“I mean, I can bench press anyone, but I thought you’d like to know that I could bench press you in particular.”

And Zarya was right.

Symmetra did like to hear that.

It had been said, after their blow-out at Gibraltar, that the difference between Jack Morrison and Gabriel Reyes was diametrical, and could be explained as thus:

Morrison was a wonderful man, but a lacking leader. Reyes was a wonderful leader, but a lacking man.

But even leaders as good as Gabriel “Reaper” Reyes have blind spots.

For example, though Reaper warned his crew that there was the possibility that Overwatch could somehow, magically find their way from Hanamura to London in an instant the same way that they themselves had, Reaper himself didn’t believe it with the level of gusto that such a belief required.

And as he walked past the rec room on the hunt for Jack, shotguns in hand, that lack of belief gravely imperiled his entire London operation.

And the bright idea that Ana and the rest of Overwatch was looking for on top floor of the Tanaka Incorporated Building in Hanamura wound up coming to them.

For within the rec room that Reaper so blithely sauntered past, there was a cabinet that on a good day in the past, would have held board games and pool cues. But on this bad day in the present, it instead held Brigitte Panzer, who Reaper had either forgotten was in the facility, or had deemed as so little a threat that her presence was of no consequence.

In the darkness of the cabinet, Brigitte brought up her holophone. The blue light of the device brought up a hard light image of Reinhardt’s face, and Brigitte pressed the button to dial.

“Brigitte?” Reinhardt said. “Oh, Gott in Himmel, I—“

“Shhhhhhh,” Brigitte said, and Reinhardt was lulled with brute force into quietude. Then Brigitte began to whisper. Whenever Brigitte Panzer was scared, it looked to the outside observer as though such a reaction was nigh identical to that of one who had gotten the wrong soup at a resaturant, and was going to humiliate the waiter.

“Reaper… is in the facility,” Brigitte whispered. “Reaper… is here. Why… is Reaper here? Reaper… should be there.”

"It’s a long story,” Reinhardt said quietly. “Here, I’ll give you to Ana. She can—“

From a few feet away from Reinhardt’s holophone, Brigitte could hear Ana say “No. Transfer her over to Torbjorn. He knows what to do.”

“Oh,” Reinhardt said. “I’ll be giving you to Torbjorn, alright?”

Reinhardt didn’t wait for Brigitte to respond. The hard light portrait of Reinhardt Wilhelm on Brigitte’s holophone immediately switched to a portrait of Torbjorn Lindholm after the transfer.
“Brigitte?” Torbjorn asked.

“Shhhhhhh.”

“Right,” Torbjorn said, a great deal quieter.

“What’s going on, here?” Brigitte asked.

“The short version?” Torbjorn asked. “Reaper and his cheery buddies used Respawn as a teleporter. They were here, and now they’re there. And now, thousands of innocent people are going to die, unless you get to the control room as quickly and as quietly as you can, and do exactly as I say.”

“Oh, that’s all I have to do? Play hide-and-seek with a shotgun-wielding smoke monster?”

“Welcome to Overwatch,” Torbjorn said. “Is he gone?”

Brigitte closed her eyes and gulped. She slowly opened the cabinet door to peek out. Reaper had passed.

Nestled in the heart of King’s Row, there lay a pub called the Hoof & Haunch.

It had been there since the 1850s, and apart from the rise of automation and technology that allowed for such additions as jukeboxes, beer taps, pay phones, and holographic interfaces for communication and commerce, very little had changed about the interior of the establishment. A stuffed javelina boar’s head was placed above the entrance by proprietor Michael Smythe in 1853 upon the Hoof & Haunch’s first day of business, and through blitz, through riot, through Omnic Crisis, through assassination, there it stayed.

In fact, the only real changes to the Hoof & Haunch in the over two centuries of business was the clientele. If Michael Smythe had been made aware of the eventual rise of the Omnics, his reaction may very well have been priceless.

In these cool pre-dawn hours of the evening, half of the clientele was Omnic, with their human co-workers or human families in tow. The Hoof & Haunch had to institute a cover charge for all Omnic customers, as Omnics neither ate nor drank, which was the kiss of death for any pub or eatery. The proprietor in 2076, a woman named Amelia Darby, braced herself for the hostile media coverage and for the Omnic Rights people to protest outside, but such protests were quelled before they began, via an online missive from a representative of the Shambali, one Tekhartha Zenyatta, saying that fair was fair, and the Hoof & Haunch should be able to charge in lieu of food, so long as said charge was not exorbitant. And Amelia Darby, so bowled over by Tekhartha Zenyatta’s clear head, made sure that this was not the case.

London Omnics, for whatever reason, recharged during the day, which meant that many London establishments instituted twenty-four hour business hours to accommodate them, the Hoof & Haunch being one of them.

The Omnics in attendance hummed and spoke, the humans laughed and ate, the jukebox unobtrusively played the latest in Country music from The Philippines, and all was well within this small microcosm of life on Earth.

Until the bell over the door jingled.
Past the javelin boar’s head walked a tall man with wild hair. He had a peg leg and an artificial arm, and he had a tire strapped to his back.

And with him was a mountain of meat that called itself a man. He wore a gas mask, and had a garish tattoo across his exposed stomach of a pig, that culminated in a snout across his protruding navel.

The skinnier of the two walked to the bar and took one of the complimentary matchbooks from the small tray that contained them. He lit one match, used that match to light the rest of the book, and proceeded to light strands of his own hair on fire, then deftly maneuvering his hand so that the flames went out, causing the hair to singe and smolder slowly.

And as he did, he surveyed the clientele of the Hoof & Haunch, his expression darkening at the number of Omnics at their seats.

He dropped the matchbook onto the floor and stubbed it out with his peg leg. Few in the pub noticed him until he began to speak.

“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen,” he said loudly. “My name is Jamison, but me mates? Me mates call me Junkrat. And given how close we’re going to become in the next few minutes, you can call me Junkrat as well. I will be your Master of Ceremonies for the evening.”

He pointed to his portly associate.

“With me, as always,” Junkrat said, “is compatriot and confidante extraordinaire, Roadhog. Say hi to the lovely people, Roadhog.”

Roadhog raised his hand, and didn’t even bother to wave. “Hi to the lovely people, Roadhog.”

“Spiffing, Roadie, absolutely spiffing… They say that in England, right?”

Junkrat seemed instantly interested in the answer to that question, before he became just as instantly disinterested.

“Anyway,” Junkrat said, “I am pleased to inform you that tonight will be a night long remembered. Tonight will go down in history, ladies and gents. Your kids will read about it in school. The night that a blow was struck against…”

It seemed that Junkrat lost interest in this as well.

“…against something, by someone, blah-blah-blah. I fell asleep when it was explained to me, and it’s above me pay grade, anyway. But it may not be above some of yours. Either way you can say you were there when what goes down goes down.”

Junkrat’s expression darkened. And as the one person who knew him well was aware, the darker Junkrat’s expression got, the more fun he planned on having.

“Provided, of course, you make it out of this pub alive.”

Junkrat reached behind him, near the tire strapped to his back, and produced a grenade launcher, each of the grenades emblazoned with a crudely drawn and an insanely designed smiley-face. Junkrat pointed the grenade launcher at the crowd, and a great many of them gasped and screamed.

“But I gotta tell ya,” Junkrat said. “It don’t look good, mate.”

Junkrat opened fire.
Brigitte’s voice came through Torbjorn’s holophone.

“Done,” she said. “You’re linked in.”

“Good,” Torbjorn said. “Is Winston still alive?”

“Yes,” Brigitte said, “but he’s not moving. Should I wake him up?”

Torbjorn weighed the options before he said. “No. When Winston gets up, he can take care of himself. You can’t right now. Get someplace safe, and hide.”

“Good,” Brigitte said. “Patching you through now.”

The portrait of Brigitte on Torbjorn’s holophone was replaced by a stylized letter A.

“Good evening, Mister Lindholm,” Athena said.

“I’ll be transferring you to Captain Amari,” Torbjorn said. He looked at Ana.

“You’re up.”

The call transferred to Ana’s holophone.

“Good evening, Captain Amari.”

“Piggyback protocol,” Ana said. “Program: Respawn, Agent: Reyes, Gabriel.”

“Verification code?”

“November Charlie Charlie Nine.”

A moment as Athena processed. “Done.”

“Thank you, Athena,” Ana said. “I’m uploading a list of Overwatch agents and the coordinates of a Spawn Point. I want them Respawned to the point with the timestamp provided.”

“It will be done, Captain.”

“Thank you, Athena,” Ana said before signing off. She turned to the rest of Overwatch.

“There are ten of us,” Ana said. “In less than two minutes, seven of us are going to Respawn outside the King’s Row facility. The remaining three will have to wait for further instructions. You’ll be brought in when needed. Is everyone on board?”

No one said anything, but everyone nodded.

There were ten members of Overwatch on the top floor of the Tanaka Incorporated building in Hanamura.

And less than two minutes later, after the rest teleported instantly from Japan to England, only three remained.
The seven materialized in a blaze of yellow light in the street in front of the house that held the secret entrance to the Overwatch King’s Row facility. The air was thick with smoke and screams. D. Va looked around among the other six and tried to do a count in her head.

“Who’s missing?” she asked.

Ana was quick with the answer. “Pharah, Mercy, and Genji. I’ll be placing them elsewhere in a few minutes.”

An arrow shattered itself on the cobblestones near Lucio’s skates. He looked up.

“Incoming!”

Reinhardt brought his gauntlet to the fore and brought up his barrier. Two more arrows and a sniper rifle round thudded into Reinhardt’s hard light protection.

He turned his head so the people behind him could hear when he said “To the left, behind the corner.”

Reinhardt slowly marched sideways to the cover provided by the building across the street, the six other members of Overwatch peering past the barrier and into the smoke to see if they could return fire. And as they made it to their destination, the smoke, whether by wind or providence, cleared from the street.

In the middle of the street, as explosions and gunshots and police sirens punctuated the air of the streets beyond, as the random passing civilians peeked out from behind corners and within alleys to get away from the chaos life in London had become in the pre-dawn hours of this blasted morning, a single corpse lie in a final repose in the middle of the street.

The legs of this corpse were close together, and his left hand was on his chest while his right was flung above his head, as though he were using his arms to indicate that it was three o’clock. His pants were gray, his jacket was tweed, and the collar of his white shirt was unbuttoned. His head lie in a small pool of blood.

This corpse (whose name, it would be revealed in The Independent two days later, was Jeremy Lister) was not special. And his was not the only corpse in the war zone that King’s Row had become. But he was singular, however, in one regard.

For while she had been in the Korean army for ten months, she had only been utilized in just two combat operations, and they had been against hostile Omnis in abandoned towns, and so the late Jeremy Lister had the unusual distinction of being the first dead body that Hana “D. Va” Song had ever seen up close.

It would not be out of bounds to assume that an average person would have had at least one of any number of visceral reactions upon seeing their first dead body. An average person may have wept at the sight. Or vomited. Or fainted.
But for the past ten months, since she had joined the Koran military in their efforts to save that nation’s citizenry and sell that nation’s MEKAs, D. Va had been told that there was something special about her. And upon seeing Jeremy Lister lying dead in the street, unmourned and abandoned, she got the faintest suggestion while the gears in her mind turned as to what that was.

For D. Va did not weep, or vomit, or faint. Instead, D. Va was granted immediate insight as to how high the stakes were, without being told.

She turned to Reinhardt. “What’s beyond that smoke?” she asked.

“Victory!”

“No,” D. Va said. “Civilians. You need to get through there and use that barrier of yours to shield them from harm. Take Zenyatta with you. Zen, you can use those Harmony Orbs on everyone, right? Not just us?”

“I can,” Zenyatta said. “And I shall.”

“Good,” D. Va said. Reinhardt looked between D. Va and Ana in confusion.

“Torbjorn?” D. Va asked.

“Yes?”

“Do what you do best. Pick a blind spot and make everyone who crosses it with bad intentions pay.”

“Pfeh,” Torbjorn said. “I was going to do that anyway.”

D. Va turned to Mei. “Mei, use your ice walls to corral whoever or whatever is on street level into Torbjorn’s line of fire.”

“I can do that,” Mei said, sounding unsure of herself.

“Lucio?” D. Va asked. The man himself had no reply to this, just a sheepish look at Ana before almost apologetically turning back to D. Va.

“Keep in the middle,” D. Va said. “Use the healing function on your Sonic Amplifier to keep Mei and Torbjorn in tip-top condition, okay? They’re counting on you. And take whatever potshots you can.”

Lucio looked at Ana again before mumbling something that sounded conciliatory.

“Okay,” D. Va said. “Tracer… Why do you have your hands down your pants?”

Indeed, Tracer had both of her hands down the back of the jeans that D. Va had bought her in Hanamura, as though she was checking to make sure her backside was still attached.

“I Respawned!” Tracer said. “My tights are fixed!”

Tracer unbuckled her new belt and began to slide the jeans down around her narrow hips without even undoing the buttons or the zipper. To say that D. Va looked astounded at this would have been putting the matter mildly.

“Relax,” Tracer said. “I’ll fold them and put them somewhere safe. Celebrities don’t buy me jeans everyday.”
“Okay, Tracer, you’re on recon,” D. Va said. “You can cover ground fast, so I need you to get out in front of this and scout. Keep in radio contact and tell the rest of us what the lay of the land is. Combat is a secondary objective, but if you have to shoot, shoot at someone who’s not looking at you. Once you know what’s going on, get back in the middle so Lucio can keep you healed up.”

Whatever Tracer was going to say in reply was caught in her throat as, at that moment, another sniper rifle round pitted the cobblestones at their feet. All seven Overwatch members jumped.

“Widowmaker’s up there,” Tracer said.

“Not your problem.”

“You don’t understand, she—“

“Tracer!”

Even with a tape measure, it would have been hard to tell whether Tracer jumped higher at the sniper shot, or at the sudden and vociferous stank that D. Va put on her voice.

“Apparently,” D. Va said, “you forgot who I was when you woke up this morning, so allow me to remind you. I’m Hana Song of the Korean Army. And when Hana Song of the Korean Army says ‘Jump,’ bitches ask ‘How high?’ So Tracer?”

“Yeah?”

“Tracer?”

“Yeah?”

“Tracer?”

“What?”

D. Va took a step toward Tracer, looked her dead in the eye, and said “Jump.”

Tracer sighed, deflated. “Fine, scouting it is.”

Ana folded her arms and glared at D. Va, clearing her throat. D. Va noticed Ana standing there, but, to her discredit, did not notice the Captain’s chilly demeanor.

“Ana,” D. Va said, “we need you on a rooftop. But don’t worry about Hanzo or Widowmaker. The people on the ground need heals, and heals they must have. Lucio’s great, but he can’t do it himself.”

D. Va turned to the rest. “Any questions?”

“Just the one,” Ana said. “Who the hell gave you the right to give orders to my squad?”

It was at this point that D. Va remembered herself, and conjured the depth of the potential shit she was in. She herself did not know whether it was possible to turn pale and blush at the same time, but given how her face felt in the moment, she reckoned that she may have pulled that particular miracle off.

Ana closed her eye and put her palm to her forehead. “Just… Just pretend I said all that. Now get to work!”
As the rest darted off to their positions, Ana pulled D. Va to the side.

“And what will you be doing?”

Another sniper rifle shot rang out. D. Va looked up.

“I have a spider to catch.”

D. Va held out her hand and pressed the button on the glove of her bodysuit. And a pink MEKA fell from the heavens to the street in front of her.

“MEKA activated!” D. Va yelled as she entered the machine. She immediately hit the boosters, sending the MEKA rising up from the smoke, and toward where she had heard the shot ring out.

The machine descended upon a rooftop half a block away, destroying the greenhouse enclosure that housed Widowmaker.

The assassin managed to back up just in time, picking up her rifle and diving over a sturdy table holding tomatoes for cover as the glass came down.

Widowmaker peeked from behind the table to see this new foe, and from within her MEKA, D. Va smiled.

“Bonjour, you little blue shit!”

“Come on out, Jack!”

Reaper’s footfalls landed heavy in the hospital wing, his boots sending tinny echoes across the walls, and off the medical equipment.

He hunted slowly, savoring the tension in the air. It hurt Reaper to do everything now, smiling included. But the simple concept—let alone the practice—of cornering Jack Morrison like the rat that he was brought a painful, agonizing smile to Reaper’s lips behind his mask.

“This isn’t like the Jack Morrison I knew,” Reaper said, calling out. “Remember that day at Gibraltar? You walked up to me like I owed you money. Said I’d be tried for war crimes for what I did in Dublin. Asked me how a simple mission could cost sixteen lives.”

Reaper kicked open the door of a supply closet and fired his shotguns blindly into the darkness inside. He knew Jack wasn’t in there, but the gunfire would have kept him on his toes. Otherwise, where was the fun?

“And I asked you…” Reaper said. “I asked you what sixteen civvies were in the name of security. See, I play a mean game of chess. I got gambits, and I got ploys… Which is more than I can say for you. And that’s your problem. You can’t see the whole board.”

Reaper heard the patter of bare feet in a gallop behind him, but he couldn’t turn around in time. Jack dove across the hall, from one room to another, firing the helix rockets from his pulse rifle in mid-air.

The explosion caught Reaper in the bicep, and his arm below the shoulder disintegrated. Reaper screamed in pain as the shotgun that his recently attached hand had been holding clattered to the floor.

“You better hope you don’t catch up with me,” Jack called from the room he was in. “I see you, I’ll fire a few rounds of checkmate into that stupid mask of yours, you shrieking edgelord asshole!”
Reaper aimed his stump at one of the doors along the hallway. The nanites in his body stretched out in a tendril of smoke and started boring a whole in the door, using the cells of the metal to make more of themselves and replace Reaper’s lost arm. There was a gash in the door four feet long, revealing the room on the other side, by the time they were done.

Reaper flexed the fingers in his new hand, and bent over to pick up the dropped shotgun. As he did so, Jack darted out of the room he was in.

“Found you,” Reaper said, and he turned into nanite smoke.

Reaper didn’t need to run anymore. He could cover more ground as smoke anyway. The column of smoke seized Jack by the ankle just as he was about to dive into another room, and the smoke that was Reaper threw Jack from one end of the hallway to another.

As he reassembled himself into his corporeal form, Reaper saw what Jack was wearing. While is was painful to smile, it was downright excruciating to laugh, so Reaper refrained from doing so. That didn’t mean he didn’t feel like laughing, though.

“Look at you,” Reaper said as he aimed one of his shotguns at the dazed Jack Morrison. “In all that’s happened, I forgot that I poisoned you. You must have just gotten up from your little coma. You’re still wearing your hospital gown. But you put yourself in danger to get those ridiculous leather pants of yours before you tried to play the game with me. Couldn’t fight me with your ass hanging out.”

Jack tried to get up, but Reaper put a boot on his chest, forcing him to the floor.

“If that doesn’t sum up Jack Morrison, I don’t know what does,” Reaper said. “All you are is a gun, and simple… stupid… vanity.”

Reaper aimed his shotgun at Jack’s face.

“The only thing more fun than hunting you down and blowing your head off of your shoulders is doing it twice. And I know you have a Spawn Point set up here, so… see you in a few seconds?”

Reaper fired. Jack Morrison’s head barely had time to turn into paste before he Respawned.

And the hunt began again.

While each of the members of the team had fought on their own terms in populated areas, this was the first time they had done so together under the banner of the revived Overwatch. It was a uniquely quieting experience for each of them. Lucio, for example, had known Río, her geography and her people. He had known the Vishkar goons, and all the dirty tricks they could pull. He did not know London, and he could only guess as to what the villains he was currently facing might do.

Even if the streets were familiar, and even if they had come to know these enemies well in the two battles they had fought, none could make sense of what might come of them indiscriminately opening fire on civilians like this. But the orders they had been given and the trust they had in each other cut through the doubt and fear, and they marched together with certainty.

They turned the corner into a wide avenue and Reinhardt raised his shield, protecting the fireteam and the crowd of civilians behind them from a hail of arrows and gunfire from the rooftops. With each intersection they passed, Reinhardt bellowed to all who could hear:

“Get behind me, I am your shield!”
And each time, people rushed behind them, and ran as fast as they could to safety. Sometimes it was a single soul. Sometimes it was a dozen. More than once there was nobody left to save.

As they approached the epicenter of the violence, explosions and gunfire from Junkrat and Roadhog got louder, and Junkrat’s mad cackle could be heard in between the bursts of deafening noise. The closer they got, the number of dead and wounded increased. But every time they went down one street in the tangled web of old walkways, hoping to find end their foe’s spree of destruction, the echoes of the junkers could be heard around a different corner, just outside of their grasp.

Lucio exhaled through gritted teeth.

“We’re too slow like this.” He said. “We’re never gonna catch them, and in the meantime more people are gonna get hurt. Big guy, you, me, and Zenyatta should start tending to the wounded. Trace, Mei, Torb,” He met their eyes and nodded. “Do what you do best.”

A few short minutes later, in an alleyway a few blocks away, Roadhog felt something land on his shoulders.

“Big lad, aren’t you?”

Tracer was standing over his head. He blasted upwards, but she had already blinked out of the way.

“Gonna have to be quicker on the draw than that, love!” Tracer called mockingly from a few meters behind him. Roadhog spun around and fired twice, his shotgun reducing a police call-box to splinters.

Tracer leaned against the behemoth man and clicked her tongue. “Missed me by that much. Better luck next time!” Roadhog turned and fired a fourth time, and yet again connected with nothing. As the tormenting young woman appeared in the corner of his eye yet again, he grunted in anger and pulled the trigger, the barrel of his shotgun pointing right at her.

Empty.

Tracer snorted with laughter, before unloading her decidedly not-empty pulse guns into Roadhog’s chest. He stumbled and howled, before charging at Tracer who blinked down another side street. Stomping after her, he found her a short distance later, leaned casually against a wall, eyebrows raised. He coughed out a hideous laugh as he threw his hook, wrapping it around the tiny woman’s waist. But even as she came face to face to him, she only wore a toothy grin. Just as he was about to knock each of the mocking teeth out of her smarmy mouth, a hail of gunfire erupted from an upstairs window and bullets perforated the junker’s back.

Unbeknownst to Roadhog, while he had been chasing Tracer, Torbjorn had been hard at work setting up a turret across the street, that made short work of the gargantuan man. As Tracer blinked out of Roadhog’s grasp once more, she gave Torbjorn a thumbs up.

“I set ‘em up…” she called into her communicator

“And I knock ‘em down!” Torbjorn called back cheerfully.

A few blocks back, Junkrat’s head swiveled back and forth, trying to locate Roadhog.

“Roadie! What have I told you about wanderin’ off… We got things to blow up, mate! Why, things like that…” He muttered to himself, spying a small office that looked absolutely crammed full of people who thought they had hidden well.
Jamison Fawkes—known as "Junkrat" by the world's intelligence and law enforcement entities, "Junkmaster J" on the cover of the (vastly unappreciated) rap album he had recorded, and "God Emperor Jamison the Magnificent" by himself—saw the end result of the thought he was having before the thought itself had finished. He imagined seeing these dull, uninspired plebs being rent to red giblets and charred scrap iron by his grenades. And if these had any level of self-awareness or appreciation for their place in the universe, they'd have volunteered, hat in hand, for their wet, sticky, loud, bright oblivion. They were born from nothing, and they were most likely going to have gone into the grave as nothing, and lo, they were saved by Junkrat's family friendly, down under excitement.

And without so much as a thank you. It wasn't everyday God Emperor Jamison the Magnificent came to London.

With his lips twisting into a mad grin he let loose an explosive, artfully arcing so that it would punch through the window off the office and detonate in midair above the huddled mass of people inside. But as the bomb sailed forward, a wall of ice suddenly erupted from the ground in front of it, and it ricocheted back towards Junkrat. Instead of artfully punching through the window, it headed straight for the junker's face. Acting on instinct, he turned his body, mechanical arm outstretched to shield himself from the blast. The small explosion ripped off his jury-rigged prosthetic clean off at the elbow.

Junkrat no longer had nerves to feel pain in that arm, but his pride hurt just as fiercely as if a bomb had gone off in it. He shook with anger.

Jesse McCree squeezed the grip of his peacemaker like he was trying to strangle the life out of it. But no matter what he did, the luminescent sights of the gun glared accusingly back up at him in the dim light of the evening.

He pressed himself further against the brick wall of the alleyway he was hiding in, trying to shrink into the shadows as he watched screaming civilians run down the street away from the mayhem that his associates were raining down. No matter how hard he was breathing, he couldn't seem to get air, and the corners of his eyes prickled and burned. He tried to tell himself it was just the oily smoke from Junkrat’s explosives, but the tremors in his chest would have betrayed his panic to anyone who cared to look.

Every time a civilian passed by, he tried to convince his legs to carry him to the center of the street and pull the trigger. That was the job today. If these people knew the good that was going to come of their unwitting sacrifice, they’d thank all of them. Hell they’d probably throw a damn parade. It was all for the greater good. That’s what Gabriel said. And he trusted Gabriel. Hadn’t turned him wrong so far since he picked him up in that ratty old police station so many years ago.

Or at least that’s what he desperately wanted to believe.

Jesse’s feet felt like they’d sunk into the cement, and his trigger might as well have been glued stuck for as much as it was budging under his finger. He thought briefly of strolling into the street and firing at the sky, to at least put the fear of god in these folks. But he knew his gun too well. Those 240 grain slugs would just sail to the other side of town and hit someone sitting in their living room. No matter which way he pointed it, someone was going to die.

That was generally the point of firing a gun, after all. And Jesse McCree was proud to say that for twenty years now, every time he’d fired his gun it had put one of those slugs just where he wanted, in just who he wanted.
But he didn’t know any of the people running down the street. And he didn’t want them to die.

He clamped his eyes shut and gasped for air. His lungs still didn’t seem to be taking any of it. One part of his brain told him run. Another told him to drop to the ground and curl up tight enough that maybe he’d disappear. A final part of his brain remembered the Deadlock’s fists on his jaw the first time he got too nervous to shoot, followed by the hand Gabriel extended that day in the police station, and the hand of Reinhardt that protected him as he boarded the transport. They were all hands that dealt violence. But one kind of violence ended as just violence, and the other kind of violence helped end wars and build peace.

He didn’t want them to die. But die they would. By shrapnel bomb, shotgun, old age, or otherwise. He breathed heavily, and his lungs finally seemed to take notice. His legs worked mechanically beneath him. These people could either die slow and dirty, or he could snuff them out quick. That’s all it came down to.

A river of panicked civilians flowed around Jesse like a river around a stone. One man was dragging himself along the ground, one leg mangled by an explosion. He was red-haired, half-bald, with a neatly trimmed beard and circular glasses sat upon his nose. Probably had a fine life. Probably just went out for a pint of beer at the wrong time. Jesse raised his gun to finish him off. The sights on the pistol stared back. A crack echoed through the streets of London.

But Jesse hadn’t pulled the trigger. A syringe had become lodged in the wounded man’s thigh, and his leg stitched itself back together. He darted away with the rest of the crowd without a moment’s glance back.

Jesse looked over his shoulder to find the source of the healing shot. A hundred yards away, a woman was kneeling on the roof of a parking garage with a rifle in hand. She wore a dark hijab now, and her hair had gone snowy white, but Jesse knew in an instant that it was Ana Amari. Even at this distance, it felt like she was staring right into his eyes with her familiar commanding gaze. He flinched and looked away instinctively out of shame. The tears that had been threatening to spill out finally came, and a sob bubbled its way out of his throat.

It only lasted a moment, though, and with a deep breath he regained his composure. He turned, holstered his pistol, and began to walk against the tide of people flowing against him down the street.

Jesse walked as if in a trance back to where the violence began. The river of people thinned to a trickle, and before long, he was alone in the street, with only a few eyes watching from windows and between the cracks of doors. Something was becoming very clear to him, deep in his dusty tobacco-shriveled heart. But he couldn’t yet put a name to it was.

London streets passed him by as if they were of no more consequence than the painted backdrops of a movie set. His legs carried him to a small side-alley, a few blocks away from the Hoof and Haunch. There, he saw his associate, Junkrat, standing hunched with one stump of an arm gesticulating wildly, his grenade launcher held in the other hand pointed down the alleyway. He was yelling something, but it was all Greek to Jesse’s ears. At the dead-end of the alley, Doctor Mei-Ling Zhou was slumped, breathing shallowly, clutching at her side where blood was staining her clothes at an alarming rate.

Jesse locked eyes with Doctor Zhou, and reality finally caught up with him.

“And I’ll show you, ya little bitch, that the only one who blows limbs off of me is me!” screeched Junkrat, as he ambled forward, grenade launcher in his hand and a glint in his eye.
In the lowermost level of Overwatch’s King’s Row facility lie the home of the Respawn mainframe. Three massive server towers reached high to the vaulted ceiling like praying hands to a loving God, and all along the walls were air conditioning vents to keep the towers cool. Bringing people back to life could make computer equipment run hot, after all, and this spacious, blue-lit room had to be kept at eighteen-point-three degrees celsius at all times.

And in this chilly room, three flashes of golden light bloomed, leaving in their wake Pharah, Mercy, and Genji. The three looked around them, clearly confused by the fact that they were both indoors and out of harm’s way.

Pharah sighed, as though this was just so like her mother, before she radioed out.

“M… Ana, come in.”

The sound of explosions, gunfire, and screaming played under her mother’s transmission the ever insistent timpani in a bombastic musical score.

“Ana, here,”

“Is this the Respawn mainframe room? Why did you have us Respawn here? Why aren’t we out there with you?”

More explosions over the radio, and a heavy sigh.

“Reaper is having Zarya and Symmetra work a payload down a route that leads to an underground foundry next to the room you’re in,” Ana said. “The wall separating them is thick, but it isn’t that thick, and as far as I know, there are no countermeasures in the mainframe room against a photon vented EMP. The three of you are to wait, and face the east wall. If you hear anything out of the ordinary, blast the wall down and take care of whoever’s on the other side.”

It occurred to Pharah to argue. To plead her case for her usefulness outside, in the open air, helping the rest of the team… but she was enough of a soldier to trust her commanding officer. Pharah knew that Ana had a Captain Mode and a Mother Mode. The latter could be argued with at great peril, but the former would not be argued with under any circumstances.

“I don’t need to tell you how important this is,” Ana said. “If Reaper’s forces get past you, it’s all over.”
Chapter 15: The Only Truth that Sticks

London

A bead of sweat began around Pharah’s temple, and began its slow, unforgiving journey down her cheekbone. The sensation of the warm perspiration in the chilly room irked her in a way that made her jaw tense.

She heard nothing beyond the east wall, and nothing within the room except for the humming of the server towers and the slight buzz of the blue overhead lights way up in the rafters.

Then came the sound of metal scraping on concrete, and Pharah turned around.

Genji had sat down cross-legged on the floor next to Mercy, who was leaning on her Caduceus Staff and tapping her finger on the staff, as though she was impatient for Reaper’s goons to bust through the wall. Genji placed his sword on the ground next to him and folded his hands in front of his chest.

“What does meditating involve?” Pharah asked.

Genji looked up. “Finding a center within The Iris, and infinite patience.”

Pharah nodded. “I always wanted to try it.”

“Meditation?”

She nodded again. “I’m, um… I get the feeling I could have been a little less high strung? A little less, uh… I guess, frightened of the things that I want. The person I wanted to be. “

And if Pharah looked at Mercy now, would she have looked back?

Genji tilted his head. “Could have been?” If I didn’t know any better, I would assume that you did not expect to leave this room alive.”

Pharah looked down. “I never do,” she said. “I’m wrong a lot more often than I am right. I think I die, then I always live, eh?”

Genji righted his head. “That… is quite bizarre.”

“Yeah,” she said. “That’s… that’s a word for it.”

“When you assume you will die, and yet inevitably live, what about you changes? What do you do differently afterwards?”

Pharah was about to say something, but stopped herself. She really had no answer to that.

“I, um… nothing, I guess,” Pharah said.

Genji looked Pharah up and down before he responded.

“Then what’s the point?”
“And I’ll show you, ya little bitch, that the only one who blows limbs off of me is me!” screeched Junkrat, as he ambled forward, grenade launcher in his hand and a glint in his eye.

It was as though sunlight tore through a thick cloud in Jesse McCree’s mind. The unstable haze of guilt, and anger, and sadness, and self-recrimination crystallized and focused pitilessly on the sight and the sound in front of him.

Salvation was within reach, redemption was in sight, and all this depended on dealing with Junkrat.

Who just swore.

In front of a lady.

McCree’s hand, free from thought but compelled by emotion, reached under his poncho. The Peacemaker was out in front of him almost as soon as his palm hit the spur on the grip, and his thumb effortlessly pulled the hammer back.

“Junkrat!”

The mad bomber’s body turned away from Mei and toward McCree before his head did. He didn’t notice Mei’s right hand reaching for the coolant bottle on the back of her endothermic blaster. His wild yellow eyes went from McCree to the gun… and drew the wrong conclusion.

“Finally!” Junkrat said. “You’ve come to your senses! Put one in her head if you want, but leave me the kneecaps. They pop like—"

But what McCree heard come out of Junkrat’s mouth sounded like a garbage disposal with flatware stuck in its maw. He wanted to say something to shut him up and put him in his place, but the only thing that plastered itself on the inside of his brain and forced its way out of his mouth was…

"It’s high noon…"

Junkrat blinked a couple of times. His lips leered down to either side of his chin, and his brow fell. Were Jesse McCree in his right frame of mind, he would have fully comprehended the altogether unique and bewildering sight of Jamison “Junkrat” Fawkes standing toe-to-toe with someone crazier than he was.

“No it bloody isn’t!” he said. “The sun hasn’t even come up yet! How could… It’s four-forty AM! Know how I know that?”

Junkrat pointed over McCree’s shoulder with his grenade launcher. “Because Big Ben is right there! You… You are just so weird! Why are you like this?”

“Junkrat?”

He looked down at Mei, who had just spoken. She had the coolant bottle in hand.

“You heard the man,” Mei said. “It’s high noon.”

With a grunt of pain, Mei flung the coolant bottle into Junkrat’s face, and covered her own with the same arm.

The bottle shattered across the bridge of his nose, and the shards would have drawn blood, had not the coolant instantly frozen the front of Junkrat’s head. The icy concoction found its way into its mouth and bonded with everything inside, freezing his screams to a stillborn state inside his throat.
He clutched silently and frantically at his face… and the oils on his natural fingers bonded with the coolant, and his hand started freezing as well.

McCree yelled “Draw!” and fired.

It was as though someone had angrily flung a cherry sno-cone at the brick wall behind him, and the cranial slush of what was left of Junkrat’s head hadn’t even hit the ground before he Respawned.

McCree holstered his Peacemaker and quickly made his way over to the wounded Mei.

“You alright?”

Mei looked at the wound on her side. “It… It hurts to breathe… but I think it’s just a flesh wound.”

McCree knelt down beside her, and Mei looked from him, to the wound in her side, almost disappointed.

“You have a lot of flesh to wound, Mei,” she said. “That’s the joke you’re supposed to make.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it, miss.”

“Oh,” Mei said. “Well aren’t you sweet? Help me up.”

Utilizing the aid of McCree’s shoulder, Mei helped herself up of the pavement, screaming in pain as she did so.

“Is this you switching sides?” Mei asked.

McCree looked around him. There were civilians dead in the streets, and the air was alive with screams, explosions, and gunfire.

With a far-away look in his eye, McCree said “I reckon it is.”

“First thing,” Mei said. “You’re under arrest.”

“I am?” McCree asked.

“I’m an Overwatch agent. I’m pretty sure I’m allowed to do that. Your first order of business as my prisoner is to get me near Lucio.”

“The DJ?” McCree asked. “Why him?”

“His gun can heal people. Cool, huh?”

McCree heard the regular thumping of Lucio’s Sonic Amplifier and said “I think he’s busy.”

“I just have to be near him,” Mei said. “Just… Just keep the bad guys off of me while we get there.”

“Can do, miss,” he said, and as he unholstered his Peacemaker yet again, they began to slowly hobble toward the combat zone.

And in between grunts of pain, Mei began to laugh.

“What’s so funny?” McCree asked.

“None of my professors told me how many times I’d be shot at if I went into climatology,” Mei said. “I think mother was right. Checking old people moles may be gross, but I imagine it would be a
great deal safer.”

“Oh,” McCree said. “Not to tell you what to do, miss, but whenever I think I made the wrong choice, I like to reach out to something tangible that tells me I made the right one. Like... I dunno... My hat, or something.”

“Hmm,” Mei said. “That’s good advice.”

And then she grabbed Jesse’s ass.

“Why do you think I’m here?” Reaper asked the empty medical wing. Since he previously dispatched Morrison, the old soldier had taken to hiding. No sneaky shots. No helix rockets from behind corners.

Reaper had to hand it to him: Jack Morrison learned quickly.

“If you asked yourself why I would turn my back on a terrorist organization like Talon,” Reaper said, “making Widowmaker and myself targets for the rest of our lives to pick a fight with you and your band of merry men, what would you say?”

A click and a hiss of static. Jack was on the hospital wing intercom.

“‘To kill me,’” Jack said, his voice distorted by the old loudspeaker equipment. “‘That’s the thing about you, Reaper. Hell that’s the two things about you. You hold grudges and you like to perform. It’s why you dress like an angry thirteen-year-old who was given a shopping spree in a costume store, it’s why you always talk instead of shoot, and it’s why you’re here now. You bomb an interview on CNN and get your command shuffled around, and you turn into an asshole. If I were as thin-skinned as you are, I wouldn’t have made it very far either.’”

Reaper knew Jack was on the intercom, but regretfully did not know where the location of the room in which the intercom was held. The only recourse was to lure Jack out. If Muhammed cannot come to the mountain...

“My faults can’t hold a candle to your ego, Jack.”

“Which is something an egotist would say. And there you go, talking instead of doing your job.”

“Do you seriously think I poured my life into Overwatch,” Reaper said, “did all those dirty deeds in Blackwatch, sacrificed, and killed, and... and died just to see Overwatch destroyed? To see you, and Wilhelm, and Amari die at the end of my shotgun? Then... then I was right. You really can’t see the whole board, can you?”

A moment of silence.

“Okay,” Jack said. “Enlighten me.”

“Well now,” Reaper said. “That would be talking instead of shooting. But I will say this...”

Reaper leaned his back against the wall of the cramped hospital room in which he stood.

“Remember that copy of Nicholas Nickleby I always carried around?”

“Yeah.”

"I never finished it."
“I know that,” Jack said. “You carried it around too long.”

“I used it to look smart in front of all the smart people. I’ll admit it.”

“You and I both know you’d only admit that if it made you look good. So what next? Keep talking instead of shooting.”


“I went to West Point, you moron. I was supposed to read The Art of War.”

Reaper elected to ignore that.

“The one thing that stuck with me about that one was that it said the goal isn’t to destroy your enemy. The goal is to demoralize them to the extent that they give up.”

Jack laughed. “I have the image of you trying to give me a wet willie until I drop my rifle. Is… is that your plan? I’m not wearing any undies right now, so if you try to wedgie me into submission, you’re coming up with a fistful of crack.”

“I wouldn’t laugh if I were you,” Reaper said. “A little birdie told me that you have found yourself a protégé. A Miss… Hana Song?”

Another moment of silence on Jack’s behalf. This one far weightier than the last.

“How do you know this?” Jack finally said.

“You said I’m a performer, Jack, and you’re right. In light of that, what makes you think I’ll reveal my tricks?”

Reaper checked the ammo in his shotguns, readying himself.

“She’s a hell of a girl,” Reaper said. “I bounced her head off of a temple wall and she just kept on coming for me, loaded for bear. She’d make one hell of a soldier. She has the temperament for it. I daresay, Jack… she reminds me of me.”

“Eat shit.”

Reaper laughed.

“Let me ask you this, Jack. When you’re standing over the casket holding the pieces of Hana Song that I let you collect, how heavy will that gun you’re holding feel? How much fight will you have left, knowing that poor girl paid the cover charge for entering the world of Jack Morrison?”

Silence. Reaper chuckled inwardly, and cursed himself for doing so, knowing how much it would hurt.

The loud slaps of bare feet on linoleum announced Jack’s impending arrival. Reaper dropped his shotguns.

He didn’t think he would need them.

Reaper opened the door slightly, and used a thick tendril of smoke that was, until a moment prior, the end of his left arm, to grab Jack as he made his way past. Jack screamed and dropped his rifle as he was flung into the far wall of the hospital room. He bounced with a sickening thud and landed face
up across a nearby bed.

With one fluid motion, Reaper used his smoke to shear an IV stand in half, and before Jack could get off the bed, Reaper used the cumbersome hunk of metal in his hand to pierce Jack’s shoulder, pinning him to the bed.

Jack screamed as the top half of the IV stand went through skin, and muscle, and bone before working its way through the bottom of the mattress. Blood soiled his hospital gown, and the white sheets beneath him. Jack Morrison was as helpless as a worm on a hook.

Reaper stood over him.

“Hana Song,” Reaper said, “is a third act problem. But now? Right now, we’re coming to the end of act two. Your life is about to get quite a bit worse, Jack.”

Reaper folded his arms.

“Just… you… wait…”

Ten… Eleven… Blink.

Symmetra had her artificial hand on the apex of the bomb casing, bridging the gaps in its construction with the hard light that would greatly amplify the force of the Bastion unit’s detonation. Zarya was leading the payload, particle cannon at the ready.

One curious thing that Symmetra noticed was that unlike her other compatriots in Reaper’s unit, Zarya spared her particle beam for members of Overwatch, or the errant London police officer that came upon them, weapon in hand, with the intent to do harm. Aleksandra Zaryanova would not harm any of London’s civilians.

Symmetra didn’t know if Zarya had been sent by a corporation or a government to join Reaper, or if she had come of her own accord. But in her own duties for Vishkar, she too tried to steer clear of civilian casualties. Sometimes it could not be helped, like in Rio de Janeiro… and Symmetra took a moment, however briefly, to reflect that Vishkar’s operations in Rio de Janeiro failed.

Satya Vaswani had always had a strange relationship with her own feelings. As a corporate functionary, she viewed them as little pockets of quicksand that, if not stopping her from completing her objectives, at the very least created an indecipherable and hazy not-quite-niceness within her.

But Zarya apparently had the same feeling toward civilians that she herself did, which made Symmetra respect her.

Ten… Eleven… Blink.

She wondered if she could respect someone and lust after them at the same time. In her twenty-eight years of life on earth, the subject had never come up in a true, meaningful way. She’d heard conflicting reports, and this particular dilemma was such a remote possibility that theorizing seemed like a waste of time.

*I can respect a woman I want to look at and touch and do things with. No one said I can’t… At least I think they didn’t…. I need to check, and make sure they didn’t.*

This reverie had to end, of course, with an explosion.
Junkrat (fresh from his Respawn at the hands of Mei and McCree, unbeknownst to Symmetra) had fired one of his grenades at two civilians, one of whom had apparently suffered a broken leg, while the other bravely and foolishly acted as a human shield for her fallen comrade.

And they both would have been vaporized, had not Reinhardt Wilhelm been there with his barrier. And the Omnic, Zenyatta, slapped a healing orb onto the person with the broken leg, and Symmetra was stunned to see the mangled limb reset, the tears in the flesh knitting themselves together.

And the refrain that she had often clung to when Vishkar had asked something of her that was beyond her own moral pale ran through her head yet again.

*They provided for me, therefore they are good. If they are good, then what they do is good. If my thoughts disagree with them, then my thoughts are bad.*

But unlike every other time she had had to rely on this mantra, the air of solid fact that it had always held began to tarnish and rot in her mind at an alarming rate. And for the first time in her waking memory, Symmetra had begun to entertain the notion that Vishkar might be wrong, and that her misgivings were altogether justified.

Above her, Widowmaker flew through the air by her grappling hook, traverseing rooftops while D. Va followed behind in her MEKA, bringing up her defense matrix when she was fired upon, and using her own guns almost every other time.

“Come back!” D. Va yelled after the French sniper. “I can’t write your name on every bullet! You have to stand still and get the one I have for ya!”

And in front of her, Symmetra could see Lucio and Tracer trying to contend with Hanzo on a rooftop above them. Tracer’s pulse pistols had pitiful range, and Lucio’s projectiles couldn’t pin down the nimble archer, but Lucio’s Sonic amplifier (which looked familiar to Symmetra for some strange reason) sped the both of them up, meaning that Hanzo couldn’t get a bead on either one. They were at an effective stand-still.

A stand-still that ended with one shot.

Jesse McCree, Doctor Mei-Ling Zhou by his side, put a bullet between Hazno Shimada’s eyes, sending him to Respawn mere seconds after he hit the ground.

Symmetra had been aware that McCree had betrayed a band of miscreants he had partnered with in his youth to partner up with Overwatch, and that he had betrayed Overwatch to side with Gabriel Reyes once it had been made abundantly clear that Captain Reyes was going to be brought before the world court, so that latest turn of the cowboy’s coat, inconvenient though it was, did not surprise her in a deeply felt way.

But now that Jesse McCree had eliminated Hanzo, Lucio and Tracer were free to focus their attention on Zarya and Symmetra.

She could hear Zarya take a deep breath, before she slapped a barrier from her particle cannon on herself.

“The last leg of this trip may get a little bumpy,” Zarya said, before she opened fire.

And on, the payload rolled.

*Ten... Eleven... Blink.*
Deep in the heart of the sarcophagus that housed the respawn mainframe, Pharah, Mercy, and Genji waited uneasily. Against the far wall, Pharah rocked on her heels, fidgeting with her weapon, alternating between setting it against the wall, and resting it on her shoulder. But no matter what she did, she couldn’t get comfortable. Even as spacious as the room was, she could feel the walls closing in around her; and as high as the ceiling was above her, she could still feel the weight of London bearing down upon her.

It felt uncomfortably close to the atmosphere of the inner cloister of the Temple of Anubis. Except there, at least, she knew what she could do. She was in control. Here, though, she felt like a bullet waiting for the powder behind it to burn, with no choice but to wait.

Mercy seemed to be in a similar state. She was caught in a loop between pacing and trying not to pace. Even when she did end up taking a few rigid steps, she kept being pulled back to the base of the mainframe. Mostly she settled for constantly shifting her weight from one foot to the other as she tried to stare a hole in the wall that Reaper’s goons were set to bust through.

Even Genji, who had been the picture of repose at the beginning, was beginning to show signs of stress. He shifted slightly in his seated position, metal legs scraping softly on the ground. He sighed, and even though his visor obscured his eyes, the little turns of his head belied a nervous, wandering gaze.

The towers of the mainframe hummed expectantly, filling the air with a light, monotonous drone that did all the talking for the three anxious individuals with which they shared a room.

“HA!” Ana said over the communicator, her sudden interjection bouncing around the quiet hall. Pharah, Mercy, and Genji all froze in anticipation.

“Looks like we won’t need you after all. We’ve got them cornered and outnumbered out here. Our prodigal son Jesse has even returned to the fold! We’ll make short work of them. You all relax down there.”

Pharah exhaled with a short laugh. The weight of the ceiling felt a little lighter. She still felt stifled, having missed out on the battle, but that’s nothing a little time with the punching bag couldn’t fix. Meeting eyes with Genji across the room, it seemed like he felt similarly relieved, as his usual languid posture returned.

Mercy, though, seemed to be, if anything, even tenser than before. Her back was held ramrod straight, and she was worrying her lip with her teeth. There was a faraway look in her eyes.

“Well.” Said Mercy. It was scarcely above a whisper, but in the cavernous silence of the room it echoed with an eerie weight.

Genji looked over his shoulder, head tilted quizzically to the side. Mercy had quietly turned around and stood at the base of one of the mainframe towers. She was staring up at it the way a troubled soul looks upon the crucifix.

“Something on your mind?” Pharah offered, taking a step forward.

With an exhale, Mercy took a step back, eyes transfixed on the mainframe. “If you want some things done, I suppose you just have to do it yourself.” She finished.

With a single, smooth motion she drew her pistol. Before Pharah or Genji could react, Mercy pulled the trigger, destroying one of the server towers. The pistol’s report filled the room alongside the smell of burning electronics.
Genji leapt to his feet, sheathed sword held tight, arm outstretched towards Mercy.

Mercy spun on her heel, and shot five times.

Genji crumpled to the floor with a clatter of steel on stone.

Pharah froze, eyes darting back and forth between Genji and Angela. She tried to speak, tried to ask what was going on, tried to scream, but nothing came out.

Mercy met Pharah’s eyes, unflinching.

“You saw it, Fareeha. He was going for his sword. I had no choice.” She said flatly.

Pharah looked desperately into Mercy’s eyes, hoping to find remorse, pity, sadness. Something, anything to suggest that this was some kind of terrible accident, that this wasn’t the way she wanted things to go. She wanted to believe the woman she had known for so long. But no matter how hard Pharah looked, there wasn’t anything she recognized there anymore. All that looked back at her were the eyes of a stranger.
Chapter 16: Exeunt

London

Above the *sturm und drang* of the rapidly thinning chaos coming to its conclusion in the streets of King’s Row, Widowmaker soared from rooftop to rooftop, her grappling hook hurling her through the air.

That she wound up falling from the sky to the rooftop of a flower shop shoulder first had nothing to do with her aim of the grappling hook (which was perfect) or the integrity of the hook itself (which was strong indeed), but had everything to do with the fact that D. Va, in hot pursuit, schooled from her first waking memory in the art of the boss battle, thought ahead and destroyed the wall upon which Widowmaker had hoped her hook would find purchase.

The thudding noise that Widowmaker’s shoulder made upon contact with the roof, as well as the groan of pain that followed, were both muted by the loud percussion of the feet of D. Va’s MEKA making landfall… or rooffall, as it were.

Widowmaker turned over onto her back. Her first instinct was to level her sniper rifle in front of her to defend herself, but the small explosion of pain in her shoulder disabused her of such a notion, as did the front lights of D. Va’s MEKA blinding her.

As Widowmaker brought her hand in front of her eyes to shield them from the light, D. Va called out.

“Game over,” she said. “Time to go back to the beginning of the stage. But this was fun. We should do it again some time.”

D. Va’s index fingers wrapped around the trigger’s of the MEKA’s joysticks.

With Angela standing in front of her, gun leveled at her hip, Fareeha knew her options were limited. She could either turn and make a run for her rocket launcher and get shot in the back, or charge in for a tackle and get shot in the front.

Fareeha chose the latter. If she were to die at the hands of a trusted friend, she at least wanted to do so while looking into their eyes.

But as she broke out into a sprint, she could see Angela press a button on her Caduceus Staff.

She barely made it two meters before her limbs locked in place and the ground rose to meet her. As she struggled to move her arms and legs, a dim memory of being briefed on her suit’s new remotely locking joints rose to the surface of her mind, and she cursed under her breath. She’d gotten a bad feeling about them from the beginning, and now she wished she’d had the good sense to listen to that bad feeling.

D. Va’s cannons didn’t fire.

“What?”
The lights on the front of the MEKA went out.

“Oh, come on…”

The holographic onboard display in front of her went dead.

“Goddammit, not now!”

D. Va’s MEKA, for all intents and purposes, was nothing more than a massive titanium coffin.

As Widowmaker picked herself up and made her get-away, D. Va shook the joysticks in the cockpit in anger and futility.

"Let's just hop Hana wasn't doing anything too important, now, hmm? Neither of you will be using those suits of yours for some time," said Angela. Her voice had a nervous edge to it. "The only question is, is this a bug or a feature of the joint locks?"

From her new vantage point on the floor, Fareeha could only see Angela’s feet walking towards her in the corner of her eye. She struggled with the weight of the suit of armor in which she was encased that was now so useless that she couldn't even use it to radio out, and came up short. She clamped her eyes closed, waiting for the pistol shot that would end her. But no such moment came. Angela’s heels clicked against the floor as she walked past Fareeha.

“You don’t have to do this Angela!” shouted Fareeha.

“Ahh, but Fareeha, I already have.” Replied Angela, voice echoing around the chamber.

Fareeha growled and tried to right herself to no avail. “This isn’t you!” she cried in frustration.

The click of Angela’s heels stopped. She made a small snort of derision before responding, “And I’m sure you are the expert in who I am. Everyone else seems to be.”

Fareeha could hear the telltale shift of armor that accompanied Angela "Mercy" Ziegler bending down to pick something up.

“You know Fareeha, I never understood why you would use such a destructive device. But I think I see why, now.” Angela said from the corner of the room.

Fareeha’s blood ran cold as she recognized the distinctive click of her weapon’s safety being switched off.

“Angela! Please, you’ve made your point. Let’s just put a stop to this nonsense and talk about it.” Pleased Fareeha. Her heart thundered in her ears, and she wished more than anything else that she could just move again.

“On the contrary, Fareeha.” Said Angela calmly, “I have only just begun making my point.”

Fareeha’s cry of protest was drowned out immediately by a rocket impacting and exploding inside one of the Respawn mainframe towers. The first explosion was followed barely a second later by a second, then a third, fourth, fifth, and sixth. Fragments of metal and plastic fell like biblical rain as the servers howled and whined in one final protest. The shrapnel bounced harmlessly off of Fareeha’s armor, but each left a weight of guilt and shame in her heart that was worse than any mortal wound.

Just as quickly as the cacophany had begun, silence fell again like a hammer. Except this time, there were not even the gentle clicks of computer systems to fill the sarcophagus. Fareeha heard Angela set
the rocket launcher on the ground. A moment, then...

"It's done," Angela said.

Then a voice came in over Angela's radio. A voice familiar and cold. A voice that threatened to chew through Fareeha's sanity.

"What do you mean?" Reaper asked.

"Respawn is done. I saw to it myself."

A pause before Reaper radioed back. "That wasn't part of the plan."

"Plans change," Angela said. "Be grateful instead of being you."

Angela discontinued her radio conversation with Reaper, and then started walking. As Angela opened a nearby door, Fareeha gritted her teeth and screamed.

"You won’t get away with this. Justice will find you, Angela!"

There was a moment of silence, in which Fareeha could almost hear Angela’s hesitation. Or maybe it was merely wishful thinking.

“I don’t doubt it will.” Answered Angela, quietly. The door closed a moment later with a click that resounded louder than the gunshots and explosions had.

Fareeha gritted her teeth and fought back against the tears pricking at the corners of her eyes. It was a losing battle.

Reaper took his finger away from his ear and looked at Jack.

“ Heard that, did you? ”

Jack Morrison’s face had fallen. His blue eyes were wide and but a scant degree north of watery. Reaper took a moment to reflect that someone who had been betrayed looked almost identical to someone who had been caught in the blast of a concussion grenade.


“She sold you out, Jack,” Reaper said. “And the Respawn mainframe is destroyed. So… not only have you lost your medic, not only did the smartest person in Overwatch decide to ditch you to join me… there’s a fight outside right now. How many of your team are going to die before the rest figure out Respawn is down, and retreat? Tell me when you get a chance.”

Reaper eyed the IV stand jutting out of Jack’s shoulder, pinning him to the hospital bed, and smiled behind his mask.

“I’m gonna radio my people and tell them the good news,” Reaper said, “but before I do… Y’know, I said I wouldn’t kill you, and that’s true, but…”

Reaper slowly raised his shotgun to Jack’s kneecap.

“…I didn’t say a damn thing about letting you keep your leg.”

Reaper’s index finger came within less than a pound of pressure per square inch of pulling the trigger.
that would amputate half of Jack Morrison’s leg, but Reaper was stopped from shooting, Jack was stopped from breathing, and the stillness of the world entire was rent asunder, by a roar.

A horrifying… primal… roar.

It was the roar that made Reaper’s head snap from Jack to the door, but it was the raging symphony of doors being torn off their hinges that made him jump, and the sound of feet slapping on linoleum, like advance of war drums, that sent a chill up his spine.

And even above all this, Reaper could hear Jack Morrison begin to laugh.

“Uh-oh,” Jack said in between pained laughs. “I think you pissed off Winston!”

More doors being destroyed, another terrifying roar, and the sound of feet advancing.

Reaper could have kicked himself. The noise was like an auditory wall so solid and massive that he couldn’t tell precisely form whence it came. And here he was, stuck in a hospital room with one narrow door. His smoke trick and recon skills were essentially useless in the event that Winston had his Tesla Cannon with him, as it could scatter Reaper even in his smoke form. And his shotgun may as well have squirted water, for all the good it would have done against a heavily armored eight-hundred pound gorilla that wished to do him harm.

In order to get out… he’d have to take the hit.

Reaper lowered his shotgun and sighed, bracing himself for the hurt.

“Stupid monkey…”

Winston, true to Jack’s description as “pissed off,” blasted through the door and most of the attached wall of the hospital room. He zeroed in on Reaper immediately, and swatted him into the far wall as though he were an empty cardboard box.

He roared again, and jumped on the prone Reaper, raining a flurry of blows upon him.

This would have killed an ordinary human being, but thanks to the desperate and experimental ministrations of Angela Ziegler years prior, Reaper was unkillable.

But he was not unhurtable. It took six more blows (which had begun to destroy the floor beneath his head) for Reaper to regain his sense and see that Winston did not, in fact, have his Tesla Cannon with him.

The seventh blow that would have landed on Reaper’s face instead landed on a bed of smoke, which dispersed on either side of the great ape’s fist. Winston, in his frenzied state, tried to grab at the wisp of smoke that trailed out the door, but to no avail. And Winston, in a state of primal rage and confronted with the escape of his quarry, begun to destroy the rest of the room.

“Winston!”

He turned to the direction of the noise with destruction in his eyes, and saw Jack pinned to the bed.

And that was all it took to snap Winston out of it.

“Jack,” Winston said, concern vibrating his voice. “Are you…”

“Get this thing out of me,” Jack said, looking at the IV stand.
Winston folded his hands. “Are… are you sure that’s wise? Maybe we should wait for Angela to…”

“Winston,” Jack said. “Angela isn’t coming back.”

Reaper did not have time to radio his soldiers to tell them of the destruction of the Respawn mainframe before Winston attacked him. Had he done so, he would have issued the order to fall back and retreat, as the mission was accomplished.

But as Reaper was prevented from doing so, both sides of the conflict in the street were still under the impression that they were under the truncated spell of immortality that Respawn provided.

This impression came to an end as soon as Ana Amari received a radio transmission from inside the King’s Row facility.

“Ana, this is Soldier: 76, come in!”

Ana, who had been perched on a rooftop and eying Tracer and Lucio’s progress with Zarya and Symmetra in between potshots and healing darts, put her finger to her ear.

“Jack?” Ana asked. “What are…”

“Respawn has fallen,” Soldier: 76 said. “I repeat: Respawn has fallen!”

“No,” Ana said. “That’s impossible. I Respawned Pharah and M—“

“Mercy destroyed the mainframe,” Soldier: 76 said. “She betrayed us.”

It was as though the bottom of her stomach had opened up like a trap door. One word in her mind drowned out the gunfire on the streets below.

Fareeha…

But Ana, distraught to her very foundation as she was, still had a job to do.

“Do you have a status update on Pharah or Genji?” she asked.

“Negative,” Soldier: 76 said. “You know all I do. I’m in a bad way right now, in need of medical attention. Soldier: 76 out.”

He broke radio contact.

Ana rubbed her face as a thin sheen of icy sweat broke out on her forehead. Nausea waged a sour war of attrition on her insides, and all possibilities concerning her daughter’s safety danced in her mind’s eye, each more gutting, more horrifying than the last.

But even then—even then—Ana Amari was a soldier. She would grieve. She would weep and rage until she crumbled to dust… but she would do it later, if she survived.

Right now, she had people on the ground.

She set her radio for blanket transmission, so the entire unit could hear.

“This is Ana. Respawn has fallen. I repeat: Respawn has fallen.”

Ana cut him off. “All personnel are to switch to Red Level combat protocols. Repeat: Red Level combat protocols. *Shoot to kill.* We’re not safe out here. Neither are they.”

“Ana,” Zenyatta radioed in. “All civilians have been moved out of the vicinity. Further orders?”

“Join the other ground team dealing with resistance. Reinhardt, switch this frequency over to the London police. Tell them we appreciate what they’ve done, but from here on out, they aren’t equipped to handle further operations. Then join the ground team and push them into the side streets. Killing them all would be great, but getting them to retreat would work just as well.”

“Acknowledged,” Reinhardt said.

“What about us?” Tracer asked form behind the corner of a shop on the ground.

“Your orders haven’t changed,” Ana said. “Occupy Zarya and Symmetra. Stop them. We may be the only ones that know Respawn is down. If they get careless, you make sure that you get lucky.”

“Roger,” Tracer said, and switched off.

Ana closed her eyes, swallowed, and reached into her overcoat. What she came up with was a nano-boost dart engineered by Angela Ziegler… and Ana was pleased to find that she had zoomed past the denial stage of grief and went straight into anger. In the shallow forefront of her imagination, she imagined Mercy’s head on a pike like in an old medieval woodcarving, and it was the only thing that brought Ana any comfort in the moment.

This nano-boost dart was meant to be fired at an ally, and once that was done, that ally’s health, strength, and speed would be boosted considerably, making them almost unstoppable.

Ana only had one.

She loaded it into the chamber of her Biotic Rifle…

…and kept her scope trained on Tracer.

---

*Ten… Eleven… Blink.*

The battle was slowly turning south, both in the prospects for Symmetra’s unit, as well in an actual, literal sense, the symmetry of which was the only thing that could possibly please Symmetra in the moment.

Jesse McCree had switched sides, as Symmetra had seen him next to the climatologist in an alley, firing shots at a nearby rooftop, making the jobs of Hanzo and Widowmaker that much harder.

Things had become so perilous that Widowmaker seemed to be forced to descend from her rooftop to the streets below to put her sniper rifle into automatic mode and start raining machine gun fire at the members of Overwatch, as without McCree, it was only the Junkers on the ground to hold back the onslaught.

But the onslaught kept advancing, pushing the Roadhog, Junkrat, and Widowmaker north, while Symmetra, Zarya, and the Bastion unit in the bomb casing… went south.

Leaving no suppressing fire to stymie Tracer and Lucio, they were freed up to make Zarya’s life a slow-rolling nightmare.
In normal circumstances, Symmetra would have conjured barrier shields to float in front of them, soaking up damage. But a speed boosted Tracer was too quick for her slow moving and slow-to-recharge shields, and these were not normal circumstances. She was using her artificial arm to keep up the photon vents on the bomb, which left only her photon projector in her free hand to fire small low-damage orbs as quick as she could.

*Ten… Eleven… Blink.*

And in the midst of this, Zarya kept firing her particle cannon, trying and mostly failing to do anything more than singe the speed demon Tracer.

“Symmetra!” Zarya said between shots. “Satya!”

“What?”

“The Overwatch people,” Zarya said. “They’re bunkering up. Getting more aggressive.”

Symmetra looked over Zarya’s shoulder into the streets beyond. She was not well-versed in combat tactics, so she would have had to have taken Zarya’s word for it.

“What do you think that means?” Symmetra asked.

“Somehow,” Zarya said, “Respawn is down… Reaper sent us out here to die.”

And still, Ana kept her sights on Tracer, waiting for the right moment to strike.

“Reinhardt,” Ana said. “Sit Rep.”

Reinhardt radioed in. “We have them on the run. Their rear guard is broken.”

Ana smiled. “Good to know.”

And with that, Ana fired her nano-boost dart into Tracer’s back.

“You’re powered up! Get in there!”

Symmetra heard two things that sent a chill up her spine.

The first was Tracer yelling *“I’M UNSTOPPABLE!”*

The second was Lucio yelling *“Speeeeed BOOST!”*

And Tracer, instantly, seemed to be everywhere at once, darting in every direction, rewinding time to suit her whims, and darting forward and side to side to suit whatever whims were left.

*Ten…*

And it was at this point that Symmetra learned that even the strongest woman in the world had her limits.

Zarya’s face was drenched in sweat. Some of Tracer’s pulse rounds were getting through her defenses, leaving nicks in her armor and scratches along her arms. And she was moving her particle cannon slower… and slower… and slower…
“Hear, O Israel,” Zarya said. “The Lord is our God. The Lord alone.”

Eleven…

And with her last bit of strength, with the last bit of energy in her weapon, Zarya cast a particle barrier… on Symmetra.

From inside the barrier, Symmetra could hear the rapid fire of Tracer’s pulse pistols, see Zarya’s front erupt in blood and screams, and feel the impact tremor of the massive Russian woman’s bulk teeter and fall across the payload.

Blink.

The particle barrier dissipated. And in this moment, Symmetra felt a war within herself. A war between over twenty-years of loyalty and self-imposed behavioral conditioning versus one single, loud instinct.

The instinct won out.

Symmetra took her artificial hand away from the bomb, short circuiting the photon venting and bringing the payload to a halt, and raised it along with her natural one on either side of her head.

Looking down at the mountainous mess of Zarya bleeding out on the payload, Symmetra said “I surrender! I’ll do whatever you ask, just… just help her, please!”

And Lucio Correia do Santos, of all people, skated up to the payload.

“I’m on it,” he said, and hit the crossfade on his Sonic Amplifier from Speed Boost to Healing Boost.

Symmetra felt the air ripple around her, and she could see that Zarya’s breathing slowly progressed from shallow to labored... which, Symmetra considered, was an improvement.

Lucio turned off the Sonic Amplifier.

“This thing can’t replace lost blood,” Lucio said, “but the wounds have closed up and all the internal damage is taken care of. Give her a transfusion and a few days in a hospital room, and she’ll be fine… I’m mean, you’re both under arrest, but she’ll… she’ll be fine.”

As the sun came up, the streets of King’s Row were once again what most civilized societies would have considered peaceful. London police had set up a barricade a block away to keep out reporters and looky-loos while the Overwatch crew tended to their business.

The first thing Torbjorn Lindholm did when he rejoined the majority of the unit was point his Rivet Gun at Jesse McCree’s head.

“Whoa, there,” McCree said. “I’m under arrest.”

“Yeah,” Mei said. “He is.”

Torbjorn sized them both up with his eye… and then lowered his weapon.

“You’re lucky I don’t shoot prisoners,” Torbjorn said.

“Speaking of which…” said Mei, as she turned to her right.
Zenyatta had slapped an Orb of Harmony on Zarya to further stabilize her. Symmetra was sitting next to her on the payload, looking at her natural hand, as though the stern expression on her face would be enough to will it to stop shaking.

And the Bastion unit was still in the bomb casing.

“How do we handle this?” Mei asked.

“In my experience, Bastion’s a gentle one,” McCree said. “Docile-like.”

Torbjorn raised his Rivet Gun again. “We don’t take chances.”

“This,” Zenyatta said, “is not a chance.” He floated past Torbjorn to the payload. The absolute nonchalance of it was enough to make Torbjorn put his weapon down again.

Zenyatta peeked through one of the gaps in the bomb casing, and started whirring.

Bastion, from within the payload, beeped and booped in reply. Zenyatta floated to the rear of the payload and pressed a button on the bomb casing, causing it to open.

The Bastion unit very gently got out, holding its non-weapon hand in front of it. The fingers of the hand slowly opened, and Ganymede, the bird, flew to Bastion’s right shoulder.

Bastion looked at everyone around it, before settling on Zenyatta. It beeped again.

Zenyatta replied in a short whirr.

And in response to this, Bastion waved to everyone.

“I take it you vouch for it?” Torbjorn asked Zenyatta.

“Him,” Mei said.

“Her,” Zenyatta said.

Torbjorn looked Zenyatta up and down. “Huh?”

“Bastion is female,” said Zenyatta.

Torbjorn looked from Zenyatta, to Bastion, and back to Zenyatta again. “And… how do you know this?”

Zenyatta cocked his head to one side.

“Because I asked her, Torbjorn.”

Halfway down the block, Reinhardt kept a respectful distance as Ana attempted, with rapidly mounting frenzy, to radio out.

“Pharah, come in… Pharah, do you copy?... Fareeha, talk to me!”

Genji’s vocalizer crackled several meters away. “—eeha…” he said

“Genji? Genji! You’re alive!” Fareeha said, fighting against her locked joints again with renewed vigor.
“Fareeha… I fear that I do not have much time.” Said Genji, before letting out a hacking cough that carried the qualities of both a crashing car and the person it impacted.

“Don’t say that, Genji, I’ll get you out of here. Somehow, just—“

“No.” Said Genji quietly but authoritatively. He continued,

“My path ends here... tonight... But yours will continue on. Do not fall to hatred, Fareeha.... Angela’s reasoning may be a mystery to us, but we know her. Do not doubt that... The woman we know would not knowingly commit an evil act. All are—“

He coughed again, and groaned.

“All are pardoned in The Iris... Please do not repay this with violence... Make it right.”

“I will try, Genji. Just, please, conserve your strength.” Said Fareeha.

“Do not worry, my friend. I am… Still glad to have been given another chance, even… Even if it ends here.” Genji said quietly.

And then Genji Shimada was still. Even now, even in death, Fareeha swore she could hear a small, wry smile on his lips.

With no way to right herself, no way to help her friend, Fareeha finally let herself cry. In that moment she felt like a child again, alone and scared with no idea what was to come.
Chapter 17: A Simple Pine Box

Hemel Hempstead

Thirty-nine kilometers from London, Adrienne’s in Hemel Hempstead’s Old Town enjoyed a brisk trade in these hours after sunrise.

The eatery’s early morning clientele usually consisted of teachers and postal workers looking for an early bite before their shift, as well as the occasional Omnic yoga instructor who paid their cover charge and were content to look at the sunrise through the massive plate glass window that took up the front of the establishment.

But today? Today, Adrienne’s was filled with twice its usual number, and all it took on the part of owner Adrienne Tivoli to figure out why was a glance at the television set behind the old oak counter at the rear.

These new faces were refugees.

“I’m Juliet Forster reporting for BBC One,” said the pretty lady on the television, “and I’m standing in front of what’s left of The Hoof & Haunch, which was ground zero of a terrorist attack early this morning that left thirty-three dead and over fifty wounded. Both numbers are expected to rise.”

Myron Sheriton, a maths teacher who had made Adrienne’s his stop for scrambled eggs before class for the dozen years the establishment had been in business, suspended his forkful of food halfway between his plate and his mouth as he stared at the screen.

“Blimey,” Myron said. “First that Mondatta chap and now this. My daughter asks me if I miss London, and I can just point to telly and tell her ‘no.’”

Adrienne was washing a glass behind the counter, and looking over the waitresses as they ran relay between tables and the kitchen.

“Think it was those Talon people?” she asked.

“What?”

“Talon. The ones what did Mondatta.”

“Well,” Myron said. “They say murderers always return to the scene of the crime.”

“Yeah,” Adrienne said, “but they usually come to check for something they missed, or stare at the police all creepy-like. They don’t come back and kill more—“

Tap-tap-tap-tap-tap.

Adrienne turned.

There was a man at the counter in a long black coat, and a matching beanie atop his head. Adrienne couldn’t rightly tell his age. His skin was on the darker side, and there was a fading lattice-work of scars on his face.
He was breathing shortly and heavily through his nose, as though the simple act of standing there pained him.

“Can I help you?” Adrienne asked.

“You’re closing early today,” the man said in a voice that revealed him as an American.

Adrienne could only blink at that, and Myron kept looking back and forth from Adrienne to the American, as though their faces were playing tennis.

“I’m afraid I’m not,” said Adrienne, trying her best to sound civil.

“Then allow me to repeat myself,” the American said, and reached into the pocket of his coat.

And this is how I die, Adrienne thought. Gunned down behind the counter of my own restaurant. Mum warned me that working a cash register would see me killed, even if I owned the place, but did I listen?

Instead of a gun, the American pulled a wad—no, a stack—no, a brick of hundred pound notes, done up in the middle with a paper band. Just from eyeballing it, Adrienne Tivoli reckoned that brick of money would be more than what the restaurant would see in two months of packed mornings like this one.

And, true to his, word, the American repeated himself.

“You’re closing early today.”

Adrienne barely remembered taking the brick of cash to the back room, loading it into her purse, and bringing her purse back to the counter.

“Attention everyone,” Adrienne said, addressing the diners, who all stopped and turned to look at her.

“In light of the events in London, it seems only right that your meals are on the house today.”

The diners responded to this well.

“Unfortunately, I’m afraid we’re closing up early today. Finish what you can, but the door locks in fifteen minutes.”

The diners responded to this… not quite as well.

“Oi,” Myron said to Adrienne. “Are you just gonna let this bloke tell you what—”

“*Myron,*” Adrienne said, snapping. “Open up your own restaurant. Call it Myron’s. And when *I* come in, I won’t be able to tell you what to do. Now on your bike.”

Fifteen minutes later, Adrienne was the last one out of the restaurant, flipping the sign on the door from Open to Closed, and locking the door behind her, leaving the American as the only soul in the place.

The American closed the blinds of the restaurant.

The American unlocked the door.

And the American dissolved into a cloud of smoke.
Reaper reassembled himself into his corporeal form not fifteen minutes later, when a tall blonde woman in sunglasses entered. She wore jeans and a baggy gray sweatshirt, and comported herself, from gait to posture, in a manner altogether more regal than her attire.

“Point me to the nearest sink,” the blonde woman said in a French accented monotone.

“Behind the counter,” said Reaper. The blonde woman walked past him. She tugged at her hairline, revealing her blonde hair to be nothing more than a wig. A long tress of dark purple hair flowed down her back. She took off her sunglasses, revealing a pair of pale yellow eyes. She took the washcloth from near the sink, ran it under the tap, and started scrubbing her face. The Caucasian skin tone on her cheeks gave way to the blue flesh underneath.

Twenty minutes after Widowmaker had cleaned her face and shed her clothes down to the purple bodysuit underneath, a Japanese man entered Adrienne’s. He wore a black suit, a black tie, and a white shirt, and a black bowler atop his head. He carried a guitar case. To Reaper, he looked like someone’s butler in one of those costume dramas he ignored on public television in America, until the man took off his bowler. Long black hair uncoiled down his shoulders.

As Hanzo sat down in one of the booths, taking his bow out of the guitar case and restringing it, Widowmaker walked up to Reaper, holophone in hand.

“You need to hear this,” she said before playing her voice mail.

And the homey atmosphere of this quaint English eatery was shattered irrevocably by the voice of an angry Junkrat.

“You tell your boss I’ll see him in hell!” Junkrat said. “Me and Roadie deserve better treatment. Respawn went down and you didn’t tell us? We were out there with our arses in the wind because you were too bloody good to share your precious master plan! You’re unprofessional, mate! We’re well and truly done with you, and you can get well and truly f—“

Widowmaker hit stop.

“The Australians will not be joining us,” Widowmaker said.

“They left without the back halves of their shares.”

“They must not like you.”

“The feeling’s mutual.”

“Why didn’t you tell us Respawn was down?”

“Have you ever gotten into a fight with an angry gorilla? I don’t recommend it. It cuts into your conversation time.”

“Why didn’t you tell us you had a contingency plan in the mainframe room?” Widowmaker asked.

Reaper sighed. “I didn’t. It was an accident that she was in there. The good doctor saw fit to… improvise.”

“Why didn’t you tell us you turned Ziegler?”

“Ziegler didn’t need turning,” Reaper said. “And besides, what do loose lips sink?”

This seemed good enough for Widowmaker. Hanzo kept to himself.
And at that moment, almost as if on cue, wearing jeans and a brown leather jacket, Angela Ziegler entered Adrienne’s.

Her mouth was open, and what it was that she had planned on saying in that moment went back down her throat, as the wall an inch away from her head was pierced by an arrow.

Angela jumped in terror, and Reaper drew his shotgun and pointed it at Hanzo, but Hanzo didn’t notice or seem to care.

His furious eyes were fixed on Doctor Angela Ziegler.

He got up from his booth and slowly walked toward Angela, and didn’t stop until he was mere inches away.

“My brother was not yours to kill,” Hanzo said with a cold fury. “The arrow that was meant for him is now meant for you.”

Amid the sudden anger-based room temperature drop, Reaper was struck by the fact that this was the first time he had ever heard Hanzo actually speak.

Hanzo looked away from the terrified Angela, as though the very sight of her would permanently sully his eyeballs, before walking out the door. Reaper saw that he didn’t take his bowler or his guitar case with him. God help the cop who makes him, he thought.

“I think you upset him,” Reaper said.

Angela’s eyes went from the door to Reaper, and her look went from fear to fury.

“An EMP?” Angela asked. “Are you out of your mind?”

“Yes.”

“And… why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because if I told you,” Reaper said, “you would have said no and you might have blown the whistle.”

Angela looked offended. “I would not. I would have found another way, but the objective is still the objective. Thousands of innocent people, Gabriel!”

“You say that now,” Reaper said. “Thousands dead is bad, sure, but necessary. And don’t even try to argue with me. I’m better at the long game than you are. And they’re thousands of strangers. At least when I try to kill my friends, I wait until they’re not my friends anymore. You don’t seem to have that problem.”

This gave Angela pause. “Genji was… unfortunate.”

“I remember Genji from the old days,” Reaper said. “I didn’t have a problem with him. I’d have said he had a good head on his shoulders if it weren’t for his awful taste in women.”

Angela glared at him.

“Don’t look at me like I forced you into a corner,” Reaper said. “You found out in Hanamura, right? The fact that you Respawned in the mainframe room at all tells me you didn’t feel the need for a last minute confession. We could have made it into that foundry, Genji could very well still be alive, and no one would be any the wiser.”
“You couldn’t have made it into that foundry,” Angela said. “Not after McCree switched sides.”

Reaper folded his arms. “Well if this doesn’t redefine irony, I don’t know what does. Someone who dresses like an angel, but has no faith. Although I will say I didn’t see the Jesse thing coming.”

Angela put her hands on her hips. “A serial traitor whom you treat like garbage finds a girl on the other team he wants to sleep with, and you didn’t see it coming?”

Reaper soaked his voice in sarcasm when he said “I like to see the good in people.”

Angela scratched the back of her head, before something else occurred to her.

“And another thing,” she said. “Ilios!”

“What about it?”

“You were just supposed to shoot me and Respawn me to make it look convincing,” she said. “Not drain me dry.”

“Did they suspect you?”

“No.”

“Then you’re welcome.”

“It was a near-run thing,” Angela said. “No one said anything, but I could feel them wondering why I wasn’t as traumatized by that as I should have been. What could I tell them? That I knew what you were going to do as soon as I fell through that skylight? Because it’s just… so… you.”

“I couldn’t help myself,” Reaper said. “You made me the man I am today.”

This, Angela seemed to take particular issue with. She slowly walked up to Reaper and got in his face.

“Yes, Gabriel. I injected you with nanomachines that have made your life a living hell… I gave you powers that matched how much of a pissy little drama queen you are… I decided to follow you on your silly pipe dream of destroying Overwatch to show the world the necessity for Overwatch, because your stupid ends have means that I require… and the only time I will ever be happy to hear your voice is if the two words that fall out of your whining fucking mouth are ‘thank you.’”

Widowmaker was not known for her ability to diffuse tension in a room, but her next words did exactly that.

“Are you getting paid for this?” Widowmaker asked.

Angela looked at her, and blinked. “Are you getting paid for this?”

“Yes,” Widowmaker said. “Quite a bit.”

“Widowmaker wants to go independent,” Reaper said. “Go into business for herself. I’ll help her if she helps me… You’re getting the Junkers’ shares, by the way.”

“I know,” Widowmaker said.

“My payment,” Angela said, “if you can call it that, is that Reaper is providing backup and transport for a few excursions. Respawn isn’t the only toy I’ve made that Overwatch can use, though it was
the first that needed to be destroyed. The rest have to go as well.”

“Speaking of which,” Reaper said. “I’ve lined up transport to take you anywhere. We’ll do half starting tonight, and half… after we implement stage three.”

Both Angela and Widowmaker furrowed their brows.

“What’s stage three?” Angela asked.

“I’m so very glad you asked,” Reaper said, and walked behind the counter. Once there, he separated three glasses from a row of them and placed them on the edge of the counter, just this side of teetering to the floor.

“The first stage,” Reaper said, “was getting there attention, which we did. The second stage was to take away their powerbase. I didn’t go quite how I had envisioned, but with Respawn gone, stage two was a success.”

“Let me guess,” Angela said. “You’re going after the founding parents. Ana, Reinhardt, Jack…”

“No,” Reaper said. “Stage three is demoralization. It’s not enough for them to die. They have to give up, and make way for a new generation. I have a hitlist, but Jack, Ana, and Reinhardt aren’t on it.”

Reaper indicated the three glasses in front of him, before putting his finger on the one farthest to his left.

“Lena Oxton…”

Reaper nudged the glass of the counter and sent it to its demise on the floor below.

_Crash._

“…Fareeha Amari…”

_Crash._

Reaper paused on the last one, as though to savor it.

“…and Hana Song.”

_Crash._

---

**London**

Standing next to Brigitte Panzer, Ana Amari stood outside a room in the medical wing of the King’s Row facility. She peered through the door at the mass of humanity in the hospital bed that called itself Aleksandra Zaryanova, wearing nothing but a hospital gown, bandages, and the half-in-half-out smile of someone loopy on painkillers. An IV was hooked up to a vein in her right arm.

“I didn’t know you knew how to perform transfusions,” Ana said.

“I don’t,” said Brigitte. “Athena had to talk me through it… Well, we had to find a room that wasn’t destroyed by Jack and Reaper’s little tussle, then Athena talked me through it.”

“You must have had a long night,” Ana said. “Get some sleep.”
Brigitte put her hands in the pockets of her jeans, and shrugged her shoulders. She had the bearing of a kid being told to clean their room, and taking as few steps as possible to get there.

“What is it?” Ana asked.

“It… It just doesn’t feel right complaining. Y’know… considering.”

Ana nodded. “I appreciate that. But you’re no good to anyone passed out on the floor. Go sleep.”

Brigitte nodded, yawned, and walked away.

Ana walked through the door and sat down in the chair at the foot of the hospital bed, not even looking at Zaryanova until she was seated.

Ana pointed to herself.

“Do you see this face?” she asked.

Zaryanova furrowed her brow and frowned. “Is… is this a trick question?”

“This is the face of a very unhappy woman,” Ana said. “Someone I raised almost as a daughter betrayed my real daughter and murdered one of my friends. The edge this organization has in the fight against evil is a smoldering ruin in the basement mainframe room. And I spent two hours last night helping Reinhardt Wilhelm get my real daughter out of her armor because it didn’t work anymore. I’ve been up for two days fighting on two different continents. In light of all this, Miss Zaryanova, what do you have to say to me?”

Zaryanova looked Ana up and down, and giggled. “I’d enquire about your dinner plans for the evening.”

“You’re not my type.”

Zaryanova laughed. “I’m everyone’s type!”

Ana folded her arms. “Do you have any allergies, Miss Zaryanova?”

“Shellfish. I’m Jewish, so that’s actually really convenient.”

“Oh,” Ana said. “Mine’s bullshit. So I’m just going to come out and tell you to tell me everything you know about Angela Ziegler.”

Zaryanova blinked a couple of times. “Who’s Angela Ziegler?”

It was at this point that Ana gave Aleksandra Zaryanova The Look.

Being intimidated by someone with one eye is a devastating prospect, and such an act elicits one of two reactions. The first is a kind of stern and almost over-exaggerated poker face, eager to tell the world that they are not intimidated by the one-eyed soldier trying to will them into cooperation. This reaction is almost exclusively the province of liars.

It was unfortunate that, in pursuit of the truth, Aleksandra Zaryanova had the second reaction.

Zaryanova folded like a deck of cards. Her head tilted downward, as did her eyes. Ana didn’t need to be psychic to know that Zaryanova was asking herself “Shit, do I know Angela Ziegler?”

Which meant that Reaper had evolved little since his time leading Blackwatch. He preferred the
Mushroom Method of leadership, which meant feeding the people under his command shit and keeping them in the dark.

Oh, well…

“There’s no TV in here,” Ana said. “And you haven’t been near the internet, so I imagine it would be the height of futility to ask if you’ve seen the news.”

“I was about to ask,” Zaryanova said. “How’s my rugby team doing?”

“Wall-to-wall coverage of the battle for King’s Row,” Ana said. “Thirty-three people dead. I know Reaper wanted thousands. That would have made a point. But thirty-three dead? That’s just an average day in America.”

Zaryanova sighed. “You forget what it’s like in my country. The people caught in that EMP would have been mostly Omnics. And it’ll be easier to get blood from a stone than it would be to get a tear from me.”

“No thought to the people who weren’t Omnics that would have been caught in the blast?”

Zaryanova’s eyes dimmed a little. “Yes… I’ll answer for that when the time comes.”

“You will,” Ana said. “We’ll get to that. The interesting part is what happened next.”

“Do tell,” Zaryanova said.

“The media, which hasn’t liked us for a good long while, is crediting Overwatch for saving London.”

“Congratulations.”

“Thank you,” said Ana. “But the interesting part is that the Russian president and his husband are on a plane right now from Moscow to New York to speak to the United Nations concerning the official, sanctioned reinstatement of Overwatch. Given the events of recent weeks, the delegates from the United Kingdom, Greece, and Japan will vote in the affirmative, should the vote come to pass. After that, the Chinese, the Koreans, and the Americans will fall in line, and it’ll be a done deal, as they say.”

“Bully for you,” Zaryanova said.

“Indeed. But the odd part is, that when the Russian president ran for his office eight years ago, he ran on a strict anti-Overwatch platform. Have any idea why he had such a drastic change of heart?”

Zaryanova shrugged her shoulders. “The world changes. People change along with it.”

“Uh-uh,” Ana said. “And what would your reaction be if I told you that we’ve received communiqués from Russian diplomats telling us that the Russian vote is contingent on us making sure that you never see trial in any country other than Russia? They want us to send you home as soon as possible.”

“My reaction,” Zaryanova said, “would be to ask when you’re going to be getting on that.”

“Yes,” Ana said. “We’re… not sending you back”

Zaryanova blinked. “What?”
“We had our AI Athena run a backtrace on those communiqués, and wouldn’t you know it? We found our way into the Russian president’s private email server.”

Zaryanova rose in her bed. “You hacked the email server of the president of Russia?”

“His firewalls are terrible,” Ana said. “And given your country’s history over the past sixty years or so, I’d say it *more* than served him right. It turns out that while we were fighting in the streets, an outfit called Volskaya Industries sent fifteen emails to the Russian president. Volskaya Industries, in case you didn’t know, is a defense contractor that builds anti-Omnic defenses. We couldn’t actually open these communications, so we don’t know what they said. But we do know that a minute after he received the fifteenth email, the president sent a blanket email to his diplomats with the heading ‘Re: Zaryanova.’”

Ana let that sink in before she continued.

“Now I don’t know what interest Volskaya Industries has in the Russian president. Corporations will have their fingers in government pies from now until the sun goes out. What *does* make me curious, however, is what interest Volskaya Industries has… in you.”

I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Zaryanova said.

And she had that first reaction. That exaggerated poker face.

*She’s lying, Ana thought. She knows something. Or she has something in her possession.*

But it didn’t matter at the moment.

“You know Jesse McCree,” Ana said. It wasn’t a question.

Zaryanova nodded.

“But you may not have heard of the McCree Deal. Twenty years ago, Jesse was a criminal, but we brought him into our cozy little family. Immunity in exchange for service. We had him sign something at the time, but that was more of a formality. It’s less a ‘deal,’ and more ‘conscription.’”

Zaryanova saw where this was going.

“You can’t do that,” Zaryanova said. “Overwatch isn’t sanctioned by the UN.”

“That’s going to change in a matter of weeks, and you know it,” Ana said. “The Russians want you within their borders. They’ll *settle* for keeping you out of The Hague for siding with Reaper. Whatever Volskaya Industries wants with you, they’ll have to go through us to get it.”

Ana got up and started to walk out the door, stopping at Zaryanova’s bedside.

“You’re a member of Overwatch, now,” Ana said. “Congratulations, Agent Zaryanova.”

Zaryanova reached out and grabbed Ana’s arm. It hurt. And in Aleksandra Zaryanova’s eyes was utter fury.

“You expect me to serve in this place… with you people… and Omnis like Zenyatta?”

“Yes,” Ana said. “I do.”

“And how do you think that would make me feel?”
“Much the same way that Zenyatta would feel about serving with you,” Ana said. “But unlike you, he’s too good a person to say anything about it.”

Zaryanova let go of Ana’s arm in disgust, and looked away.

“‘Person.’ Ha!”

She looked back at Ana.

“You helped found Overwatch to fight those things,” Zaryanova said. “You’ve seen what I’ve seen. Tell me you haven’t dreamed of a world without a single Omnic in it.”

“To be honest… No, I haven’t.”

Fury gave way to confusion on the face of Aleksandra Zaryanova. Ana put her hands on her hips.

“Everyone has a vision of paradise,” Ana said. “They’re all clean. They’re all peaceful. And they’re all lies.”

Zaryanova rolled her eyes. “You are… whatever the opposite of a ray of sunshine is. I changed my mind. I don’t want to have dinner with you. And you’re not invited to my birthday party, either.”

“Humankind has yet to devise the currency with which to pay for Utopia. Almost-But-Not-Quite is the closest we will ever get to true peace. And in such times, I find that tension is good for the soul.”

“Peace through distrust.”

“Don’t knock it,” Ana said. “It’s cheap, and it works. The fact is that were not both human and Omnic so deeply appreciative of how fragile their peace is, then we would go back to the bad old days of human beings fighting each other… And unlike you, I’m old enough to remember how bad those bad old days really were.”

Ana made to leave again, and Zaryanova stopped her again. This time with her words.

“Captain Amari?”

Ana turned around.

“Where is Satya Vaswani?” Zaryanova asked.

Ana folded her arms. “We have Symmetra in holding until we figure out what to do with her. She works for Vishkar, and any intel we get from her would be valuable, but she’s loyal and, well… somebody has to stand trial for what’s been happening.”

“I see,” Zaryanova said. “Then… I have demands.”

“You work for us,” Ana said. “You don’t get to make demands.”

Zaryanova threw up her hands. “Then I have suggestions, alright? What’s the expression? ‘You have me over a barrel?’”

“I do believe that’s the expression.”

“It means I’m the bottom,” Zaryanova said, “which is a first, and hopefully last for me. Don’t be such a bitch about it…”
The prior evening’s events cast a pall over the demeanors of everyone in Overwatch. The overall mood was glum, hushed, as though the entire of the underground facility were an empty church after a funeral.

Hana Song and Jack Morrison sat at a table across from each other in the kitchen, each with a meager sandwich in front of them. Hana needed to make both, as Jack’s arm was in a sling after the previous night’s unfortunate run-in with an IV stand.

Hana picked up her sandwich, and looked from Jack, to the food in her hand.

“Tuna fish and potato chips,” Hana said.

“And mayonnaise,” Jack said.

“How could I forget?”

“For texture.”

“Just… Just you saying that isn’t encouraging.”

Hana took a bite and had to chew once before she could fully register the taste hitting her tongue. The sandwich tasted as though someone had already eaten it. But she swallowed.

“It’s an acquired taste,” Jack said.

“I’m hungry,” Hana said. “I’m tired, my head hurts, my MEKA got toasted last night, and…”

She was about to say “…and I still have Genji’s funeral to go to today,” but she kept it to herself, letting the glum atmosphere of the day after The Battle for King’s Row overtake her yet again.

Jack looked at her, sympathy in his eyes, and said the one thing she truly, desperately needed to hear.

“Just say it,” he said.

He could have meant any number of things, but Hana, in need of an outlet, took it to mean “Everything.”

She put her sandwich back down. “I knew it,” she said. “I knew there was something that stank about her from the minute I walked in here. You remember.”

“I do.”

“Everything that’s gone wrong in the past few weeks, everything. The hacks, you getting poisoned with something her staff conveniently couldn’t heal, Fareeha’s armor getting bricked at the same my MEKA did—I have no idea how she did that, and…”

“Genji,” Jack said.

Hana was grateful to him for sparing her from having to say his name.

“I’m… I’m not trying to start shit with you when I ask this, but…”

“Why didn’t any of us see it coming?” Jack asked.

“Well I saw it coming… kinda…”
Jack pinched the bridge of his nose before he looked Hana in the eye.

“Some of the time,” he said. “Not all of the time, but some of the time, when we see the good in someone… It’s… It’s like we’re seeing how good we want ourselves to be. The little things that give the game away? We don’t see them, even if they’re not hiding them. And it gets to a point… where it’s less about them lying or hiding something, and more about us not wanting to be wrong.”

Jack sighed. “Between Angela and Gabriel, I’m beginning to think I suck at this.”

Hana folded her arms.

“How what?” she asked. “Reaper wanted to destroy Respawn, and he did it. Where do we go from here?”

“Now… Now the street fight starts.”

Hana just looked at Jack. “Like… what happened outside last night?”

“No,” Jack said. “Speaking of which, Ana told me how impressive you were last night. Giving orders like an honest to God soldier. Couldn’t be more proud, that one. Don’t worry, she’ll get around to telling you herself when she gets a free minute.”

Hana felt surprised to hear this, and she feared that it showed. “She… kinda yelled at me for doing that, though.”

“Because chain of command on the battlefield is important to her. It’s important to everyone at the top. Doing what you did does a number on team unity. Operations live and die by one voice. You have any bright ideas, go up to your commanding officer, and any CO worth their salt will change their orders to suit them. Do that… you’re a soldier.”

Hana slouched in her seat. “You know, even after ten months on the Korean Army and my time here, I still can’t quite think of myself as a soldier.”

“Yeah,” Jack said. “Mei’s a scientist. Zenyatta’s a monk. Lucio’s a DJ. But we’re all soldiers, now. However… a soldier can serve for forty years, rise to four star general, see more ops than can ever be counted… and never see one street fight.”

“We’re back to that,” Hana said. “Okay. Define ‘street fight.’”

“It’s when any method you use to defeat the enemy is completely justified,” Jack said.

Hana entertained the thought. She didn’t like it. At all.

“See,” Jack said, “ops are supposed to be clean. Or at least as clean as ops can be, because they don’t get personal. What happened last night is very… very… personal. Reaper came into where we live, put doubt in our hearts, and used one of our own to take one of our own. Up until last night we could safely say this was about ideology, or protecting the world, but it isn’t anymore. What’s left is us. As people. And that has to be defended because without it, there’s nothing left.”

As Hana turned this over in her head, Jack picked his sandwich back up again.

“Reaper isn’t done,” Jack said. “And Angela, extra as she is, isn’t one to do her thing and steal away in the night without putting an exclamation point on it, so she isn’t done either. In the movies, things like this would be settled by a big explosion at the end. But this isn’t the movies. What happens next is going to be small. It’s going to be brutal… It’s going to be a street fight. And the two of
them made damn sure of that.”

Jack took a bite of his sandwich, and said no more.

“Are you alright?”

“Shouldn’t I be asking you that?”

Lena sat cross-legged in the hallway next to the conference room, her holophone out in front of her, a very lovely young woman with red hair and freckles on the blue-hued screen.

Emily Hammond was a dietician, whom Lena had met a year earlier, quite improbably, at an underground show in Chelsea, put on by Usalama Siri, which was the finest punk band that the country of Kenya had ever produced.

They saw each other in the smoky basement, Lena with her hair dyed pink for the evening, and Emily with her ginger tresses moussed into a Mohawk/pony tail combo that was that was beginning to wilt in the heat of the crowd and fall to the left side of her head.

They were making out in the loo half an hour later.

It was that kind of show.

Numbers were exchanged, and Lena was honestly surprised when Emily called her the following afternoon.

“I’m sitting in that bakery on Craven Street,” Emily had said. “I seem to have ordered two croissants instead of just the one. If you get here in the next twenty minutes, I’ll let you have the other one.”

Lena had been, at that moment, in the Trafalgar Square post office, picking up replacement parts for her pulse pistols. Craven Street was such a short distance away, that Lena took it as a sign. She was at the bakery in ten minutes on foot.

Seeing each other in that bakery in broad daylight was a sign to both of them that punks of a certain age have day jobs. Lena’s shock at seeing Emily’s hair come down around her shoulders onto a rather conservative navy blue cardigan was about as equal to Emily’s shock at seeing Lena’s pink do gone, and replaced with a windswept chestnut brown soft butch starter kit.

Lena sat and they both talked. They talked of what books they liked to read. What shows they liked to watch. The subtle differences in style between punk from sub-Saharan Africa, and punk from Latin America, and which the each preferred (Emily was an avid proponent of the former, though Lena liked the latter).

“What’s that, then?”

“This? It’s a chronal accelerator.”

“Oh. I thought it was something you wore to shows. I was gonna ask where I could get one.”

“Well, get displaced from the space-time continuum, and I know an eight-hundred pound gorilla who can make you one for free.”

They were making out in Emily’s car twenty minutes later.
It was that kind of bakery.

Lena moved into Emily’s flat three months after that day in the bakery, and the ensuing year had its ups (like Emily leasing a bigger space for her practice), its downs (the inconsolable week after Lena failed to save Tekhartha Mondatta), its in-betweens (Emily successfully coaching Lena to finally and at long last pick her bloody socks up off the bedroom floor), and even its endearing weirdness (at least on Emily’s end, as Lena felt that spending Christmas with the eight-hundred pound gorilla she mentioned was the most normal thing in the world).

And through all this, Emily knew that Lena was a pilot with the Royal Air Force who used to be in Overwatch when she was in her late teens. But Lena could tell, as much as Emily loved her, that it honestly did grate when she accepted Winston’s recall without so much as discussing it with her.

Lena hoped a little bit of time apart might heal the nigh imperceptible rift between them that Emily was too much of a sweetheart to bring up.

A terrorist attack on London really didn’t help matters.

“But seriously, though,” Emily said over the holophone. “Are you okay?”

Lena sighed. “It’s…it’s not great over here right now.”

“How not great?”

“Well…” Lena said. “You know that Doctor I told you about?”

“The blonde with the legs?” Emily asked. “Or the Chinese bird with the everything else?”

“The blonde,” Lena said. “And as the worst kind of luck would have it, it turns out she’s been evil this entire time.”

“Evil? How—How evil?”

“She killed another member of the team,” Lena said. “I’m going to his funeral later today.”

Emily blinked. “How did she even do that? I thought you said there was a thing that kept all of you safe.”

“She destroyed it on the way out,” Lena said.

Emily was a pale woman to begin with, so her feat in turning a couple of shades whiter was an impressive one.

“Oh…” Emily said.

Lena had heard that “Oh…” before. Emily and Lena didn’t have “fights” per se, as any conflict between the two consisted of Emily looking disappointed, and Lena looking sheepish.

“I remember you telling me that you used to be in Overwatch, and it all just seemed so exciting. It’s like there wasn’t a shade of gray with you. My girlfriend is one of the good guys. But when you said that, Overwatch was done. Disbanded. And now I see on the news that the Russian PM…”

“President,” Lena said. “Russia has presidents.”

“He’s—he’s going to the UN to try and get Overwatch reinstated. Overwatch is going to be a thing again, isn’t it?”
“It looks that way,” Lena said.

“So… you’ll be doing a lot more of this,” Emily said. “Putting yourself in danger with people that might turn evil at the drop of a hat with nothing to protect you. And even then, I might be alright with it, but… they attacked King’s Row. They attacked my home. Our home.”

Lena didn’t know what to say to that. She knew something had broken between them, and had no idea what it was, or how to fix it. So Lena, seeing no other alternative, fell back on her old stand-by.

“I’m sorry,” she said. It was soft, and on the pathetic side.

“It’s okay,” Emily said, sounding like she didn’t know how okay she actually was. “People get a time to find out how strong they are. This is mine.”

Silence fell. An awful, uncertain, sticky, five second silence that lasted an eternity.

Emily was the one who broke it.

“So, um… do you need me there? At the funeral?”

Lena did. She honestly, truly did. But…

“I wish you could,” Lena said. “But there’s the security issue…”

“Oh,” Emily said.

Again.

Lena knew that all Emily wanted was to be by Lena’s side right now. Both for reassurance in a scary time, and to reassure herself that she could be The Good Girlfriend in the wake of Lena’s sorrow.

And Lena couldn’t even provide that.

“I love you,” Lena finally said.

“I love you, too,” Emily said, and Lena could tell that she meant it. “I’ll see you soon.”

They both hung up at the same time.

As Lena felt herself caught in the inky emotional quicksand that had been brought about by the toll that her Overwatch duties had taken on her relationship, she noticed a large shadow that had been enveloping her entire frame. She’d been too occupied with Emily’s call to notice it until now.

Lena looked up.

“Hi, there,” Winston said.

“Cheers,” said Lena. “You alright?”

Winston sighed. “I’m a scientist,” he said. “I’m supposed to be in a lab. But here I am, running combat ops. All the stress is making the hair on my back turn silver.”

“Aren’t you a silverback, though? Gorilla, I mean?”

Winston sighed again, and even bigger one this time. “That’s what makes it a joke, Lena.”
“Ohhhh,” Lena said, not laughing. She looked at her holophone, then back up to Winston.

“How much of this did you hear?” Lena asked.

“All of it.”

“Hm,” said Lena. “Cheeky monkey, you are.”

“And you’re the only one I’ll let get away with calling me that.”

“Because you’re the best.”

“I know.”

“Let me ask you something,” Lena said. “How do you handle relationships? I mean… What are you…”

“I’m a gorilla,” Winston said. “I’m into gorillas.”

“Yeah, but there are no other gorillas like you.”

“I know,” Winston said. “Believe me, I know. So if you’re asking me about how I handle relationships, the short answer is, I don’t.”

“Like, at all, then?”

“I mean, I tried to at least engage on an intellectual level with people online, but I can’t go on Twitter anymore… Not after the furries found out about me.”

The look of abject fear on Winston’s face after he said that made her smile. At least a little bit.

“There are no gorillas like me,” Winston said. “There are no people like you. And life for people like us is a never-ending litmus test we pass out to other people to separate those who can handle uniqueness from those who can’t.”

“That,” Lena said, “is not reassuring. Not even a tiny bit, mate.”

“I know,” Winston said. “Today’s not a very reassuring day. I wish I had something slick to tell you to get you to the next chapter in your life, but I don’t. What I do have…”

Winston pulled something out of one of the side pouches of his armor.

“…is a banana.”

He held it out to Lena. “Would you like a banana?” he asked.

Lena’s first instinct was to say no, but she felt a pull in her stomach, and realized she hadn’t eaten since before she left for Hanamura.

She took the banana. “Thank you,” she said.

“You’re welcome,” said Winston. “I try to be good for something.”

On the other side of the facility from the hospital wing, there was the collection of five cells that made up the brig.
On one side of these cells were the bog standard metal bars (titanium, in this instance, and fitting for the kind of superpowered reprobate that would find themselves in an Overwatch cell). On the other, however, was a long pane of bulletproof, reinforced two-way plexiglass that made up the entirety of the rear wall. And on the other side of this wall was a separate room, from which Overwatch agents could see in to the cells, but the cells’ inhabitants could not see out.

The two cells the furthest to the right remained empty, but the one in the middle contained Satya “Symmetra” Vaswani. She glared at the two-way plexiglass, as though there were people on the other side watching her, and she wanted them to know that she knew.

Which there were, and they did.

“You took her arm?” Lucio asked.

Reinhardt nodded. “Normally we would not confiscate artificial limbs,” he said. “But with the lenses installed in the appendage, she can use them to create hard-light constructs, which could be a danger to us, and to herself.”

“Why would she be a danger to herself?”

“She said not a single word during her interrogation. She works for Vishkar, and she seems to be extremely loyal. We don’t know anything about their training or operating practices for agents like our Miss Vaswani, but she could be a one to take her own life rather than divulge corporate secrets.”

Lucio furrowed his brow. “Do we even want to know Vishkar corporate secrets?”

“They’re not high on our list of priorities,” Reinhardt said, “but we wouldn’t say no to them. It would be helpful to know what we’re up against. But either way, we won’t press the issue, and she is in no danger from us.”

“You know my Sonic Amplifier?”

“Yes.”

Lucio scratched the back of his head. “Well, I kinda… sorta… stole it… from Vishkar.”

Reinhardt looked down his nose at Lucio, and he couldn’t tell if the look held any judgment in it or not.

“They were occupying Rio,” Lucio said. “Putting the people in the favelas to slave labor. It’s not like we could afford guns. We had to make due with the prototypes they brought with them.”

“And so you used their own weapons to free your people,” Reinhardt said, nodding. “There is poetry in that.”

Lucio smiled and said “Thank you.”

They walked to the right to look into the fourth cell.

“And you let her keep the bird, though,” Lucio said.

In this fourth cell, Bastion stood, watching Ganymede flit around the interior, before looking at the two-way glass. Much like Satya, Bastion was also aware of the fact that there were people on the other side, but unlike Satya’s steely glance, Bastion offered a friendly wave, and a couple of beeps.

“The bird isn’t dangerous,” Reinhardt said.
“Dude, one of her arms is a gun.”

“Yes, well, Zenyatta asked her to surrender her ammunition. In fact, Zenyatta has been having long conversations with her. I cannot say as to what subjects these conversations pertain, as it’s mostly just beeping and vibrating, but I think the talks have helped Zenyatta after…”

“Yeah,” Lucio said, trying to steer the conversation off of anything somber. “I—I get it.”

“Truth be told,” Reinhardt said, “she doesn’t appear to be dangerous at all, but we have absolutely no idea what to do with her. But once we know, we’ll let her out.”

“Torbjorn’s not gonna like that.”

“Make a list of the things Torbjorn does like on your fingers,” Reinhardt said, “and you’ll have enough left over to grip a sword.”

Reinhardt and Lucio walked along the plexiglass to the final cell… only to be stopped dead in their tracks.

Reinhardt raised his hand to his mouth in shock. “Gott in Himmel!”

And Lucio, for his part, could only stare at what was in that final cell, and then start laughing hysterically.

Jesse McCree was not alone in his cell. Mei-Ling Zhou was with him. Or rather on top of him, her thighs on either side of his on the cot in the cell, her lips savagely pressed to his. Her hand, which was in Jesse’s hair, pinning it against the side wall of the cell, migrated downward to his artificial hand, where upon she guided it to a firm grip on her backside.

And Lucio was still laughing.

“She’s almost eating his face!” he said. “Oh, man… it’s like his head’s made of Twinkies!”

Reinhardt pressed the intercom button on the side wall, so the two inhabitants of the fifth cell could hear him.

“Doctor Zhou! Doctor Zhou! This is—“

“YOU GET IT, GIRL!”

“Lucio, stop that! Doctor Zhou, this is most unprofessional!”

And the make out session in cell five blissfully and forcefully went on, lack of professionalism be damned.

“Doctor Zhou, are you even—she’s not even listening to me.”

Reinhardt took his finger off the intercom button, and Lucio’s laughing fit slowly wound down.

“Oh…” Lucio said. “Oh, she found water in the desert. Good for her.”

Reinhardt sighed. “For the life of me, I don’t even know how she got in there…”

Mei broke the kiss.
“Did you hear something?” Jesse asked.

“No,” Mei said, and took her glasses off. She rubbed the lenses with the hem of her tank top before putting them back on. “You got my glasses all foggy.”

“Last time I spent the night in a cell,” Jesse said, “was twenty years ago back in Santa Fe… This time’s a fair sight more fun.”

“Well, we aim to please, here at Overwatch.”

“And you don’t miss, now do ya?”

Jesse reached up with his natural hand and put his index finger on Mei’s chin. Mei leaned her head down and lightly bit.

“I have a favor to ask,” Jesse said.

Mei spat Jesse’s finger back out and looked at him blankly for a moment, before reaching down to take off her tank top.

“Okay,” Mei said as she worked the hem up over her belly, “but here? Now?”

Jesse reached up and stopped her, pulling her hands, and her shirt, back down. “Not that,” he said.

“Then what?”

Jesse looked off to the side and sighed.

“I remember Genji,” he said. “From the old days. Never had a sore word for the man, nor him for me… and if I could go to his funeral, I would be much obliged.”

Jesse McCree was not allowed to attend Genji’s funeral. The veto came down from Jack Morrison himself.

“He’s a traitor,” he had said. “It’s bad enough he isn’t in the ground, but I will be good and Goddamned if I’m letting him sit at a funeral he’s responsible for.”

The earthly remains of Genji Shimada occupied a simple pine box in the hangar bay next to open door of the dropship. Reinhardt stood near the casket in full armor, as he had volunteered to ferry the body back to Hanamura and back to the Shimada clan. That the Shimadas were most likely to treat Genji’s body as disrespectfully in death as they did in life weighed on everyone’s mind. Fareeha even floated the proposition of keeping the body and cremating it themselves, but Ana assured her that the right thing to do was sometimes the most disheartening, and that this was one of those times.

All of Overwatch, save for the newly christened Agent Zaryanova, were in attendance around the casket. The organization was abuzz with people who wanted to speak, but in the end, only one managed take the leap.

Tekhartha Zenyatta stood at the head of the makeshift casket. He stared at the simple box for a while before looking up at those in attendance.

“Mondatta once said, and so taught, that in the rings of each person’s soul, be they organic or Omnic, there is a darkness. A great, gnawing plague that guides us to violence and greed. But one of the keys to enlightenment rests not in avoiding this darkness, but acknowledging it, negotiating it, and
working around it for the betterment of all.”

Zenyatta looked back down at the casket. “He came to Overwatch, much as he came to the Shambali, in that darkness. To you, he came in pain, in crime, in great misdeed. To us, he came in uncertainty in his own existence, a frustration of purpose. And through our respective ministrations we wiped away that pain and that uncertainty to reveal the true Genji Shimada… and that Genji saved lives and brought joy. Defended the weak and the helpless from tyranny and strife. And so, through helping him, he helped us all, and The Iris remains in focus.”

Zenyatta was quiet for a spell. Then he continued.

“It is a truth, bitterly acknowledged, that the saddest of our number, caught in the grip of unexamined life, feel the need to prey on our most joyous. That our most honest can be laid low only by our most deceitful. And so… Genji was murdered by the woman he loved.”

Zenyatta looked from the casket, directly to Fareeha. There was weight in both of their stares.

I loved her too, she thought. But I’m alive, and he isn’t. Trying to make sense of this will make me go mad.

“You gave me his final words,” Zenyatta said to her. “I thank you for this. For even on the lip of the chasm that leads to what lies beyond consciousness, Genji Shimada did not fall to despair or vindictiveness. That on the precipice of death, he sought to instruct. To inspire. To heal… and to hope.”

Zenyatta looked from Fareeha to the rest of those assembled. All were stunned. All were numb. But the only one of these hardened soldiers whose emotions brought on tears was remarkably, Torbjorn Lindholm. Zenyatta wondered if it was guilt at his own behavior that brought this on, and Zenyatta knew that he would never ask.

He placed his hand on the casket.

“It is despair and grief in which I am awash this day, but let my one sole comfort be yours as well. That even in death, Genji Shimada… my pupil… my friend… did not fear the darkness.”

Fareeha restlessly paced through the halls of the base. By this hour, everyone else had gone to sleep, and the only noise accompanying her footsteps were the click of the automatic lights as they turned on to greet her in every new hall, and as they clicked off in the distance as she left. Even though she’d been awake for over twenty-four hours, which had included an international flight and two battles, she couldn’t sleep. Twice now she had tried to settle into bed and found herself unable to. It used to be that when she couldn’t sleep she would clean her armor. But as it currently lay in inert, disorganized pieces in the gear lockup after being pried off of her body, she couldn’t stand to look at it. She had tried exercise, but couldn’t make much headway with her already screaming muscles. She had tried eating, but couldn’t find an appetite. Reading had similarly been fruitless. Between her wandering mind and tired eyes the words slid off the page and turned to nonsense. A small part of her briefly considered asking to be medically sedated. But the only doctor among them anymore was Mei, and she didn’t think she was that kind of doctor.

And so she walked, hoping that at some point she would collapse on her feet.

She wanted to talk to someone. There was too much in her heart, and it felt fit to burst. It used to be that she could talk to Angela, and now she wondered if she ever really cared. Had she just been humoring her for all these years? Had this duplicity always been in her heart?
Fareeha shook her head and sighed. No. Genji had been right in his dying words. She knew Angela too well to believe that. In all that she did, she had a strong sense of ethics and an earnest desire to help others. And, even if she had been lying to them all for the last weeks, the care and kindness she had shown to Fareeha and Ana were undeniable. That didn’t feel fake. And she had spared her life when she had the chance to kill her. That had to mean something, right?

But at the end of the night, she just didn’t know. Fareeha sighed again and turned another corner aimlessly.

The prospect of loneliness was an aspect of returning to Overwatch that she had failed to consider. Back in Egypt she had a therapist that she could talk to when she was troubled. Technically she could still call her, but the amount of classified and illegal information she would have to avoid disclosing made that an daunting prospect when her thoughts felt fit to spill out of her mouth.

She considered everyone in this organization her friend—family, even. But it was dawning on her that she didn’t actually know any of them well enough at this point to feel comfortable talking about such closely held feelings. Hopefully she could rectify that. Jesse had been like a brother to her when she was a teenager, but she hadn’t seen him in decades. Their last interaction had been trying to blow holes in each other on Ilios. She didn’t know what kind of man he was anymore, and after seeing what happened with Angela, she was afraid to find out.

Fareeha’s heart sank to the pit of her stomach, and a shuddering sob wracked her body as she thought about her memories with Jesse. When she was thirteen, they had spent many long nights playing heated games of euchre. When she was fifteen, she had told him in a hushed, anxious whisper that she thought she might be a lesbian. He had clapped her on the back and said he coulda told her that since the day they met, and it was about time she figured it out. When she was eighteen, he listened to her plans of joining the Egyptian military when her mother wouldn’t hear a word of it. They’d spent more years apart than they’d ever spent together at this point, but she missed him fiercely, and hoped to god that he was still the man he used to be.

This trip through her memories soon turned to Gabriel. Before he was Reaper, he’d taught her how to play basketball. Always told her she didn’t need to go to college if she didn’t want to, but if she did, she’d be a star player with her height.

Both of them had been so important to her. And yet she shot without question when she saw them again, and they shot back. One came back, and one nearly killed thousands of innocent people.

Fareeha walked a few more hallways, stewing in these thoughts. It wasn’t often that she allowed herself any kind of self-pity, but it felt earned this morning.

As Athena quietly announced the turning of the hour, Fareeha’s mind finally turned to her mother. She had tried her best not to think of her, but at this point her thoughts on everyone else were exhausted, and the weight of the subject couldn’t be held off by her tired mind anymore.

She was still angry at her. Angry that she abandoned her, angry that she was so dismissive of her desires, angry that she was still treated like a child. And considering their ages, her anger and her mother’s behavior seemed unlikely to change.

But even so, something was becoming clearer over the course of the night. Even though she didn’t always treat her like she wanted, the person who knew her the best out of anybody in the world was her mother. And, in turn, her mother was the person she knew best out of anyone else in the world. More than that, Fareeha was shocked to realize that her mother was still the person she trusted most in the world, too. Even if they would fight, Fareeha realized that she always trusted that her mother loved her, and would do anything for her if she asked. In a strange way, that was even why she
bothered fighting with her. Because she trusted her to listen, if not agree, or change.

Fareeha sat down in the hall and stared at the darkened window of the exercise facility as she processed this revelation. Did her mother know? Or did she think that she hated her? Guilt twisted in Fareeha’s stomach as she realized that she probably did think that, and not without good cause. No wonder she was so guarded.

For years Fareeha had hated that she wanted and needed her absent mother, because she couldn’t access her, and felt that she shouldn’t need her. But she did need her. Not because she was weak, or a child, but because everybody needs the person they trust most. Now that her mother was back in her life, it was time to put away that resentment, and embrace her. Her anger might not change. And her mother might not change. But Fareeha’s approach could change, and maybe that would be enough.

Fareeha rose to her feet, and felt her exhaustion finally catching up to her. But she did not turn towards her quarters. Instead, she walked towards where her mother was staying. She stopped before the door, and took a deep breath, before opening the door into the darkened room. Her mother barely stirred in the bed across the room. Fareeha crossed over to the bed, lifted the corner of the sheets, and carefully climbed in. She wrapped her arms around her mother, and pulled her close to her chest.

“I’m glad we’re home. I love you, mama.” She whispered, before finally falling into a peaceful sleep.
Under most circumstances, Angela was well used to flying. At this point in her life, she had probably spent entire years inside various planes. If anything, flying had become a comfort, as it offered some of the only time she ever got to simply sit down, without even the temptation of a lab or a field hospital to return to. She loved red-eye flights in the obscene hours of the night and morning best of all. Most people were either asleep, or desperately trying to be, and usually the only noise on those flights came from the soothing white-noise roar of the engines. Even if she were surrounded be people, she could be alone with her thoughts and the brilliant purples and blues of the dawn sky.

On her current flight to Tangiers, however, none of this was true. It was a short flight from central England, but she felt every single second scrape slowly past. Rather than being a welcome relief, the inability to work on something, anything, gnawed at her. The sleek, spartan walls of the jet closed around her, as suffocating as a plastic bag over her head. Nervous energy twisted inside her chest, and the drive to focus on something wrestled her consciousness from any relaxation she might have settled into.

Logically she knew that this was guilt, and that she would need to face herself eventually. No matter how justified her actions had been, no matter what good she might have done, she had betrayed the only family she had known for close to thirty years in a way that could never be repaired. She dreaded what Ana and Fareeha would think of her most of all. Ana had been a mother figure to her longer than she had ever known her biological mother. Knowing that they would, in all likelihood, never speak to each other as friends ever again was like losing her family all over again. Perhaps it was even worse this time, because it was due to her own conscious action. She couldn’t even imagine what Zenyatta must be feeling. So soon after losing a brother, he had lost his brightest student because of her.

Regardless, no matter how much she might want and need to fully process what she had done, now was not the time. Widowmaker sat across from her on the cramped jet, and her uncanny presence precluded any feeling of privacy. This was the first time Angela had been alone around Widowmaker, and the presence she commanded was impressive as it was unsettling. Despite her flamboyant mode of dress and unnatural coloration, she melted into the scenery as easily as a chair or potted plant, as if she belonged everywhere she went. The few glances she had spared Angela, it had felt more like the implacable gaze of a statue than of a mere human. Her slow breaths, too, had more in common with the drafty sighs of an old house than any flesh and blood woman. In the last hour she blinked only eight times.

Angela must have looked a little too closely, as Widowmaker’s stoic expression flashed suddenly into one of distaste.

“I can feel you cutting me open with your eyes, docteur. Sizing me up for how you might fix me?” Sneered Widowmaker.

Angela was taken aback, and stumbled to reply before finally saying, “Nothing of the sort. If anything, I was merely marveling at your physiology. But, I’m sorry, it’s inappropriate of me.”

This seemed to put Widowmaker back at ease, and she relaxed almost imperceptibly, with a small, smug smile hinting on her lips. “Good,” she said, “because I am a masterpiece.” She stated with
complete assurance that it was a fact.

“I wanted this. I chose it.” Widowmaker continued, now seeming to be talking to herself more than Angela. Her confidence began to waver, however, and she paused for a moment. “At least, I think I did. It’s hard to remember right now.” She finished, brow furrowing slightly.

Angela looked at Widowmaker with concern, before averting her eyes. Staring seemed to upset her, and what she was about to suggest could easily lose what little trust she may have just gained. Even if this was the first time they had spent any time together, she could tell something was bothering Widowmaker. What, however, she could only guess at for the moment. So she asked the only question she could think of.

“If you’d like, I could see if I could be of assistance with your memory.” Angela offered timidly.

“Non.” Widowmaker replied immediately. Angela was relieved, however, to hear the previous accusatory edge to her voice absent. “I have had enough done to me. Even if the results are exquisite, the work it required was painstaking. I fear that changing it further would be equally... disruptive.”

Widowmaker went silent again for a moment, but it seemed as though she wanted to say something. Angela waited.

“Like Tracer. The way she looks at me is like the gaze of a hungry dog. I cannot fathom why, but it seems as though she wants to not just defeat me, but reshape me, fix me in her image. The rest of the world wants to kill me, and this I am fine with, because I know they will fail. Tracer, however... Tracer wants to unmake me. And that terrifies me... to the extent that I feel fear, at any rate.”

Angela nodded slowly. “I know how hard that can be. Being seen by others for what you can do for them, rather than as a whole person.”

Widowmaker looked back at Angela and raised her eyebrows a fraction of an inch. Angela continued, “To Overwatch I was just as much a tool as my technology was. When they took me in, I was just glad to be putting my expertise to good use. Or, what seemed like a good use at the time. After the rest of the world treated me like a marvelous machine instead of a child, it seemed like Overwatch welcomed me like a family. But, in reality, I was just a different kind of machine to them. If they needed me to be their child, I would be. If someone needed me to be their mother, I could be that to them, too. Everyone had such a clear idea of who they felt I was that it was hard not to think that they were right. It felt so good being rewarded and praised for being their angel, their blessing, that I never stopped to consider if any of this is what I wanted. Everybody knows the name Angela Ziegler, but nobody knows who she is.”

Angela sighed heavily. Widowmaker made no response except for her lips drawing into a tight line. It was becoming clear that for her, these small changes in expression would likely be the equivalent of a grand exclamation in anybody else. Outside the window, the airstrip they were headed for came into view, and the jet began its descent.

With a small smile, Angela looked back at Widowmaker.

“In any case, I think both of our fears will soon be assuaged, Widowmaker. Even if Overwatch can no longer be trusted with my research, there’s no reason it can’t be put to good use. After we retrieve what is stored here, I’ll just need to collect a sample from Gabriel.”

London
Hana had her publicist on her holophone. And he was not happy. *At all.*

“Why can’t you be like all the other movie stars?” Harry asked. “Crash a car or two. Get busted with meth. But no, one of my biggest clients has to skip out on her movie premiere because she joined *Goddamn Overwatch*”

Hana thought to say something at this point, but decided to let Harry burn himself out. She laid herself out on her bunk, and held her holophone over her head.

“I mean… y’know… Hey, good for you, you saved London or whatever…”

“You didn’t watch the news?”

“I… My time is a little bit too valuable, okay? My assistant filled me in. So yay. London saved. That doesn’t help me, does it?”

“Well, it certainly helped London.”

“Don’t change the subject, alright? Hana... Hana, look, you got a lot of skin in a lot of games, here. Hollywood? You got skin there. Endorsements, you got endorsements. Blizzard, Twitch, I mean… I mean you have your own line of tortilla chips coming out. And let’s not forget the massive chunk of change the Korean government is betting on you. You’re the face of the MEKA operation they’re setting up, and… and then you do *this.* Just respect the situation this puts us all in.”

As Hana opened her mouth to reply, an image, unbidden, sauntered into her head. An image of Jeremy Lister lying dead in a pool of his own blood in the streets of King’s Row.

Up until the point that she had seen Jeremy Lister dead in the street, no matter how bad it had gotten in Overwatch, she still viewed her stint in this fledgling organization as an act of personal autonomy. A thing she wanted for herself. All the while, she had still judged her “career” outside of Overwatch of the utmost importance. Even in her rebellion, she still viewed herself as a commodity.

And yet…

She remembered telling Fareeha not too long ago that she wanted to actually see the people she was supposed to be defending. And now she had. She had seen Jeremy Lister.

“No,” Hana said.

A pause before Harry said “What?”

“No, I don’t respect the position all of you are in. It’s not what I signed up for.”

“Hana, what the hell are you—“

“Even though it feels like forever,” Hana said, “it really wasn’t that long ago that I was streaming video games out of my bedroom. But Omnic assault attacked my country. The government started looking for gamers to pilot their MEKAs and I signed up. Because I wanted to defend Korea. I mean… You see something bad happen on the news, and you say to yourself ‘Someone should do something about that.’ But then you realize that you’re someone, and you try to help. Tell me what I got, Harry. Tell me what I got for being someone.”

“I don’t kn—“

“Two ops,” Hana said. “Two ops for the Korean Army. Both under controlled conditions so
nothing bad happened to me. Two one day ops in ten months. The rest of that time, I’ve been in movies, in commercials, touring the world and talking to old-ass politicians and grabby-ass businessmen trying to sell the Korean Army’s merchandise. I signed up to defend my country, and now they’ve spent so much money on me that I can’t defend it. But I can do this. I can serve in Overwatch, and do what I set out to do in the first place.”

Silence on the other end of the line. A long one.

“You can’t just walk away from what you’ve been doing,” Harry finally said. “What you’ve already done. I mean you’re a… you’re a…”

“I’m a soldier,” Hana said. “That’s that. We’re in the middle of something now, but when it’s over, I’ll do what I can on your end. But it’s not the highest priority for me. Overwatch is.”

“Colonel Kim’s gonna be furious,” Harry said.

And at this, Hana had to laugh. Colonel Kim’s rages at Hana in the earliest days of her service seemed, at the time, to be so massive, so volatile, but now? Now they just seemed so far away.

When the laughs subsided, Hana said “The UN vote is in two weeks. On whether or not Overwatch gets official, UN sanctioned reinstatement.”

“What about it?” Harry asked.

“When the vote goes through,” Hana said, “and it will, then the Korean Army answers to Overwatch, and not the other way around. So I really don’t give a shit if Colonel Kim’s mad at me or not.”

And with this, Hana hung up. She knew it was rude, and she knew she had just potentially napolmed almost every last bridge between her and her pre-Overwatch life, but still… Hana reckoned that this must be what adults feel like.

Hana rolled over onto her stomach, and switched her holophone to video playback.

On the night Jack was poisoned, Athena had said that she had one-hundred-seventy-five pieces of video pertaining to Gabriel Reyes, eighty-nine of which contained field exercises. Hana asked for those eighty-nine videos to be transferred to her holophone.

And now she began to study, looking for weaknesses in Reaper’s game.

It didn’t take long for her to find them.

Poring over one particular defeat in a training op, Hana remembered something Jack had said about Reaper during the good ol’ days.

“Everyone has their quirks and faults as a soldier, and his was that he never looked up. Had an exceptional grasp of what was in front of him, behind him, to either side, but never above.”

Jack wasn’t kidding.

Satya Vaswani was tending to a holophone call of her own. And as contentious as Hana’s call with her publicist had been, Satya’s call had been altogether more unpleasant.

Wilhelm and the older Amari woman had let her out of her cell in the brig, along with Jesse and the Bastion unit, as they’d had no idea what else to do with them, and their threat level had apparently
been downgraded. They’d given her her arm back, and after she had reattached it, she had tried to find a secluded place within the King’s Row facility to place a call.

A call to Director Bannerjee.

Rahul Bannerjee was the head of the archtech program at the Vishkar Corporation, and had been since Satya had been taken in at the age of six. Every order that had come down from Vishkar’s Board of Directors, from building plans to clandestine operations on six continents, first came from Director Bannerjee’s lips.

His words to Satya had always been low. And flat. And quiet. In truth, Satya had tried to emulate his tone somewhat in the neverending quest to mask her feelings from those who would use them against her.

But today, his words were loud. His face scrunched in the same way most people’s were when they were yelling.

“This… is… completely unacceptable!”

Satya felt shocked. She’d never heard him speak like this, and she’d had to wait until the twelfth second to compose herself and keep her face straight before she could speak.

Ten… Eleven… Blink.

“To what do you refer?” Satya asked.

“To what do—You were captured, you fool!”

Satya had to search his face for some manner of tell that this was a trick of some kind. But such endeavors failed Satya even in the best of times, and the current moment was clearly not among their number.

“You mean,” Satya said, “that this was not among your projections?”

Director Bannerjee let a slow sigh hiss through his teeth. “Twenty-two years, Satya. For twenty-two years, you have been a part of Vishkar, from your childhood in the program to two nights ago. In your head, you have knowledge of Vishkar’s inner workings. History that must not be made known, and plans for the future that must now be changed because of your carelessness!”

The feeling settling over Satya now was one of confusion. Which was her least favorite emotion. She had always felt that others were hiding things from her, and confusion was an involuntary way of admitting it to herself.

“Director Bannerjee, did you expect me to die rather than be captured?”

He rolled his eyes. “It was expected, Miss Vaswani, both by myself and the board, that you were to do your job! Although any outcome was preferable to the one we find ourselves in. You had a one-hundred percent clearance rate. Both you and I know that capture by an organization that will make the existence of Vishkar much more difficult was to be avoided at all costs. Already, there’s talk of Overwatch being reinstated by the UN, dear God…”

The confusion intensified.

“What do you mean I had a one-hundred percent clearance rate?” Satya asked.
“Do you honestly think you’re still a part of Vishkar after this?” Director Bannerjee asked. “The official line is that you are a disgruntled ex-employee who joined Reaper’s terrorist cell. Your passwords have been revoked and your accounts have been frozen. Requests for documents on your status will be forged in a way that suits us best, and distributed to all who ask. You… you idiotic girl… you’re out in the cold.”

Satya heard the words coming out of his mouth, and knew their ramifications were severe, but did not comprehend their extent. Confusion threatened to engulf her, and she said the words that usually got her out of situations of such an infuriating lack of clarity.

“Your instructions?”

Director Bannerjee sighed again. “Satya… I really don’t care.”

And then he hung up.

Ten… Eleven… Blink.

Satya lowered her hand and, with a creeping dread, finally realized with the full extent of her mind and her heart what had just happened. How alone she was in the world. How adrift. Icy oceans swirled within her, threatening to drown her form the inside. If she was to be honest with herself, the future had never occurred to Satya Vaswani. The rote repetition of her daily tasks and the certainty of orders from an organization that would no doubt outlive her eliminated the need for planning, but now there was nothing in every direction around her, as far as she could ever hope to see.

And was this turmoil soured her insides and set her mind to an icy blaze, the expression on her face did not change. Not one bit. And the only stimuli from the exterior world that pierced her interior miasma was…

“Bum-tiss, bum-tiss, bum-tiss, bum-tiss, bum-tiss...”

It was coming from the room next to her. She turned the corner and peered inside.

This room was the kitchen. And a rather short man with blonde dreadlocks and a well-groomed scruff of facial hair on his chin was shaking his backside to the noise that he himself was making. He was standing in front of a toaster on the counter, and that toaster ejected two slices of whole grain toast from its slot.

This pleased the short man for he said “Makin’ tooooooast!” in a sing-songy voice before putting the toast on a plate and reaching for a butter knife and an empty jar of peanut butter. Satya watched this oddity slather his toast with peanut butter before grabbing the plate and turning, catching sight of her.

“Oh, hey!” the man said. “Want some toast?”

It was the man who had saved Aleksandra’s life two nights ago.

“No,” Satya said.

“Suit yourself,” he said, and sat down at a small table. “Come on in. I don’t bite.”

Satya’s world had just ended with a call to Director Bannerjee, and now here was this bizarre, and strangely familiar man offering her a seat and conversation. Satya didn’t have a sense for whether this man was friendly or not, but she took it as a sign anyway.

Before she sat across from him, the man asked “Did you take the deal yet?”
“What deal?” she asked.

“The McCree Deal,” the man said. “The big lady with the pink hair? She took the deal. Immunity in exchange for service. I guess I have to call her Agent Z... Zuh...”

“Zaryanova,” Satya said, and felt a little bit warmer for having done so.

“That’s the one,” he said. “Ana said she was gonna offer it to you. She must not have gotten around to it yet. But she will.”

The man took a bite, and Satya finally recognized who he was.

“You are Lucio Correia dos Santos,” she said.

“Yup,” the man said after he swallowed. “And you’re the girl who works for Vishkar.”

Just hearing that hurt, but her face didn’t show it. “I... have been relieved of my duties.”

“Ohhhh,” Lucio said. “That must suck. How long were you with them?”

“Vishkar took me in when I was six years old,” she said.

“Wow... And how old are you now?”

“Twenty-eight.”

Lucio seemed to have forgotten the slice of toast in his hand. “Man,” he said. “That long? You must not know what to do with yourself. That must be terrible.”

Satya didn’t feel quite at ease with Lucio to the extent that’s he would divulge her emotions. She remembered why he seemed so familiar.

“You were the one who brought the Vishkar operation in Rio de Janeiro to a halt.”

Lucio swallowed a mouthful of toast. “I just freed my people and stole stuff. That Sonic Amplifier that I used to heal Agent Zedidiah with?”

“Zaryanova.”

“Her, too. I got that out of a Vishkar encampment in the favelas. I remember firing it at the last Vishkar dropship leaving the futbol stadium. The last one in Rio. I knew it wasn’t gonna hit anything, I just felt like doing it.”

“Ten... Eleven... Blink.”

“I understand that the people of Rio de Janeiro took a dim view of our business in the city,” Satya said.

“You understand correctly.”

“And yet you offer me a seat at your table. I have observed that human beings usually do not function that way.”

Lucio shrugged. “They don’t. But I learned that some things you have to let go of immediately, like
a hot pan on a stove, or something. I can’t speak for everyone else, but to me, holding onto to something like that looks an awful lot like signing up to be miserable. Any real grudge I had against Vishkar ended when I fired at that dropship.”

Lucio extended his hand in front of him and mimed the pulling of a trigger.

“Just like that,” he said. “I was oppressed…” he squeezed the imaginary trigger again. “And now I am free. And then I gotta figure out what else to do with my time.”

Lucio lowered his hand, and Satya rolled that around in her head.

“It’s that simple?” she asked.

“I’m not saying it’s like that for everyone,” he said. “But… I got famous for helping out. Got on the news. A record company bought my demo and I became a millionaire overnight. Me. A millionaire. After I spent most of my life hungry and broke. And now that I don’t have to worry about the things that took up most of my life, I get to find out who I really am. I gotta go deeper. Like for instance? I dig ‘em old.”

Satya wasn’t sure she heard that correctly. “You… dig them old?”

Lucio nodded. “Women, I mean. And I don’t mean forty or fifty, either, I mean granny old. Which is… y’know… It’s interesting.”

“And this is a blanket assessment?”

“Well, one woman in particular, but you get the idea. I learned that about myself. And I may not have learned that if I spent time feeling sorry for myself about how bad I used to have it. I mean, look at you.”

“I’m not that old,” Satya said.

Lucio smiled. “I… yeah. But you spent twenty-two years with Vishkar, and now you’re not with ‘em anymore. And now that all that real estate in your mind is vacant, you gotta fill it with something else. You have to learn about what makes you, you. The stuff you like. And that’s gotta be a little bit exciting, right?”

A flash of pink hair and climbable biceps snaked its way through Satya’s brain.

Ten… Eleven… Blink.

This conversation had been a great deal more rewarding that she had initially figured. She wasn’t about to tell him that, but that didn’t mean she was any less grateful.

Satya had sat for a while, listening to Lucio eat his toast, when Winston came in over the loud speaker.

“All personnel, please report to the conference room,” he said. “We’re getting a transmission… from Mercy.”

Everyone was in the conference room by the time Hana arrived. For the mass of humanity in the room (bar, of course, Zenyatta, Bastion, and Winston), the room seemed oddly cool. As though blood itself refused to flow within their veins.
As the screen flickered to life, and Angela’s familiar face lit up the far wall of the conference room, a heavy, oppressive air fell over the room. The combined feelings of all those in the room created a palpable tension. And the only sound in the room, putting everyone on edge, was the absent-minded cracking of Fareeha's knuckles.

Her nostrils flared in spite of her. Seeing Angela's face flipped one of Fareeha Amari's many interior switches, and not the one she would have immediately assumed. She had poured an entire adult life’s worth of emotion into Angela Ziegler, and while her opinion of the Swiss doctor had fallen, she at least held fast to the notion that Angela's emotion toward her had been real. That her own emotion had not been misplaced.

But finally seeing her again, after she left Fareeha helpless on a concrete floor with her friend dying just a few feet away, an emotion she’d had little experience with sprouted from an assumed-dormant seedling deep within her chest.

This? This was rage.

It was small, and it was surprising, and Fareeha tried to bury it as quickly and as deeply as she could... but it was there.

Finally, the image of Angela began to speak. “I believe I owe you all an explanation.” She said.

“Now there’s an understatement if I ever heard one!” Spat Torbjorn.

Ana rolled her eye and nudged him with her elbow. “It’s a pre-recorded video, she can’t hear you, you know.” She said.

The image of Angela spoke again. “To begin with, I was not informed about the plan to use an EMP. I only agreed to the bombing of the mainframe so that it could not be used again. As such…”

Angela’s words died in her throat, and she clamped her eyes shut. After composing herself for a moment, she continued.

“As such, I feel that what… Happened, was perhaps the best-case scenario. Only thirty-four lives were lost, instead of thousands. I am not proud of what I did. Genji trusted me, and didn’t deserve to die.” She let that statement hang heavily in the air for a moment, staring pointedly into the camera.

“But, that said, I do not regret my actions. My technology has changed the world. It has been put to use not just in hospitals, but integrated, as you know, into dance music, Omnic mysticism, and portable rapid-action first aid stations. Through applications like these, the common man has more power than ever to help one another, to uplift each other from sickness and violence! But Overwatch never respected my desires and intentions for this technology. My crowning achievement was curing death. Something no physician or scientist has ever hoped to accomplish, no matter how many have tried throughout history! And yet how was this put to use? By being jealously guarded in the form of the Respawn Matrix. What could have been a vehicle for peace was perverted to allow you a blank check for destruction.”

“Philosophical points aside, though,” she said, "the simple fact is that none of you respected me, not just in the form of my work, but as a person. I am the world’s greatest medical prodigy! All of you would be dead if it weren’t for me. And yet to you I seem to be merely a convenient caretaker, or eye-candy to moon over. Where is my credit? Where is my name in the story of Overwatch? Where have you all been for the last two decades of the international press dragging my name through the mud, because people find it easier to believe I am some kind of—I don’t know, evil Witch or immortal Vampire than merely a woman who wants to do good. More thought has been wasted on
the subject of my *thighs* than has ever been said about my work.”

The image of Angela grimaced and averted her eyes. She shook her head slightly, as if to dismiss the train of thought.

“Whether or not you will bring justice to the world with a second try will be seen. But as I have been so disrespected in the past, you will do so without me, and without any further assistance from my research and prototypes. To this end, I have been traveling to each Watchpoint, and destroying all of my materials that have been stored there. This brings me to the point of this message.”

“Fareeha,” the image of Angela said, and Fareeha’s blood ran cold. “What was it you said recently? That combat should be a ‘pure distillation of moral conflict’? If you wish to bring me in to face justice, I am giving you one chance to put your ideal to the test. In twelve hours, the King’s Row facility will receive a set of GPS coordinates. Twenty-four hours after that, Fareeha, I will expect you at those coordinates to settle any differences between us once and for all. And Lena Oxton? Hana Song? Widowmaker and Reaper expect you there as well.”

Angela’s face had metamorphosed into a mad, wide-eyed glare so gradually over the course of the transmission that no one had noticed it until just now. She seemed to be searching for a high note on which to end this tirade, and it appeared she had found it.

"For the future? No price is too great. For me... or for you."

And with that, the transmission cut out.

All in attendance sat quietly for a moment until, wordlessly, they all began to file out.

What caught Hana’s attention was Zarya. From what Hana could see, while everyone else was looking at the transmission, Zarya had had her eyes squarely on Fareeha. She still had them on her, even as she noticed Hana coming toward her.

"That girl," Zarya said, "is built like an ox."

"That must mean a lot coming from you," Hana said.

Zarya nodded faintly, eyes still on Fareeha.

"And the day she realizes it... we’re all *doomed.*"
Chapter 19: At Midnight in Some Flaming Town

London

The sight of Angela’s face contorting into madness, the voice of the woman she had spent her entire adult life loving keening with accusation and resentment, was too much for Fareeha to bear.

Blood pounding in her ears, Fareeha broke off from the rest of the team after she had left the conference room, going down a narrow hallway into what had used to be the King’s Row facility’s daycare center. The teacher’s desk was still there, but nothing else remained.

She leaned on the desk, using her arms to rock her body back and forth in weak, half-hearted push-ups to physically quiet what felt like a swarm of angry bees in her head.

So intent was she on the furor in her mind and the uproar in her heart, that the opening of the classroom door behind her made her jump.

Ana closed the door behind her, and turned to her daughter.

Fareeha looked at Ana, mindful of what felt like that gallon of sweat on her face, when Ana spoke.

“When I was, oh… fifteen, I’d say? Your grandmother told me ‘Ana, you are a beautiful woman. And as a beautiful woman, you must never, ever, ever date an ugly man.’”

Fareeha simply stared at her mother with what could generously be called ‘incomprehension.’

“Because when a beautiful woman dates an ugly man,” Ana continued, “then that ugly man is elevated within his own mind. He will question or even deny the unflattering things he has told himself, even if those unflattering things have the benefit of being true. And that ugly man will cheat. Because up is down, black is white, and he has no idea what he’s capable of.”

“Odd,” Fareeha said. “I remember a conversation you and I had when I was fifteen where I stated in no uncertain terms that I wouldn’t be dating any men, ugly or otherwise.”

Ana rubbed the side of her nose before she folded her arms in front of her.

“God help us,” Ana said. “Angela Ziegler hit her rebellious teenager phase when she was pushing forty and holding a gun. It’s… unfortunate.”

“That’s a word for it,” Fareeha said. “I have a few myself. None of which I can say on television.”

Ana looked Fareeha in the eye. This was not the soft, motherly gaze that she was familiar with, or the petrifying death glare that it seemed she was even more familiar with. This look, if Fareeha had to come up with a word on the spot, was “sobering.”

“Fareeha,” Ana said. “You know what must be done.”

Well, Fareeha knew what her mother meant, at any rate. Whether it must be done was an entirely different matter. Just glancing her mind off the thought made her feel sick.

“No,” Fareeha said. “Mother, no!”
“I know you lo—“

“I am not going to kill her,” Fareeha said. “I know what she did must hurt you as much as it hurt me, but you want revenge. I want justice!”

The sobering look on Ana’s face gave way to the death glare. The older Amari advanced on the younger, putting her hands on Fareeha’s shoulders.

“I don’t have the luxury of falling back on ideals, Fareeha! Nor am I so low to send you to fight on my hurt feelings! The fact is, three days ago, Angela was like a daughter to me and she was the woman you loved. Today, she challenged you to a fight to the death! You, me, all of us were so blinded by our expectations of the smartest person we’d ever known that we treated her like who we thought she was, and not how she wanted to be treated. Now? Now I know that I’ve never even met the real Angela Ziegler. Neither have you. But the thing that really scares me? Neither has she!”

Ana rubbed her face as she turned around, like she was thinking of something else to say, but she turned back around immediately.

“Do not think, for one single moment, that you will ever be too old, too experienced, too muscle-bound that I won’t protect you to my dying breath! Because…”

And with this, Ana Amari seemed to deflate. Seemed to shrink.

She seemed her age, which terrified Fareeha on a level she did not want to reckon with.

“Fareeha, you… are the most wonderful kind of fool. You honestly think there’s good in everyone. And I’ve tried to encourage you because it’s mostly true. But we don’t get to choose when people are good, and we can’t change the minds of people trying to deny that goodness within themselves. Angela murdered Genji and convinced herself that she was right for doing it, don’t you see that? And because she thinks she’s right, she’s going to do something worse. Because up is down, black is white, and she has no idea what she’s capable of. You will try to incapacitate her. You will try to bring her in alive… and you’ll die for it.”

Silence passed. The buzz in her mind had returned, and it had gotten louder. All Fareeha could muster was…

“Mother… you’re wrong.”

Ana didn’t seem convinced by that.

Neither did Fareeha.

“I know you,” Ana said. “Eight years away, and I still know you. You’re a soldier, and you’ve left me no choice… Stand at attention.”

Fareeha stood ramrod straight instinctively upon hearing the words, her heels clicking together as she did so. She knew what was coming.

Mother, don’t do this.

“Captain Amari,” Ana said. “As the acting Strike Commander of Overwatch, I order you to put Angela Ziegler in the ground.”
Eleven and a half hours later, true to Angela Ziegler’s word, the coordinates came in. They had been transmitted from an encrypted channel to Athena herself, who woke Winston in the dead of night to deliver them.

The coordinates corresponded to a location in Germany.

_Eichenwalde_…

“I want to you to know how proud I am of you,” Ana said.

Hana said “Okay,” in response, noticing how rehearsed the Captain sounded. As though she’d practiced this in the mirror the night before.

They were in the hangar bay at the moment, as Ana had called her here right after she’d eaten breakfast. They were standing between the two dropships, next to the lockers. Three others were also there, standing off to the side as though they were waiting to get their drivers licenses renewed. On the right was Brigitte, on the left was Zenyatta, and in the middle of them was Zarya. Zarya spent her time trying to give Brigitte approving looks at her backside while she wasn’t looking and glaring at Zenyatta without caring if he was looking or not.

“You showed forethought and initiative,” Ana said. “You kept a level head. And we won.”

Ana put a hand on Hana's shoulder and squeezed... and Hana almost tapped out in pain. She knew Ana was trying to be supportive, but she had _ungodly_ Old Lady Strength.

“Yeah…” Hana said. “We kinda didn’t, though.”

Hana remembered that, thanks to the coins in her pocket, that one of the last things Genji Shimada did on Earth was get his high score on _Lost Vikings VI_ back. So… there was that, at least.

Ana put her hands on her hips. “We stopped Reaper from destroying London and murdering thousands, and we did that because of you. Angela’s… betrayal… does not diminish your effectiveness as a soldier. I do not hesitate to say that I am proud to serve with you, and, should you wish it, there is a spot for you high within the ranks of Overwatch after the UN vote.”

“Provided the vote goes through.”

“Of course.”

“Provided I want to.”

“Of course.”

“Provided I live past tonight.”

Ana sighed. “Do I have to remind you that you are under no obligation to fight Reaper at Eichenwalde?”

Hana raised her eyebrows. “And let Fareeha and Lena go off alone? They’ll be bored to tears.”

Ana smiled.

“And they’ll bump into stuff… Fall on their asses… Start crying… We just can’t have that.”

Ana smiled wider. “Good. There are some things you should know.”
“Like what?” Hana asked.

“For that,” Ana said, “I brought these three. Brigitte, if you wouldn’t mind going first?”

Brigitte broke off from the other two and stepped forward. She folded her hands in front of her, and seemed to almost struggle with looking Hana in the eye.

“I have bad news,” Brigitte said.

Hana looked at her out of the corner of her eye. “How bad?”

“The worm that Angela worked into the subroutine that destroyed the locks on both your MEKA and Fareeha’s armor,” Brigitte said. “Luckily, we managed to clear it in the Raptora in two hours with a simple manufacturer’s reset.”

“And how long will it take to, uh… de-worm my MEKA?”

A flush came to Brigitte’s cheeks. “It’s really not that simple,” she said. “The routines of the MEKA are tied to your bio-signature. That’s why each MEKA can home in on your location from the Korean satellite in space. Each MEKA is capable of modification by the pilot, sure, but getting something that deep out of the MEKA’s programming quickly requires assistance from the Korean government, and access to their servers, and being as Overwatch isn’t officially reinstated yet, that assistance would most likely be illegal for everyone on both sides.”

Hana remembered her talk with Harry the day before. That, and the Korean government is pissed at me right now.

“Okay,” Hana said, “how long would it take to get the worm out without access to Korean servers?”

“Going through the code line by line,” Brigitte said, “will take six days.”

Hana could almost feel herself going pale. “Six days? I have to be at Eichenwalde in…”

“Nineteen hours and forty-two minutes,” Zenyatta said, under the impression that he was being helpful.

“Yeah,” Hana said. “You’re telling me I have to fight the unkillable smoke-douche with nothing but a pistol?”

“Aren’t you trained in any other weapons?” Ana asked.

“No,” Hana said. “I’m a MEKA pilot. The Korean Army was under the impression that any further weapons training was a waste of time.”

Ana glowered. “But shooting a terrible movie wasn’t? I must have a talk with your Colonel Kim.”

“Is there anything I can do with the MEKA?” Hana asked Brigitte. “Anything at all?”

“Well… you can call it…”

Hana didn’t even have the energy to respond to that. She had no idea what she was going to do with a giant pink titanium paper weight, but it was better than nothing.

“Thank you,” Hana finally said. “I’m sure you tried your best.”

Brigitte nodded, and got back into line.
“In light of this unpleasant news,” Ana said, “I put feelers out amongst the rest of the crew for ways they might help you. And these two came forward with a couple of good ones. Agent Zaryanova, if you will?”

Zarya stepped forward. Even a couple of feet away, Hana had to look up to meet her gaze.

“Miss Song.”

“Your largeness.”

Zarya handed Hana a small white module with a little blue button on the side.

“Press it,” Zarya said.

Hana did so, and she was immediately enveloped in a bubble of pinkish, purplish energy.

“Ohhhhhh,” Hana said. “This is that shield thing you have.”

“Indeed,” Zarya said. “It usually goes on my particle cannon, but it is removable. It only lasts a couple of seconds on me, but it will work quite a bit longer on you.”

As the barrier dissipated, Hana asked “Why does it work better on me?”

“Because you are tiny, and I am not,” Zarya said. “It can withstand anything. Even hostile nanotech.”

Hana grinned. “So if Reaper turns into smoke and tries to eat me…”

“Then it will be almost as effective as if he tried to throw a blanket at you,” Zarya said. “Not only that, but if you sync it to that little pistol of yours, any damage done to the barrier will make your weapons fire stronger.”

“Good to know,” Hana said, feeling relief. “Thank you.”

“Where did you get your particle cannon?” Ana asked Zarya.

“From an APC,” Zarya said. “I tore it off with my bare hands.”

“Alright,” Ana said. “But who made the cannon?”

Zarya looked as though she was about to say something, before she said. “I haven’t the faintest idea.”

“Uh-huh,” Ana said, as though she knew the answer Zarya was trying to hide. She walked back to her place between Brigitte and Zenyatta, glaring at the latter.

“I’m watching you Omnic,” Zarya said to Zenyatta.

Hana knew that Zenyatta didn’t have lips, but nonetheless, she imagined Zenyatta smiling when he said “And I will watch your back as well.”

He floated toward Hana and said “Holophone, please.”

Hana looked from Zenyatta, to her wrist, and back again, before turning her holophone on and extending it to him. He held his hands out before him, and made rings with his thumbs and forefingers. As the orbs around his necks started spinning, a holographic display popped up between
his hands, the most prominent of which being a loading bar. When it hit a hundred percent, the holographic display disappeared, and Zenyatta lowered his hands.

“Done,” he said.

“What is?” Hana asked.

“You are to go to Eichenwalde,” Zenyatta said. “It is a place of remembrance for Omnic and human alike, for a great many of both were killed there. A German paramilitary group called The Crusaders attempted to outflank Omnic forces as they marched toward Stuttgart in Germany. The Crusaders succeeded, but no one survived. Reinhardt is a Crusader, and he may tell you more, but Eichenwalde is a holy place to the Shambali, even though the German government will not permit Omnics to go there. I need you to know that what I have just done was not done lightly.”

“Okay,” Hana said. “What have you not-lightly done?”

“The corpses of a great many Omnic Bastion units litter Eichenwalde’s streets,” Zenyatta said. “And their weapon’s systems… are still functional. What I have just given you will allow you to control them with your holophone.”

Hana looked down at her holophone, trying not to look like she had just gotten the bossest of all boss Christmas presents! Imagining the two of them in the opposite situation, with Hana giving Zenyatta a magical way to control a bunch of severed human hands and feet helped with that a lot.

“You can just do that?” Hana asked.

“I got the protocols from Bastion,” Zenyatta said. “She’s in the training room right now, waiting to help you test it out.”

Hana looked at Ana with a big smile on her face.

“Can I go play with the giant robot?” she asked. “Pleeeeeease?”

Satya waited outside the hangar bay. Zenyatta left first, with Hana in tow. Brigitte came next, along with Ana.

And then Aleksandra…

_Ten… Eleven… Blink._

As Satya fell in line behind Aleksandra, Satya’s heels clicked on the linoleum of the hallway floor, echoing throughout the corridor like pebbles falling form a cliff face to the rocks below.

She knew she needed to talk to her, and in fact had contemplated rehearsing something the following evening, but the inner maelstrom of being cut adrift by Vishkar had not yet abated. And for some reason, a reason that she could not even articulate in a simple haze of emotions within her own heart, she knew that the real Satya Vaswani had to come out eventually. Indeed, now that she had no one, there wasn’t a soul in the world for whom to pretend.

“I can hear you,” Aleksandra said. “I know you’re behind me. I’m waiting for you to say something.”

“May we talk, please?” Satya asked.

“Isn’t that what we’re doing?”
“May we stop and face each other while we do so?”

Aleksandra obliged. She stopped, turned, and looked down at Satya like a friendly giant.

Like a friendly, climbable, sexy—STOP THAT, THIS IS IMPORTANT!

“Yes?” Aleksandra asked. Satya didn’t know how long she had stood there in silence, just staring at her. People had definitions for awkwardness that Satya had always failed to comprehend.

And now that she was here, doing what she had wanted to do since her talk with Lucio the day before, she had no idea what to say.

Ten… Eleven… Blink.

“I have nothing,” Satya finally said. It slipped through the guard towers in her head and emerged on the other side of her mouth. And now that she said it… she had to deal with it.

“You… have nothing?” Aleksandra asked.

So I talk about what that means, Satya thought. Conversations with pretty girls as mathematical equation. This is easy!

“Vishkar has cut me loose,” Satya said. “It was all I’ve known for my adult life, and now that it’s gone… I don’t know what to do.”

“I am sorry,” Aleksandra said, and though Satya had a hard time reading the facial expressions of others, something… something about Aleksandra impressed upon her the idea that she actually meant it.

I was wrong, Satya thought. Talking to pretty girls isn’t easy at all!

And face with the wall of solid nothing erected instantaneously between her brain and her mouth, there was only one thing she could say. The one thought that had plagued her since she had met Aleksandra Zaryanova had to come straight with no filter. Satya knew that saying it meant that had to finally be real with another human being for the first time in her adult life.

And the prettiest, strongest woman that Satya Vaswani was going to think she was weird.

“Why are you… you?” Satya asked.

Aleksandra blinked. “Why am I… huh?”

Ten… Eleven… Why am I doing this? It’s too late for this now.

And so, Satya didn’t blink. She held to thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, before she blinked again. Just to show herself who was boss.

“I was supposed to run,” Satya said, surprising herself with how loud she had gotten. It wasn’t much louder, but she had been careful about such things for over twenty years.

“I was supposed to run,” Satya said again. “I knew the King’s Row operation had failed. I knew there was no hope of success, and I was supposed to run to preserve myself. To preserve the corporate secrets I hold. But I stayed. I surrendered. And I did it in exchange for your safety. Because you would have bled out on a dirty street in a foreign land, and I couldn’t allow that to happen.”
Aleksandra was quiet for a time, before she said “Thank you.”

Satya forgot to say “You’re welcome.”

“But… you’re complicit in this.”

Aleksandra blinked again. “You will have to explain that to me.”

“You did this on purpose,” Satya said. “You knew this would happen. You had to. It’s the only way that this makes sense…. No, no, it doesn’t make sense at all. And you haven’t answered my question. Why are you you?”

“That’s not an easy question to answer.”

“It has to be!” Satya said, and it had only been after she had said it that she realized it came out in a shout. She folded her arms before continuing.

“There is an order to things,” Satya said. “A strict and linear progression of events that made you into the you-shaped person that you are. What is it about you that made me forget what it was about me?”

Aleksandra just shrugged the shoulders that Satya took the time to notice were massive and round and silky before she said “I… don’t know. I’m just me. You’re just you. I think you just found out how much you’re you a couple of nights ago. So… It’s news to both of us. I’d like to find that out along with you, if you’ll let me. You’re a beautiful woman who seems to like me a great deal. And I like you just as much. Anything that you and I do together sounds like a lot of fun. And I like having fun with beautiful women.”

And Satya had started out trying to divine the meaning of her words, before she realized that they were made so simple that no divination was required.

Aleksandra Zaryanova was now a thing in her life. A thing that could lead to other things. And Aleksandra seemed fine with that. More than willing to like Satya for Satya in a way that she could understand.

Satya had revealed her thoughts to another person and wasn’t rejected out of hand. And the thought, worrying and liberating at the same time, was that she had nothing to worry about right now.

And she was curious how much further she could take this.

“May I hold your hand?” Satya asked.

“You may.”

“Oh… Good… May I kiss you?”

“Which one would you like to do first?”

“The, um… the second one.”

Aleksandra smiled. And Satya could tell it was a smile.

She bent down, and brought her forearm behind Satya’s backside. She lifted her up to eye-level.

And they kissed, their lips neatly overlapping each others’, little whiffs of their breath getting into each others’ mouths.
Satya ran her nose along Aleksandra’s jawline before she brought her lips to Aleksandra’s ear.

“I don’t dig them old,” Satya said.

“What?”

“I dig them big… Does that mean I’m weird?”

For the first time in her life, Satya Vaswani could hear the smile in another person’s voice when Aleksandra Zaryanova said.

“It means you’re not blind.”

And Satya smiled. It was the first time she’d done that in the presence of another human being in over two decades.

Aleksandra set Satya back down, and Satya scratched behind her ear.

“I fear I have broken a protocol of some kind,” she said. “You’re supposed to kiss after an arbitrary number of dates, and we’ve yet to have one.”

“Well,” Aleksandra said. “I know where the kitchen is. We can eat something, and… that’s a date.”

“Excellent,” Satya said. “Can we kiss again afterwards?”

“I don’t see why not,” Aleksandra said. “Do you still want to hold my hand?”

“Yes, please.”

Aleksandra held out her hand, and Satya took it as they began to walk to the kitchen.

Satya’s hand slid down to grip the smooth and rigid thickness of Aleksandra’s fore and middle fingers.

This made Satya light-headed, for some strange reason…

The day progressed, with each member of Overwatch either clustered with someone else, or in solitude with their thoughts, or their dreams, or their fears.

And no one slept.

Five hours out from the rendezvous time in Eichenwalde, everyone found themselves in the hangar bay.

While many were in a state of abstraction or denial about the permanence of what was to come, one that was not was Bastion. She had made a point to weave among the throng in the middle of the hangar bay to hand cookies to Hana, Fareeha, and Lena.

Lena, sat on the bench between the lockers, contemplating the cookie in one hand, and picture of Emily on her holophone in the other.

She hadn’t called Emily to tell her about Eichenwalde and what was going to take place there. About a fight to the potential death with her opposite number, Widowmaker, from the other side of The Iris. About how her success or failure would be cataclysmic, even if, for no other reason, than for the colossal peace of mind that it would provide.
And how could she? Lena knew, on the basest level where one understands such things, that she had to do this on their own. There were some who would not, could not understand that, and she knew that Emily was one of them. And if she were in a position to ask forgiveness by the time this night was out, she would do so. But for now, she was on her own.

“Do you need a pep talk?” Ana asked her as she was passing by. “I’ve been giving those out recently.”

“What?” Lena asked. “No, I’m—I’m fine.”

Suit yourself, she said, and walked further away.

Ana caught a glimpse of Fareeha out of the corner of her eye. She was still in her leggings and compression half-shirt, not even in the Raptora yet. She was talking to Reinhardt and Torbjorn about something that Ana couldn’t hear.

The gravity of the last conversation that they had had was still palpable. Mother looked at daughter, and both nodded from across the room.

And that was enough.

There was fear in the heart of Ana Amari. A fear that could weaken her if she said it aloud, or even looked at it any closer than the healthy distance at which she had placed it in her mind’s eye.

She watched Jesse and Mei holding hands as they walked up to Lena. And further away, she saw Zarya and Satya leaning against a wall away from everyone else, also holding hands.

*The young, and their distractions…*

And then, as though her mere thinking of the words “young” and “distraction” had summoned both from the ether in one package, Lucio wondered past between Lena and Hana.

Ana glided past him, not even slowing down when she whispered in his ear…

“My room. One hour.”

…and she was gone before she saw how pale Lucio had become.

And over near the corner, Hana and Jack spoke.

“Why are you wearing your body suit,” Jack asked. “Your MEKA doesn’t work.”

“I’m not fighting evil in my new jeans,” Hana said. “I just bought those. These body suits I get for free.”

“You could have trained with me,” Jack said.

“I know.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“Because,” Hana said, “if Reaper wants to fight me, he’s gonna fight me. He’s not gonna fight an extension of you.”

Jack smiled. “So you have a plan, then.”
“Yup.”
“Mind telling me what it is?”
“Yup.”
“Why?”
“Well,” Hana said, “it’s a stupid plan, and I don’t want you talking me out of it.”
“Oh, those are the best plans, aren’t they?”
Jack smiled. And then Hana smiled. And then they both got quiet.
He looked around and said “You can feel it, y’know?”
Hana tried looking around, too. “Feel what?”
“I mean, maybe you can’t, but among us old timers? See, Reinhardt won’t say anything because optimism runs in his veins. And Ana won’t say anything because if she’s gonna suffer, she’s gonna do it in silence, but…”
Jack trailed off, still looking around, before he leveled his gaze once again on Hana.
“Even if that vote goes through,” Jack said. “Even in Overwatch comes back… if this fight the three of you had goes south, there won’t be anyone to stock Overwatch with. Lena’s kind of our mascot. Fareeha is Ana’s daughter. You’re my protégé, or whatever. And… the game won’t be in us anymore. I’m too goddamn old to keep losing people so goddamn young. So… come back.”
Hana thought this was the opposite of the no pressure speech, and she didn’t know what to say. Deflecting emotion with humor was a clichéd response… but clichés were there for a reason.
“Protégé?” Hana asked. “I’m your friend, you asshole.”
As the time to leave drew nearer, everyone said their see-you laters. No one said their goodbyes.
And as the door to the dropship closed on Hana, Lena, and Fareeha, all agents of Overwatch (save for Satya and Zarya, who were new, and still off in the corner), stood in the middle of the hangar bay, and saluted.

Somewhere over Denmark

Fareeha, Hana, and Lena didn’t say anything to each other until they were over Denmark.
It was there that Lena, overcome by hunger, started to eat the cookie that Bastion had given her. And she was not quiet about it. She was still chewing her last mouthful before she turned to Hana.
“Do you still have the biscuit that Bastion gave you?”
Hana had just set it down on the table, so she got up and got it for Lena.
“Didn’t she just get those out of the kitchen?” Hana asked.
“I’m not complaining,” Lena said. “My girlfriend’s a dietician. I don’t get to eat biscuits all that often.”
Hana looked Lena’s complete slenderness up and down before she said “She’s a dietician? It appears to be working.”

“If anything, she’s trying to fatten me up.” Lena said. “I spend most of my days running. Running burns calories. Emily gives me these energy bars, but…”

“What do they taste like?” Hana asked.

“Papier-mache,” Lena said. “With a hint of blueberry.”

Lena’s eyes caught Fareeha’s over in the corner. Standing there, staring into the middle distance.

“This must have hit you hard, Fareeha,” Lena said. “But… But if it makes you feel any better, there would have been some, y’know, points of contention between you and Angela. I mean take religion. You’re Muslim… and she’s an arsehole.”

Fareeha looked at Lena. Lena wanted that to be a joke, but even if Fareeha did get it, it’s clear she thought it wasn’t funny. Lena went back to eating her cookie.

For Fareeha’s part, she started to stare at her lap. Two days prior, she felt within her a tiny seedling of rage at Angela Ziegler. Fareeha Amari had been angry before, but anger was beautiful. Anger purified. Anger was useful.

But rage? Rage was almost completely foreign to her. Anger wanted to build, but rage wanted to consume. It wanted to destroy. It wanted to shed blood and break bones.

The coming confrontation between herself and Angela was not something so quaint and prosaic and defeating a villain. That was there, yes, but it was more than that. What Angela had done worked its way into Fareeha’s very bones. Angela Ziegler had killed a friend right in front of her. Angela Ziegler made her feel helpless. Angela Ziegler had either been numb to Fareeha’s feelings, or knew they were there and had discarded them entirely.

Angela Ziegler made her cry.

And that seedling of rage, which could have just as easily guttered itself out, had instead grown hotter, and was threatening to spread.

Fareeha Amari tried to figure out what to do with that as the first drops of rain hit the roof of the dropship.

---

**Eichenwalde**

The dropship set down in the woods on the outskirts of the village of Eichenwalde, where Omnic and Crusader alike met their deaths in a bloody battle years before. Pharah made her exit first, followed by D. Va and Tracer.

“I wouldn’t have put product in my hair if I knew it was going to rain this bad,” Tracer said as she rubbed rainwater off of her visor.

Immediately after she said that, a blue flare fired into the rainy sky from deep within the village

“That’s Mercy,” Pharah said.

“How do you know?” D. Va asked.
As though in response, pink and yellow flares rose into the night from different parts of the village, indicating where Reaper and Widowmaker would be respectively. D. Va, Pharah, and Tracer looked at each other…and said nothing.

They didn’t know what to say. They had each known that this could be their last night on earth, and their affairs were either put in order, or had been ordered for them. They would not die forgotten.

And all of them, as though sharing the thought, hesitated wishing each other luck. They were all under the mistaken impression that they were under stage rules, where a wish of luck would bring utter calamity. Neither did they wish each other to “Break a leg,” for in fights to the death, such an event was a running concern.

So they settled for nodding, before setting off in their respective directions.

Pharah flew to the blue flare’s point of origin, pellets of rain streaking ineffectually across her helmet’s visor. She landed at a strip of street that held a gutted business that used to sell clocks. She looked around, trying to find Mercy.

Lightning flashed.

Someone was on the second floor of the bombed out clock seller’s.

But it couldn’t be Mercy.

It couldn’t be.

The person in the top floor, staff in hand, slowly dropped from the destroyed second floor to street level, and looked Pharah in the eye.

Those eyes were purple instead of blue. That hair was black instead of blonde. Where once a golden halo stood, there now rested a pair of horns, with black accompanying outcroppings above her eyebrows. And where her battle gear was once gold and white, it was now red and black.

And she smiled.

“Hell is empty,” Mercy said. “And all the devils are here…”
Chapter 20: In Action How Like an Angel

Eichenwalde

Pharah could feel the pity and disgust stretch itself across her face beneath her helmet. “What have you done to yourself?”

A smirk wafted onto Mercy’s red lips. “I am what I have always been,” she said. “I’m the sum total of what others see. You project, and I change to meet it. If my form displeases you, you’ve only yourself to blame.

The sheer petulance of how Mercy said that made bile rise in Pharah’s throat.

Mercy brought her staff behind her back. “Do you know what the best day of my life was?”

Pharah didn’t say anything.

“For the longest time it was the day Overwatch extended an offer to me to be their chief medical officer.” Said Mercy. “Imagine it! Me, practically still a child, being given funding and technology never before imagined by any researcher in history to spend my days mending bodies so thoroughly you’d never known they had ever been injured, extincting diseases, healing the scars of war, building bridges between neighbors, healing the rift between man and Omnic! Until I cured death. Everything changed after that.”

“Let me ask you something: If you help build a machine that brings people back from the brink of death, but it’s only used on soldiers that keep killing others… did you actually do anything? Did the world get any better? I should have learned from Nobel, Gatling, and Opponheimer. There is no weapon too terrible for the human race to be afraid of using it. When Overwatch fell… Respawn went with it. That day was the first time I could breathe easy in years. That is, until I got my recall notice.”

Mercy fixed Pharah with a glare. “How bad is it that one hopes their life’s work never makes it out into the world?”

Pharah sighed. “You could have just said so—”

“I did say so, Fareeha” hissed Angela. “You were even there for one such occasion! Even when anybody agrees with me, it remains purely an abstract political concept. Nobody was going to shut it down while it still benefited them, no matter how kindly I asked.”

“Have you even read the Petras Act, Fareeha? I have. Tell me if it strikes you as odd that the United Nations left Overwatch watchpoints out in the world without seizing anything inside them? Or Winston? Did you know he’s not even legally a person in any country on earth? In any other instance he’d be dissected in a lab somewhere, but he’s Overwatch. So instead they hole him up in Gibraltar and tell him not to break anything.”

Mercy took a step toward Pharah. “You have that vote coming in the UN on whether or not Overwatch gets reinstated. Don’t tell me you can’t put two and two together and see that they didn’t put Overwatch on the backburner until they needed you again, and everything that went with you —everything I worked on! But the world’s changed these past eight years. There are no secrets anymore. And that Respawn technology wouldn’t have stayed with Overwatch for long. Until the
UN took it for themselves, or the specs leaked on the black market, and every despot on a throne and every terrorist in a cave could whip up a batch of immortal killing machines.”

Mercy took another step. “I didn’t want to kill Genji. I didn’t want those civilians to die. But the longer I live, the more impossible choices get put in front of me, and that’s one I had to make. It was that, or live with the knowledge that my hands paved the way for conflicts even more destructive than the Omnic wars.”

Pharah chuckled tonelessly and shook her head. Mercy’s eyes went wide.

“Thirty-three civilians died in London,” Pharah said. “And if Jesse hadn’t switched sides, thousands more would have died as well. Were you really so busy making sure your name didn’t go next to Oppenheimer’s that you almost put it next to bin Laden’s?”

Pharah, at the moment, could not comprehend the farce of a display of hurt feelings by someone dressed as the actual, literal devil. Mercy’s eyes drew down to slits, and she grimaced coldly.

“It’s useless talking to you.” Mercy spat. “It…”

And then she stopped. Almost as though she didn’t want to say something that she would regret. And Pharah could only marvel at the hypothesis that Mercy thought she hadn’t passed that point.

“Let me guess,” Mercy said. “You’re going to put on a sad face and tell me to turn myself in? That you’re the good guys, and we’re the bad guys, and I’ll put my gun down when I finally realize that?”

“No.”

“Bold.”

“I’ve been given orders to make sure you die.”

Mercy laughed. “Your mother had to do it, huh? I knew if you came at me with lethal force, it wouldn’t be your idea. You’re… you’re too you!”

Pharah brought up her rocket launcher. “I really hope you brought a bigger gun.”

Mercy unholstered her Caduceus Pistol. “You’ll see I’m full of surprises.

They both took flight…

Tracer didn’t even hear the shot before it made impact.

She had just been coming to the edge of the woods after she had gotten off the dropship, wiping strands of unruly and rain-dampened hair out of her visor as she went toward the yellow flare, when the trunk of a tree, no more than a couple of feet away from her, cracked and pitted, spraying her with chunks of wood. She was halfway to hitting the dirt when she heard the shot that had hit the tree.

Tracer inched her way toward another, larger tree for cover when a voice came over her radio.

“Bonjour…”

Tracer thought to ask how Widowmaker had gotten this frequency… but how did anything else that was bad happen since Overwatch got back together?
“Mercy did it.”

“You have things to say to me,” Widowmaker said. “I want to hear you say them.”

Tracer took a deep breath as she got to her feet. She reached to her neck and started pulling tiny bits of tree out of her skin, and then rubbed the flesh along her neck before looking at her gloves. No blood.

She started to run for the next tree, but a patch of mud at her feet exploded, forcing her to turn back. Then she heard the shot.

“You want me to have a chat with you while you’re shooting at me?” Tracer asked.

“I’m going to kill you,” Widowmaker said. “The least I can do is let you talk. You seem the type who likes to do that, and I am nothing if not courteous.”

A French monotone free from all courtesy. Tracer would laugh if she weren’t thinking so hard.

“You kill people,” Tracer said.

“The two are not mutually exclusive,” Widowmaker said. “The rest of your life can be measured in minutes, before I take everything you have. The least I can do is let you have this, so… talk.”

Tracer blinked to another tree farther away, near the edge of Eichenwalde proper, but couldn’t cover enough ground in the time aloud. She found herself out in the open, out of cover, feet from her target. She bolted even harder for the tree, and felt mud hit the calves of her running tights. And thunder followed. Or more sniper fire.

She crouched as soon as she got behind the tree, and tried to catch her breath.

“Running is not talking,” Widowmaker said. “And the closer you get to me, the less time you have to live. I find it hard to believe someone as course and as gauche as you would pass up the opportunity for inane chatter.”

A little bit of anger flare up in Tracer’s chest. “Course and gauche, am I?”

“I’ve seen your shoes. You’ve made me your life’s mission since the night we met, and after all this time, you have nothing to say?”

Tracer took a few more deep breaths. The time she spent talking could allow her to regroup and form a plan, so in the absence of any better ideas at the moment, she’d indulge Widowmaker. Or let Widowmaker indulge her. Whichever one this was.

Tracer wiped a mingling of sweat and rain off of her brow.

“Why did you do it?”

“Do what?”

“Mondatta. Why did you kill him?”

Silence on the other end of the radio. This particular lack of noise had a strange accent to it. A confused silence sounds different than any other kind.

“Because I was paid to,” Widowmaker said.
“That’s it?”

“I need further criteria?”

Tracer huffed. “It’s not like you don’t watch the news. You knew what he meant to the world.”

“What did you expect me to do?”

“Wh—Say no!”

More confused silence. “I provide a service and was paid a nominal fee.”

“And that’s all it is?” Tracer asked. “Just a little bit of money, and you’ll kill whoever? No one taught you right from wrong when you were a little girl?”

“I was never a little girl,” Widowmaker said.

Tracer knew there was more to it than that, but she could resist asking “So you just came out fully grown, blue, and with a gigantic arse? Where’s your mother buried?”

Widowmaker sighed. “Amelie Lacroix was a little girl. I was not.”

And the idea that Tracer was waiting for finally came to her. She brought up her holophone and flipped through the apps until she got to the video recorder. She positioned the holographic screen towards her body and the camera receiver to the tip of her index finger. Then she put her hand around the tree she was hiding behind so the camera on her index finger displayed a feed of a darkened section of Eichenwalde.

“So that’s how you do it?” Tracer asked. “Split yourself into two little halves and never the twain shall meet?”

“I have seen much hand-wringing about right and wrong, and it never made sense to me,” Widowmaker said. “It made sense to Amelie, this I know, but it’s all so much posturing. So much jockeying for a superiority that has no presence and no weight. Money I can spend.”

Tracer huffed again. “And you won’t even try to figure it out?”

“Oh…” Widowmaker said. “I’ve tried. And for this… I have you to thank.”

What Tracer had been waiting for finally happened. A flash of lightning, massive and blinding, illuminated the landscape, including the strip of Eichenwalde upon which Tracer trained her camera.

And on the top floor of a dilapidated hunting lodge, a small burst of light bloomed within one of the windows.

The glint of a sniper scope.

Tracer knew exactly where Widowmaker was.

On her journey to the blue flare, D. Va felt the enormity of the dark and rainy Eichenwalde close in around her, as though she was in the palm of a very large, very sinister hand.

Her teeth began to chatter. Her suit regulated body temperature in inclement weather, so it wasn’t because she was cold.
This was fear.

Marching to almost certain doom sounded so cool before she got on the dropship. Hell, it even sounded cool while she was on the dropship. But now that she was actually, literally marching toward a fate with no small amount of uncertainty, the weight began to fall on her.

_Jesus, I don’t have a plan! I mean I have a plan, but it’s a stupid plan. It wasn’t stupid when I came up with it, but it’s stupid now, and what the—_

“Focus,” D. Va said to herself. Colonel Kim had told her during her training that in times of great uncertainty, what separated one form a desired outcome was sheer force of will.

As she set about finding her force of will, D. Va wondered about that particular wording.

“Sheer?” _Like fabric? How that hell strong could that force of will possibly be if you could see nipples through it? I should really be thinking about something el--_

The high, irritating, unmistakable sound of bricks sliding off one another made D. Va snap to attention, teeth on edge, toward a bombed out café.

Reaper stood atop a hill of bricks within the shattered fourth wall of the cafe, bathed in moonlight. He spread his arms out wide, making himself seem bigger, and asked…

“Like my new outfit?”

And D. Va, much to her own consternation, had to fight off the instinct to say “Yeah, I do!” His long black coat was replaced with a white one, and his white bird’s skull mask was now silver.

Against her own better judgment, D. Va thought it was cool.

Reaper asked “They wear white at funerals in Korea, right?”

Now, fully in line with her own better judgment, D. Va thought it was a great deal less cool.

As Reaper folded his arms in front of him, D. Va noticed that in the cratered buildings and in the destroyed streets around her lie the corpses of Omnic. True to Zenyatta’s word, many of these Omnic corpses were Bastion units with their guns still attached.

She hid her hands behind her back and brought up her holophone. She had it rigged to bring up Zenyatta’s app automatically. It would vibrate when calibrations were finished, and she needed only close her fist to get the show started. Zenyatta even had the forethought to upload pictures of Reaper to the holophone, so when the weapons systems came on line, they’d automatically know what to shoot at.

But there was no telling how long calibrations would take.

And Reaper wanted to talk.

“What happened to your MEKA?” Reaper asked.

“Little Angie Tries-Too-Hard broke it.”

“She’s a pill, that one,” Reaper said. “She wants to destroy Overwatch, you know.”

“And you don’t?”
Reaper shook his head. “What happened to that woman where I’m the more optimistic of the two of us? Now, I don’t want to destroy Overwatch. But hey, you came here in nothing but a bodysuit and packing nothing but a pistol. I admire that. You got what the old-timers used to call ‘moxie.’”

“Yeah,” D. Va said. “I’m pretty sure the only time anyone ever used the word ‘moxie’ was to bring up how people older than they were used it. No one ever used it like anyone thinks they did.”

“I don’t know if Jack told you this,” Reaper said, “but I said to him that you remind me of me when I was your age. The only thing that could get me to do something stupid and go up against impossible odds was having something to prove. And you? Well… Here you are.”

This rankled D. Va on a level she didn’t even know she had. Yeah, Reaper wanted to go on his bad guy rant, but D. Va was under no obligation to indulge him. And what this douche might not expect was some trash talk of her own. She may not have been the most experienced soldier, but when it came to cursing people out on a stream, she was Alexander the Great.

“Stop,” D. Va said. “Just… stop.”

Reaper, who had taken in a breath to say something, held it at this sudden outburst. He had the stature of a baby bird trying to look big to its parents, and this sight gave D. Va a little more confidence.

“You’re gonna eat the dick,” D. Va said. “That’s… that’s what’s gonna happen. You step to me like you’re the baddest man on the planet, but I’ve played enough shooters to know that anyone who mains with a shotgun can’t hit toilet water with their own piss while they’re sitting down. And you need two of them! And don’t ever… ever… compare yourself to me again. Because if the day comes when I start acting like you, blowing up innocent people while I’m dressed up like a goth condom, then I’ll gladly step into the four foot range you need to hit something with those shotguns of yours, and let you do me in. But today ain’t that day. Today is the day when you eat… the dick!”

And from his prior, puffed up stance, Reaper had hunched over during her speech, and D. Va swore she could see stink lines of anger coming off of his white coat.

Reaper’s voice was colder than usual when he asked “Are you done?”

D. Va’s holophone vibrated.

“Not even close,” she said.

She closed her fist, and hit the deck.

A buzzing whirr came alive in the street, and the guns of the years dead Omnis pointed themselves at Reaper.

“What th—“

The air roared and caught fire as the Omnic guns fired. Reaper was ripped to shreds, and the café came down on his remnants.

It was an eternity that didn’t last more than a minute before the Omnic guns emptied themselves, and the quiet that descended felt, to D. Va, like a cool pillow placed over a throbbing wound. There was only falling rain, now.

D. Va got to her feet. She brushed water off of her front, and got wet hair out of her eyes. She looked at the destroyed café.
“Is that it?”

The ground rumbled, and the mountain of bricks began to dissolve as they were devoured by the loud and screaming fury of Reaper’s smoke.

No, that wasn’t it at all…

Both of them were in the air, zooming in and out of the makeshift canyons and gulfs of the village of Eichenwalde, weaving between raindrops.

And even at this late stage, Pharah was playing by the book.

Even in light of direct orders from her mother, Mercy hadn’t actually fired a shot in this engagement, and thus, was still a low-level threat. And so whatever shots she fired, they were concussive blasts, not her actual rockets. They were ineffective so far, but the challenge was trying to land a shot near her, to knock her into the side of a building and ground her. Once that was accomplished… well… Pharah didn’t really know.

Underneath the percussion of combat was a throbbing bass-line of dismay.

It wasn’t supposed to be like this…

Up until the past few days, whenever Pharah thought about the nebulous prospect of “The Future,” she imagined a cabin in Switzerland. She and Angela sitting on a sofa in front of a roaring fire, feet up on a wooden coffee table, playing footsie with each other in their socks. They were wearing sweaters, drinking something hot from matching mugs, and they were either about to, or had just gotten done, skiing.

That she would fire a weapon on her with the intent to harm was a devious vision from a nightmare too horrendous to ever have ventured into her mind.

But beneath this was the rage. It was still there, its embers burning brighter, singing all around it.

And yet the work remained. They were zipping around the spires of Castle Eichenwalde, now, where the armor of Crusader Balderich von Adler still rested. Pharah got enough of a bead on Angela’s movements to predict her ensuing dive. She fired a concussive blast along Mercy’s flight path, so she would meet it head on.

But this was a feint on Mercy’s part, and Pharah found this out in the most horrifying way possible.

For as the concussive blast was about to make impact, the form of Angela “Mercy” Ziegler dissolved into a cloud of smoke.

Pharah knew what had happened immediately… and what it meant.

My God, Pharah thought. What she did to Reaper, she did to herself. No wonder she only brought a pistol.

The cloud of Mercy’s smoke devoured the concussive blast as it impacted, adding to its mass, before it swirled through the air and went straight toward Pharah.

And she could have sworn the smoke was laughing.

Pharah tried for evasive maneuvers, but those only worked for a couple of seconds. The smoke found its way into the Raptora armor’s vents. It wormed its way inside and brought the interior
cooling fans to a grinding halt.

Everything on Pharah’s visor flashed red, before the head’s up display died completely.

Along with the engines, and everything else.

Pharah began to plummet to the earth below…

Tracer waited for the next lightning flash before blinking to the next bit of cover. She was in Eichenwalde proper now, huddling in the ruins of a bike shop.

“What do you mean you have me to thank?” Tracer asked.

She could hear an intake of air through Widowmaker’s nostrils before the assassin spoke.

“If you caught me, what would you do with me?” Widowmaker asked.

“What would I do with you?”

“You’ve never given it any thought?”

Tracer scratched her wet scalp. “I’d… we’d… try to bring you back.”

“Where did I go?” Widowmaker asked. “I’m right here.”

“You weren’t always like this,” Tracer said. “You weren’t always with Talon. You weren’t always a murderer.”

“Yes, I was,” Widowmaker said.

“I asked them how you were before,” Tracer said. “Ana and Reinhardt? They said you loved to dance. You loved your husband. You were trying to quit smoking. You tried to bake croissants from scratch, but never really got the hang of it. And even though you tried to present yourself as all prim and proper-like, you thought fart jokes were the funniest thing you’d ever heard!”

“You are speaking of Amelie Lacroix,” Widowmaker said. “I am not her.”

“You were!” Tracer said, her calm eroding.

But Widowmaker’s calm seemed stubbornly in place. “You follow The Iris,” she said. “At least, that’s what Doctor Ziegler told me. They believe that Omnis are software, not hardware. A soul, and not the body. And human beings don’t deserve the same distinction? Whomever else occupied this body so long ago is of no concern to me. Amelie is gone. Widowmaker is here now. Tell me, you seem so nostalgic for an Amelie you’ve never met, I’m curious to know what you think of the Widowmaker that you have.”

Tracer opened her mouth, but couldn’t say anything.

“Curiosity is the only emotion that Talon couldn’t train out of me,” Widowmaker said. “That you can’t say anything leads me to believe that you have something interesting to say.”

Tracer took a deep breath. Talking to Widowmaker, being put on the spot by Widowmaker, made her realize some things about herself. Not all of them were good.

“You make me sick,” Tracer said. “There are a lot of things that make up a human being, and you
are none of them. I don’t understand you at all. I don’t understand how the world lets you live, how it doesn’t swallow you whole from the wrongness you are. I don’t know how you can walk, or talk, or breathe. You don’t have the thing that makes a person a person.”

No response from the other end. Another deep breath from Tracer, this time with a slight shudder to it.

“I try to be a good person,” Tracer said. “And… I hate you. I hate you so much that I don’t know how much longer I can keep calling myself decent. But you’re my opposite number. From the other side of The Iris. So I can’t just let you go. You’ll keep popping up, and I’ll still hate you. It’s like it’ll swallow me whole. I can handle getting unstuck in time, but for some reason, I can’t handle you. There are people who care about me, people who love me, but if I have this in my heart, how can I be there for them fully? And that’s why I’ve been following you. Because deep down, you’re making me worse, and I need to stop it.”

“You say this as though I have feelings to hurt,” Widowmaker said.

“No such luck, I guess.”

“Why not just kill me?” Widowmaker asked.

“Because I want to be better than you,” Tracer said. “If I take you in alive, a hero wins by being heroic, and the world could always use a few more heroes. The difference between you and me is all that matters.”

“You are correct,” Widowmaker said. “The difference between you and I is that I will kill you.”

Another lightning flash, and Tracer blinked again to the side of a small row of flats. She was only a block away from the hunting lodge.

“You can bloody sure try,” she said.

As Reaper’s smoke barreled toward her, D. Va used reached for Zarya’s barrier module, which was clipped to the waist of her bodysuit. She pressed the button, and the barrier sprang up in a bubble around her.

And this is how the little Korean girl straight-up tanked the unstoppable smoke monster.

The barrier rippled as Reaper passed around her, but did not break. She pressed the button again after he passed, to conserve energy, hoping the barrier had a shorter cool down the less it was used.

Reaper rematerialized in corporeal form behind her. D. Va unholstered her pistol (which, true to Zarya’s word, was stronger now that it had absorbed energy from the barrier) and started blind firing as she ran for a nearby building. Her round made a brick in a wall behind Reaper explode, and the three shots that hit Reaper center mass knocked him off his feet, smoke pouring from the wounds.

She opened a side door as Reaper got back to his feet, roaring with rage.

D. Va found herself in the industrial kitchen of what appeared to be a very small elementary school. She could see through the openings where the lunch was served, that child-friendly streamers and decorations inside the main cafeteria had not been touched since Eichenwalde was evacuated so many years before.

She hit the lock on the doors and backed to the other side of the room. The metal doors buckled and
bent as Reaper kicked and scratched at them from the other side. Then Reaper’s smoke poured through the gap between them.

As Reaper reassembled into his corporeal form, D.Va looked around for something upon which to build a plan.

“It’s admirable, the trouble you’re giving me,” Reaper said… as he was standing next to a massive industrial gas stove.

D. Va leveled her gun and placed her hand over the barrier module.

“Nerf this!”

She fired, and pressed the button. Her bullet punctured the bottom of the stove and hit the gas line. Reaper was engulfed in the ball of flame that ensued, and the explosion rocked the entire block and brought the entire cafeteria crashing down.

D. Va brought her barrier back down as the smoke cleared. She could see the sky above her now, and Reaper was nowhere to be found.

She started laughing.

“All the hype’s been leading up to this, and this is how it plays out?” D. Va said. “All this time I was wondering how I was gonna stop you. How the hell are you gonna stop me? Huh?”

Someone tapped her on the shoulder, and D. Va whipped around.

“The old fashioned way,” Reaper said, and then punched D. Va in the face.

Pharah blacked out on impact with the cobblestone bridge at the base of Castle Eichenwalde. She came to on her side as though she were leaning on her elbow in bed, her shoulder resting upon the side of the bridge. She struggled, but the Reptora was as dead as it had been the night Genji died. She was completely helpless.

And before her wisps of smoke coiled in the rain, becoming a human form.

“Don’t look at me as though I’ve taken up bloodletting or trepanation,” Mercy said. “This is temporary. I could have, oh… eight more hours of fun with these new powers before the nanites dissolve into simple protein chains and pass through my pores along with my sweat.”

She took out her Caduceus Blaster. “But I won’t need eight hours to deal with you.”

Mercy walked up to Pharah and took off the fallen Amari’s helmet. She seemed to raise the blaster, but gave up halfway through. Her eyes were fixated on Pharah’s.

Slowly, with great deliberation, Mercy knelt before Pharah so they were eye to eye, and Mercy’s unnaturally purple irises were filled with a great and familiar warmth, and Pharah, for a fraction of an instant, seemed to have forgotten her surroundings.

Mercy brought her gloved fingers up and gently traced Pharah’s jawline. She brought her face closer, closer, closer, and Pharah could see Mercy’s eyes sweetly close. And Pharah’s own did as well, the eyeballs beneath her thin stretches of eyelid rolling back in her head.

She could feel the warmth of Mercy’s lips coming toward her own, and in the coldness of the rainy night, Pharah could feel gooseflesh spring up across her entire body.
And then… nothing. Mercy just stopped. Pharah opened her eyes to see that little puffs of their breath were getting in each others’ mouths, and Mercy’s purple eyes were no longer so sweet.

“How long have you waited?” Mercy asked. “How long have you pined for a moment just like this one? How long did you delude yourself into thinking that I would let your fumbling… idiot… fingers even TOUCH me?”

Mercy got back to her feet, and as Pharah’s eyes followed her face, Mercy sent a kick into the side of her head. Pharah grunted in pain.

“You thought you could stand next to me and not catch fire,” Mercy said. “The hardest lesson you’ll learn, little girl, just so happens to be the last.”

Mercy brought up the blaster again, and placed flush against Pharah’s head.

“Goodbye, Fareeha.”
Chapter 21: In Hesitation How Like a God

_Eichenwalde_

“Goodbye, Fareeha.”

Pharah closed her eyes, and wondered if she would hear the shot that would kill her.

She heard a shot, two in fact, but neither of them had any effect on her at all.

The first shot did not come from a firearm. She heard the light _thwap_ of a pulled string being loosed, and the _whoosh_ of a projectile sailing through the air.

The second came not a second later, from the Caduceus Blaster, a few feet away and a great deal lower than it had been.

Pharah opened her eyes and saw that Mercy was looking to her right, and Pharah’s eyes followed.

A lone figure stood atop the battlements across from the drawbridge, and a flash of lightning amidst the falling rain revealed who this lone figure was.

Hanzo Shimada.

While Pharah’s eyes had been closed, Hanzo fired an arrow that knocked Mercy’s blaster out of her hand. Amid the embarrassment of what Mercy had just said, and the surprise of what Hanzo had just done, Pharah took the time to appreciate how skilled Hanzo had to be to make such a precise shot from that far away in the rain.

Mercy sighed. “Killing Shimadas is apparently a _thing_ I do now.”

She walked over to the discarded blaster and took it in hand, before sparing one last glance at Pharah.

“Don’t go anywhere,” Mercy said, and then took flight after the errant Shimada.

As Pharah looked on after her flying nemesis, Pharah began to shiver. And the last bit of conscious surprise she was capable of for the evening told her that the cold and the rain had nothing to do with it.

_Rage…_

The ember that threatened to catch, finally did. It engulfed everything around it, going from simple fire to extinction level event, setting the entire world within her alight.

A few nights prior, Mercy, in an act of betrayal, left her in a situation much like this: Trapped in armor that she could not move, feeling helpless and worthless in equal measure. Mercy had broken Pharah’s heart with that betrayal, and with what she had just said on this drawbridge, she wanted to make sure it stayed broken as she was dispatched to the beyond.

And it would not… _would not_… happen for a second time.

A guttural and groaning scream, far deeper than any Pharah had managed in her life, escaped her lips
as she attempted to lift her left arm. She was unable to do this in the Respawn mainframe room, but she did not have an all consuming fury within her whose aid she could enlist.

Her left arm rose to a clasp in the collar of the Raptora that would loose the entire left arm of the suit, this making getting out of the armor something that could be accomplished in minutes with a free arm. She didn’t get stronger since the last time this had happened, nor had the armor gotten lighter. But the anger that freed her completely blocked the pain of all the pulled and torn muscles in her arm.

The clasp gave and the arm disconnected. She let her left arm drop and drew it back out of the discarded armor piece. She felt the rain hit the sleeve of her lycra compression half shirt.

As her free left arm worked its way over to the clasp that would undo the right, Pharah could feel herself getting antsy.

Freedom awaited.

And justice…

Tracer had finally made it to the base of the hunting lodge. She had been moving from cover to cover for the past five minutes by blinking during lightning strikes. No further shots from Widowmaker’s sniper rifle sounded.

But she still had things to say.

“You don’t understand, do you?” Widowmaker asked.

“Understand what?”

“If you have to ask,” Widowmaker said, “you’ll never know.”

Tracer did a few small jumps in place. The hunting lodge had balconies on each of the windows facing this side of the street. They were made of wrought iron, and were perfect for grabbing.

She ran to the corner of the building and used her right foot to get a lead off for a vertical jump.

*Blink!*

Second floor.

“It’s the easiest thing in the world,” Widowmaker said. “You don’t know how close you are, but you are dancing around the edges.”

She leaned on the second floor railing and brought her feet up for the jump, like she was a comic book hero about to take flight or spin a web.

*Blink!*

Third floor. One more to go.

“Please,” Widowmaker said. “Reward this one article of faith. Get this before I kill you.”

One diagonal jump from the third floor railing would bring her to Widowmaker’s room. No doubt she’d have her eye pressed to the scope of the sniper rifle, so all she’d see was something blocking her view. Tracer would have to be quick to pull this off… but Tracer had never had a problem with being quick.
She closed her eyes and counted to three.

_Blink!_

She made it to the fourth floor railing and barged into the room. But what she saw there stopped her dead in her tracks.

Widowmaker’s sniper rifle, and a laptop, like in the bell tower at Ilios.

But no Widowmaker.

Tracer turned to the open window, pulse pistols in hand.

She didn’t even hear the shot before it made impact.

The bullet hit Tracer (from Widowmaker across the street) hit Tracer at center mass. She flew into the opposite wall before she crumpled to the floor beneath a mounted elk’s head.

Widowmaker sighed on the other end of the radio.

“*So* disappointing.”

Tracer grunted in pain and looked down.

Physically she was okay. The bullet was blocked by her chronal accelerator.

The chronal accelerator itself, on the other hand, was horrendously damaged. There was a gulf in its middle, and the constant blue light that had been her companion for so many years was blinking and guttering.

Tracer sat up straight to see how bad this could be, and got her answer in a most unpleasant way: She dropped her guns.

No.

No, she didn’t “*drop*” them.

For a split second, she vanished from the present, and her pulse pistols just fell through where her hands used to be.

“Oh, no,” Tracer said. “Ohhhhh, no-no-no-no…”

Tracer didn’t even have time to reflect on how bad this really was, when she heard a clang of metal on metal. She looked up to see a grappling hook hitched to the railing on the window where she had been standing a moment before.

Widowmaker emerged from beneath the railing, entering the room, sniper rifle in hand, with a dancer’s grace. She looked at Tracer’s prone, almost panicking form, and simply shook her head.

“The impact I have on the world,” Widowmaker said, “can be measured in the money I spend and the people I kill. Because I have lived, someone else has died. Adding further complications to this makes things fall apart. And you, Tracer, are living proof.”

Widowmaker reloaded her rifle.

“You knew how I came into the world,” Widowmaker said. “From what Talon did to Amelie
Lacroix, I emerged. And now you’ve made it your crusade to bring Amelie back by doing the same thing to me… and I don’t think that’s occurred to you until just now.”

It hadn’t occurred to Tracer. Nothing was occurring to her. It was like her entire body was shellacked in a static electricity that belayed all thought. She had only had this feeling once before.

“And so,” Widowmaker said, “my one experiment with morality is a resounding success.”

With this she brought up her sniper rifle, aiming for Tracer’s head. She looked down the scope.

“Compared to you… I’m not so bad.”

Widowmaker opened fire.

The bullet pierced the wall, bringing up a cloud of plaster.

Because before the bullet could make contact, Lena “Tracer” Oxton came unstuck in time.

D. Va flew into what remained of one of the walls of the cafeteria. She rubbed her jaw and bit down. She could tell immediately that one of her back molars was loose.

Reaper stood up straight. “What’s the matter? Run out of shit to talk?”

She rebounded off the wall and aimed a heavy haymaker at Reaper’s jaw… which phased right through.

Reaper sighed. “I’m made of smoke, you idiot.”

He lifted his foot and aimed a kick right below D. Va’s sternum. All the air left her as she flew over the destroyed all to the exterior of the building.

D. Va coughed as she tried to rise from the muddy ground. As she had gotten on all fours, Reaper jumped over the two feet of wall that was left after the stove explosion.

“You got plenty left in the tank.” Reaper said. “C’mon, let it out.”

Reaper aimed a kick to D. Va’s ribs that was so hard that she actually flipped over, and back on to her stomach.

She couldn’t even scream, or make a sound. And as she felt her ribs (Yup, broken), D. Va finally got a chance to survey her surroundings, and found out where she was.

She was on the playground next to the school that’s he had just partially blown up.

D. Va did a quick scan of the area, and found paydirt.

A sandbox.

A plan formed quickly in her head. All she needed to do was get to the other side of the sandbox to pull it off.

Her first instinct was to get up and make a run for it, but she quickly nixed it. If she did, Reaper would know she was planning something, and wouldn’t take the bait. This meant that she had to lull him into a false sense of security.
This meant, unfortunately, that she would have to let Reaper continue kicking her ass.

_Oh... Joy..._

“Y’know,” D. Va said as she got back to her feet, “a teacher in high school told me that if Hitler got accepted into art college, World War II may never have happened the way it did.”

D. Va looked Reaper in the eye. “Which begs the question... would you really be such an insane douche if you learned how to give a better interview on CNN? I mean, that’s how this started, isn’t it? You bombed on TV, and Jack got your—“

Reaper cut her off with a right cross against her jaw that was so hard it whipped her neck around. She didn’t so much as fall down as she performed a fast-motion sit.

She teetered over to a prone position to get back on her feet, only to feel Reaper’s boot gently press down on her back. She was so tired and in so much pain that she had no choice but to let the strength of his foot slowly press her to the ground.

“I’m all for banter,” Reaper said. “But hits below the belt like that will cost you.”

With that, Reaper lifted his foot back up and brought it down with considerable speed and immense power on the back of D. Va’s right knee. And she couldn’t tell whether the loud snap of the joint shattering or the tremulous screech of pain that followed was the louder.

As tears of pain stung her eyes, the only good news she could see was that she was just a couple of feet away from the sandbox.

_Walking’s out of the question, _D. Va thought through the mist of pain. _So I guess I’ll crawl. and hope he doesn’t get trigger-happy by the time I get to where I’m going._

Pharah had finally extricated herself from her armor. Her shoulders heaved up and down in the rain and moonlight with the deep breaths she took.

When Mercy had used her smoke to shut down the Raptora armor, Pharah had dropped her rocket launcher, and she had no idea where it was. Even if she had, it would not be the wisest decision to use it. It was all well and good when she was encased in enough metal with which to make two luxury sedans, but now all she had protecting her body was one thin layer of lycra.

She didn’t even have any _shoes_ on.

For someone to whom anger was almost foreign, Pharah would have been shocked by the clarity it provided. She looked into the depths of Eichenwalde and saw Mercy zipping around outcropping of roofs, dodging arrows, and firing shots, occasionally turning into a cloud of smoke that roared into one direction or another before realigning herself back into solid form.

Hanzo, for his part, was putting up one hell of a fight. His acrobatics in his fights against Genji served him well here. But Hanzo could get tired. Mercy, with what she had done to herself, could not. Pharah not only had to put Mercy down, but had to do it before she could do the same to Hanzo.

As Pharah’s bare feet hit the wet cobblestones leading into Eichenwalde, she studied the fight, and drew a very promising conclusion: Mercy had indeed done to herself what she had done to Reaper, but what she had was a great deal weaker than what had infested Gabriel Reyes.
The smoke needs a cooldown…

Observation bore it out. The smoke attack only lasted four seconds, after which, she couldn’t use it again for another fifteen.

Not only that, but she seemed to raise her Caduceus Staff in the air before she did it. There seemed to be a button on the staff that she used to activate the smoke attack. It must have been synced to the staff’s Resurrection protocol.

But what a game-breaker it is.

Pharah crouched down the closer she got to the center of Eichenwalde where the battle was raging, making sure she couldn’t be seen or heard. But this was an act of confidence, the act of a predator, not the timidity of someone who was outgunned.

Even though she was.

Anger was a hell of a drug.

Pharah ducked behind a small house near the town center, wreathed in shadow, and waited.

Widowmaker looked back up from her scope.

Tracer had vanished. She left behind her pistols, the remains of the chronal accelerator, and her clothes, including those horrendous shoes.

Widowmaker was well-aware that the glowing blue orb on Tracer’s chest kept her tethered to the present after an accident on a test flight years ago, but hadn’t imagined what it would be like if the thing had stopped working.

Tracer was taken care of, in the conventional sense, but she wasn’t strictly dead. Widowmaker quite frankly, didn’t know if she had won or not.

Do I have to win? Widowmaker thought. What’s done is done.

She held her sniper rifle over her arm and started toward the door that led to the stairwell leading down to street level.

Widowmaker had her hand on the doorknob when she heard laughing.

It came from all around her, in movie theatre surround sound. It made the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end.

It was familiar.

And it was tragically cockney.

If Widowmaker were the type to feel fear, she’d have booked it out of the room screaming. But Widowmaker was not the type that felt fear.

Widowmaker was the type that felt curiosity.

She took her hand off the doorknob and peered into the darkened room. If she didn’t know any better, she could have sworn that the bluish hue the air had taken had nothing to do with the moonlight streaming in through the open window.

“I don’t know how you could be haunting this place,” Widowmaker said, “when I didn’t kill you.”

“Of course you didn’t kill me,” Tracer said. “I’m not a bloody ghost. You just kicked me out of the timestream.”

Tracer began to laugh again, and Widowmaker furrowed her brow.

“I could go to every possible past,” Tracer said. “Every possible future. But this one future in particular? Ooh… It’s a *pistol*, it is!”

The blue hue of the night seemed to lift itself off the air and center itself in the middle of the room in a column that was almost six feet tall… almost as though it was in the shape of a person.

As Widowmaker peered into silhouette of electronic blueness, a new voice made itself known. It too was aged, and female.

And it had a French accent.

“I remember being that young,” the voice said. “But I don’t… I don’t remember being that *sad… Mon dieu…*”

The electric blue silhouette finally snapped into focus and gained color. It was only for a second.

But a second was all she needed to commit the sight to memory for the rest of her life.

It was a woman in her fifties. She was wearing a black leather jacket over a red turtleneck. Jeans hugged a pair of long legs and tucked into exquisite black boots that came halfway up her shins. For a woman this advanced in years, she had held up extraordinarily well.

And of particular note, over her chest, was an apparatus much like the one tracer wore, big and glowing blue, no doubt aiding what appeared to be a temporary excursion through time.

A streak of gray pervaded the older woman’s long and lustrous mane of purple hair. The wrinkles in her blue skin around her mouth could only have been achieved by a couple of decades of regular laughter. And her yellow eyes had kindness in them.

And then she was gone. She blinked out of existence in a silent blue static discharge, and the night was as it had been before. Plain. And wet. And quiet.

Widowmaker finally remembered to blink, as she began to reckon with what she had just seen.

Tracer… Scrawny, infuriating Tracer… had been true to her word. She had ventured into a future where Widowmaker had been rehabilitated, and found a way to violate the laws of time and space just to rub it in her face.

Had she truly been rehabilitated, though? Her older version still had blue skin, purple hair, yellow eyes. Whatever she had just seen, it was not the second coming of Amelie Lacroix. She was still Widowmaker.

But it was a Widowmaker that seemed so far beyond what she was at present. She had seen things that had made her laugh, and interacted with people she didn’t kill or receive money from.

And her older self sat in *judgment* of her. She *knew* something. She knew something that her
present self did not, and this… this Widowmaker could not abide.

She wanted to know what it was.

She had to know what it was.

Widowmaker sat cross-legged in this room on the fourth floor of the Eichenwalde hunting lodge, and tried to puzzle what this all meant.

__Just… a few more feet, D. Va thought.__

She was in the middle of the sandbox, now. Her broken ribs were throbbing. It felt like someone had replaced the fluid in her knee with small splinters of broken glass. It was hard to breathe. She was cold. She was scared.

But she was in the middle of the sandbox. Just a few more feet.

Reaper followed behind her, occasionally kicking wet, rainy sand onto D. Va’s back. She could almost feel him smiling at her beneath his mask, which added a wave of nausea to the broken bones and impending death with which she currently dealt.

The seconds dragged for eons. D. Va was shocked that not only had the sun not come up, but that it hadn’t come back down again.

But she dragged her broken ribs over the large piece of wood that demarcated the border of the large sandbox, groaning as she went. Her legs soon followed, and once she was fully clear, she turned over on her side, looking at Reaper, who stopped.

__Here goes nothing…__

“Y’know,” D. Va said, “I think there’s a fork somewhere in that kitchen I just blew up… So between those two shotguns and that fork, you can either kill me or eat my ass. Either way, we’re done.”

Reaper tilted his head. There was something about his presence that D. Va couldn’t place a bead on, until she was forced to compare Reaper to actual normal people.

He was moved.

“A little shit,” Reaper said softly. “To the bitter end.”

“You like that?” D. Va asked.

“More than you know,” Reaper said, and turned around.

Black smoke began to rise from Reaper’s shoulders. His white hood disappeared, replaced with dark skin and black hair.

He turned around again, and D. Va saw a man with scars on his face, and brown eyes with a clear purpose. A beard that obscured his mouth, so she couldn’t tell whether he was a laugher or a frowner. He looked young, but being that the nanomachines kept repairing damage, then that meant that he wouldn’t have aged a day since that fight with Jack Morrison.

This wasn’t Reaper.
This was Gabriel Reyes.

“Nobody wakes up in the morning and decides to do the wrong thing,” Gabriel said. “But… the dividing line between the heroic and the monstrous is time. Greatness today means calamity tomorrow… And I’m betting everything that the opposite’s true.”

“Sure,” D. Va said. “Paint me a pretty picture about how blowing up civilians and trying to kill Overwatch members in all this.”

Gabriel looked hurt by this. He took a step further into the middle of the sandbox.

“I… love… Overwatch,” Gabriel said. “More than words can say. We saved the world. It needed Overwatch then, and it needs it now, but… the world can’t abide the same Overwatch. It needs people that can change, that can adapt, but Morrison? Amari? Wilhelm? They’re still stuck back then, when anything they did was right just by virtue of them doing it. They need to look into the future, and they can’t! But I can’t kill them. I can’t make them martyrs and cause a new generation to look at their legends and make their mistakes. I… I just can’t. They need to be cautionary tales. They need to see that their methods and their hopes just don’t work. They need to walk away.”

He rubbed his face. “The world needs people like you, Hana. Young people. People who can go toe-to-toe with someone like me, give me one hell of a fight, and can still be defiant at the very end. I’m sorry you had to meet me. I’m sorry you came too soon.”

He took another step toward the center of the sandbox. “The world is a horrible place, Hana. And only one thing makes me feel better about this..."

Smoke rose from Gabriel’s shoulders again. The hood and the mask returned. Reaper was back.

“...is that you'll never be able to find out.”

Reaper raised his shotgun to kill D. Va, and only one word blared in her head:

NOW!

In a motion as fluid as she could make it under the circumstances, D. Va pressed a button on the glove of her bodysuit while taking it off and flinging it at Reaper as hard as she could. It bounced limply off of Reaper’s chest, and to that sand at his feet.

He looked from the glove, and back to D. Va. “Was that supposed to accomplish something?”

D. Va smiled. “Reaper… That’s the dick!”

And D. Va tried to get into as much of a fetal position as she could with a shattered knee.

Hana “D. Va” Song had had the science of what happened when she summoned a MEKA explained to her, but it never really sank in. The only equation that mattered to her was “button on glove = fresh MEKA.”

When D. Va presses a button on her glove to summon a MEKA, her coordinates get transmitted to a Korean satellite array in Earth’s orbit, which has row after row of MEKA’S built in. Upon receptions of the coordinates, the MEKA gets launched.

MEKAs are equipped with self-dissolving thrusters that slow the MEKA down once they enter the atmosphere. This serves the dual purpose of easing the heat from entry, as well as making sure that the MEKA itself doesn’t completely obliterate the space it lands on, or the pilot it lands near.
However, thanks to Angela Ziegler’s sabotage a few days prior, those thrusters inoperable, along with everything else, save the call function that D. Va had just activated. In this instance the self-dissolving thrusters dissolved, but did not thrust. And the MEKA that D. Va called in made landfall with all the force and heat that something that heavy plummeting from space would have.

And it is at this point that Reaper did the one thing that he so very rarely did during the training footage that D. Va had watched in the King’s Row facility.

He looked up.

Once he had, however, he had a mere fraction of a second to reckon with the three ton mass of titanium MEKA that was about to land on top of him.

It landed on Reaper so hot and heavy that the sand in the sandbox upon which he stood immediately superheated and liquefied upon its deafening and earth-shaking impact.

And the cold and rainy German night meant that the tidal wave of molten glass that had been kicked up by the MEKA’s impact instantly snap-froze.

When the rumble died down, and the heat cooled off, D. Va opened her eyes and looked.

The sandbox looked like a half formed glass Christmas ornament, in which she could see a pink MEKA at its center. And even from a distance she could see the clear, spherical wall of glass was veined with little black tendrils of what was left of Reaper’s nanites.

D. Va waited for a moment for something horrible to happen, but she knew she didn’t need to. She knew it would never come.

Hana “D. Va” Song killed the unkillable smoke monster.

She lay back in the grass, and closed her eyes, feeling the rain on her face. Past joy, there is relief.

D. Va didn’t open them again until she heard footfalls on the grass near her head.

It was Widowmaker. And she was looking down on her. Before D. Va could get worried, however, Widowmaker said:

“T’m turning myself in.”

D. Va blinked a couple of times. “Where’s Tracer?”

It was only now that she noticed that Widowmaker was holding the remains of Tracer’s chronal accelerator in her right hand.

“I have no idea, “Widowmaker said.

D. Va closed her eyes. The nausea came back again. She wanted to shoot Widowmaker in the face, but her gun was in the remains of the cafeteria.

Plus, she had questions. And they wouldn’t be answered if Widowmaker was dead.

“Fine,” D. Va said. “You’re under arrest. Now help me up. I can’t walk.”

Hiding in the shadows behind the house at the center of Eichenwalde, Pharah’s patience finally paid off.
Hanzo, perching on a beam atop the roof of a house, attempting to line up a shot, almost lost one of his toes from one of Mercy’s blasts. He instinctively moved his foot to compensate, causing him to lose his balance and fall…

…right at Pharah’s feet.

Hanzo, as he was picking himself up, saw Pharah in the shadows. They locked eyes, and Pharah motioned her head down the cobblestone street, indicating that he should make a run for it.

Not needing to be told twice, Hanzo picked up his bow and hightailed it, his sandals kicking up rain as he went.

Mercy’s voice bellowed from above: “Where do you think you’re going?”

Pharah could hear the thrusters of Mercy’s wings at street-level getting closer and closer. She looked to her right and found a metal trash can.

*That’ll work…*

Pharah picked it up. Mercy’s thrusters got louder and louder.

She could feel it in her bones. She could almost smell it. She needed to be perfect, or she may as well have signed her own death warrant right then and there.

As the thrusters got to their loudest, Pharah threw the trash can up into the middle of the street.

Mercy swerved in mid-air to successfully avoid it. Doing so, however, meant that she veered too far to the other side of the street, and one of her suit’s wings snapped off on impact with the side of a brick house. Mercy screamed as she spun out of control. She lost altitude and made impact with the ground, rolling at a violent speed, until she came to a stop next to the ruins of an old tavern.

Pharah came out from the shadows and walked down the street. A few meters away, she came upon Mercy’s staff and blaster, which she had dropped upon impact with the house. Pharah picked up the staff and used all of her strength to break it over her knee.

So now, by Pharah’s estimation, Mercy couldn’t shoot, Mercy couldn’t fly, and Mercy couldn’t turn into a smoky cloud of nanomachines.

And Pharah couldn’t wait to see how Mercy would deal with all of this.

Mercy herself was a few yards beyond, near the dilapidated tavern, picking herself up.

And only one sound broke through the humid hiss of falling rain:

That of Fareeha Amari slowly cracking her knuckles.

Mercy heard it, and looked up. Pharah knew that she saw her, that she saw the broken staff, that she saw the gun just a few feet away from a woman whose heart she’d just broken and whose life she just tried to end less than an hour before.

Pharah saw Mercy get to her feet and begin to walk toward her, fuming, her shoulders bobbing up and down in anger.

She furrowed her brow. Pharah imagined (quite rightly, as it turned out) that Mercy was going to attempt to still play the merciless, larger-than-life villain, even though she had no real way to fight back.
That just pissed her off more, seeing Mercy double-down with money she didn’t have.

And Pharah found that when her fury was at its apex… it burned cold.

“I have a lot of regrets in my life,” Mercy said angrily as she stormed up to Pharah. “One of them is not killing you on that bridge. Fortunately for me, it’s a regret that I can recti—“

**THWACK!**

Even Pharah had underestimated her own reach. Her right fist shot out, as though propelled by a cannon, and landed right in Mercy’s eye. Mercy flew back and landed on her stomach, kicking up a small puddle.

Mercy scrambled onto her back and held her hand to her face, a look of utmost shock in the one eye that wasn’t beginning to swell shut. It was a look that said: *You weren’t supposed to do that! You weren’t supposed to know how to do that!*

And even in the midst of all of her anger, Pharah felt like smiling at that look, even though she ultimately didn’t.

“I gave… almost everything to Overwatch,” Mercy said as she attempted to stand. “My time and my effort and my… my soul! But you wanted my heart, didn’t you? You and Genji wanted my heart! There wouldn’t have been a me anymore! THERE WOULDN’T HA—“

**THWACK!**

No sooner had Mercy gotten to her feet than Pharah punched her in the face again. This blow landed on Mercy’s jaw, sending her backward, bouncing the back of her head on the wet cobblestones.

Mercy curled up before getting to her hands and knees. She coughed, and from her mouth came a half a shot glass worth of blood and one… no, wait, two of her teeth.

Lightning flashed, and Pharah saw that Mercy’s hand was about a foot away from the Caduceus Blaster.

Pharah knew that Mercy knew it. The trick was not letting her find that out.

“I know… you think… I’m petty,” Mercy said slowly, trying to navigate a freshly ruptured mouth. “I’m not… But that being said… I think crashing your funeral… will be most amusing.”

Mercy grabbed the gun and instantly rose to her feet, aiming the Caduceus Blaster at Pharah’s head…

…and Pharah just snatched it out of Mercy’s hand, as though she were a toddler holding a book of matches.

The interplay of emotions on Mercy’s face was a sight Pharah would take with her. The utter dismay at being so thoroughly outmatched by someone she had underestimated competing with the pride that wouldn’t let her show it.

Finally… finally… Mercy closed her eyes.

“Do it,” she said.
“Done.”

**THWACK!**

Pharah’s hand shot out again. This time the punch landed on Mercy’s temple, and Pharah flattered herself that she could feel orbital bone crunch beneath her knuckles.

Mercy limply spun around and fell flat on her stomach again, out cold.

She still had the Caduceus Blaster in her hand. She aimed it at the unconscious Mercy’s head, and…

And…

And…

Nothing. She didn’t pull the trigger.

It wasn’t pity that caused her to defy her mother’s direct order. And though she would say later that she was playing it truly by the book in her refusal shoot an unarmed and unconscious prisoner, in truth, that would only be a small part of it.

The fact of the matter was, that while her rage was abating, it was still high. But even within that context, her higher reasoning was still functioning.

The truth would come out. About Reaper, about the attacks, about Respawn. And it was that last one that gave Pharah pause. The revelation about the machine that cheated death being placed solely in the hands of a military organization would be both public and explosive. Not everyone would have seen the necessity for such a device, or the good it could have done in the right hands, with the best of intentions.

And those who would hate Overwatch for such a thing would know the name of Angela Ziegler.

So would they know a martyr… or a criminal?

And it wasn’t precisely as though she would lie to protect herself in court. This was a woman, after all, who tried to pick a fist fight just minutes before when she had no earthly way of winning. She’d cop to having a hand in the attacks on Ilios, Hanamura, and London. Her ego wouldn’t let her do anything else.

The truth was, if Pharah was to be honest with herself, that the worst, most painful, most punishing thing she could do to Angela Ziegler was let her live.

She did deserve it, after all.

And, as the fire in Fareeha’s heart began to die down, it occurred to her how small Angela looked laying crumpled on the pavement. Here she was, the woman who, for the longest time, she believed to be the smartest person in the world, with face bruised from an unwinnable fight and crown adorned with gaudy horns. This was the image of someone who truly had no idea who she was. Who knew so little about herself that she truly believed that to speak honestly with the ones closest to her would compromise her very personhood. After all she had done, she deserved few things, patience, mercy, and forgiveness least among them. But she did deserve the chance to finally get to know herself. All of herself. With all of the pettiness and cruel intent standing stark and undeniable alongside any good she may have done.

Pharah knew there was a sound from the roof of the tavern before she could place precisely what it
was, and she aimed the Caduceus Blaster.

Hanzo was on the roof, arrow drawn, aiming at the unconscious Mercy on the ground.

Pharah and Hanzo stared at each other for a moment.

“I don’t kill my prisoners,” Pharah said. “What makes you think I’ll let you do it?”

“She killed my brother,” Hanzo said. “I need to do this. Without this, I have nothing.”

“Then leave,” Pharah said, “while I still let you keep that nothing. I saved your life. This is my payment.”

Hanzo glared at Pharah with honest hatred for awhile… but he eventually lowered his bow, and disappeared into the night.

Pharah threw the blaster away and looked down at Mercy for a few moments, before kneeling down, and picking her up.
Chapter 22: We Are Overwatch

Eichenwalde

Only now, after her anger had died down, did she feel the pain in her left arm. Any muscle in that appendage that she didn’t pull trying to get out of the Raptora, she tore, and visions of surgery and rehab danced in her head.

*And that’s just the beginning, Fareeha thought. Then there’s all the working out I’ll have to do to get both arms back to the same size.*

Thankfully, she had slung the unconscious Angela Ziegler over her right shoulder as she made her way through the rainy Eichenwalde woods back to the dropship. And she was filled with both optimism and dread to see that the enormous side door was open.

Fareeha’s first instinct was to go for a gun she didn’t have when she saw Widowmaker sitting at the table near the door. A shattered chronal accelerator rested on the table’s surface, which told Fareeha everything she needed to know about Tracer’s fate. It felt like her stomach was boiling.

Only now did Fareeha see Hana lying on one of the triage cots that came out of the wall. In lieu of saying hello, Fareeha gestured to Widowmaker and asked:

“How didn’t you shoot her?”

Hana gestured to the unconscious Swiss doctor slung over Fareeha’s right shoulder.

“How didn’t you shoot *her*?” Hana asked. “She surrendered, and I needed someone to help me walk.”

Fareeha noticed Hana’s leg, which was bent inward at the knee like a shallow checkmark. Questions about this would come later.

“Could you press that button next to your head?” Fareeha asked. “My arm is killing me.”

Hana pressed the button near her head, and another triage cot came out of the wall, upon which Fareeha gently placed Angela’s unconscious body. Hana’s face became a comic mask of derision.

“Oh my God,” Hana said, trying not to laugh and failing miserably. “Is this extra bitch dressed like the devil?”

“Athena?” Fareeha asked.

The AI’s voice came in over the speakers. “Yes, Captain Amari?”

“Close the door and take us home, please.”

“Done,” Athena said. The side door closed, and the dropship shuddered as it lifted off.

Hana was still laughing. “Wh-What did you do to her face? It looks like it has *mushrooms* growing underneath it!”

Fareeha rooted in a built in cylinder at the foot of Angela’s triage cot. She found painkillers for
herself, and a syringe of sedatives for Angela. Mercy said that she still had eight hours left of her powers, seven of which still lie ahead. Fareeha knew that, with the Caduceus Staff broken, Angela couldn’t turn into a cloud of nanite smoke, but as she jabbed the needle into Angela’s neck, she remembered something the head of Helix Security had told her during her training in Cairo: “Underestimating an opponent is the last thing a stupid person does before they die.”

She looked at Hana. “I take it your fight with Reaper went well.”

Hana gave her the short version.

“Well done,” Fareeha said.

“Thank you,” Hana said in reply. “I remember Angela saying the only way to kill Reaper was dropping him in a volcano. I figured molten glass works just as well.”

Hana looked at the unconscious Angela and fought off some more giggles. “I don’t need to know how well your fight with her went. Just looking at her tells me you do good work.”

Fareeha gave the short version of her own exploits.

“Well,” Hana said.

“What is?” Fareeha asked.

Hana furrowed her brow. “How did Hanzo know we were in Eichenwalde?”

In all the madness, it hadn’t occurred to Fareeha to ask that question. The answer came quickly.

“I told him,” Widowmaker said. Hana and Fareeha whipped their heads in her direction, almost as though they had forgotten she was there.

“You just… told him?” Fareeha asked.

“Yes.”

Hana raised one eyebrow. “Are you and him…?”

If Widowmaker took umbrage with the question, she didn’t show it. She just shook her head.

“Hanzo Shimada has never said a single word to me,” Widowmaker said. “I like that in a man.”

---

London

The dropship made landfall at the King’s Row facility four hours later, and all members of Overwatch were assembled in the hangar bay as the dropship touched down and the bay doors closed.

Torbjorn, who had been doing some tinkering on his next turret (this one named “Elin”), still had his rivet gun in his hand, and was the first to raise it at Widowmaker upon her exit. Widowmaker was on the right of Hana, Fareeha on the left, both helping her walk down the ramp with one leg.

It was when Torbjorn saw the destroyed chronal accelerator in Widowmaker’s hand that he lowered his gun. And the addition of two to two to get the four of Lena Oxton’s fate spread silently among the organization.
Everyone’s face fell. Reinhardt had to leave the room. Brigitte followed. And Lucio could have sworn he could hear Winston (next to whom he’s been standing” mutter to himself: “What in God’s name am I going to tell Emily?”

Ana was the first to step forward. “One for the brig?” she asked her daughter.

“Two,” Fareeha said. “There’s one still in the dropship.”

Ana blinked. “Reaper?”

“No.”

Ana and Fareeha stared at each other. Both were hard to read, at least if you asked anyone else in the room. But Mei had the odd impression that these two were having hundreds of pages of correspondence with each other silently, and without moving their faces.

And it was the elder Amari who walked away first.

Winston took the chronal accelerator from Widowmaker, as well as the job of being Hana’s right flank. The two women and the gorilla made their way to the medical wing. Jack asked to borrow Torbjorn’s rivet gun, and walked Widowmaker down to the brig.

Zarya and Satya went inside the dropship to retrieve the heavily sedated Angela Ziegler. The former picked her up while the latter conjured a hardlight stretcher, upon which Mercy could be placed. The two slowly made it down to the medical wing, depositing Mercy in one of the empty rooms adjacent to where Fareeha and Hana were being tended to.

Zarya started to leave, only to be stopped by Satya, who had her feet planted to the floor.

“What is it?” Zarya asked.

“Do the thing,” Satya said.

Zarya smiled and bent her knees, spreading her arms out. With a giggle, Satya put her hands on Zarya’s back for leverage and hopped into the air with her legs wide. Zarya caught Satya’s legs, straightened up, and now Satya was ready for her piggy-back ride.

But Zarya did not move.

“What is it?” Satya asked.

“Satya… do the thing.”

Satya smiled, and slowly wrapped her long dancer’s legs around Zarya’s mid-section. Smiles on both their faces, Satya and Zarya left the medical wing in a display so adorable that it was… just sickening, really.

Brigitte, with the aid of Athena, examined all three women in the medical wing.

Hana’s ribs were cracked, but not broken. Her knee, however, was shattered in three places, with fractures spreading into the femur and tibia. Brigitte walked through Athena’s explanation on how to set the bone and make a cast. It would be six moths before that cast could come off, and another six months after that, Hana would have to use a cane to get around.

Brigitte was shocked at the state of Fareeha’s arm.
“Is it that bad?” Fareeha asked.

“No,” Brigitte said. “Well… yes. But I’m just surprised you aren’t shrieking in pain right now.”

“What do I need?”

“Surgery,” Athena said. “Lots of it.”

But a sling would do for now.

Angela had a hairline fracture in her jaw, in addition to her missing teeth. Not only that, but her orbital bone was less “broken,” and more “powdered,” which required immediate bandaging. She would need to be seen to, of course, but Overwatch needed to bring in specialists to do so, or petition the UN for provisional active status, as taking her to any old hospital would remand Doctor Ziegler to the custody of the London police, and out of their jurisdiction.

Oh, and she had a concussion.

“I strongly advise against sedating Doctor Ziegler in her present condition,” Athena said.

“And I strongly advise against members of Overwatch killing each other,” Brigitte said as she jabbed another syringe of sedatives into Angela’s neck. “We’re all making sacrifices.”

From there, Brigitte undressed the unconscious Angela (and yes, Brigitte felt really weird doing this), and put her in the same drab OR scrubs that Jack made Widowmaker wear in the brig. She called in the nearest Overwatch member, which happened to be Bastion, and had her stretcher Angela to her cell.

It was the dead of night in London, and no one in the King’s Row facility felt like sleeping.

The place was abuzz with the fact that this months long conflict was finally over. Conversations were had, into which others were roped, and the mass of humanity convened, extemporaneously, in the conference room.

No one assembled would call this a celebration. Lena Oxton loomed large in her absence. But the quiet conversations gradually got louder as the hours whiled away, and they permitted themselves to laugh.

And Lucio went out and got food.

In the rear of the room, near where Satya and Zarya sat, feeding each other focaccia bread, Torbjorn and Zenyatta sat with a deck of cards. Lucio sat next to them, staring off into space.

“I am interested to learn the intricacies of this ‘poker,’” Zenyatta said. “I’ve heard much, and my curiosity is piqued.”

“It’s a wonderful way to pass the time,” Torbjorn said. “It calls upon your attention to human nature, what peoples’ faces say, to root out deception. Get good enough, and all their money will be yours.”

“I have no money,” Zenyatta said. “Or, conventionally speaking, a face.”

Torbjorn stopped shuffling the cards long enough to groan. “It’s the spirit of the thing,” he said.

“It’s about the ten—“

“I slept with Ana last night,” Lucio said, interrupting.
He said it flatly, with the same tenor one might use to describe a particularly commonplace event at work. But his eyes told the story of a man who had found himself at the bleeding edge of a great precipice, had found will to pull himself back, and somehow regretted not falling.

Torbjorn and Zenyatta slowly turned their head to look at him, Torbjorn’s with wonder, and Zenyatta’s with, well, nothing, as conventionally speaking, he didn’t have a face.

“I mean, I knew I could bend that far forward,” Lucio said. “I work out a lot. But… I had no idea she could bend that far back…”

“Fareeha is going to murder you,” Torbjorn said. “With her bare hands.”

Lucio nodded absently. “It’s not like life’s gonna get better…”

In the middle of the room, everyone had cleared chairs for Bastion to sit. Mei and Jesse sat with her, as Snowball hovered around Ganymede, who was perched on Bastion’s shoulder.

“I’m gonna get me some vittles,” Jesse said. “You want something?”

“No,” Mei said. “I’m not hungry.”

“They got pork rinds.”

“You will give them to me.”

Jesse smiled, kissed Mei on the cheek, and went to the desk near the front of the room which held the food. Mei looked along after him.

“Mei?”

She looked up to see Jack standing over her.

“That man betrayed a gang to join Overwatch,” Jack said, “betrayed Overwatch to join Reaper, and betrayed Reaper to join you. Whatever your’re doing to keep him on the straight and narrow, for Christ’s sake, do it right.”

Mei looked back at Jesse, who was bending over to see what food was on the back of the desk, the cheeks of the man’s glorious ass hugged by a pair of tight, worn jeans. It looked, to Mei, like two light blue moons colliding in a particularly bombastic example of 1970s prog rock album cover art.

Mei smiled, blushed, and said “Oh, that’s not gonna be a problem.”

Jack looked at Jesse, saw what Mei saw, and managed to get away from her before he groaned.

“Damn kids,” he said before he came upon his favorite damn kid in the world, Hana Song, who was in a wheelchair, engaging in animated conversation with Fareeha, who was sitting in a chair, her left arm in a sling.

“You feeling okay?” Jack asked.

“Great,” Hana said with a toothy smile. “Being hopped up on painkillers comes in a close second to the time I did ecstasy in my friend’s basement.”

Neither Jack nor Fareeha expected that to come out of her mouth, and it must have showed on their faces.
“Oh, come on,” Hana said. “I’m nineteen and busy, not sixty and dead… Too soon?”

Jack looked at Fareeha. “Keep an eye on her.”

“Will do,” Fareeha said.

As Jack walked away, Hana called after him.

“I don’t need an eye kept on me! I killed a smoke-monster!… Jack, I’ll race you!… I’ll even give you a head start!”

Jack smiled as he joined Ana and Reinhardt in the back. Reinhardt saw Ana looking at Lucio, and Ana noticed Reinhardt’s noticing.

She smiled.

Reinhardt glowered.

“He takes direction really well,” Ana said.

Reinhardt glowered harder.

From there, Ana looked to Fareeha, who had gotten up and was about to leave through the side door.


Her brows knitted together. “Fareeha defied a direct order.”

“She defied a direct order to do the right thing,” Reinhardt said. “That order should not have been given, and you know that. You’d be proud of any other soldier who defied that order. Why is Fareeha different?”

“Because…” and then she trailed off. She looked around at everyone in the room.

“Do you think anyone else in this room will have children?” Ana asked, taking herself to task for voicing this thought out loud. “Will it only be me? Am I that bad of an example?”

Jack and Reinhardt looked at each other.

“Torbjorn has children,” Reinhardt said.

The shock showed in her widening eye and the speed with which she looked at him.

“What?”

“Yeah,” Jack said. “Like, nine of them. He could colonize Mars.”

Ana blinked a couple of more times. “And he didn’t tell me?”

“Do you tell him everything?”

Ana looked at Torbjorn who, judging from his paleness, had just finished learning about her evening’s exploits with Lucio, as men are wont to do.

She smiled.
Widowmaker sat on the cot on her cell, and looked at what she was wearing. Drab, ugly scrubs and no shoes.

An indignity, to be sure, but a small one. She knew what she had been in for when she turned herself in to the Song girl.

Widowmaker had memories that did not belong to her. They were stored, in the great staging area of her mind, in a packing container marked “Amelie Lacroix,” through which she could peruse at her leisure.

She knew of Amelie’s fierce love for her husband with a secondhand warmth, and she knew of Amelie’s fear at being captured by Talon with a secondhand coldness. But that delayed reaction, that hand-me-down emotion, was all she had known since she had become Widowmaker.

And at the summit, in a potential future, she knew, thanks to the trickery of Lena Oxton, that she could have own. That experience and feeling could be all the more hers, instead of an empty display by someone else, with whom she had shared a body.

And the thought filled Widowmaker with… not fear, no… Uneasiness.

Human beings were messy creatures, built to get tears, and sweat, and DNA all over each other. They cried at both weddings and funerals, which did not make sense to Widowmaker, but now that she was going to get “help” (which was a word she had to put in quotation marks in her own mind), it would. It was said that one must be careful what one wished for, and by the simple act of turning herself in to Overwatch, Widowmaker must have wished for this.

She now greeted the future with no small amount of suspicion. She had seen people make faces and flail their arms in service to their emotions, and now she had signed up to do the same.

Yes… “Uneasiness” was the word.

She could hear footsteps padding up to her cell, and she looked up to see who had joined her.

The gorilla, Winston, glared at her. He held Lena’s shattered chronal accelerator in his hand.

“I can bring her back,” Winston said. “It’ll take time, but I can. I will. Do you… even care about that at all?”

“No,” Widowmaker said. “Should I?”

Winston huffed and walked away, out of Widowmaker’s field of vision, and past Fareeha, who was staring into the adjacent cell.

The nanites that Angela Ziegler had injected into herself had passed through her system. Her hair had turned back into its original blonde, and the one eye that wasn’t covered with a bandage had turned back into its original blue.

Angela would need surgery to fix her eye, and her jaw would need to be wired shut to make sure it would heal properly. Scuttlebut was that they were trying to get clearance for specialists to come in.

Even apart from the bandages and the explosive bruising, Angela still looked pathetic. The scrubs she was wearing were too big for her, making her appear shrunken. The abundance of Eichenwalde rain and a lack of hair spray meant that her blonde locks settled around her shoulders in a frizzy mess, as no one would give her anything back to tie it into a ponytail.
This woman had held a great and abominable power over Fareeha for her entire adult life. She had been her definition of a woman, supplanting even her mother in this respect. She was the subject of untold and numerous fantasies, the pin upon which Fareeha’s hopes flimsily held.

But those fantasies had grained and decayed. Those hopes withered and died. And looking at this pathetic creature made Fareeha wonder how Angela had held any power over her at all. More so, she was filled with a sense of pride. It took her a while, and it happened under the direst of circumstances, but she had outgrown Angela Ziegler.

Yeah, she punched her in the face a bunch of times, too, but still. *Growth!*

And so she stared at Angela Ziegler, and Angela’s one blue eye stared back. Both expressions were blank, each not wanting to give anything away.

Fareeha knew that Angela was itching to say something to her, anything at all. She also knew, with an equal certainty, that she would not, for doing so would expose her broken teeth, and her vanity and ego would not allow it.

Seventy percent of Fareeha thought this was sad. The other thirty percent, however, thought it was hysterical.

Someone cleared their throat behind her, and Fareeha turned to see Ana standing in the doorway to the brig, waving her out into the hallway.

Fareeha followed, and Ana closed the door. Mother and daughter tried to put off looking at each other as long as they could.

“I defied a direct order,” Fareeha finally said. “I will accept any—“

Ana held up a hand, and Fareeha silenced herself. Ana looked her daughter over for a moment before she finally said:

“Torbjorn has *children.*”

Fareeha could only stare back. “Yes…”

“You knew?”

“I…Yes.”

“And you didn’t tell me either?”

“I thought you knew,” Fareeha said. “What does this have to do with anything?”

“The *future,*” Ana said, smiling as though at a joke only she got. “He has nine children. One of them has to be a better person than he is! There are so many of them! And Torbjorn’s, well…”

Fareeha tried to say something, but nothing on hand seemed appropriate.

“The future is uncertain,” Ana said. “The only thing that makes us good is that we make the world a better place by the time we leave, and I’ve done that. I gave you an order, Fareeha. An order that you defied. And it was a terrible order. I know that now. It would have hurt the organization, and it would have doomed you in the same way I thought that I was doomed. I told you I wasn’t sending you into battle on my hurt feelings, and I didn’t know how wrong I was when I said it.”

Fareeha reckoned that for someone who was wrong, her mother sure was smiling a lot. She shook
her head.

“Mother,” Fareeha said. “You told me you had qualms with my becoming a soldier because you didn’t want it to destroy the gentleness in me. Last night, I walked up to the woman I’ve loved for twenty years and broke her face. How does this make you smile?”

“Because… Because you can hold both of those inside you. You are gentle, Fareeha, but the time for gentleness passes, and the time for strength comes. You can have those two things coexist within you side by side. That’s what makes you better than Angela, don’t you see that? The moment she couldn’t live up to being an angel, she became the devil incarnate.”

Ana put her hand on Fareeha’s shoulder. “We are Overwatch, Fareeha! We take up arms to ensure peace. We acknowledge the contradiction in that, and do it anyway because it needs to be done. Not everyone plays by the same rules that we do. And I sent you to kill Angela because I couldn’t see that. You are the example I should have been!”

The elder Amari took her hand away from the younger. “I am honored to call you my daughter, Fareeha. I am honored… to call you Strike Commander.”

Any passing mote of dust falling from the ceiling would have had the power to knock Fareeha Amari on her ass. “What?”

“The order I gave you,” Ana said, “proved I shouldn’t be giving orders like that. The world has changed, and the fact that you exist, the fact that you did what you did, means it has changed for the better. Jack and Reinhardt spoke to me about this, and it’s for the best.”

Fareeha was too stunned to cry. She lunged forward and hugged her mother tightly, and the fact that she only had the one working arm to do it with meant Ana was spared bruised ribs.

“Yes,” Ana said, hugging her daughter back. “The UN gets to yell at you, now.”

Fareeha laughed, and eventually, the two broke apart.

“Torbjorn has children,” Ana said.

“I know.”

“Someone looked at Torbjorn Lindholm and said to themselves ‘I want to spend a combined eighty-one months of my life carrying his children inside me.’”

“I will not be sleeping or eating ever again after hearing you say that.”

“Are you sure? Lucio brought crab cakes.”

“I will have one crab cake,”

“Uh-huh.”

“Just the one.”

“Uh-huh.”

Mother and daughter walked, side by side, back to the conference room to the rest of the team. They would talk. They would eat. They would laugh.

They would wait until the world needed them again.
It was a man. This was all he knew.

This man had a car.

This man had eyes that could show fear.

This man had a mouth that could scream as he died, his body shriveling from the inside.

And after this husk that used to be a man fell to the pavement, a cloud of smoke tore off its hand.

Angela Ziegler once said that Gabriel “Reaper” Reyes could regenerate his entire body from a single nanite. And though it was a great deal more than one nanite, that is exactly what Reaper did.

Not much of Reaper survived Hana Song’s falling MEKA, no more than a button on a pair of trousers, but it was enough.

The process of rebuilding himself took so long that he had no knowledge of the time passed, and it was so excruciating that he had no idea where he was.

And this time, it was… different.

He flitted from place to place, ignorant of whether it was night or day. His body kept falling apart, collapsing into smoke and reassembling itself unbidden. Something was horribly wrong.

He needed help.

He needed to find a man that he could turn into a husk, and whose had he could rip off.

Reaper stole away into a building. He knew not what the building was. Only that it was empty. He used all his concentration to look at the severed hand he held. All of his might to bring up the holophone attached. All of his recall to punch in a number.

That number would send up a signal.

That signal would bring help.

That signal would bring her…

Reaper’s mind passed into oblivion. By the time it came back, she had already found him.

“You’re in real bad shape, Gabe,” she said. “The nanites were already decaying to begin with, but with whatever did this to you, the bonding routines have worn out. I want to meet the one who did this to you. Maybe buy them a drink. But the fact is, if you don’t get help soon, you’ll die. For real, this time.”

He could hear the click of her boots pacing on the floor.

“The question you have is whether or not I can fix this. The good news is, I can. I can hook you up with a virtual intelligence that can realign all the nanites. It’s not an AI, but… it’ll follow orders… There’s a catch, though.”

He could hear her getting closer.
“Talon is dying,” she said. “They don’t want it made public yet, but they can’t hold on to their talent. When they go, there’s gonna be a massive power vacuum, just waiting to be filled with the new hotness. And when I think of both ‘new’ and ‘hotness,’ I think of myself.”

Even closer, now.

“I do this for you,” she said, “and you belong to me. Body and soul. You don’t do anything unless I tell you to. I’m the one running the VI, I’m the one running you… So what do you say, Gabe? Ready to get the party started?”

Fusion bombs of pain racked Reaper’s body when he mustered the will to say two words:

“Do… it…”

And she laughed.

“Ohhhhh, Gabe!” she said. “You and I are gonna have so… much… fun…”

The red haze that obscured his vision parted, and through this chasm reached a gloved hand. Reaper didn’t have the energy to scream in agony when the forefinger of that hand touched his nose.

“Boop…”

THE END

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!